

# Crawley Borough Council

## Report to Overview and Scrutiny Commission 3 October 2016

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## Crawley Leisure Card Scrutiny Panel Final Report

Report by the Chair of the Crawley Leisure Card Scrutiny Panel:  
Councillor M L Ayling  
**OSC/251**

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### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Crawley Leisure Card Scrutiny Panel was established in April 2016 to investigate the scope, advantages and disadvantages of introducing a 'Crawley Leisure Card' for various facilities within the town. This report presents the findings and recommendations.
- 1.2 The Panel formally met 3 times between March 2016 and July 2016. The Members of the Panel were:  
Councillors: G Thomas (Chair), M L Ayling, F Guidera, B McCrow and R Sharma with a change of membership in May 2016, Councillors: M L Ayling (Chair), R S Fiveash, F Guidera, B McCrow and R Sharma.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:

The Commission is asked to note the report and to endorse the recommendations, amending any recommendations as appropriate, of the Crawley Leisure Card Scrutiny Panel and decide what comments, if any, it wishes to submit to the Cabinet.

- 2.2 To the Cabinet:

The Cabinet is requested to approve the actions and recommendations set out in Section 8 of this report to improve access to leisure facilities within the town.

### 3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 To enable the Council to consider improvements to accessing leisure facilities within the town, either through admission or marketing.
- 3.2 It was recognised that given the financial pressures one of the main objectives for the Council was an increased focus on achieving (new) sources of income, whilst ensuring that the service objectives are not comprised, taking into account the ability to pay for services by users. It was important that residents continue to benefit from services which might otherwise have to be reduced or withdrawn.

- 3.3 Following the Panel's work, evidence identified that there was not strong justification to introduce a 'Crawley Leisure Card' for various facilities within the town as it was not financially viable. The town had evolved since the introduction of the Leisure Plus card with the majority of council facilities being operated under partnership/contractor arrangements.
- 3.4 The report recommends that it may be possible to improve the marketing and publicity regarding the numerous leisure activities and offers already in existence within the town. These options are proposed within section 8 of this report.

#### **4. Background - The Panel's investigations and information gathering**

- 4.1 During the 5 October 2015 Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting particular support was raised for the re-establishment of the 'Passport to Leisure' or 'Leisure Plus' scheme that previously existed, providing subsidised leisure use (which was subsequently raised at Full Council). The Scrutiny Panel had been requested to investigate the scope, advantages and disadvantages of introducing a 'Crawley Leisure Card' for various facilities within the town.
- 4.2 The Leisure Plus Card applied generic discounts to sport and recreation services. The cost of the card was dependent on various categories (resident/non-resident) and was free for people in receipt of certain benefits.
- 4.3 Previous reviews (including Scrutiny Reviews) had been undertaken in the past regarding subsidised charging. There had been an association with the opening of K2 Crawley and the introduction of membership. This membership promoted the targeted use of the council's subsidy and free use policy and interfaced with the subsidised charge at that time. The council has a Corporate Framework for Leisure and Cultural Activities and the fees and charges policy is determined each year with the Portfolio Holders.
- 4.4 The agreed review scope is outlined in Appendix 1.

#### **5. Methods of Investigation and Evidence**

##### **5.1 Witnesses**

The following officers were involved in the review, as the most appropriate stakeholder representatives that had been identified through the Scoping Framework. The Panel would like to thank them for their time:

- Chris Harris – Head of Community Services
- Karen Rham – Parks and Streetscene Manager
- Graham Rowe – Partnership Services Manager

##### **5.2 Other Local Authorities**

Other local authorities operate similar schemes to the Active Crawley Card and apply discounted rates to charges within other facilities. It was also noted that the *Compass Card West Sussex* was launched in spring 2016 providing discounted fun, leisure and sport activities for children or young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

##### **5.3 Desk Based Research**

Desk based research was undertaken to survey other authorities operating similar leisure cards to the Active Crawley Card. These included: Brighton and Hove CC, Woking BC, Elmbridge BC, Guildford BC, Horsham DC, Arun DC and Mid Sussex DC. Evidence was also obtained from the following reports:

- Five Year Business Plan for Tilgate Park and Nature Centre – 5.10.15
- Final Report of the Subsidised Fees & Charges Scrutiny Panel – 14.10.09
- Scrutiny Review of Subsidised Fees & Charges: Background Report & Scoping Framework – 24.11.08
- Quarter 4 Financial Monitoring & Audit Recommendations – 3.7.06
- Fees & Charges Sport & Recreation – 15.6.05
- Management of Indoor Recreation Centres Future Management Arrangements – 15.6.05
- Best Value Review Sport & Recreation Final Report – 15.6.05
- Best Value Review Sport & Recreation – 2005
- Best Value Review of Sport and Recreation Interim Report – 11.10.04

## 6. Findings

### Active Crawley Card

- 6.1 There had been an association between the Leisure Plus card with the opening of K2 Crawley and the introduction of K2 Crawley membership, followed by the Active Crawley Card (operated by Freedom Leisure on behalf of the council), that provides discount to various activities. Similar to the Leisure Plus card, the cost of the [Active Crawley card](#) was dependent on various categories (£5.50 adult resident, £2.90 junior/student/senior citizen resident) and was free for people in receipt of certain benefits. It was acknowledged that there had been an administrative cost to the Leisure Plus card in terms of resources (originally 3 staff to administer) and should a new leisure card scheme for Crawley residents be implemented there would be additional resource implications (including administration, training, marketing, ongoing monitoring, together with ICT software, hardware, licences and depreciation).
- 6.2 In terms of benefits, data provided<sup>1</sup> indicated that for K2 Crawley the majority of members (90%) travelled less than 5 miles to the facility and consequently there is a possibility these could be identified as Crawley residents (K2 Crawley membership analysis is included in appendix 2). The Active Crawley Card provided discounts to Crawley residents on sport and recreation interests and varied between activities. K2 Crawley also offered corporate discounts and this was similar to other local authorities.
- 6.3 From information provided through evidence collation and witness sessions, there was no shortage of leisure facilities within the town centre. It was felt that nowadays many other operators offered competitive rates throughout the town allowing individuals a range of choice, discounts and payment options and with additional discounts available online. It was therefore questionable whether a leisure card would be beneficial due to the range of alternatives. The Community Sports Activation Fund (CSAF)<sup>2</sup> consultation noted positive comments about the wide variety of facilities on offer in Crawley – which Panel Members had also recognised. Indeed some facilities offer gym membership for varying rates across the town between £11 and £62 a month and even open 24 hours.
- 6.4 However, it was also felt more could be done to increase capacity and membership, although there were mixed views as to whether discounted charges would result in increased participation. Visits could be increased through event days or improved marketing/publicity (besides social media use). Specific events were advertised through the established promoter and additional marketing could be undertaken by the facility operators. Similarly publicity for some events are advertised through schools and publicity could be improved. Indeed, feedback from the CSAF consultation indicated targeted communications by the council and its partners would assist the council in promoting its facilities and the benefits of exercise.

<sup>1</sup> K2 Crawley Membership Analysis, January 2016

<sup>2</sup> Community Sports Activation Fund (CSAF) Consultation 2016

- 6.5 Panel Members questioned whether residents should receive cheaper access to facilities in comparison to non-residents as there were “fairness considerations” to contemplate. There was a wish not to discourage non-residents from visiting the town or partaking in activities. The introduction of a specific leisure card and discounted rate may have the potential to deter visitors.
- 6.6 Concerns were raised regarding the administering of a leisure card scheme in terms of financial and resource implications (staffing and ICT infrastructure requirements) with particular reference to the current budget strategy assuming a (current) projected budget gap of £1.5m. The council receives a payment for the K2 Crawley contract and any amendment to fees and charges (discount applied on the charges) would make a difference to the payment received to the council and given the financial pressures this was an issue to be noted. Any reduced income would result in further savings having to be identified.

### Tilgate Nature Centre

- 6.7 Three years ago the park secured over £500k capital investment through the Council’s budgetary process, on a ‘spend to save’ basis, to make improvements to visitor attractions, whilst improving facilities. Since then, animal enclosures have been improved, new animals introduced such as the meerkats, a visitor shop opened and a small entry charge introduced for the Nature Centre. Smith & Western, Go Ape and Dynamic Adventures have also come to Tilgate Park, bringing additional visitors and income. Following these changes, in excess of £150k additional annual income has been received by the park and Nature Centre, exceeding the promised additional income for the £500k investment.
- 6.8. With regards to the Nature Centre, since 1 April 2016 the charge has been £2.50 (adult) – increase from £2.00, £1.50 (child) – increase from £1.00. The charges responded to the findings from public feedback and consultation (including responses that payment for entry into the Nature Centre was a viable option), as well as the need to repair park infrastructure and raise additional income to enable the park and Nature Centre to become self-financing by 2020/21.
- 6.9 Throughout the summer months there is an increase in non-Crawley residents visiting Tilgate Park. Winter visitors are predominately Crawley residents. From 2016 there would be a charge for entry during the winter months however there would be ‘free open days’ (report [HCS/02](#) refers). It was recognised that increased charges may be unaffordable for some families if charges were to increase indefinitely and perhaps the prices could be capped, although a loyalty card has been introduced and proven popular (visit 5 times, 6<sup>th</sup> visit free – based on a maximum of two adults and three children). It was noted that entry to Tilgate Park was free and would continue to remain so.
- 6.10 Since the new road had opened the number of visits and car park income had comparably increased. It was suggested that a car park annual pass be introduced, which could be marketed with a ‘Friends of Tilgate Park’. It was thought this may increase visits and would assist in the ease of paying for parking.
- 6.11 [Group visits and educational talks](#) were available at the Nature Centre and considered reasonable value. Further marketing to schools (inside and outside Crawley) was recommended to encourage attendance.

## **7. Description of Issues to be resolved**

- 7.1 Should a leisure card be implemented the charges would need to be increased to non Crawley residents by the same amount as that by which the discount was applied for Crawley residents. This may result in less visitors attending the Nature Centre and Tilgate Park in general. It is questionable in terms of “fairness” whether residents should receive cheaper access to facilities in comparison to non-residents.

- 7.2 The Panel was not fully convinced that Crawley residents having access to discount facilities was entirely preferable. The town had evolved since the 'Leisure Plus' scheme was in operation.
- 7.3 Therefore it was concluded questionable whether a scheme would be advantageous, particularly with the Active Crawley Card already in operation which already provides a discount scheme to residents for various sporting activities at K2 Crawley. However, in terms of 'customer choice' there are now many other operators (both in the town and online) offering competitive rates allowing individuals a range of offers, discounts and payment options.
- 7.4 The Panel concluded that ultimately unfortunately it was not thought (financially) viable to operate a discount scheme for residents within the town:
- a) The town had evolved since the introduction of the Leisure Plus card.
  - b) The majority of the facilities were now not run by the council, making a concession scheme logistically difficult to implement and manage.
  - c) It was questionable whether a town wide leisure card would be of benefit given the other discounts and competition in existence, particularly given the additional publicity '[Save Money on Leisure in Crawley](#)' featured on the council's website.
  - d) The amount of benefit residents would receive may not equate to the amount it would cost to administer and resource.
  - e) The rapid change in technology (eg apps) may make discount cards redundant in the future. However, this may be an opportunity to reduce administrative costs in the future. It was recognised that "contactless" payment may be a future option, albeit not offer a discounted payment.
  - f) The recent CSAF consultation considered barriers to sport and physical activity so the council and its partners could also apply for suitable funding streams. A project delivery plan is planned to be developed by the Crawley Wellbeing Team following the consultation to overcome these barriers and broaden the eligible physical activity and wellbeing, as well as pure sports and this should be the catalyst and driving force for change.

## **8. Actions & Supporting Recommendations**

- 8.1 Despite the Panel's conclusions, Members have proposed the following actions and recommendations (a-h) –

### Marketing

- a) Increase public awareness via the various leisure facilities within the town, particularly in relation to offers/discounts, activities and events that exist, (including the current Active Crawley Card).

It was felt this may assist in increasing capacity and membership. It was felt this was particularly relevant for major sporting events where marketing may occur predominately through promoters.

- b) Further marketing to schools (inside and outside Crawley) to encourage group visits and educational talks, particularly at Tilgate Park.
- c) Increase usage of the council's Events Directory (filtered by event type 'leisure' or 'sport' and by 'ward') for further marketing and publicity of the numerous leisure events taking place within the town. This would aid targeted communication regarding facilities and sporting activities.
- d) Increase the marketing and publicity, particularly through the use of social media, neighbourhood posters and Crawley Live (ensuring information is relevant for publication)

date) regarding the various offers and events – for example when council press releases are issued for the openings of new Nature Centre zones include the loyalty card.

#### Operational

- e) Consider the potential to offer regular free/open days (more than once in school holidays and once a term) at facilities belonging to the council be investigated.
- f) Consider the potential to offer family tickets at facilities belonging to the council be investigated.
- g) Consider the possibility of discounts in any future contract negotiations be investigated.
- h) Consider the possibility of introducing a Tilgate Park car park annual pass, which could be marketed with a 'Friends of Tilgate Park'.

## **9. Financial Implications**

- 9.1 The Panel recognised that there may be some financial implications should the recommendations be approved, particularly as some of the Council's facilities have partner/contractor obligations and should any discount be varied this would affect the amount received by the Council.

## **10. Background Papers**

[Minutes of Crawley Leisure Card Scrutiny Panel Meeting](#) 8.3.16  
[Minutes of Crawley Leisure Card Scrutiny Panel Meeting](#) 5.4.16  
[Minutes of Crawley Leisure Card Scrutiny Panel Meeting](#) 21.7.16  
[Residents break down barriers to sports press release](#) 27.5.16  
[Five Year Business Plan for Tilgate Park and Nature Centre](#) – 5.10.15  
[Final Report of the Subsidised Fees & Charges Scrutiny Panel](#) – 14.10.09  
[Scrutiny Review of Subsidised Fees & Charges: Background Report & Scoping Framework](#) – 24.11.08  
[Quarter 4 Financial Monitoring & Audit Recommendations](#) – 3.7.06  
[Fees & Charges Sport & Recreation](#) – 15.6.05  
[Management of Indoor Recreation Centres – Future Management Arrangements](#) – 15.6.05  
[Best Value Review Sport & Recreation Final Report](#) – 15.6.05  
[Best Value Review Sport & Recreation](#) – 2005  
[Best Value Review of Sport and Recreation Interim Report](#) – 11.10.04  
Crawley Citizens Panel, Household Survey 2002, BMG January 2003

## **11. Panel Thanks**

- 11.1 Several officers also provided some valuable advice and assistance to the Panel throughout the review:
  - Carrie Burton - Interim Head of Community Services (Strategic) & Corporate Transformation – Scrutiny Panel/Review Lead Officer
  - Paul Baker - Senior Leisure Officer
  - Mark Hurst - Assistant Neighbourhood Services Manager
  - Simon Woodard - Tilgate Nature Centre Manger
  - Dave Downey - Community Sports Development Officer (Freedom Leisure)

Contact Officer:  
Heather Girling, Democratic Services Officer  
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**Scope identified for the Panel's Work:**

Despite various facilities operating within the town, the majority were deemed out of scope for the review. However the Active Crawley Card and Tilgate Nature Centre remained 'in scope'.

**Tilgate Golf Centre –**

The facility is currently leased on a long term basis to a private contractor and as a result would require a re-negotiation of the lease. The Panel decided this facility would be out of scope.

**Adventure Playgrounds –**

Crawley Play Service's adventure playgrounds are open from February to November at no charge. As a result, it was determined these facilities were out of scope.

**Bandstand –**

The facility will not be available for hire at the end of April 2016 due to restoration and relocation. The Panel decided this facility would be out of scope.

**Sports Pitches –**

Some pitches are booked and paid for by clubs (Football Leagues) and affiliated to a League, not individual residents. After discussion, Panel Members recommended that sports pitches would be out of scope.

**Community Centres –**

Subsidised rates are already available to regular hirers (subject to assessment), occasional hires are often residents however a discounted rate is already available for children's parties. Due to the subsidy rates offered, the Panel decided community centres would be out of scope.

**Hawth Theatre –**

Access to discounted tickets and free events are available via the Hawth Friends scheme (residents and non-residents). Rooms at the Hawth are also offered on a commercial and non-commercial basis. Other concessions are also offered. The facility is currently leased on a long term basis to a private contractor and as a result would require a re-negotiation of the lease. The Panel decided this facility would be out of scope.

**Concessions as already available at K2 Crawley/Bewbush Centre –**

K2 Crawley already offers various concessions and these are determined via the fees and charges in discussion with the Portfolio Holder. A general increase in fees and charges had been set at 2%. Further information would be determined through the K2 Crawley tender and contract negotiations. It was determined that this item would be out of scope.

**Active Crawley Card available at K2 Crawley–**

The Active Crawley Card managed by Freedom Leisure on behalf of the Council provides discount to activities K2 Crawley facilities to Crawley residents. Panel Members held a detailed discussion on the various activities that were included within the Active Crawley Card and the varying degrees of discount offered as these fluctuated depending on category (adult, junior, student, senior citizen or 'free use' resident) and the activity. The Panel felt additional information would be beneficial for a future meeting together with discussions with the Partnership Services Manager. The Panel decided this category should be in scope.

**Non-user or specific/targeted groups –**

The Panel noted that work had been undertaken in previous years (including Scrutiny Reviews) regarding non-user and specific targeted groups. It was acknowledged that 'cost' had previously been a common misconception as to the barrier to using sports facilities<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Crawley Citizens Panel, Household Survey 2002, BMG January 2003

The CSAF Consultation<sup>4</sup> 2016 had recently been completed with the aim to explore what Crawley residents considered the barriers to sport and physical activity and importantly how these barriers could be overcome. The consultation findings indicated that cost, timing of activities and low confidence were commonly identified barriers to sport and physical activity, although other factors were also taken into account. It was not the anticipation that the Scrutiny Panel would duplicate the work of the consultation. The consultation was undertaken so the council and partners could develop a project delivery plan to overcome barriers and in addition apply for funding from the Community Sports Activation Fund (provided by Sports England).

It was recognised that the K2 Crawley contract would shortly be due for re-tender and it may be advantageous for an analysis of the new community profile together with the results of the participation in physical activity survey being undertaken in 2016. However, with reference to this Scrutiny Panel, it was determined that this category would be out of scope.

Tilgate Nature Centre –

The Panel acknowledged the Five Year Business Plan for Tilgate Park & Nature Centre report ([HCS/02](#)) and the need to raise additional income. However, discussions took place surrounding the charging and the proposed gradual increase in entry charges for the nature centre, whilst also introducing winter charging. The loyalty scheme in operation at the Nature Centre was a welcomed addition, although it was considered there was a general lack of awareness of its existence and therefore felt beneficial to increase the marketing and publicity. As a result, the Panel decided this facility should be in scope.

Goffs Park Pitch and Putt –

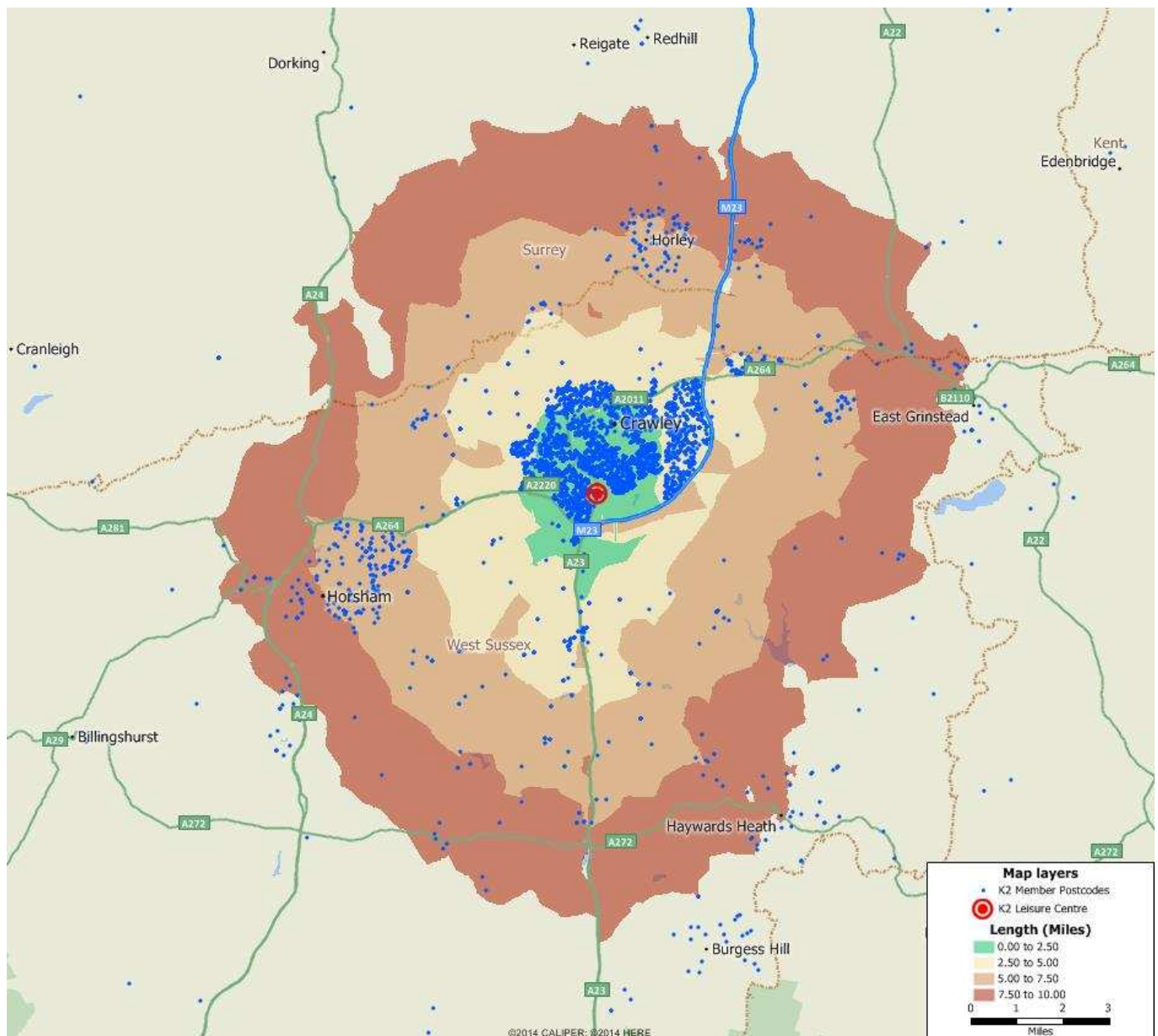
Differential charge rates are already applied between adult, child and senior citizen and over different days. Additionally Panel Members felt the activity was seasonal and weather dependent. The Panel determined this facility would be out of scope.

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<sup>4</sup> Community Sports Activation Fund (CSAF) Consultation 2016



## K2 Crawley Membership Analysis



It plots the members' postcodes with a blue dot. It should be noted that it is based on driving distance to K2 Crawley rather than Crawley residency and only covers members rather than all users.

In summary:

2826 members (61%) travel between 0-2.5 miles  
 1343 members (29%) travel between 2.5 – 5 miles  
 324 members (7%) travel between 5 – 7.5 miles  
 139 members (3%) travel more than 7.5 miles

(Data provided for Panel's January 2016 meeting).