

5. Question by Nigel Gibson: Why is Oxford City Council Discriminating Against the Disabled?

In July last year, the Council Leisure Partnership Board confirmed that Fusion admission fee increases are contractually limited to the Retail Price Index, and noted that the price increases for this year would be discussed at the October Leisure Partnership Board and then forwarded to CEB and Council for approval.

There is no record in the October minutes of any proposed fee increase, and there are no published minutes of the January meeting. The 2018/19 increases for the Bonus Card concession increases are in fact buried in the middle of an Appendix 7 of the budget document voted through by Council in February. There is no record I can find of any discussion of increases that, far from being within the RPI, are in fact several multiples of it, while 'normal' users have increases of under 3%.

The Council offers a concessionary rate, called a Bonus card, for a range of people in need, including the disabled and their carers and different types of income support.

Can you please explain why the admission price for these concessions at Ferry Leisure Centre has been increased by 53.85% from £1.30 to £2.00 since the start of April, with no advance warning, especially as this discriminates so much against the disabled and those on benefits who now have to find extra money in order be able to participate in exercise?

I would also like to know why the pricing shown on the Fusion websites is in line with your Budget appendix, but not what people are being charged, is different between different leisure centres and in my opinion further discriminates against the disabled by introducing the £2 charge in a 'peak time' of 4-8pm during weekdays – with £1.50 at other times, which is a mere 15.38%.

The Blackbird Leys leisure centre pricing shows the higher increase at peak times for swimming, but kept the gym price at £1.30.

It would be helpful to understand if you intend implementing a 'Peak Time' at some point, or whether you plan to continue with the massive percentage price increase regardless of entry time or venue.

What was, before April, a very simple pricing structure that clearly offered real benefit to those in need has become in my view a complex mess.

It would be good to think that the Council still wants to provide those benefits rather than leaving in my view vulnerable people feeling persecuted by what I consider to be iniquitous increases in admission charges, and that you will do something urgently to sort things out, including refunds for overcharging.

Written Response from the Board Member, Councillor Smith,

The schedule of fees and charges including the price of activities in our leisure centres was consulted upon as part of the public consultation on this year's budget between 21 December and 28 January. The fees and charges were then agreed by the City Executive Board on 13th February and by Full Council on 19th February. The new concessionary charge of £1.50 off peak and £2 peak for holders of a Bonus card still

represents a very large discount on the full price and excellent value for money. For comparison the normal price for swimming is £4.70, for a swim and sauna £8, for an exercise class £6.60 and for a visit to the gym £8.30. This means that a Bonus Card holder pays only 18% of the regular price off peak and only 24% of the regular price at peak times for gym access.

These fees and charges agreed by council are the maximum prices that Fusion Lifestyle can charge under our contract with them for the operation of our leisure services. Fusion currently offers a monthly membership for Bonus Card holders for only £19 a month. This equates to £4.38 a week for unlimited access to our leisure centres and demonstrates the commitment shared by this council and Fusion Lifestyle to inclusive and affordable leisure facilities for all residents of this city.