

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - JULY 2010

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

TITLE WIRRAL LIFELONG AND FAMILY LEARNING COURSE FEES 2010-2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report details the proposed Lifelong Learning Service fees for 2010-11, in the light of Skills Funding Agency funding allocation.

1. Background

1.1 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, contingent on fulfilling planning requirements in partnership with SFA and Wirral Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) partnership. The amount is unchanged from the previous year. 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.

2. Risk Assessment

2.1 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 is judged "Good" by Ofsted. 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.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 Funding has been allocated to Lifelong and Family Learning at the exact same level for ASL since 2006, whilst learner targets have remained the same for 3 years, giving an effective annual reduction, due to salary rises and inflation.

3.2 The Lifelong and Family Learning Service Adult Safeguarded 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. The impact of the actual reduction in funding is either there is a reduction in the numbers of learners or there is an increase in other income to allow for provision on current levels.

	2009-10	2010-11
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
Learner targets for LSC /SFA	2408	2408
Actual learner nos. for LSC/SFA	*2825	

- Total up to June 2010

- 3.3 The service has provided a range of courses for different groups of Wirral people and managed to maintain steady and increasing learner numbers over the past 3 years by using the core allocated grant, together with course fees and other income to develop a responsive and high quality curriculum offer. There have also been savings in areas such as rental costs through good partnership working. The service works closely with schools, children's centres and other local providers to identify shared use of premises and shared delivery to meet common goals and has been able to continue to provide adult learning to more learners in targeted areas and also general advertised courses. Additional funding for the service has been sought from project funding and LSC/SFA tenders. This has resulted in additional adult learning opportunities being funded for Wirral, through Employability Skills Programme and Wirral JOBS, although these are more tightly focussed on employment outcomes than the general adult learning provision.
- 3.4 Adult Learning courses are SFA funded and therefore are subject to quality requirements and OFSTED inspection. Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service was inspected by OFSTED in January 2010 and was judged to have "Good" Overall Effectiveness, with "Good" for all Areas of Learning, Outcomes for Learners, Quality and Leadership and Management and "Outstanding" Equality and Diversity. A key aspect of this approach to Equality and Diversity was the targeting of courses to reach a variety of people with different needs. This includes some courses that are not expected to generate much fee income, because it is expected that the target group would be mostly unemployed, for example learners with disabilities attending DASS centres, or parents in areas of high unemployment. Balanced against this are courses which generate fee income, to offset some or all of their costs, for example an evening language course open to the general public.
- 3.5 LSC previously and now the Skills Funding Agency, in allocating their funding, assume that a fee policy will be implemented for courses. Each year a paper has been brought to Cabinet seeking approval for fees. Income for the service comes from individuals or other agencies or employers paying for courses. Income from course and exam fees was predicted to be £33,000 for 2009-10, although actual income is expected to be higher, approx £47,000, due to more agencies paying fees for courses. All income is put towards the cost of providing additional Lifelong Learning courses. This year, as some budget lines no longer exist, we need £56,000 to deliver the service at the level planned. To achieve this the proposed fee levels are set out below. Any additional income could extend the number of courses offered.
- 3.6 The SFA expect that Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy and Skills for Life courses will be provided free. Many learners are eligible for fee remission following

SFA national criteria: learners who are unemployed or on means tested benefits are eligible for free tuition. In 2009-10, 68% of PCDL enrolments were fee remitted, although there were higher numbers of fee payers in certain types of courses, eg IT, languages and particularly evening courses. From 2007-8 nationally, provision in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) no longer attracted automatic fee remission. Free tuition is offered to people who are unemployed or receiving income-based benefits. Since 2008-9 a reduced rate of fee has been agreed for ESOL up to Entry 3. The introduction of fees for these courses has not resulted in any significant drop in the overall numbers of learners over a 3 year period.

- 3.7 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. The reasons for developing a coherent fee policy are
- Strategic approach across providers
 - Common marketing possible to build public perceptions of the cost of adult learning and make it easier for people to understand the range of courses
 - Covers the costs of additional courses to enable extension of courses

To bring the service broadly in line with local colleges, and to enable expansion of fee paying courses, it is proposed that for 2010-11, there is a fee of £50 per term for entry and level one courses, compared to £49 in 2009-10. Learners eligible for fee remission under SFA categories 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, and this area of work be developed to enable a wider offer.

- 3.8 ECDL qualifications are long courses which commit the service to continuing the courses until learners have achieved. These course have been popular, with both people seeking work and those seeking promotion and new skills within work. 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 the ICT and other curriculum areas. It is proposed that long level two courses like ECDL, which are a minority of courses, carry a fee of £250 for a course of 100 hours, increased from £240, to enable them to contribute more to their costs.

- 3.9 New Leisure learning courses were introduced as a pilot in 2009-10. These courses are fully fee bearing to cover their costs and not publicly subsidised so they do not require as much tracking and paperwork as the SFA funded courses. Leisure Learning courses are run more informally and do not require as much teacher preparation and marking, so the running costs are lower than SFA funded courses. It is proposed to increase the number of these courses to enable to the service to offer more learning opportunities across Wirral. By running 14 Leisure courses per term the service could generate sufficient income to cover the annual cost of coordination for the courses at £6,000. The models shows the number of learners required for these courses to be self sustaining based on an intake of 10-14 fee payers, which is realistic from previous experience. The suggested fees vary in cost per hour and are based on the actual costs of different length courses.

Leisure course costs	hours	Total running cost £	Cost per person £	Number of paying learners to break even	Break even (with no rent costs)
Basic intro	20	855	60	14	11
Short course	10	447.50	45	12	10
Taster course	3.5	206	17.50	12	10

4. Staffing Implications

- 4.1 Currently no 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.

5. Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment

- 5.1 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.

6. Community Safety Implications

None

7. Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 7.1 Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service promote sustainability throughout courses and centres, and within the curriculum. In addition specific courses have been targeted at helping local people to gain the skills to improve their local area for example through the development of community allotments.

8. Planning Implications

None

9. Anti-poverty Implications

- 9.1 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.

10. Social Inclusion Implications

- 10.1 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. Local Member Support Implications

- 11.1 Adult learning benefits adults from all areas of Wirral.

12. Background Papers

RECOMMENDATIONS

That

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

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services

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Appendix 1

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WIRRAL LIFELONG AND FAMILY LEARNING SERVICE COURSE FEES POLICY 2010-11

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. Nationally, people who are unemployed or on means tested benefits are entitled to fee remission on SFA funded courses. 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. Since 2007-8 nationally, provision in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) has no longer attracted automatic fee remission. Free tuition is still available to priority groups – primarily people who are unemployed or receiving income-based benefits. Fee remission in Wirral is granted according to agreed criteria following national SFA guidelines.

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. 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 targeted only at specific vulnerable groups could be free
- SFA Employability Programmes will be free
- ESOL up to Entry 3 level £20 per term
- Entry and level 1 courses are £4 per week and £10 registration per term
- ECDL & Level 2 courses, which are likely to be funded by employers carry a fee of £250 for the full year course
- Non accredited leisure courses are £60 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	Full Cost 2009-10 £	Full cost 2010-11 £
2 hrs taster for - e.g. healthy eating, confidence building	2	0	0
ESOL beginners	20	19.60	20
Intro 1 term courses in: IT, gardening, arts, languages, psychology	20	49	50

Non accredited leisure – e.g. local history, water colour painting (require minimum numbers to cover costs)	20		60
Level 2 courses & ECDL	100	240 (+ tests)	250 (+tests)
ECDL full cost for a group of 10	100		4600 (+tests)

Remission Of Fees

The policy regarding remission of fees is consistent with SFA guidelines.

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.

SFA Categories

The categories of learners who are entitled to fee remission are (learners only need to be eligible under any single entitlement category):

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those in receipt of income-based benefits, formerly known as means-tested benefits, that is: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) unemployed people in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance b) those in receipt of Council Tax Benefit c) those in receipt of Housing Benefit d) those in receipt of Income Support e) those in receipt of Working Tax Credit with a household income of less than £15,276 f) those in receipt of Pension Credits (Guarantee Credit only) • Unemployed people in receipt of contribution based Jobseeker's Allowance • The unwaged dependants (as defined by Jobcentre Plus) of those listed above • Offenders who are serving their sentence in the community • Those taking learning aims that are funded as basic skills, excluding English for speakers of other languages • Asylum seekers eligible for FE funding according to the <i>Learner Eligibility Guidance 2010</i> and in receipt of the equivalent of income-based benefit (assistance under the terms of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999) and their dependants • Certain learners participating in SFA-funded projects where identified in the project specification. 	Free (proof is required)
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Other categories

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered unemployed, not in receipt of benefit 	Free
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 19 <p>Not eligible for subsidised adult education courses (unless specified in the SFA contract)</p>	Full cost to be recovered

Evidence

Acceptable evidence of unemployment benefit or a means-tested state benefit would be official documentary evidence of the relevant means tested state benefit. Evidence of low income, such as pay slips, is insufficient to claim SFA fee remission funding and such learners should be referred to other government agencies for determination of means-tested state benefits.

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.