

Report of the Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

**Report on the commissioning of services through the Children's
Early Intervention Fund and Better Play Grants**

Summary

1. This paper sets out:
 - the commissioning process for the Children's Early Intervention Fund (EIF) which has as on this occasion been linked to the Better Play Grants (BPG);
 - the funding recommendations of the panel set up to consider applications for the joint EIF/BPG fund.

Background:

2. The Children's Early Intervention Fund builds on the legacy of the Children's Fund in York. It has in the past year continued to provide a range of targeted and robustly monitored early intervention and preventative support programmes aimed at vulnerable children aged 5-13. York has received funding from the government up to March 2011 equating to £355,920 in each year.
3. Better Play Grants are offered through the Play Team to purchase specific activities or programmes from organisations 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. 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. Approximately £129k is available for the next two years, so that together, after allowing for central administration costs, the total amount available for allocation across the two funds is **£420,600** in 2009/10 and **£419,600** in 2010/11.
4. The commissioning process for EIF/BPG was agreed following discussions at the Executive Member for Children & Young People's

Services and Advisory Panel meetings in January and July 2008. The argument for combining the two commissioning processes is their strategic fit: both funds have at their heart the principles of early intervention and targeted positive activities to help children and young people to maximise their life chances. The linkage is also being encouraged by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in order to improve outcomes for children and young people by better identification of gaps in provision, and elimination of any overlaps.

5. The commissioning process takes place within the context of the wider integrated commissioning process being developed under our children's trust arrangements. We have now established a high level Integrated Commissioning Group (ICG) as a sub group of YorOk Board, and the Group that has overseen EIF/BPG commissioning is itself a sub group of the ICG. In time we expect this will enable a strategic debate to take place about the right balance between funds allocated to universal provision, and those allocated to targeted preventative work.
6. A multi-agency group was brought together to oversee the commissioning process, chaired by the Assistant Director for Partnerships and Early Intervention, with representatives from across the children's trust (Health, Voluntary Sector, City of York Council, Police). This group drew up a set of overall themes which are set out at **Annex A**, informed by:
 - The National Children's Plan;
 - The City of York Corporate Strategy 2007 – 2011;
 - Local planning for children and young people – Children and Young Peoples Plan 2007-10 and the Local Area Agreement;
 - Views of children and young people via the consultation process for the Children and Young Peoples Plan 2009-12;
 - The Legacy of Children's Fund in York;
 - Equalities Legislation;
 - The Better Play Strategy.
7. Applications were invited from across the city for proposals that would meet these themes. Applications needed to show evidence of how they would meet the overall themes, and specific application criteria including evidence of need and effectiveness; positive impact for children and young people; how the work complements other initiatives in the city; how work will be targeted toward those disadvantaged and disaffected; and how children will be involved in shaping the work. The joint process attracted over £900k in bids for each of the two years for which funding is available, ie roughly twice the amount available. This, and the generally high quality of applications, is evidence of the increasing importance of this agenda – and the "oversubscription" will need to be considered as a longer term strategic issue for the city.

8. Applications were initially considered and scored by a sub-group of the multi-agency group (reflecting the wider sector representation). The sub-group developed a short-list for consideration by the wider group. The short-list was discussed by the main group which unanimously drew up the recommended funding proposals contained in **Annex B**. Members should be aware that in the great majority of cases, given the overall pressure on the funds available, the recommended funding is less than the amount the organisation was seeking; in a number of cases the recommended amount simply represents a continuation of the current level of funding, with no allowance for inflation. The group also found it necessary to limit the funds allocated to any one organisation to £40k pa (ie £80k over two years): this was not an explicit policy from the outset, but the natural outcome of having to weigh so many high quality competing bids against each other. The group was also trying to strike a balance between backing proven models, as well as allowing for innovation.
9. As is inevitable in commissioning processes overseen by a partnership, potential conflicts of interest arose for certain individuals at various points in the proceedings. These were rigorously identified and recorded. Key members of the group (Chair, and EIF and BPG managers) did not act as referees for any applications, and sub-group members did not score or consider applications where there was a potential conflict of interest.
10. Clearly we need to recommend that a significant number of applications are not successful on this occasion. The list of unsuccessful applications is at **Annex C**, which should be treated as confidential for reasons of commercial sensitivity.
11. We have sent all applicants a letter informing them of the *provisional* recommendations of the panel, pending the EMAP discussion. We have offered feedback to the unsuccessful applicants, and, where appropriate, have pointed them towards alternative funding sources. For the successful ones, discussions have commenced about the drawing up of detailed Service Level Agreements; this is particularly important where the recommended amount is significantly less than the sum that was applied for.

Consultation

12. The issues and themes contained in this report have been discussed with:
 - The Integrated Commissioning Group
 - The Children's Early Intervention Fund Commissioning group

Both groups are made up of representatives from across the children's trust with membership from partner agencies and the voluntary sector. In

addition, children and young people have been consulted as part of the consultation for the new children and young people's plan. Specific work has been undertaken with a school council in a primary school to help inform the commissioning priorities for this process. The school council was chosen because of its strong record of inclusion. This school council will also be involved in an on-going piece of work to monitor successful applications.

Options

13. The Executive Member is asked to consider the following options:

Option A:

Approve the funding recommendations of the EIF/BPG group contained at **Annex B**, rejecting those outlined at **Annex C (Confidential)**.

Option B:

Do not approve the list at Annex B and consider some other outcome, such as continuing to fund all existing projects at their current level.

Analysis

14. **Option A** would mean:

- All applications were effectively 'capped' at £40k per annum, as described above. This is due to the sheer quantity of good applications. No application has been recommended to receive 100% of the sum that was applied for; however, the EIF/BPG group is still confident that these suggested reductions will enable viable provision. The details of this will be discussed with the organisations concerned in the coming weeks, and in some cases may mean that we will need to accept a lower volume of provision than that originally envisaged.
- These recommendations would mean *70% of the funding will be directed to work being developed by the voluntary sector*.
- Funding will be offered to the named organisation for the purpose described. The exception is funding being made available to support for play for disabled children. The EIF/BPG group saw a clear need for this type of provision, and has recommended an allocation of funding. However, there needs to be further work with a particular voluntary sector provider to clarify the specific work to be undertaken before we can confidently recommend it as the recipient of the allocation. Initial discussions to clarify this will have taken place before the EMAP meeting.
- Work would be commissioned that meets the overall themes of EIF/BPG within a Prevention and Early Intervention framework. These links are outlined in Annex B and will include:
 - Development of play for key targeted and vulnerable groups and in key geographical localities;

- Specific support for small voluntary groups: the small grants will have a positive impact for many children and will be a pathway to deliver support for small voluntary play organisations with the city;
- Support to children to reduce their engagement in risky behaviours and engage in positive, challenging activities;
- Community engagement and mobilisation via strategic and organisational support for the voluntary sector;
- Targeted work focussed around promoting the inclusion of vulnerable children in universal services.

15. **Option B** would mean:

- Current work could continue.
- However, work would not develop to meet the changing needs of the city and the priorities emerging through the Children and Young People's Plan.
- The commissioning between EIF and BPG would not be integrated and the benefits of joint commissioning would not be realised.
- There would be no scope for innovation or for new providers.

Corporate Priorities

16. City of York's Corporate Strategy informed the commissioning criteria, specifically 'Improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children, young people and families in the city.'

Implications

17. **Financial** The Early Intervention Fund was allocated for the years 2008-11. CYC are receiving £355,920 in each year. The amount allocated to the Better Play grants remains at £129,000. Together these two funds amount to £484,920 per annum for both the years 2009/10 and 2010/11. The central costs of managing the programme will be £64,320 in 2009/10 and £65,320 in 2010/11 and this leaves the amounts to be allocated as £420,600 in 2009/10 and £419,600 in 2010/11.

18. **Human Resources (HR)** These proposals do not have any direct HR implications. However consideration may need to be given to the impact on posts that are used to deliver this programme, if commissioning arrangements change significantly from those currently in place.

19. **Equalities** have been integral to the commissioning process. Equalities legislation has been taken into consideration in developing the commissioning criteria. Applicants have specifically been asked how work would impact on vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people. The decision making has taken this into account. The recommendations include specific pieces of work which will support disabled children and young people and children from minority

communities. The recommendations will contribute to partnership priorities on equalities and contribute to improving life chances of disadvantaged children and young people.

20. **Legal:** There are no legal implications.

21. **Crime and Disorder** A number of recommendations as set out in Annex B will support the priorities on crime and disorder as set out in the Local Area Agreements.

22. There are no **Information Technology (IT), Property or Other** implications.

Risk Management

23. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, the main risks that have been identified in this report are those which could lead to the inability to deliver ongoing, well received, services to children and families, the subsequent damage to the Council's image and reputation and impact on partners. *Option A* would prevent this risk and ensure that the re-commissioning process will build on the legacy of the Children's Fund and progress Better Play in the city, as well as meeting the priorities being developed through the Children and Young Peoples Plan Process. Option B would ensure a degree of stability, but the inability to commission new work would have a negative impact on the Council's reputation, and would lead to poorer outcomes for children in the city.

Recommendations

24. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member that the recommendations for commissioning projects through the Children's Early Intervention Fund and Better Play grants, described as Option A and set out at Annex B, be accepted.

REASON:

To deliver a programme of Preventative and Early Intervention work which will more fully meet the emerging needs of children and young in the city from now until 2011.

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Report Approved

 Yes

Date

31 December 2008

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Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

Report Approved

 Yes

Date

31 December 2008

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Financial

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

 ALL

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Executive Member for Children & Young People's Services and Advisory Panel:

- Report of Children's Early Intervention Fund – transitional Arrangements – July 2008
- Purchasing from Voluntary Sector of Play Services – January 2008
- Report of Children's Fund – Future funding arrangements and implications on commissioning of services and transitional arrangements within York – December 2007

Annexes

Annex A – Aims and Themes Early Intervention Fund – Better Play Grants

Annex B – Recommended Funding

Annex C – Applications not recommended (**Confidential annex**).