

<b>DELEGATED DECISION</b>  <b>7 AUGUST 2019</b>  <b>COUNCILLOR TOM USHER</b>	<b><u>EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE</u></b> <b><u>CHARGING POLICY</u></b>
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Councillor Tom Usher, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education, said:

“It’s important that our early years services are able to continue providing excellent support to families. These services are tailored to meet the needs of local people and are completely free – and will remain so. This new policy means we can charge for the costs associated with providing training and facilities to other organisations in the borough. This helps us keep our services sustainable and free to the residents who need them.”

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to bring to Cabinet’s attention to proposals for applying charges to some services within the Early Childhood Service. A summary of proposed charges is:

- Apply a non-refundable charge to training delivered by the Local Authority’s Early Childhood Service, to cover training resources and avoid non-attendance;
- Apply a cost for specialist/bespoke training delivered by Early Childhood Service staff; and,
- Apply booking charges for use of training/meeting room spaces in Wirral’s Children’s Centres.

Charges **will not** be applied to those services provided by Early Childhood Services or via partnership arrangements directly delivered to children and families. The policy will be implemented as of 1 January 2020.

Furthermore, priority for use of accommodation will be given to activities based on improving outcomes for children and families thereby contributing to the performance framework for Early Childhood Services and the Wirral Plan.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

It is recommended that Cabinet approves the proposal for applying charges through a charging policy framework.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

1.1 Wirral Council is committed to the pledges *Children Are Ready for School* and *Vulnerable Children Reach their Full Potential*. In line with those pledges, the proposed Charging Policy will enhance the capabilities of the early years workforce and support more children to achieve Good Levels of Development (GLD). The proposal will contribute to this by enabling an enhanced level of quality training and support for early years providers across Wirral.

1.2 The proposal embodies the Council's Values and Behaviours:

#### **Be customer-focused**

The proposal will allow the Early Years Quality Improvement & Training Team to be more responsive to the needs of individual providers, delivering bespoke packages of training which will enable providers to increase the quality of their provision at a significantly lower cost than commissioning a private provider. Children will be beneficiaries of this.

#### **Be professional**

Applying a charging policy will enhance the professional relationship between the Early Childhood Service and its partners. Formalised arrangements will ensure that the highest professional standards are applied. It is accepted through research that greater value is attached to training where a charge is incurred. This approach is in line with progress in most Local Authority areas in the region.

#### **Be accountable**

The proposal seeks to ensure that there is joint accountability between the Early Childhood Service and its customers, that bookings for training and venues are valued and that each partner benefits from this new relationship.

#### **Be ambitious**

We want to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children. The Early Childhood Service is committed to working with its partners to ensure that we develop highly qualified and skilled staff who will enable children to reach their full potential. The Charging Policy will provide capacity to deliver an enhanced level of training across a wider range of areas, meet bespoke needs for staff and particular cohorts of children, leading to a better experience and improved outcomes for our 0-5s.

1.3 The proposed use of premises aims to maximise the utilisation of Children's Centre property assets in pursuance of the delivery requirements and objectives of the early years and wider early help offer, whilst ensuring that the Council's interests are fully protected.

## **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Consideration has been given to reducing running costs of premises through a reduced service delivery programme. This would negatively impact on the delivery of early help services to those communities most in need.
- 2.2 Consideration has been given to reducing the running costs of the Early Childhood Service, however, given the service review of 2014-2016 and reduction of Wirral's Early Years and Children Centre portfolio, this has previously been fully realised. The Council must demonstrate a core early years and Children Centres offer as a statutory duty.
- 2.3 Consideration has been given to continue with the existing training provision offer, which would mean that providers would have to seek bespoke/specialist training from private organisations at a greater cost.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Charging Policy is aligned with Wirral Partnership's objectives to ensure sustainability of essential community assets that improve outcomes for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families, particularly in early years of life.
- 3.2 The Early Childhood Services leads the *Children Ready for School* Pledge, working in partnership with key agencies such as Public Health, Midwifery, Health Visiting, education and Children's Social Care. The use of Children's Centre premises for the delivery of training programmes, specifically for parenting, attachment, early communication and language activity is critical to reducing barriers for disadvantaged groups and increasing social mobility.
- 3.3 The charges for room hire will apply across Wirral's Children Centres in Wallasey, Birkenhead and South and West Wirral. The charges for training will be borough-wide and applied to all childcare providers, childminders, nursery schools and voluntary/partner agencies. The costs for training will be minimal with a non-for-profit approach, as the main principle is to recoup layout of costs for room hire, resource and professional speakers.
- 3.4 Children Centre room hire charges will be minimal and applied at an hourly rate, with consideration of local market conditions. Hiring arrangements will be flexible for evening and weekend use where appropriate. Charges will consider the flexible working arrangement for council facilities officers in overseeing access to premises and consider energy-efficiency and wear and tear.
- 3.5 Premises would not be used by for commercial, business, trade or political purposes. The proposed charging policy has been devised for use within Wirral Council's owned Children Centre premises only, regardless of the management route in place.
- 3.6 In terms of non-chargeable activities, the Early Childhood Charging policy will outline examples as follows:
  - Free services/activities being delivered as part of the Early Childhood Service core offer requirement, including hot-desking for staff delivering core business activities;

- Where a chargeable activity is provided with an agreed number of free places for the centre to use;
- Supervised contact sessions for children and families within Wirral's Children's Social Care service;
- Training/networking for Foster Carers or prospective adopters for Wirral Council;
- Any organisation delivering training on behalf of the Early Childhood Service, as part of a commission agreement; and,
- Voluntary organisations who deliver services as part of the Early Childhood Service core offer and require a room not connected with this activity e.g. committee meeting.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Children's Centres are a valuable community asset and play a key role in ensuring that children get the best possible start in life by providing a community venue to access services. With increasing financial pressures such as health and safety compliance maintenance upgrades, it is essential to ensure that these venues are sustainable. The ability to generate income will enable an offsetting of financial pressures and enable Wirral to continue to provide quality services to residents within their local communities. Cost benefit analysis has been undertaken and the policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 All legal implications and requirements are addressed within the policy.

#### **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

6.1 There are resources implications for Local Authority Early Childhood Services as the Charging Policy will require robust administration. This has been mitigated by ensuring that processes are in place, such as using electronic systems, to ensure it is a manageable. With regard to assets, further wear and tear through increased volume of use would be manageable as additional income from hire costs would enable ongoing maintenance.

#### **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 A risk may be lack of uptake for room hire at Children Centres and the projected income generation not achieved. This will be mitigated against by a thorough promotional and communication plan.

7.2 Another risk may be lack of uptake for bespoke training activity however consultation indicates that the vast majority of early years providers are in support of an enhanced offer provided through a charging policy.

#### **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 A consultation with early years providers and stakeholders took place during the Autumn Term 2018 and into Spring Term 2019. The proposals were reviewed by the School Forum on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019. Following challenge by Early Years representatives on

16<sup>th</sup> January 2019, the initial key principles were revised. The draft Charging Policy (Appendix 1) was agreed through this consultation process.

## 9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no equality impact implications in relation to this report.

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**APPENDICES** Early Childhood Service Charging Policy

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS** Not applicable

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Not applicable	Not applicable