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Introduction

Children's earliest years are recognised as vital in enabling them to reach their full potential. Childcare charities are established for the purpose of providing care and education to meet the individual needs of children during those early years, giving them the necessary support and encouragement to achieve their best. One of the major values of providing childcare through charitable activities is the ability to engage parents and carers in shaping the childcare provision and empower them to become more involved in their children's care and education; which research shows, provides better outcomes for children and their families.

Childcare charities make a huge contribution to the lives of young children each year and offer enormous benefits for local families and communities. This is only possible however, through the invaluable work of the individuals, usually parents and carers of the children using the services, who volunteer as trustees to govern the charity. The part they play in managing the charity and all of its activities is very important and can bring great personal rewards, but the responsibilities associated with the role are numerous and can be daunting at first; particularly as trustees often have no prior experience of charity governance or the childcare sector. *Charity Essentials* has been developed to support new and existing charity trustees by providing a comprehensive guide to the fundamentals of running a charity and a childcare provision.

The requirements for charities can sometimes be complex and differ depending on the legal structure that it is set up with and also the requirements of the charity's own governing document, which is an enforceable set of rules developed for each individual charity. In addition, charities must satisfy the statutory obligations that relate to the activities they are involved in, such as providing childcare and employing staff. The intention of this guide is to provide readers with an understanding of how childcare charities work, to help give trustees a clear picture of their role in governing them. Trustees are introduced in further detail to key tasks and areas of responsibility, including conducting meetings of the charity, managing the childcare provision and ensuring it meets the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Ofsted registration, employing staff to work for the charity and managing the finances of the charity.

Charity Essentials is not an exhaustive guide and should not be used as a replacement to seeking specific professional or legal guidance to ensure that you comply with the requirements for your particular charity. We recommend that trustees use this as a reference alongside their charity's governing document to provide a background understanding of general charity operations. The guidance within this publication is relevant for charities in England and Wales only, and the requirements relating to providing childcare apply solely to provision registered with Ofsted in England. Different requirements apply to childcare charities registered in other parts of the UK.