

### **3.6 Deputy A.D. Lewis of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding Active Card membership for those aged over 80 years: [9562]**

Could the Minister advise why his department no longer provides free membership to existing Active Card members when they turn 80 years of age and instead now charges them £30.50 per month for senior citizen membership, and state what, if any, impact this has had on take-up of Active Card membership by senior citizens?

#### **Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):**

If I may ask the Assistant Minister with responsibility for sport takes this question.

#### **Connétable S.W. Pallett of St. Brelade (Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture - rapporteur):**

Firstly, can I thank the Deputy for both asking the question and allowing me as Assistant Minister to answer? Like all States departments the sports division faces funding pressures over the next 3 years and future years. However, a review of the Active Card membership took place in early 2015 prior to any discussions on M.T.F.P. 2. This included free membership to ensure that any free provision was fair, equitable and transparent. The previously introduced well-intentioned but informal arrangement of providing free membership for long-serving and loyal Active Card members who reached the age of 80 was not at this stage deemed to be fair, equitable and transparent. Neither was it part of the Active terms and conditions. The 50 or so 80 year-olds who were provided with free membership prior to May 2015 have not been affected by any changes and retain their free access to Active facilities. The sports division will undertake a further review of over-80 free membership and intend by January 2017 to confirm the eligibility criteria to access free membership for those reaching 80 based on previous loyalty to the Active Card scheme that is clear and within the terms and conditions of the scheme. To answer the last part of the Deputy's question, I do not believe the change in May 2015 has had any impact on senior citizen membership. We are currently 534 over-65s have an Active Card. Interestingly the number of Active Card holders increases significantly when members reach 65, which suggests to me that the discount of the senior citizens rate is very attractive.

#### **3.6.1 Deputy A.D. Lewis:**

I was delighted that the Assistant Minister answered the question because I know he has a real passion for sport and keeping active. But would the Minister not agree that having affordable access to schemes such as the very successful Active Card scheme helps keep our senior citizens healthy, happier and fulfilled, which of course also reduces the increase in demands on the health service? Does he agree that we should be doing everything we possibly can to ensure that people remain active for as long as they possibly can?

#### **The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I could not agree more. I think we have to remember, Jersey will have an increasing number of senior citizens over the next 2 decades and it is important that with an ageing population that they remain fit and healthy and also reduce the burden on the Health Department. So, yes, I agree with him but it has to be affordable, it has to be sustainable. I could remind him that we have got thankfully 4,000 people over the age of 80 in the Island, all of which we want to keep fit and healthy and in their own homes. But the impact on the Sports Department of obviously increased numbers in gyms and the effect on staff, there is a cost to that, and as long as we can bear that cost within the Sports Department we will do all we can to help. We have had discussions with the Health Department already about various aspects of providing that these

type of facilities and also providing exercise referral. There are ongoing discussions but at the end of the day we have to be able to pay for it.

### **3.6.2 Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

My colleague, Deputy Lewis of St. Helier, has said much of what I wanted to say.

[10:30]

But £30.50 per month for a senior citizen is an awful lot of money. Surely the health and well-being of our senior citizens should be paramount. Does the Minister not agree?

### **The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I could not agree more but I still think and stand by what I have just said in regards to it being a very attractive scheme. Again, we can see by those that transfer over from paying full membership to over-65 membership, it almost doubles. So clearly they think it is good value for money. Do I want to see more people accessing gyms? Yes. But we have got to remember that we have got an Active Card scheme that covers all ages and all generations, and I think we need to ensure that there is space available for everybody to do all sorts of activities within our Active gyms and Active facilities. I do not agree with him that it is not value for money. But clearly if people have issues around accessing gyms and cannot afford it then it is something that we need to address possibly with the Social Security Department. But as far as I know the people that need to access the gyms do get opportunities to use our gyms.

### **3.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Could the Minister just remind us what the student rate is for joining the Active scheme?

### **The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Offhand I do not know what that is, but I will get back to the Deputy and provide him with those details.

### **Deputy M. Tadier:**

Would he circulate those figures and maybe announce whether that is the same or less than what senior citizens get charged?

### **The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Quite happy to do.

### **3.6.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is the Minister not in danger of discriminating against 80 year-olds in preparing a separate set of rules for 80 year-olds compared to others?

### **The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I could not agree with the Deputy more. We are the only jurisdiction that I am aware of that provide a scheme for over-80s but I do not want to seem to be heartless and not make available opportunities for those of that age to be able to access the gyms. We have to review it, it has to be sustainable, it has to be affordable. But he is right. In a way it is positive discrimination towards over-80s but it is something I think maybe we should consider a good thing to do. It is well-intentioned, as I have said before, it is something I am happy to carry on but it does need to be reviewed and it does need ... we need to ensure that it is sustainable.

### **3.6.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is the Minister aware that he keeps saying that he agrees in principle with opening up and encouraging people to stay fit but that the magic word is sustainability, which means we cannot afford it? Is that the result of his boss? What he is saying is: “In principle I agree with helping those elderly stay fit but I am not prepared to do anything about it.”

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I think I have just said that I am going to do something about it by carrying on the scheme. We are going to review it. It has to be within certain eligibility criteria that we have currently got. So I think to say we are doing nothing about it is just frankly untrue.

**3.6.6 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The Minister has talked about making the scheme so it was for existing members, long-serving, who had perhaps been members for a while so there was a kind of loyalty element to it. Can the Minister confirm whether this is in fact what is being proposed, and, if so, is that not slightly counter-intuitive insofar as surely we want to get new entrants into the scheme, people who have not necessarily been active previously, to incentivise them to join and to do exercise?

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

On his last one I could not agree with him more, we do need to make sure that we keep our elderly people fit and healthy; I cannot agree with that more. But we have to be realistic about how we move forward with this. We currently have issues with the numbers accessing our gyms. I think by opening up or providing free access for more over-80s, it is only even going to put more pressure on those gyms. Should we do more to do it? Nothing is free; there is a cost to everything and I go back to Deputy Southern, there is a cost to everything, there is no such thing as a free meal in this world, we have to pay for these things. I think we have got it right. I think the way we are pitching it and the level we are pitching it at with the over-80s is right.

**3.6.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

Could the Minister provide any details on the exercise referral scheme, which I believe many pensioners are eligible for free access via that method?

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I can provide the Deputy with it. I have not got it with me to hand but I will provide her with the information she needs in regards to the exercise referral.

**3.6.8 Deputy A.D. Lewis:**

Does the Assistant Minister, though, accept that keeping elderly people as active as possible, there is a net long-term saving of course to the health service? That is assuming they do not sprain things in the meantime in the gym. But having said that, generally speaking that would be the outcome and I am sure that is what he would like to see happen. So there could be a net-net nil cost, we just do not know. Would the Minister be prepared to investigate that further with the Health Department and see whether this should be continued free of charge at 80? It does change behaviour. We have seen it with bus passes; as soon as people get their bus pass, they get it and they use it and that is what we want them to do, to get out, stay active and keep going. So, could the Assistant Minister assure me that he is talking to the Health Department about this and seeing what the real net-net cost might be?

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Preventative health care is something that we have already discussed, I think, at length with the Health Department and will carry on discussing. It is important, we do need to keep our

over-80s fit and healthy so they can remain in their homes and reduce the burden of the cost on the health service. I think it is all accepted and I think we agree with that. We will have ongoing discussions with the Health Department about how that can be funded, how the Health Department can support the sports division in regards to what they offer and they are ongoing discussions. We have had them recently in regards to exercise improvement and we will carry on having those discussions.