

Report to: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
CABINET

Date: 19TH MAY 2008
29TH MAY 2008

Subject: INTRODUCING A FEE POLICY FOR ADULT COMMUNITY
LEARNING

Report of: DIRECTOR OF ADULT SERVICES

Contact officer: LOUISE SUTTON EXT 2798

Purpose / summary: To introduce a fee policy for the Learning and Skills Council funded adult learning provision.

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: There is not an alternative option available to the Council if it is going to continue to receive LSC funding to the total value of £300,000 per annum.

A safeguarded statutory fee remission will ensure that adults in receipt of means-tested benefits will be eligible for a fee remission and all priority courses such as Skills for Life and Family Learning will be free of charge.

Recommendation / decision: That a fee policy for Adult Learning Provision is introduced in July 2008.

Key Decision: This report involves a key decision within ground(s) 7.

The decision made as a result of this report will be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until seven working days have elapsed, i.e. before 20th May 2008.

This item is included in the Forward Plan.

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	The introduction of a fee policy for Adult Learning Provision will generate around £50,000 income to be re-invested in the service. The introduction of a fee policy is in line with LSC funding policy and £300,000 external funding could potentially be at risk if such a policy is not implemented.
Staffing:	N/A
Policy:	To introduce a fee policy for LSC funded adult learning
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	Yes – attached.
Wards affected:	Borough-wide

Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

No

If yes, have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property Officer?**Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?**

A diversity impact assessment is not necessary at this stage, however, equality and diversity implications have been considered when producing this report.

Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure?

A diversity impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as an appendix to this report.

Has the Director of Legal and Property Services confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution? **Yes**

Has the Director of Finance and IT confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council’s budget? **Yes**

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **No**

* delete which applicable

For Cabinet reports only :

Categorisation of the report:	X		X
Discussion leading to a decision		Discussion	
Monitoring		Decision	X
Sharing for corporate understanding		Information	

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
	19 th May 2008	29 th May 2008	

List of Background Papers in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

Document	Date	File Reference	Place of Inspection
Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills – Adult Learning and Skills Investing in the first steps.	2007	-	Civic Centre
Department for Education and Skills – Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances.	March 2006	-	Civic Centre
Learning Skills Council – A Framework for Managing the balance and Mix of Provision (2007/08).	February 2007	-	Civic Centre

Proper Officer Bernard WalkerDate 7th May 2008

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 There is currently a major reform of all Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) being conducted by the government which will continue throughout 2008/09. One consequence of this review is that funding to support ASL is expected to be capped at current levels for the next three years.
- 1.2 The Learning and Skills Council (the national funding body for adult learning) have placed an emphasis on changing the balance between public and private subsidies for learning; learners and employers are expected to pay for a greater percentage of adult learning to build a sustainable funding base. There is an assumption that adult learning providers will source courses at full or partial cost with the introduction of a fee policy. However, there is an intention that a safeguarded statutory fee remission will ensure that adults who need it will be entitled to free or reduced cost courses.
- 1.3 The "Framework for Managing the Balance and Mix of Provision 2007/08" establishes the following principles:
- Access should be universal with most learners contributing some or all of the cost of their learning. There is no intention to reduce the amount of provision to more affluent or well-qualified learners so long as they are willing to meet the costs of their learning.
 - Those who have benefited least from the education system and are in most financial need should have greatest access to *public funding* for Personal and Community Learning (PCDL) provision.
 - Access to PCDL programmes will not be based on prior educational attainment.
 - LSC-established Partnerships at local level are the foundation of the reform of PCDL. Such partnerships (built from public, private, voluntary, community and faith organisations) should lever in other sources of funding or services and identify providers who can reach under-represented groups of learners

2. PROPOSALS

- 2.1 A Wigan Council fee policy would be a key part of the strategic planning process for adult learning provision; additional income would support learners in receipt of means-tested benefits and priority courses such as Skills for Life and Family Learning.
- 2.2 The fee policy proposed is attached. In summary:
- i) Those people in receipt of a means-tested benefit would pay a contributory fee of £5.00 per person, per course.
 - ii) Those people who are not in receipt of a means-tested benefit would pay a contributory fee of £1.25 per hour of learning. Typically a two hour, ten week course will equate to £25.00.

- 2.3 This will strengthen the business planning and financial projections of services involved in adult learning, they will be more sustainable and less dependant on a single funder such as the LSC. Currently, the Adult & Community Learning service receives £300,000 of LSC funding, of which £200,000 is targeted at Personal, Community Development Learning (PCDL) and First Steps provision. Through the introduction of a fee policy it is estimated that by charging fees to those who can afford to pay approximately £50,000 income will be generated. This can only be estimated as employment and benefit status has not previously been recorded. However, there are 3,000 learners per year participating in PCDL and First Steps learning.
- 2.4 All income generated will be re-invested into adult learning provision and focused on increasing the learning opportunities for those people who live in the most deprived wards of the borough.
- 2.5 A Wigan Council fee policy will standardise fees already being paid and establish uniform policy across the Council. For many years other providers such as Wigan & Leigh College has operated a fee charging policy, with significant success.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDED OPTION

- 3.1 If Wigan Council is going to continue to receive Adult Safeguarded Learning Funding it must implement a charge to those people who are not on means-tested benefits. This will be in line with other adult education provision in Greater Manchester and the North West where fee polices have been in place for several years.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The ability to charge fees will ensure the availability of a wide range of adult learning opportunities for Personal and Community Developmental Learning for all Wigan residents (not just those entitled to free courses or in priority wards). This will include the provision of courses that address the skills gaps in the Borough i.e. construction, retail, ICT, Social Care, etc.
- 4.2 Making the service more sustainable in this way will ensure that Adult and Community Learning will continue to deliver priority free courses such as Family Learning and Skills for Life.
- 4.3 A fee policy will help expand the Borough's Employer Engagement activities to ensure that high quality courses are delivered to the working population in Wigan, with employees improving their skills and progressing in the workplace. In turn this will help Wigan business to be competitive.
- 4.4 All research indicates that personal contributions to learning costs help retention levels; if learners commit to attending they are more likely to achieve and progress in the courses they attend.

Wigan Council

Adult Learning and Employment Fee Charging Policy 2008/09

1. This policy covers Personal and Community Learning and First Steps courses provided by Wigan Council Adult Learning and Employment Services which are funded through the Learning and Skills Council, Greater Manchester.

This policy does not include Wider Family Learning, Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy, and Skills for Life Courses as these priority courses will be provided free of charge.

2. This policy will take effect from 1st July 2008.
3. The hourly rate for courses will be £1.25 per hour for full paying learners.
4. Learners in receipt of the following benefits will be charged a concessionary fee of £5.00 per course:

<u>Benefit</u>	<u>Evidence</u>
Jobseekers Allowance	Award letter or recent letter from benefit office
Income Support	Award letter or recent letter from benefit office
Working Tax Credit	Award Notice (TC062 with a household income of less than £15050)
Pension (guarantee) credit	Award Notice
Housing Benefit	Letter of Notification from benefits office
Council Tax Benefit (not single occupancy)	Council Tax Bill or notification from Benefits Office
Unwaged Dependents of the above	Award letter or recent letter from benefit office

5. It is not the policy of the Adult Learning and Employment Services to automatically refund fees when a change of circumstance prevents or discourages a learner from continuing with their classes.

A full refund will be paid if the course is cancelled within the first two sessions. This will be refunded on a pro-rata basis thereafter.

In exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Centre Manager, other refunds may be given. These requests must be made within 2 weeks of the start of the course. After 5 weeks no refund will be given under any circumstance.

6. This policy will be reviewed in June 2009 to inform the 2009/10 planning round.

Diversity Impact Assessment form

Section: Department of Adult Services, Adult Community Learning

Policy/Service Area: Adult Community Learning – Fee policy

Person Completing Form: Lynne Davison

Date:29/02/08

Do any of the below groups suffer specific disadvantage (please indicate)

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Race		✓	Disability		✓
Ethnicity		✓	Gender		✓
Age		✓	Religion		✓
Class		✓	Sexual Orientation		✓

Is there evidence of disadvantage or associated problems?

No – those who are not on a means tested benefit will be in a position to contribute towards the cost of their learning.
Skills for Life (numeracy, literacy and language) and Family Learning are excluded from fee paying.

How was the information collected and/or who have you consulted with?

Information has been gathered and collated from other North West and Greater Manchester Local Authorities and the Learning and Skills Council (main funding body).

Action Plan – *What specific actions are planned to tackle any disadvantage identified?*

There will be fee remission for those people who are on means tested benefits, including Income Support claimants, income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Housing or Council Tax benefit claimants, Working Tax Credit recipients (up to £15,500 per annum), those on pension credits and unwaged dependents of those in receipt of the above benefits.

Is the policy in line with current equality legislation and relevant codes of practice?

Yes

Timescale	30 th April 08
Responsibility	Lynne Davison
Comments	

Are the actions specified included in any other documents/plans?

Departmental Service Plan	No
Section/Team Plan	Yes
Other (Specify)	LSC's, Adult Safeguarded Learning plans & strategies

Date for further review – 30th April 09