Introduction
Bega Valley Shire Council education and care services are committed to providing affordable quality children’s services to families who live and work in the municipality.

Strategies
Information
The Authorised Provider will ensure:

- Fees for all children's service are set on an annual basis and are exhibited on public display as part of Bega Valley Shire Council’s Management Plan (Fees and Charges).

The Nominated Supervisor for each education and care service will:

- Ensure that information about the cost of care and the hours of service operations is displayed for families and provided in the Parent Information Handbook.

The Administrative Officer of each education and care service will provide families with all necessary information about fees including the following information:

- Child Care Benefit is paid by the Commonwealth government to help with the cost of child care. A family can apply for reduced fees by contacting the Family Assistance Office (FAO) on 13 61 50 within seven days of commencing care. The FAO will assess each family’s income and decide the amount of assistance that the family is eligible to receive. Education and care services responsible for Child Care Benefit can only reduce the fees of a family when they have received a letter from the FAO stating their Child Care Benefit percentage. Education and care services who do not provide Child Care Benefit require evidence of family income levels. Changes to income information can only be backdated for a period of 1 term.

All families will:

- Provide the necessary income information to enable fees to be calculated for their use of their education and care service
Finishing care – 1 weeks’ notice

All families will:

• Provide one weeks’ notice of their last day of care.

The Administrative Officer of each education and care service will provide the following information to families:

• The Family Assistance office has advised that a child’s first or last day of care is deemed to be the first or last day of attendance. They have stated that Child Care Benefit will not be paid for families who are absent on their first or last day of care unless they are able to supply evidence of an Approved Absence for their child. For this reason, families will be charged full fees for any non-Approved absences in their first or last week of care. Families are required to sign the attendance register at the start and end of each day, including days on which their child is absent, in order to be eligible for Child Care Benefit.

Procedures for payment of fees

All families will:

• Pay fees on a weekly or fortnightly basis during office hours to the Administrative Officer.

• Use one of the preferred methods of payment. These are by Centrepay, cheque or electronic banking. If fees are paid by cheque and the cheque is dishonoured, the family must pay the amount outstanding as well as any charges that are incurred by the education and care service. If two cheques have been dishonoured within a three month period, then future fees must be paid by Centrepay or bank cheque.

• Contact the Administrative Officer immediately to discuss options for addressing any problems relating to fee payments.

The Nominated Supervisor and Administrative Officer of each education and care service will:

• Ensure accurate records are kept of child attendance and fees and charges for every child using the approved Bega Valley Shire Council financial systems

• There is a regular review of bookings, utilisation and outstanding fees and charges

• Provide any family that has an outstanding balance with a fortnightly invoice or statement of account for payment of fees. The invoice will include the following information:
  o Parent’s name, address, family CRN and Account Code.
  o Service details including contact details, ABN and Service ID or Family Assistance Office CRN
  o Child’s name, weeks charged, fee, any fee reductions and days attended or absent.
  o Payments made and any amounts outstanding
  o Details of how payments can be made

• Answer any family questions about fees, charges and payments

• Meet with and discuss payment options where a family is experiencing short or long term difficulty in meeting their commitment to fee payments.
Procedures for payment of outstanding fees

Families with outstanding debts will:

- speak with the Administrative Officer for their children’s service immediately to establish a means of making regular automatic payments. This may include any of the following options:
  - direct debiting
  - Centrepay

The Administrative Officer of the education and care services will:

- approach any family who is more than 2 weeks behind in payment of their fees in order to identify any issues that are affecting the family’s ability to pay their fees.
- discuss the family’s situation with the Nominated Supervisor to explore possible assistance options and to determine the most appropriate response. Possible responses include:
  - sources of special funding
  - developing a repayment schedule
  - applying for additional assistance

- Where a family has an accumulated debt of more than 4 weeks fees send a letter to the family requesting that the family make full payment within seven (7) days or make an appointment with the Administrative Officer to determine a repayment schedule.

- Where a family has an accumulated debt in excess of 4 weeks fees and does not respond to the Administrative Officer’s request for a meeting, the matter will be referred to the Nominated Supervisor and Approved Provider representative. This is the Group Manager Community and Relationships Bega Valley Shire Council to determine a debt management strategy. This strategy may include referral to the Bega Valley Shire Council’s Revenue Clerk and/or forfeiture of a child’s place in the children’s service.

Doubtful Debts

A doubtful debt is one where:

- The family has left the area and/ or no longer uses the children’s service
- The Group Manager Community Relations and Leisure at Bega Valley Shire Council determines that the outstanding debt for fees should be referred to the Council’s Revenue Clerk.

The Administrative Officer will

- Refer all doubtful debts to the Nominated Supervisor, the Approved Provider the Bega Valley Shire Council’s Revenue Clerk for action. A report will accompany the referral outlining:
  - accrued debt
  - payments to date
  - any payment schedule agreed to by the family
  - last known contact details.
Evaluation

All families have correct information about their fees, understand the process for fee payments and make regular payments.

Legislative requirements

- Education and Care Services National Regulations, 2011.

References

- Bega Valley Shire Council, Fees and Charges Available Online: www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au
- Community Child Care Co-operative, Sample Policy, Arrival and departure
- Family Assistance Office, Registered Care Benefit, 2011