

<b>Policy title</b>	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees
<b>Policy type</b>	Management
<b>Group</b>	Family and Children

## Rationale

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure procedures are in place for the payment of fees and provision of a Statement of Fees charged by the education and care service, in accordance with the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*, and *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999*.

## Policy statement

Moonee Valley City Council is committed to:

- responsible financial management of the service
- establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level
- a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts. Maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of families enrolled at the services
- providing families 28 days' notice of intended changes to the Payment and Provision of Fees

<b>Group</b>	<b>Responsible Manager</b>	<b>Document</b>	<b>Document No</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>	<b>Review Date</b>
Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019

## Calculation of fees

In long day care, fees are calculated on a daily or weekly basis. Occasional care and family day care services fees are calculated based on the hours of use. Fees are set once a year following adoption of the Council's annual budget.

In long day care and family day care, normal fees are charged for all children's booked days even if they happen to fall on a public holiday. If a child is absent from the service due to illness or holidays, normal fees will apply. In long day care, Council does not swap days of care and does not arrange make up days, due to the restriction of licensed places and maintaining educator-to-child ratios.

Australian Government payments made to families to assist with the cost of childcare include:

- Child Care Benefit (CCB)
- Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB)
- Grandparent Child Care Benefit (GCCB)
- Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA)
- Child Care Rebate (CCR)

**Federal Government legislation No Jab, No Pay' stipulates that CCB and CCR payments will be conditional on children meeting current immunisation requirements;**

The Commonwealth Family Assistance Office (FAO) calculates fee reductions using family eligibility information and the information provided by services on attendance record/timesheet reports.

It is the families responsibility to apply for CCB and CCR via the Family Assistance Office and to provide the Customer Reference Number (CRN) to the service. Full fees will be applied until the service receives the parent/guardian and child's CRN.

## Kindergarten fee subsidy

- The kindergarten fee subsidy allows children to access up to 15 hours of kindergarten delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher in the year before school for free or at low cost.

Group	Responsible Manager	Document	Document No	Approval Date	Review Date
Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019

- Your child is eligible in any of the following circumstances:
  - If your child identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
  - If your child is identified on their birth certificate as being a multiple birth child (triplets or more).
- Or if your child holds or has a parent or guardian who holds, one of the following:
  - A Commonwealth Health Care Card.
  - A Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card.
  - A Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card.
  - Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866).
  - Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas.

If your family or child has a humanitarian or refugee visa listed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection which is not included in the above list, your child may still be eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy. Please speak to your kindergarten service for more information.

- To enable Moonee Valley City Council to claim the subsidy on behalf of the family:
  - Families are required to provide a photocopy of their valid card (one of the above) to Moonee Valley City Council prior to commencing kindergarten and upon expiry of their current card throughout the year.
  - Families are required to notify Council's Finance Department on 9243 8888 if their card is not renewed through the year and an invoice will be issued.
- When a family has twins attending in the same year, Council provides a subsidy for each child enrolled. Each child in a multiple birth will be entitled to a \$10 per term discount.
- Families who have triplets or quadruplets are eligible to receive a State Government funded fee subsidy. In order to qualify for this subsidy:
  - The child must be identified on the birth certificate as a triplet or quadruplet.
  - The other two or three children on the birth certificate are attending a funded kindergarten program.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Responsible Manager</b>	<b>Document</b>	<b>Document No</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>	<b>Review Date</b>
Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019

## Payment methods for long day care services

Prior to starting at our services and upon acceptance of a place, 2 weeks full fees in advance are required. When families exit the service, any balance owing is refunded to the family. On commencement of care, fees will be Direct Debited from your account on a fortnightly or monthly basis.

The payment method is for families to set up direct debit payments through Ezi Debit. Once the first payment has been processed, families' financial banking details provided in the Direct Debit Request (DDR) will be destroyed. After each payment, families will receive a statement for fees which shows all payments received and credited to your account.

## Payment methods for family day care

- payments are to be made on the final day of care each week or within the fortnightly pay period as agreed with the educator
- receipt for payment is shown on the timesheet. A copy is given to families at the end of each fortnight

## Payment methods for occasional care

- fees can be paid via EFTPOS or direct debit (from credit card)
- ensure enough funds are available in order to clear all payments
- if your child is absent from a booked occasional care session and you did not notify the service 24 hours prior to the session of your child's absence then fees for the booked session will be payable
- if your child is not collected within 5 minutes after the session end you will be charged an additional session hour fee

## Payment methods for kindergarten

- the payment method is for families to set up direct debit payments through Ezi Debit. Once the first payment has been processed, families' financial banking details provided in the Direct Debit Request (DDR) will be destroyed. Families will receive a statement for fees which shows all payments received and credited to your account at the end of each term.

Group	Responsible Manager	Document	Document No	Approval Date	Review Date
Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019

- if families are having difficulty meeting fee payments, contact the kindergarten coordination unit on 9243-8888 to arrange a payment plan.

## Direct Debit Request Authorisation

By signing a Direct Debit Request or by providing Council with a valid instruction, you have authorised Council to arrange for funds to be debited from your account. You should refer to the Direct Debit Request for the terms of the arrangement between Ezidebit and you. We will only arrange funds to be debited from your account as authorised in the Direct Debit Request.

You may make changes to the Direct Debit Request, such as updating your bank or credit card details by notifying your centre co-ordinator or kindergarten administration team with at least 7 days written notice.

It is the family's responsibility to ensure that there are sufficient cleared funds available to allow a payment to be made in accordance with the Direct Debit request. If there are insufficient cleared funds to meet the debit request you may be charged a fee and/or interest by your financial institution. You may also incur fees or charges imposed by Council or Council's Direct Debit provider. Council may request the family to arrange for another method of payment to cover the debit or to agree to a timeframe as to when the debit can be processed again.

## Dispute

If you believe that there has been an error in debiting your account you should contact Council immediately on 9243 8888 and confirm that notice in writing as soon as possible so that we can resolve your query more quickly. Alternatively you may wish to take the matter up with your financial institution.

If Council concludes as a result of our investigations (using information from our Direct Debit provider) that your account has been incorrectly debited we will respond to your query by arranging for your financial institution to adjust your account. We will also notify you in writing of the amount by which your account has been adjusted.

If Council concludes as a result of our investigations that your account has not been incorrectly debited we will respond to your query by providing you with reasons and any evidence for this finding in writing.

If you believe that a payment has been made but Council records (provided by our direct debit provider) indicate this is not the case you will be required to provide evidence such as a bank statement to confirm the payment was made.

Group	Responsible Manager	Document	Document No	Approval Date	Review Date
Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019

## Accounts

You should check:

- (a) with your financial institution whether direct debiting is available from your account as direct debiting is not available on all accounts offered by financial institutions.
- (b) your account details which you have provided to us are correct by checking them against a recent account statement; and
- (c) with your financial institution before completing the Direct Debit Request if you have any queries about how to complete the Direct Debit Request.

## Confidentiality

We will keep any information (including your account details) in your Direct Debit Request confidential. We will make reasonable efforts to keep any such information that we have about you secure and to ensure that any of our employees or agents who have access to information about you do not make any unauthorised use, modification, reproduction or disclosure of that information.

We will only disclose information that we have about you to the extent specifically required by law; or for the purposes of this agreement (including disclosing information in connection with any query or claim).

## Charges

There are some small charges associated with the introduction of direct debit. These charges are outlined in the table below:

Fee	Amount	Charged to
One off Administration Fee	\$2.20	MVCC
Bank Account Transaction Fee	\$0.88 per weekly or fortnightly transaction	Family
Credit Card Transaction Fee	<b>Visa / MasterCard</b> 1.8% (Min \$0.88) per weekly or fortnightly transaction <b>AMEX/Diners</b> 4.4% (Min \$0.88) per weekly or fortnightly transaction	Family
Failed Payment Fee	\$14.80	Family

Group	Responsible Manager	Document	Document No	Approval Date	Review Date
Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019

## Late collection Fees

It is the responsibility of the family to ensure their child is collected prior to the service closing. If the family does not contact the service to advise of unavoidable delays in collecting their child a fee may be imposed. If the family continues to collect their child after the service has closed, a late fee will be imposed.

The long day care, family day care and kindergarten the late collection fee is \$20 for every 10 minutes or part thereof. Families will be billed separately from their fees and Child Care Benefit will not be applied.

## Overdue accounts for long day care services

- if a fee payment is declined, the family will be alerted via email and/or phone and requested to make funds available within 48 hours
- when an account is 15-30 days overdue or \$1000 in arrears, the family will be given a formal letter requesting immediate payment of the outstanding amount
- in the event a family's account is overdue 31 days or in arrears \$1,000, and payment of the account has not been made, their child's place at the service may/or will be forfeited and the account forwarded to debt collection. In this event the family will not be allowed to return to the centre until the account has been paid in full
- families experiencing genuine difficulty with payment of their fees can agree to a payment plan. The payment plan should be designed to clear debts through an additional payment on top of the regular payments for care. In certain cases, SCCB may be applied
- child care may not be offered to a family at any of Council's education & care services if there is an outstanding debt at any of them. For example, a debt with a long day care centre would mean no access to family day care until the debt is paid or a payment plan is in place

## Overdue accounts for kindergarten services

Group	Responsible Manager	Document	Document No	Approval Date	Review Date
Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019

- responsibility for collection of overdue kindergarten fees and debt management sits with the Coordinator Kindergarten Services who will oversee and manage this process
- kindergarten term fees are due for payment via Ezi Debit weekly or fortnightly. If families would like to discuss other payment terms and frequency they should contact the kindergarten coordination unit on 9243-8888
- if a fee payment is declined, the family will be alerted via email and/or phone and requested to make funds available within 48 hours
- should fees be more than four weeks in arrears, the Coordinator Kindergarten Services or their representative will remind the family of the outstanding fees in writing requesting payment
- if there is no immediate response to the letter, the Coordinator Kindergarten Services or their representative will continue to telephone parents/guardians over a one week period to arrange a payment plan
- if there is no response to the first letter or the follow up phone calls a second letter requesting payment will be sent to the family
- council reserves the right to take action to recover any debts owing. This can include the engagement of debt collectors
- if there is no response from the family after the two (2) reminder letters and phone calls, the Coordinator Kindergarten Services will engage Council's debt collection agency to issue a letter of demand for payment
- in order to engage the debt collection agency the amount of debt owed by the family must be greater than \$50.00
- throughout this process the Coordinator Kindergarten Services will provide communication to the Manager Family and Children's Services in relation to the number of families with outstanding fees and the actions being undertaken to recover the debt
- if there is no response from the family after the reminder letters, phone calls and demand for payment letter, the matter will be referred to the Manager Family and Children's Services and the Director City Services for advice and direction in relation to recovery of the debt
- in the case of a family attending a three (3) year old program, that incur debt greater than a single term, Council may at its discretion suspend or cancel the place until the debt has been paid in full

<b>Group</b>	<b>Responsible Manager</b>	<b>Document</b>	<b>Document No</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>	<b>Review Date</b>
Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019



- this decision will be made in consultation between the Coordinator Kindergarten Services and the Manger Family and Children’s Services. This decision will be based on the amount owed and any prior debt management issues with the family
- if a decision is reached to suspend or cancel a three (3) year old place the family will be given one (1) week notice
- if the three (3) year old place is cancelled the family will be placed on a waiting list and will be eligible to recommence their place once all outstanding debt has been paid and a place becomes available
- families experiencing genuine difficulty with payment of their fees can agree a payment plan. The payment plan will be designed to clear debts through an additional payment on top of the regular payments

### **Refunding kindergarten fees**

- Refunds will only be issued if:
  - Four (4) weeks notification is received in writing outlining your intention to withdraw your child/children and we are able to fill your place.
    - You have become eligible for the fee subsidy during the term.
- There will be no refund of fees due to:
  - A child’s short-term illness.
  - Public holidays.
  - Family holiday during operational times.
  - Closure of the centre for one or more days when a teacher or qualified staff member is absent and a qualified reliever is not available.
  - Closure of the centre for staff training days.
  - Closure of the centre in extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

### **Cancellation/change of booking long day care and family day care**

Families are required to provide 2 weeks written notice of the cancellation/ or change of their child’s booking. Fees will continue to apply until a written cancellation is received.

If your child doesn’t attend the service during the last 2 weeks of the 2 week notice period, without a medical certificate, full fees will apply and you will not be eligible for Child Care Benefit or Child Care Rebate.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Responsible Manager</b>	<b>Document</b>	<b>Document No</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>	<b>Review Date</b>
Family and Children’s Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019

## Link to Council Policies

This Policy and Procedures are informed by Moonee Valley City Council's annual budget development process and guidelines.

## Resources and Useful Websites

This Policy is linked to the following *National Quality Standard*

<http://acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework/the-national-quality-standard>

Department of Human Services: 13 61 50 (8am - 8pm Monday to Friday)

13 12 02 (for languages other than English)

[www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/child-care-benefit](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/child-care-benefit)

Department of Education and Training (DET), CCMS instruction sheets, Child Care Service Handbook 2013-2014.

<http://education.gov.au/child-care-service-handbook>

To find out about whether families are eligible for Child Care Tax Rebate (CCR), visit

[www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/child-care-rebate](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/child-care-rebate)

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Family and Children's Services	Michele Leonard	7.5 Payment and Provision of Education and Care Fees	17/284671	August 2017	August 2019