

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

14 March 2007

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

**Purchasing from the Voluntary Sector of Play Services**

**Summary**

1. This report seeks approval for the purchase of Play services through service level agreements.

**Background**

2. The Play Team based in the Early Years and Extended School Service has a number of contracts and service level agreements with the Voluntary and Community Play sector. These are to provide services and programmes for Play in the City.
3. City of York has a long tradition of working in partnership with others in order to deliver key services and this has been acknowledged and further strengthened by the York Compact.
4. The authority has a responsibility to secure best value in the procurement of services. Furthermore, local authorities' funding arrangements are now more than ever tied into national outcomes. This, coupled with a saving requirement for 2007/08 of £11k from the Better Play Grant budget, has led us to review services delivered by our partners with a view to ensuring that future contracts fully meet local and national outcomes. Although the authority has known of its budget allocation from the government up until 2007/08, until the completion of the comprehensive spending review, future funding cannot be confirmed beyond this date.

**Better Play Grants**

5. 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.
6. The context for awards is *Taking Play Forward*, York's play policy, an update of which appears elsewhere on this agenda. This provides a framework through which groups can review their play provision in relation to the experiences of the children and young people who use them.

7. 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 Executive Member to approve grants of more than £5k and up to £50k
  - Grants of more than £50k to be approved by the Executive
8. Funding for 2007/08 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 Children's Information Service database.
9. For the 2007/08 round of funding, the Play Team received 17 applications totalling £176,480. This year's budget requires a reduction in the total monies available from £140k to £129k. Play Officers have liaised with applicants throughout the process to inform them of the reduction in the total monies available through the Better Play Grant. Taking this into consideration, discussions have taken place around the level of service that can be delivered by the applicants, against the amount of funding received.
10. This year sees the two organisations with service level agreements complete their 3 year term, namely SNAPPY and Playspace. Bell Farm Adventure Playground also receives funding of over £5k through a service level agreement. Over the past few years the organisation has undergone a number of developments and set backs e.g. building burning down, and as a result found it difficult to meet the criteria set to receive a 3 year contract. The Play Team will continue to support the committee as they strive to enhance current provision. All three organisations have again applied for grants of similar amounts. The other 14 applications are for grants of £5k or less and have been allocated using officers delegated authority.
11. Since the previous 3 year service level agreements were implemented, a number of key developments have occurred in the play sector. These include:
  - The development and rewrite of the 2002 Taking Play Forward Policy
  - The introduction of documents including Every Child Matters, Time for Play, the Children and Young People's Plan and Local Area Agreement.
  - The investment by the Big Lottery Fund of £155 million for Play nationally, with £16 million allocated for the voluntary sector, through the 'Playful Ideas' fund
  - A reduction in local funding for play

The authority must allocate the reduced Better Play Grant funding and continue to strive for Best Value and the best outcomes for the play sector and children and young people and taking this into account the above factors.

12. In supporting the voluntary and community sector, it is the responsibility of the Play Team to assist in, and disseminate information on, new sources of funding working in collaboration with these groups. The 'Playful Ideas' is one such opportunity to positively support the sector in developing services and

projects. Organisations' future service Level Agreements may change should organisation be successful.

## **Options**

13. In light of recent developments and the change in the play sector, the Play Team recommends the 3 organisations over the £5k threshold receive in the first instance a 1 year contract. This will enable the Play Team to monitor, evaluate and support organisations in line with these developments including applications to the 'Playful Ideas' fund. Following this process the Play Team will look to enter into a 3 year agreement from 2008 onwards where the council:
- has confidence in the organisations ability to deliver good quality services to local people over a period of time,
  - has identified the need for the particular service to be provided by the organisation within a statutory or local council strategy throughout the agreement,
  - is a major partner in the provision of the service in terms of its financial investment.

## **Applications for Service Level Agreements**

### **Bell Farm Adventure Playground**

14. 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 2006/07 they were allocated £32,000 to enable to carry on supporting and promoting their activities. They have requested £39,500 to continue this same level. The recommendation is to allocate £31,000 to sustain the service.

### **SNAPPY**

15. 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 2006/07 they were allocated £40,000 to continue this work. In 2007/08 they have requested £45,000 and have been recommended £36,600 to sustain their service.

### **Playspace**

16. 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. This will mean withdrawing from delivering summer static playschemes, which, in the climate of reduced funding, are unsustainable. In 2006/07 they were allocated £40,000. In 2007/08 they requested £48,500 and have been recommended £36,600 to continue and develop their services to support the community sector inline with the Taking Play Forward policy.

## Play Funding Opportunities

17. In addition to the 'Playful Ideas' funding available to the voluntary sector through the Big Lottery, the authority has also received an allocation of £328k, through the Children's Play Initiative. Play Officers have worked with the sector to identify projects that will be submitted in a portfolio along with the new *Taking Play Forward* policy to the September 2007 round. This is a positive time for play and will enable the sector to grow and develop with these new funding streams.

## Analysis

18. Following the review of the play policy, it is appropriate to review and appraise all service level agreements and the length of time they are offered. With this in mind, the advantage of offering a year's contract, in the first instance, would be to continue to support organisations in the changing play climate 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 inhibiting longer term planning of that part of their service.

## Corporate Objectives

19. All applicants to the Better Play Grant must demonstrate how they meet the 9 Better Play Objectives as outlined in the Taking Play Forward policy. As part of the Council's Local Area Agreement, there is a PI target linked to play and specifically, the number of organisations meeting the 9 objectives.

## Implications

### Financial

20. There are 17 applications totalling £176,480. There is only £129,000 available in the 2007/08 budget and so the recommended allocations are shown in the table below

Organisation	Amount Applied For £	Amount Allocated £
Bell Farm Adventure Playground	39,500.00	31,000.00
SNAPPY	45,000.00	36,600.00
York Playspace	48,500.00	36,600.00
14 other applications under £5k	43,480.00	24,800.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>176,480.00</b>	<b>129,000.00</b>

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

## Risk Management

22. 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, forms part of the agreement.

### Recommendations

23. The Executive Member is asked to agree the award amounts for the three organisations as set out to be issued initially for one year.

Reason: To continue funding quality play provision across the city inline with the Taking Play Forward policy recommendations.

### Contact Details

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**Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**

Charlie Croft  
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**Report Approved**  **Date** 28 February 2008  
Patrick Scott, Director of Learning, Culture and Children's  
Services

**Report Approved**  **Date** 28 February 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**