

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

14 APRIL 2011

| | |
|--|--|
| SUBJECT: | LIFELONG AND FAMILY LEARNING FEES 2011-2012 |
| WARD/S AFFECTED: | ALL |
| REPORT OF: | INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES |
| RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER: | COUNCILLOR SHEILA CLARKE |
| KEY DECISION? | NO |

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report details the proposed Lifelong and Family Learning Service fees for 2011-12. The Lifelong and Family Learning Service will support the Council's Corporate Priorities by providing opportunities for adults to develop their skills to support their children, gain confidence, become more employable and learn how to be actively involved in their local area. The Service is entirely funded by a Skills Funding Agency (SFA) grant, with the expectation that course fees are set and collected.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

2.1 That

- (1) Cabinet is requested to approve the changes in Lifelong Learning fees policy

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 3.1 Fees policy needs approval.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service is funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA – formerly LSC until April 2010), through the Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) funding stream. The funding is allocated annually for local authority adult learning as a grant with a minimum number of learners to be engaged. A requirement of the SFA is that the service should review income targets and the policy for charging fees for adult courses. There is less publicly funded general adult learning available nationally as in recent years public funding has been targeted more at skills and employability. Within Wirral the Lifelong and Family Learning Service, Wirral Metropolitan College and Birkenhead Sixth Form College offer courses for adults funded by SFA.

Providers meet to plan with the aim of avoiding duplication and developing a coherent offer for local adult learners.

- 4.2 The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), Skills for Sustainable Growth and Further Education –New Horizon: Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth Strategies, November 2010, outlined how the funding for informal adult and community learning had been protected at the same level nationally to support learning for individuals, families and communities. Funding Allocations for 2011-12 academic year will be based on historical allocations. In order to simplify the funding structures for adult learning the number of separate budget lines was reduced. They have combined the four components of ASL into a single budget line giving some flexibility to respond to local needs. The service will be responsible for continuing to deliver a balanced offer that is responsive to local communities and focused on the following:
- Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities
 - Personal and Community Development Learning
 - Wider Family Learning
 - Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy
- 4.3 As in previous years, priority target groups of learners for Lifelong and Family Learning in 2011-12 are based on local need, as identified in Council priorities. The service works in partnership with a wide number of local organisations through the Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) partnership to reach a wide range of adult learners. Courses are designed to target different groups including:-

TARGETED COURSES FOR IDENTIFIED GROUPS

Unemployed people, particularly those who are:

- those with low level skills in Skills for Life & Functional IT
- not on active job seeking benefits and not able to access other programmes
- unemployed/low skilled people with disabilities, including learning disability, physical disability and mental health
- ex offenders, probation clients with low level skills
- BME groups; with low levels of English, and not able to access other provision, in low paid households

Families experiencing poverty and needing additional support including:

- those needing Family Learning intervention at early stage
- disadvantaged families/households
- families needing additional support to help their children to learn eg parents with low levels of English, disability or mental health needs which affects their ability to support their children

OPEN ACCESS COURSES - INCLUDES FEE PAYERS / FEE REMISSION

Including people

- living in areas of high deprivation (using SSOAs) including small areas
- carers
- On low incomes
- BME – through schools, organizations and religious groups

- adult returners to learning/ unemployed: who need to upskill/retrain
- male learners
- people with disabilities
- retired people
- socially isolated older people on low incomes

LEISURE/FEE PAYING INCLUDING TRAINING & WORKSHOPS

- open to all, any area of Wirral
- designed to meet needs of local people and organisations

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 There is little risk of the service not meeting its targets. The service has been running adult and family learning courses for many years and successfully operating a model of both targeting hard to reach learners and offering more general open courses to the wider public. The quality of the provision was judged “Good” by Ofsted in January 2010. There is a risk of reduced numbers of fee payers enrolling on courses due to economic circumstances, however in the recent experience of the service and local colleges this has not been the case as there is still a high demand for adult learning.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 The SFA expect that Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy and Skills for Life courses will be provided free. For all other Adult Safeguarded Learning providers are free to set their own fee policies. Each year a paper has been brought to Cabinet seeking approval for fees. In previous years Lifelong Learning fee remission has followed national guidelines for FE colleges. SFA have changed the eligibility for FE fee remission for 2011-12 academic year and only people who are actively seeking work will now be able to claim remission for mainstream college courses. This will exclude many of the people who previously claimed fee remission; people who are on means tested benefits and low incomes, older people, partners of unemployed people and people with disabilities who are not actively seeking work. As many of the Lifelong Learning courses are targeting disadvantaged people to engage them in learning it is proposed that the fee remission option for those on low incomes and means tested benefits is retained for 2011 -12. This policy is also being proposed for the ASL funding received by Wirral Metropolitan College.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service work with local providers of adult learning, voluntary and community groups and other services through the Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) Partnership to identify local needs in adult learning. Local groups support the service to consult on the needs of their service users and stakeholders, for example by working through schools the needs of parents are identified. The service will be involved in future consultation events as part of wider Council marketing activity.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service works with a wide range of voluntary, community and faith groups. There are many opportunities for partnership working in different ways. The service can offer courses to VCF client groups, they can work together to identify need, design learning and deliver learning and there are subcontracting opportunities. Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived communities funding is subcontracted annually to organisations who can reach new, harder to engage learners. There are many examples in the past 5 years of very successful activities being delivered in Wirral by VCF organisations under this funding. Subcontracting for 2011-12 will take place following the Council's procedures.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 9.1 The Lifelong and Family Learning Service Adult Safeguarded (ASL) provision is fully funded from the SFA grant. Annual adjustments are made from within the service. There is no impact on the Council's budget.
- 9.2 The ASL budget has been protected for 2011/12 and providers' allocations are similar to those for 2010/11. The four individual funding allocations of ASL – Personal and Community Development Learning, Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy and Wider Family Learning and Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities have been combined into a single allocation. Providers are free to decide how they meet their commitments and how they respond to their local communities but must deliver a balance of provision across all four areas of ASL. The Skills Funding Agency expects each provider to ensure that they reach at least as many learners as in 2010/11 and where possible exceed this number.

| | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Personal and Community Development Learning | £382,762 | £382,762 | |
| Family Learning | £273,915 | £273,915 | |
| Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities | £179,181 | £179,181 | |
| Total | £835,858 | £835,858 | £836,199 |
| Learner targets for LSC /SFA | 2408 | 2408 | 2408 |
| Actual learner nos. for LSC/SFA | 2970 | | |

- 9.3 Income for the service comes from individuals, other agencies or employers paying for courses. Income from course and exam fees is predicted to be £66,000 in 2011-12. To achieve this the proposed fee levels are set out below.
- 9.4 It is proposed to update the fee rates annually in line with other local providers of adult learning in order to develop a coherent strategic approach to adult learning across the whole of Wirral. To bring the service broadly in line with local colleges, and to enable expansion of fee paying courses, it is proposed that for 2011-12, there is a fee of £52 per term for entry and level one courses, compared to £50 in 2010-11. Learners eligible for fee remission would continue to receive free tuition. Leisure courses would carry a fee of between

£3.00 and £5.00 an hour, depending on the length of the course to enable them to cover their costs.

- 9.5 ECDL qualifications are long courses which commit the service to continuing the courses until learners have achieved. These courses have been popular, with both people seeking work and those seeking new skills. Whilst wanting to continue to support people to gain useful skills the service needs to retain an amount of flexibility to respond to other demands in ICT and other curriculum areas. It is proposed that courses like ECDL, which are a minority of courses, carry a fee of £80 for Part one or £260 for a course of 100 hours, increased from £250, to enable them to contribute more to their costs.
- 9.6 Leisure learning courses were introduced in 2009-10. These courses are fully fee bearing to cover their costs. It is proposed to increase the number of these courses to enable the service to offer more learning opportunities across Wirral. The fees will vary based on the actual costs of different length courses.
- 9.7 Seven staff took EVR from the service in December 2010. Currently no further changes in staffing are anticipated. The majority of the lifelong and family learning tutors are employed on sessional contracts so the service is able to respond flexibly to changes in patterns of demand.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Lifelong and Family Learning play a valuable contribution to improving the skills of Wirral residents. Much of the provision is located in disadvantaged communities and encourages people back into learning and employment. OFSTED judged Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service to be "Outstanding" in Equality and Diversity. The number of courses available to local people can be increased by using fee income to cover the costs of additional courses. The Service has links to Wirral PCT and mental health services to refer people to services and to develop health related courses and adult learning has a proven positive impact on people's health and mental well being. Much of the targeted provision is located in disadvantaged communities with high unemployment and the aim is to encourage people back into learning and to take the first steps that will lead to employment. Adult learning has a major impact on child poverty by helping families to gain confidence and skills, which help them to cope better with their lives and move on towards employment. There are many examples of learners who have gone on from short courses to further learning or to work. There are clear links between areas of deprivation and those with low levels of adult qualifications. Adult learning helps to enhance social inclusion and community cohesion, by offering people the opportunity to learn together and mix with people they may not have met before, whilst at the same time developing their confidence, skills and knowledge. It also enables people to give a contribution back to their community and Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service encourages and supports volunteers to become involved in learning as Learning Champions promoting learning, or Learning Buddies supporting other learners. OFSTED

commented that Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service make a positive contribution to community cohesion in Wirral.

11.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required? No

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 None.

REPORT AUTHOR: Sarah Howarth

Principal Manager Lifelong Learning

telephone: (0151) 346 6613

email: sarahhowarth@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Fee Policy 2011 Appendix 1

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Dept for Business Innovation and Skills,

- “Skills for Sustainable Growth”, (November 2010)
- “Further Education – New Horizon: Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth” (November 2010)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

| Council Meeting | Date |
|-----------------|-----------|
| Cabinet | July 2010 |
| Cabinet | June 2009 |
| Cabinet | June 2008 |

WIRRAL

WIRRAL LIFELONG AND FAMILY LEARNING SERVICE COURSE FEES POLICY 2011-12

Introduction

Wirral Lifelong Learning Service has had a policy of charging fees for courses since 2005. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA formerly LSC), who fund the courses, expect us to set fees for all courses, the government view being that all adults who can afford to pay for learning should pay and public subsidy should be targeted at the most disadvantaged learners.

Skills for Life courses are offered free for all adults who need them. Skills for Life courses are Numeracy and Literacy at level 2 or below. Other courses are expected to generate fee income including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

Currently Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service is unable to meet demand for courses. Income generated from fees is used to fund more courses and growth. The suggested updated policy is based on a rate comparable to other local providers who run similar courses. Work continues to be done in partnership with local colleges and others, to look at proposed fee levels and remission policy. In order to extend opportunities for adult learning in Wirral, Leisure Learning opportunities which will fully cover their costs, will be extended. This can only occur if full costs are met, so courses can only run where there are a minimum number of fee paying learners.

Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service Policy

- Skills for Life - Adult literacy and numeracy and Family Learning literacy, numeracy and language courses should be free (this is a national policy).
- Very short tasters could be free, as a marketing tool.
- Courses targeting specific vulnerable groups could be free
- ESOL up to Entry 3 level £21 per term
- Entry and level 1 courses are £42 tuition and £10 registration per term
- ECDL part one courses, which are likely to be funded by employers carry a fee of £80 plus tests
- Non accredited leisure courses are £65 per term
- Shorter tasters and one day courses to be priced to cover costs average between £30 -50 each
- For specialist courses and courses commissioned by another organisation or with sponsorship from employers, a higher fee should be charged to cover costs.

Typical costs will be:

| Course | Number of hours | 2010-11 £ | 2011-12 £ |
|---|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 2 hrs taster for - e.g. healthy eating, confidence building | 2 | 0 | 0 |

| Course | Number of hours | 2010-11 £ | 2011-12 £ |
|---|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| ESOL beginners | 20 | 20 | 21 |
| Intro 1 term courses in: IT, gardening, arts, languages, psychology | 20 | 50 | 52 |
| Non accredited leisure – e.g. local history, photography (require minimum numbers to cover costs) | 20 | 60 | 65 |
| ECDL Essentials (part 1) | 30 | 75(+tests) | 80 (+tests) |
| ECDL full cost for a group of 10 | 100 | 4600 (+tests) | 4800 (+tests) |

Remission of Fees

The policy regarding remission of fees is consistent with similar Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) courses in Wirral colleges

Wirral Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) Fee Remission Policy

Most course fees are free to learners in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or any other means tested benefit. Leisure courses do not carry fee remission. There is an option to pay in instalments.

Fee remission Categories

| If you are | tuition fees | exam fees | what to bring as proof of entitlement |
|---|---------------------|------------------|--|
| in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance | Free | pay in full | letter from Job Centre Plus |
| in receipt of Council Tax Benefit /Housing Benefit | Free | pay in full | letter/ statement |
| in receipt of Income Support | Free | pay in full | letter from Job Centre Plus |
| in receipt of Working Tax Credit with a household income of less than £15,276 | Free | pay in full | Award notice |
| in receipt of Pension Credits (Guarantee Credit only) | Free | pay in full | Award notice |
| Offender serving your sentence in the community | Free | pay in full | letter from Probation service |
| taking basic skills, excluding English for speakers of other languages | Free | Free | subject to status of course |
| in receipt of income related Employment Support Allowance (ESA) | Free | pay in full | statement of entitlement |
| unwaged dependants of those listed above* | Free | pay in full | evidence of partner's entitlement |
| Registered unemployed, not in receipt of benefit | Free | pay in full | letter from Job Centre Plus |

*as defined by Job Centre Plus. Learners only need to be eligible under any single entitlement category

Other categories

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Under 19 Not eligible for subsidised adult education courses (unless specified in the SFA contract) | Full cost to be recovered |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leisure Learning courses | Full fee |

Evidence

Acceptable evidence of unemployment benefit or a means-tested state benefit would be official documentary evidence of the relevant benefit. Evidence of low income, such as pay slips, is insufficient to claim fee remission funding and such learners should be referred to other government agencies for determination of means-tested state benefits. All proof of entitlement must be produced at enrolment. Proof of entitlement must be current and /or dated within the last 3 months. Please note that discounts are only available on specified courses.

Examination / Registration / Certification Costs

- Exam and certification costs to be covered by the learners, with the exception of Skills for Life qualifications or where costs are covered by another agency or organisation. £10 admin fee for all courses leading to Greater Merseyside Certificate

Refund of Fees

The refund policy recognises that there are circumstances in which learners have a genuine reason to claim a refund. Refunds are offered in the following circumstances to all people who have enrolled on a class:

- Where the course closes as a result of lack of numbers to make the class viable.
- Where a class is cancelled by the service for any reason.
- The meeting times, venue or day of the class are changed so that it is no longer possible for an individual to attend.
- A learner enrolls in advance of the course starting and pays a fee but prior to the course starting their circumstances change so that they are entitled to a free class. Note this would not apply once the course has started.
- In addition a refund may be offered where personal circumstances change so that it is impossible to attend the class.

Instalments

Instalment payment options will be offered e.g. termly payments for courses of one-year duration. In circumstances where a learner is paying for a course by instalments they are not paying for part of the course, merely spreading the payment. If they dropped out of a course they would be liable for the full amount of the course.

Appeals

In exceptional circumstances learners who are not eligible for fee remission can appeal, in writing to the Head of Service to be considered for fee remission.

Transfers

A learner transferring from one course to another where the fee is the same will not incur an additional cost.

Review

This policy should be reviewed annually in light of national changes in funding for adult learning.