

CABINET MEETING – 11 MARCH 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Capping Fees for Personal Community Development Learning Programme (PCDL)

Author(s):

Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report:

Cabinet approved the introduction of a fees policy to support the delivery of Personal Community Development Learning (PCDL) programmes at its Cabinet meeting in December. Cabinet asked for a further report to be submitted with recommendations for capping the amount of fees that any one individual would be expected to pay during an academic year.

Description of Decision:

Cabinet is asked to approve that those learners receiving a 50% concession receive up to a maximum of three free courses in any one academic year once they have paid for six courses at a total cost of £108, subject to the availability of funding.

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? Yes

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

Concern was expressed that in the current economic climate potential fee paying learners may exclude themselves from participating on learning programmes on the basis of affordability.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

There are three options proposed for Cabinet to consider, with option two being the recommended option to approve, given that the average number of courses currently undertaken by learners in this category is three per term or nine per year.

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? Yes

Is it included in the Forward Plan? Yes

Relevant Review Committee:

Children's Services

CAPPING FEES FOR PERSONAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LEARNING PROGRAMME (PCDL)

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Cabinet approved the introduction of a fees policy to support the delivery of Personal Community Development Learning (PCDL) programmes at its meeting in December 2008. Cabinet requested that a further report be submitted with recommendations for capping the amount of fees that any one individual would be expected to pay during an academic year.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE DECISION

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve that those learners receiving a 50% concession receive up to a maximum of three free courses in any one academic year once they have paid for six courses at a total cost of £108, subject to the availability of funding.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Family Adult and Community Learning (FACL) have operated under contract from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to deliver Family Adult and Community Learning Programmes across Sunderland since 2001.
- 3.2 The LSC announced in 'Priorities for Success', published in Autumn 2006, 'that providers of learning who receive LSC funding for the delivery of PCDL would be expected to raise fees to complement the funding received from the LSC in order to meet the rising costs of the delivery of provision, and those learners who can afford to pay for their learning should do so'. The LSC stipulated that any fees collected must be used to underpin the increase in the amount of provision that is currently made available to those learners who are entitled to free tuition.
- 3.3 At December's Cabinet the following decisions were agreed:
- 3.3.1 All learners who are in receipt of means tested benefits (as defined by the LSC) receive free tuition, and that fees are charged for the following groups:

- £1.80 per hour of delivery for those learners aged up to 59 who are not in receipt of means tested benefits
- £0.90 per hour (50% concession) for all learners aged 60 and over that are not in receipt of a mean tested benefits.

4. CURRENT POSITION

4.1 Courses are delivered over a 10-week period and are delivered 2 hours per week for a maximum of 20 hours.

4.2 An analysis of data for term one of the academic year 1st August 2008 to date, indicates that potential:

- Full fee paying learners do, on average, one course per term, up to a maximum of three courses in any one academic year
- Learners receiving a 50% concession do, on average, three courses per term up to a maximum of nine in any one academic year.

4.3 Currently around 60 learners (7%) would be expected to pay a fee.

5. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

5.1 Concern was expressed that in the current economic climate potential fee paying learners may exclude themselves from participating on learning programmes on the basis of affordability.

5.2 In setting a cap on the maximum amount of funding that a learner would be expected to pay in any one academic year, consideration has been given to the amount of funding that Family Adult and Community Learning receives from the Learning and Skills Council and the purpose for which this funding is intended.

5.3 The primary aim of the funding is to engage 1,200 unemployed people from deprived areas into learning. However, there is recognition that provision must also be made available to those who are not in receipt of means tested benefits and as such would be expected to pay a fee.

5.4 Any courses which are offered free to potentially fee paying learners are subject to the availability of funding to support any additional courses over and above those for which they have paid a fee.

5.5 The fees policy, and the arrangements for capping the amount of fees that any one learner would be expected to pay in any one academic year, will be reviewed during 2010/11 to coincide with the demise of the LSC.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 Option one – do not have any fee capping arrangements, thus allowing individual preference and affordability to determine how many courses a full or partial fee payer attends.
- 6.2 Option two – Offer learners receiving a 50% concession the opportunity to receive up to a maximum of three free courses in any one academic year once they have paid for six courses at a total cost of £108, subject to the availability of funding.
- 6.3 Option three – Offer learners receiving a 50% concession the opportunity to receive up to a maximum of three free courses in any one academic year once they have paid for nine courses at a total cost of £162, subject to the availability of funding.
- 6.4 It is not expected that learners would pay the full £108 at the beginning of the academic year. Learners pay for a course as they participate and have to option to pay for each course weekly, monthly or termly.

7. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 Financial: Consideration has been given to the availability of funding and the priorities attached to the use of funds.

Background Papers

- Cabinet Report, December 2008
- Priorities for Success, Learning Skills Council, 2006

