

Council 10 October 2018: Questions submitted from Members of the Public

Question No.	Question from	Question:	Question to:	Responsible Officer:
1.	Mr Robert Sams	<p>The recently initiated car park charges for users of the Swallows leisure centre mean (using me as an example) an increase from £317 to £567pa (assuming 2.5 visits per week for 50 weeks of the year) – a 79% increase.</p> <p>Did you do a similar calculation, and if so, have you considered the impact this will have on people's behaviour (going to a different gym, or not going at all, with the invisible extra load that may put on health services in the future).</p> <p>BTW - how many of YOU use this gym?</p>	Councillor Sarah Aldridge	<p>Martyn Cassell</p> <p>Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure</p>
<p>Response:</p> <p>I have set out below the background which may help you understand why the decision was taken.</p> <p>The Council is committed to improving the health and well-being for our residents and, in particular, the young and old, which is why the Council's Cabinet agreed to a five and a half contract extension for our centres along with a £2m capital investment in improving them.</p> <p>The savings that will be achieved by the Cabinet decision to remove parking refunds (jointly funded by the Council and Swale Community Leisure) will help towards paying for the new facilities and improvements.</p> <p>This includes including new Healthy Living Gyms at Sheerness Pool and Swallows in Sittingbourne which are specifically designed to help those with health and mobility issues.</p> <p>The young users who want to take part in physical activities can do so in the proposed new Family Adventure Zone in Swallows.</p> <p>Both centres are very accessible by public transport and this was an important consideration ahead of the decision to remove</p>				

subsidised parking. In recognition of the potential financial impact for users, Swale Community Leisure will be freezing membership prices for the first year of the new facilities in operation.

Furthermore, we do not subsidise other cultural activities in this way, there were no refunds for users of Faversham swimming pool previously nor is there for libraries or museums etc.

We understand that the change in policy may result in some residents not wanting to continue with their memberships. However we are hopeful that the improved offer (which isn't replicated in totality by other operators) will encourage continued membership. We had a number of calculations done by leisure experts as part of the review project and these considered the current and likely future users of the centres. The full detail of the decision can be seen in the Cabinet report from the 30th May 2018.

I am not aware of the total number of Councillors that are members but I know that there are some along with a number of our staff.

It is also important to emphasise that physical activity does not just focus on our leisure centres. The Council led Swale Active Lives Framework 2017 – 2022 'Towards an Active Swale', sets how all local stakeholders are playing their part in enabling residents to be active and thus lead a more healthy and sustainable lifestyle and help improve mental health.

Whether this takes place in their local green space by participating in a free or low cost activity or at a sporting event, or being a volunteer at a local sports club, all this helps encourage more inclusive active and healthier opportunities for our residents.