

**Meeting of Executive Members and Children's
Services Advisory Panel**

21 January 2008

Report of the Director of Learning Culture & Children's Services

Purchasing from Voluntary Sector of Play Services

Summary

1. This paper sets out:
 - The Government's recent announcements from the Children, School and Families Secretary on the national play agenda;
 - A request for approval for the use of Better Play Grants for the purchase of some specific play services through service level agreements.

Background

Developments in Play

2. Below are a number of key national, regional and local developments which have occurred recently in the play sector and which have directly influenced the work of the York Play Team:
 - The development and rollout of the "Taking Play Forward" Play Policy which makes clear links to other strategic documents including the Local Area Agreement. A key indicator within the Children and Young People block is the number of providers that sign up to its ethos and objectives.
 - The introduction of documents including Every Child Matters, Time for Play, the Children and Young People's Plan and the Local Area Agreement.
 - The investment by the Big Lottery Fund of £155 million for Play nationally. The authority has now received notification of the successful bid through the Play Programme which sees York receiving £328K over a three year period for four projects with a focus on the outdoors and adventure. This is a very positive development.
 - As part of the £155 million investment, the Lottery allocated £16 million for the voluntary sector, through the 'Playful Ideas' fund. The Play Team and partners from the Voluntary sector have supported a number of organisations to submit bids to the programme by the 31 December 2007. The outcome of this process will see the team continuing to support the successful applicants in developing their projects.
 - The Children, Schools and Families Secretary has announced his 10 year vision for children, which outlines its commitment to play, including the

publishing of a play strategy by summer 2008. Also included is £225 million over the next three years, to offer every local authority capital funding that will allow up to 3,500 playgrounds nationally to be rebuilt or renewed and made accessible to children with disabilities; as well as to create 30 new adventure playgrounds for 8 – 13 year olds in disadvantaged areas, supervised by trained staff.

- In 2006, Yorkshire Play (a limited company and charity) was formed to promote play in a variety of ways across the Region. Yorkshire Play has a strong commitment in working with Play England and also holds a Service Level Agreement with SkillsActive to deliver targets for “playwork”, education and training. A member of the Play Team is currently a Director of Yorkshire Play which strengthens the authority’s links to play at a Regional and National level with a chance to influence the agenda across the spectrum of the sector.
- On the 6 Dec 2007, in a report detailing options on future funding arrangements and commissioning of services, members approved that the Children’s Trust develop a coherent commissioning process which can be utilised for wider usage across the city including play.

Better Play Grants

3. Better Play Grants are offered through the Play Team to purchase a specific activity or programme from an organisation involved in direct play provision. To qualify for funding, applicants are required to be constituted organisations with policies and procedures in place that are appropriate for working with children and young people.
4. The context for awards is *Taking Play Forward*, York’s play policy, which provides the framework through which groups can review their play provision in relation to the experiences of the children and young people who use them.
5. The scheme of delegation in respect of service level agreements is as follows:
 - Delegated authority for officers to approve grants up to £5K;
 - Delegated authority for the Executive Member to approve grants of more than £5k and up to £50k;
 - Grants of more than £50k to be approved by the Executive.
6. Funding for 2008/09 was advertised through the voluntary sector funding booklet produced and distributed by the Strategic Policy Unit. In addition, a letter promoting the availability of this booklet was sent to play settings listed on the Families Information Service database.
7. For the 2008/09 round of funding, the Play Team received 22 applications totalling £216,642. This year, officers received an increased number of applications with a large majority able to demonstrate how they work to the Better Play Objectives. Six organisations applied for grant funding over £5k. Of these, three have previously received funding along with a one year service level agreement, namely SNAPPY, Playspace and Bell Farm Adventure Playground. *It is recommended that these organisations receive an amount similar to last year’s funding.* Of the other three organisations that applied for

funding over £5K, one applicant requested £40k for a research project and, whilst it had value, it is more suited to be redirected to a more appropriate funding stream. The other two are recommended to receive a proportion of the requested amount within officers' designated authority. The other 16 applications are for grants of £5k or less and have also been allocated using officers' delegated authority.

8. The authority must allocate the Better Play Grant funding in order to continue to strive for the best outcomes for the play sector and for the children and young people. The latest developments both locally through a revised commissioning process and nationally through recent announcements must also be taken into account.

Options

9. Option 1 - In light of recent developments within the play sector, the Play Team allocate the three organisations over the £5k threshold a 1 year contract only, enabling the development of a coherent commissioning process by the Children's Trust which will devise joined up approaches to commissioning services for children and young people.

Option 2 - The Play Team will look to enter into a 3-year agreement from 2008 with those organisations that clearly meet local criteria

Applications for Service Level Agreements

Bell Farm Adventure Playground

10. Bell Adventure is a unique outdoor adventure play setting in York providing for a large number of children and young people participating in a wide range of activities including open access free play, sports and arts. In 2007/08 they were allocated £31,000 to enable to carry on supporting and promoting their activities. They have requested £34,000 for 2008/09 to continue this same level. The recommendation is to allocate £30,700 to sustain the service.

SNAPPY

11. SNAPPY have been working in the city for many years providing distinct play services which offer children and young people with special needs a variety of quality play and recreational opportunities. In 2007/08 they were allocated £36,600. In 2008/09 they have requested £48,500 and the recommendation is to allocate £36,300 to sustain their service.

Playspace

12. Historically, Playspace have delivered a large number of quality play projects and initiatives in the City. Over the past 2 years, the organisation has expanded its role in the sector to support community and targeted schemes including the YorOk initiative and the Chill Out Zones. As a result, Playspace are looking to operate in a more community development ethos. In 2007/08 they were allocated £36,600. In 2008/09 they requested £40,000 and the recommendation is to allocate £36,300 to continue and develop their services to support the community sector inline with the Taking Play Forward policy.

Analysis

13. Following the review of the play policy, it is appropriate to appraise all service level agreements and the length of time they are offered. With this in mind, the advantages of offering a year's contract would be to continue to support organisations in the changing play climate and enable the authority to develop a comprehensive commissioning process to utilise available resources through a joined up approach, whilst ensuring that they meet all necessary policy and monitoring requirements in line with Council service plans. The disadvantage would be that voluntary organisations are inhibited from longer term planning of that part of their service.

Corporate Objectives

14. Enabling the play sector to access the play grant contributes to achieving two of the corporate objectives – Improve the health and lifestyles of the people who live in York, in particular among group whose level of health are the poorest and Improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children, young people and families in the city.

Implications

Financial

15. There are 22 applications totalling £216,642. There is £129,000 available in the 2008/09 budget and so the recommended allocations are shown in the table below. A further advantage of offering a one-year contract would be to provide scope to respond to budgetary pressures in future years.

Organisation	Amount Allocated 07/08 £	Amount Applied For 08/09 £	Amount Allocated 08/09 £
Bell Farm Adventure Playground	31,000	34,000	30,700
SNAPPY	36,600	48,500	36,300
York Playspace	36,600	40,000	36,300
19 other applications under £5k	24,800	94,142	25,700
Total	129,000	216,642	129,000

16. There are no human resources, equalities, legal, property, crime and disorder or IT implications.

Risk Management

17. All successful applications to the Better Play Grant are monitored against the Taking Play Forward policy by the Policy Development Worker. Formal contracts are drawn up with each setting with regular visits, reports and monitoring forming part of the agreement. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, we consider that such monitoring means that the risks

associated with the recommendations of this report are negligible, and certainly well below 16 in terms of the risk score

Recommendations

18. The Executive Member is asked to agree Option1 and award amounts for the three organisations referred to for a one year period until a full review of the commissioning process is completed and an appropriate system is adopted.

Reason: To continue funding quality play provision across the city in line with the Taking Play Forward policy recommendations without restricting opportunities to locate play funding within wider future commissioning arrangements.

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Report
Approved

Yes

Date 4 January 2008

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Report
Approved

Yes

Date 4th January 2008

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Financial

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Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All Yes

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers

None

Annexes

None