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Meeting of the Executive Member for Children's Services and Advisory Panel      19 January 2009

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

**“Quality and Access for all Young Children” – Allocations of Capital Grant**

**Summary**

1. This paper seeks approval to bids from the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector to use the new “Quality and Access for All Young Children Capital Grant Allocation”. These bids have been recommended by a panel established for this purpose.

**Background**

2. In November 2007 the government announced this new Early Years **Capital grant : Quality and Access**. This funding is in addition to the capital funding announced specifically for the development of children's centres and the capital funding for extended schools announced as part of the School Capital Settlement.
3. This new grant has three aims:
  1. To improve the quality of the learning environment in early years settings to support delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage, with a particular emphasis on improving play and physical activities; and Information, Communications and Technology resources.
  2. To ensure all children, including disabled children, are able to access provision.
  3. To enable PVI providers to deliver the extension to the free offer for three and four year olds and to do so flexibly.
4. The government's expectation is that the majority of this capital grant is used to improve the quality of the environment in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) early years and childcare settings, both to support higher quality experiences for young children, and to ensure that all children can access services and benefit fully from them.
5. This new capital grant must be used for the three broad purposes set out above but it is for the Local Authority to decide how best to deploy the grant for maximum impact and value for money. For example, the grant can be used to fund 100% of the cost of work/equipment for those providers which have little or no resource of their own; for others with more resources, the grant can be provided on a matched funding basis.

6. In a paper to EMAP on 17 July 2008, we recommended a process for inviting all eligible providers to bid into the fund in three batches. The current paper reports on the outcome of the first tranche of bids, the closing date for which was 30 November 2008. A copy of the letter sent to providers is at **Annex D**.

## **Consultation**

7. The criteria for application into the funding stream emphasises the need for applicants to provide clear evidence of consultation with key partners, particularly through Shared Foundation Partnerships. The bids approved must also be consistent with the local Child Care Sufficiency Assessment for the authority, a document produced in York following major consultation activity with all stakeholders including users of child care services.
8. The assessment panel we convened to consider the bids was drawn from membership of the “places sub-group” which is part of the Early Years and Extended Schools Partnership. Members of the panel included Peggy Sleight (Chair of the Early Years and Extended Schools Partnership), the Pre-School Learning Alliance, the National Childminding Association, the National Day Nurseries association, as well as representatives from Education Planning, Finance, the Training and Development Unit and the Early Years and Extended Schools Service. All bids were assessed against a set of agreed criteria.

## **Options**

9. Members have the option of approving or rejecting the bids from the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector to use the new “Quality and Access Early Years Capital Grant Allocation”, as recommended by the panel.

## **Analysis**

10. Research shows that children will only benefit fully from early education and care if it is of high quality: a high quality setting also needs the right built environment and adequate and appropriate resources. This means providing enough space for larger group sizes which can also be used flexibly and up-to date facilities and equipment to support children’s learning and development. This new Quality and Access grant will allow Local Authorities to invest strategically to ensure that the PVI sector is able to deliver high quality learning and development for all children. This is particularly important for York given that most of our three and four year olds are in the non-maintained sector, which has not previously been able to access similar types or levels of funding.
11. Expenditure eligible for grants under the fund includes:
  - equipment to ensure that practitioners can effectively observe and capture children’s progress – digital cameras, scanners and video recorders, laptop and desktop PCs;
  - information and communication technology – laptop and desktop PCs, digital cameras, video and sound recorders, hi-fi equipment;
  - provision of stimulating and accessible outdoor play space and equipment – this includes the purchase of land to be developed for this purpose;

- development of adequate indoor space for age-appropriate play activities and suitable rest areas;
  - replenishing and replacing toy stocks and purchasing other learning and development materials and resources to support the EYFS;
  - resources to encourage a rich and stimulating language environment in line with Letters and Sounds – musical instruments, tape recorders, CDs as well as books, rhymes and signs.
12. The Panel received some applications for similar items that would cost under £2,500 and therefore it is proposed to bulk purchase such items and distribute them (rather than cash) to the applicants. It is proposed that other settings will be able to take advantage of similar bulk purchase arrangements. An example of such items could be ICT equipment e.g. printers, digital cameras etc.
13. Every setting must have an inclusion policy setting out how it will meet the needs of *all* children, in line with delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). However, ensuring full access, particularly for disabled children, and providing facilities and equipment for disabled children and children with SEN, can often require adaptations. The allocation of this new Quality and Access grant creates opportunities for us to further progress this agenda, particularly where it can be combined with other funding streams.
14. Settings from the PVI sector were invited to access support from the Extended Schools Remodeling Consultant (ESRC) team prior to completing their bids.
15. **Annex A** refers to bids that the Panel considered met the agreed criteria. **Annex B** refers to bids that the Panel agreed with in principle but that had sections which required additional work. **Annex C** refers to bids that the Panel felt did not meet the criteria and needed substantial additional work; for reasons of possible commercial sensitivity, this annex is confidential.

### **Corporate Priorities**

16. This paper clearly contributes to the Corporate Priority aimed at “improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children, young people and families in the city”.

### **Financial Implications**

17. The DCSF has allocated York £2.1m over the three year period 2008/09-2010/11 to be spent on capital projects under this heading.
18. A total of 43 bids to the value of £334,366 were received in the first tranche. Of these, 23 bids totaling £143,863 are recommend for full approval, with a further 18 bids totaling £139,753 recommended for approval in principle subject to certain conditions being met. Bids received covered childminders (12), private day nurseries (22) pre-school playgroups (8) and a maintained nursery (1).

## Other Implications

19. This report does not have specific HR, Legal, crime and disorder or IT implications. It clearly contributes to an equality strategy which seeks to ensure high quality access to services.

## Risk Management

20. Risks are minimised by the application of recommended and clear criteria, by the transparent process of bidding and by the level of consultation undertaken around the use of the capital funding stream. The additional capital work such funding stimulates will carry some risks but they are minimised given the relative scale of the developments, through clear project management and through regular reporting arrangements to EMAP being in place. It is recognised that working through the PVI sector will require particular support arrangements and these are in place within the Early Years and Extended Schools Service.

## Recommendations

21. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member:

- 1) To accept the recommendations of the panel for the first tranche of bids for the Quality and Access Early Years Capital Grant Allocation as set out in the annexes as follows:
  - annex (a) approved
  - annex (b) accepted in principle but requires additional information
  - annex (c) requires substantial reworking and should be declined at this stage

*Reason:* to enable the further development of early years provision in York, in accordance with government guidelines.

- 2) To approve that Early Years and Extended Schools Service should bulk purchase certain items under £2500 and distribute them directly to settings

*Reason:* to obtain economies of scale.

## Contact Details

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### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Peter Dwyer  
Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

**Report Approved 31 December 2008**

### Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Richard Hartle  
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### Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

**Background Papers:** None

**Annexes:**

**Annex A:** bids recommended for approval

**Annex B:** bids recommended in principle, subject to the provision of additional information

**Annex C:** bids that should be declined at this stage ***[Confidential]***

**Annex D:** Letter to Providers