



Accord Newsletter

Welcome to the second edition of the 'Accord' newsletter - a quarterly update on new developments for Aberdeen's very own smart citizen's card. We had a tremendous response to our first newsletter, with emails from readers from Aberdeen to France and everywhere inbetween, and we hope we can continue to keep you up-to-date with what the Accord Scheme can offer.



NEW ACCORD VAN LIVERY

THE ACCORD TEAM IS NOW TAKING TO CITY STREETS IN STYLE, ADDING STRIKING ACCORD LIVERY TO ITS SMALL FLEET OF TWO VANS. THE COLOURFUL DESIGN WAS PUT TOGETHER BY ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL'S GRAPHICS TEAM - AND EVERYONE AT THE ACCORD OFFICE IS DELIGHTED WITH THE RESULTS.

IN OUR PICTURES, SYSTEMS ANALYST DAMIEN BIRD AND TECHNICIANS DONALD CLARK AND NADIR FREIGOUN SHOW OFF THE LIVERY AT ABERDEEN BEACH.

ALL ABOARD FOR FREE BUS TRAVEL

The Accord Scheme is playing a key role in a national scheme which will deliver free bus travel to elderly and disabled people.

Almost a year ago, then Minister for Transport Nicol Stephen announced a nation-wide free bus travel scheme for people over the age of 60 and people with disabilities, replacing 16 local concessionary schemes.

In order to tackle fraud - and ensure that bus operators are fairly compensated - it was decided that the concession would be hosted on a smartcard.

A key difference between Aberdeen and the other authorities taking part is that, in the Accord Card, we already have a product capable of delivering these services.

While other councils across Scotland are now looking to issue smartcards to implement the scheme, the National Concessionary Fare Scheme is simply adding another string to the Accord Scheme's bow - one of many services that bring value for cardholders.

The initial stages of the new scheme will be based on 'show and go' - cards that you display to your driver, much as you would with a traditional bus pass - while work continues with bus companies across Scotland to introduce the infrastructure required to make the most of smartcards.

However, the Accord Scheme has already been working with Stagecoach and First to ensure local buses already have ticket machines that read smartcards so, unlike the rest of the country, our cards will do a little bit more.

Users will continue to place their card on the ticket machine, which will then read the serial number of the card.

As this function is not yet available elsewhere - and the scheme must work on a national level - Accord users will be issued with a fresh card, visually similar to those being produced across the country, that continues to allow local buses to identify their card, but also makes it easy to 'show and go' in other local authority areas.

Eventually, the ticket machines used on buses will be replaced or upgraded to meet new standards that allow them to access eight different kinds of smartcards. When this happens, Accord users will be able to enjoy the full benefits of their card wherever they travel in Scotland.

The Accord Scheme will not be switching to the same type of

used elsewhere in Scotland - indeed, plans are well progressed for Accord to step up to a more advanced IBM JCOP Card in the near future - but the existing cards will need to carry a National Concessionary Fare Scheme logo.

Overall, around 22,500 existing users will receive new cards - and a similar number of new customers will be issued with application forms, as the national scheme gears up to welcome around one million smartcard users.



QUESTIONNAIRE UPDATE

Thousands of students at schools in Aberdeen have taken part in a major customer survey to help shape the future of the Accord smartcard scheme.

Pupils were asked to complete a questionnaire, which recorded how they use their Accord cards, what they think of the scheme and new features they would be interested in.

The results will help the Accord team gauge user response to the card and the many benefits available through it - and also plan new services. They will also allow schools an insight into how pupils feel about using Accord to purchase school meals and collect Healthy Eating Points.

MAKE SURE YOU DON'T MISS OUT

New pupils at Aberdeen's non-local authority schools are being urged to make sure they don't miss out on the benefits carrying an Accord Card can bring.

Earlier this year, the Accord Team took a roadshow around the schools, signing up pupils for the first time.

Although students cannot use their cards to purchase meals, as in council-run schools, Accord does allow them access to Young Scot features and discounts, as well library and leisure services.

However, while new students at some schools automatically receive an application form on enrolling, others may not realise they are entitled to a free Accord Card.

Pupils who have not been offered the chance to apply should ask their school to contact the Accord Team on 01224 645596 or info@accordaberdeen.co.uk and we make sure forms are available.

A report on the findings is yet to be published, but responses reveal that over 42% of pupils completed and returned their questionnaire, which is a robust sample in statistical terms, with an equal amount of girls and boys taking part.

Younger pupils were most likely to respond, with 67% of questionnaires completed by users aged 12-14.

Our survey found 77% of cards are experiencing very heavy usage and 60% of pupils are still using their first card, which suggests the product is robust.

Most replacements have been due to pupils losing their Accord card.

The main use of cards, as would be expected, is to purchase food at school - with this cited by a healthy 64% of pupils. However, there is a growing awareness of other services, with 40% and 29% using Accord for Young Scot discounts and proof of age respectively.

However, there are mixed feelings about the card - mainly related to queues. 43% of pupils said they disliked using the card, with many citing long lines at terminals to load cash onto their card, which we hope will ease as schools and pupils become more used to the system. Several initiatives - from cheque top-ups to the opportunity for schools to purchase additional load terminals - have already been put in place to address this issue.

Personal Balance readers remove the need for pupils to queue at terminals to check the money stored on their card.

Others had entirely different reasons for disliking their card - with a significant number citing their photograph as a problem.

In more general terms, there is a growing awareness of the uses of the Accord Card, but users want more discounts and incentives to add value.

New Accord gadget will help pupils balance their diet



Above, Northsound DJ Andy James took his breakfast show to pupils at Northfield Academy



A handy gadget that lets school pupils keep track of their money - and their eating habits - has been launched by the Accord Scheme.

Accord Personal Balance Readers are keyring-sized devices that read a limited amount of information from any Accord Card - such as cash balance and Healthy Eating Points - and display it on their own LCD screen.

Pupils in council-run secondary schools have now received the new Accord Personal Balance Readers - which were launched with a Big Healthy Breakfast event in September.

Northsound DJ Andy James took his breakfast show to Northfield Academy, which hosted a healthy breakfast club for pupils.

Accord Personal Balance Readers make it easy for individuals to check the balance on their card, without visiting a top-up point, and even check the number of Healthy Eating Points accrued on the card. Points are awarded for buying healthy foods, such as fruit, cereals and salads.

The balance readers can also be used by parents to ensure their child has sufficient money loaded onto their Accord Card.



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