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Dear Parent

CHANGES TO CHILDCARE CHARGES

I am sorry if there remains uncertainty for parents regarding the approach to the application of charges. The original Council paper could not provide the level of detail required to make individual calculations. However, parents were advised by letter that the Head of Centre would receive detailed information and be in a position to provide parents with a clear explanation of how charges will apply. Hopefully the information below will clarify any outstanding areas of concern.

Centres providing for children aged 3 - 5 years

For 3 and 4 year olds who access their free entitlement in a Council centre, charges will be applied differently for term time and holiday periods.

Term Time

Entitlement is for 2.5 hours for 5 days over school terms, from the term after the child's third birthday (12.5 hours). Charges will only be made for any childcare in excess of the entitlement.

As stated in the Council report, additional hours up to 3 hours will be charged at £3.50 per hour, or part hour. So if parents access 2 hours childcare in a day they will be charged £7.00. If they access 2.5 hours they will be charged £10.50, 3 times £3.50.

If parents require more than 3 hours per day in addition to the free entitlement, that will be charged at an hourly rate based on the sessional charge. This means that in term time, parents will be charged £2.90 per hour, or part hour, based on a sessional rate:

- £23.20 for 8 hours. (in establishments opening for 40 hours)
- £26.10 for 9 hours (in establishments opening for 45 hours)

Holiday Periods

During holiday periods, ie outwith term time, children have no free entitlement so the sessional charges will apply, based on the current operating hours of the centre.

For children accessing childcare in a centre offering up to 40 hours, this will be charged as follows:

Up to 4 hours (half day)	£13.60
Over 4 and up to 8 hours (full day)	£23.20
Up to 40 hours per week (full week)	£112.00

For children accessing childcare in a centre offering up to 45 hours, this will be charged as follows:

Up to 4.5 hours (half day)	£15.30
Over 4.5 hours and up to 9 hours (full day)	£26.10
Up to 45 hours per week (full week)	£126.00

Centres providing for children 0 – 3 years

In relation to children who are 3 and younger with no entitlement, the sessional charges will apply at all times.

Children aged 0 - 2 years

Centres open 45 hours:

- Up to 4.5 hours (half day) £17.10
- Over 4.5 and up to 9 hours (full day) £29.70
- Up to 45 hours per week (full week) £144.00

Centres open 40 hours

- Up to 4 hours (half day) £15.20
- Over 4 and up to 8 hours (full day) £26.40
- Up to 40 hours per week (full week) £128.00

Children aged 2 – 3 years

Centres open 45 hours

- Up to 4.5 hours (half day) £16.20
- Over 4.5 and up to 9 hours (full day) £27.90
- Up to 45 hours per week (full week) £135.00

Centres open 40 hours

- Up to 4 hours (half day) £14.40
- Over 4 hours and up to 8 hours (full day) £24.80
- Up to 40 hours per week (full week) £120.00

We hope to improve the range of payment options open to parents. However, there are no plans to change the timing of payments. More information will be available on payment methods within the next few weeks.

A number of parents have raised questions about the new charges in relation to the overall Council budget. As noted in the Council report, childcare is currently significantly subsidised by the main budget, and will continue to be subsidised even when charges are increased.

While we have used the local private sector childcare providers as a benchmark in terms of reviewing charges, the Council services do not operate on a commercial basis. While the aim of the rise in charges was to increase income through applying more realistic charges, particularly in respect of the 50% discount, childcare will continue to be subsidised through the main budget.

There are significant differences between the Council run service and the private sector in respect of staff qualifications, experience, pay and conditions, support and resourcing which mean that the Council could not operate childcare services at a profit.

Provision of childcare is not a statutory requirement for the Council but it is offered in limited circumstances as part of the overall pre-5 service, in order to support working parents and as part of the Council's support to employees. Gartocharn and Garshake EE&CCs are the only two centres which offer significant levels of childcare in addition to the statutory early years' education entitlement.

I appreciate that these increased charges will have an impact on families using the services, and depending on the age and stage of the child and the level of usage the increased costs could be significant. However, given the difficult financial situation facing this Council and others across Scotland, elected members have to consider how to maintain non- statutory services while still carrying out their statutory functions. Charges for childcare have remained low over a number of years and, coupled with the extremely generous discount for second and subsequent children, this has been of great benefit to the working parents who have been able to access the limited number of childcare places available in Council run centres. Many other parents who live in the area have to access nursery based childcare via the more expensive private sector. In the current budgetary context, however, the level of subsidy for one particular group of service users could not be justified or maintained.

I hope this information is of assistance to you. Should you require further clarification regarding your own situation please speak directly to the Head of Centre.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry Lanagan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Terry Lanagan
Executive Director of Educational Services