

15 July 2010

Dear Play Lead

Government is clear that play is an important part of childhood and child development, and good for families and communities more broadly. We are committed to supporting local people to have an active role in shaping the play opportunities that they care so much about.

However, due to the need to tackle the deficit, the Secretary of State for Education announced on 5 July that the Department for Education needs to identify savings from a number of capital budgets in 2010-11 where commitments are no longer affordable.

These savings will reduce the Department's End Year Flexibility (EYF) requirements by £1bn to help ensure no additional borrowing is required this year. The Secretary of State sent a letter to all 152 top-tier local authority Chief Executives and Directors of Children's Services (or equivalent) on 14 July providing detail of which capital budgets would be affected by this. The play capital grant, which is supported by EYF, is one of those budgets which has been identified as having to make savings during 2010-11.

Play Capital Grant

In order to determine how the play capital grant will contribute to the necessary savings, and the level of capital grant payments that can therefore be made this year to each local authority, we need to ask for information from the 10 Wave 2 Pathfinders and all 122 Playbuilders (*see attached template at Annex A*).

With immediate effect and until further notice, all of these local authorities should avoid incurring any new contractual liabilities in relation to their play capital grants.

The Department will cover the cost of expenditure already incurred for completed sites and sites where groundworks / construction has already commenced.

However, we will need to review contractual commitments already entered into in relation to sites where groundworks / construction have not yet commenced. We hope to allow authorities to progress these projects, although this will be conditional on our ability to make the required savings from projects that are not yet contracted.

In the event that we are unable to make the necessary savings, we may have to request further information on your contractual commitments. On this basis authorities should not progress these projects in any way that would prejudice their ability to exit the associated contracts as per the current stated terms. **Groundworks / construction work should not commence on these sites until further notice.**

Any capital grant that is not yet spent or where there is considered to not be a strong case to continue the commitments entered into, may be retained by the Department. We will be looking to achieve the most equitable distribution of reductions possible, in the context of the savings we need to make.

In order to assess the liabilities already incurred by your authority between 1 April to 14 July 2010, **the template at Annex A needs to be completed, signed by an authorised officer of your local authority and returned, by Friday 23 July 2010.**

Where local authorities have entered into arrangements with district or parish council partners to deliver play sites we will look to the authority accountable to the Department to collate and return the information.

Completed templates should be returned to:

Amanda Barrett, Department for Education, Child Health & Wellbeing Division, Ground Floor, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, Westminster, London SW1P 3BT.

We intend to seek any further information from you and confirm revised allocations by end of August so that you have as much time as possible to plan budgets for the rest of the financial year and get projects underway.

Play Revenue Funding

In his letter of 16 June to Chief Executives and Directors of Children's Services (or equivalent), the Secretary of State announced a £5m reduction in the Play Revenue budget as part of the £670m contribution this Department is making to the £6.2bn revenue savings announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 May.

The letter provided specific detail of how the savings will impact on Pathfinder and Playbuilder programmes this financial year. In summary, Playbuilders will receive no revenue grant this year and Pathfinders will receive 50% of their allocation as set out in the LAC 2502100003, dated 16 March 2010.

The 50% Play Pathfinder revenue funding allocation will retain its ring-fence, and we would like Pathfinder authorities to focus this funding in the first instance on staffing for the adventure playgrounds delivered as part of the play capital programme, given the level of capital investment that has been/is being made in those facilities.

We will be employing a very light touch approach to requests for information on pathfinder revenue spending plans for the remainder of this financial year. We do however need to know what the reduced allocation means for Pathfinders' current 2010-11 Project Plan, and specifically any services to (or involving) the public. Meanwhile, until you have spoken with one of us here in the play team, we

encourage Pathfinders to not make immediate decisions on stopping revenue funded projects.

Any issues should be raised by Friday 23 July 2010 with Amanda Barrett, Department for Education, Child Health & Wellbeing Division, Ground Floor, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, Westminster, London SW1P 3BT (telephone: 0207 340 7355)

Play England Role

You may have seen the announcement from Play England, on 28 June, regarding their proposed reorganisation in light of their reduced contracts with the Department. The remainder of their contract will focus on supporting action by the community in the management and delivery of play provision.

What this will mean for you is that Play England regional teams will no longer contact you to gather data/information in order to monitor the Department's play capital and revenue programme.

We are currently working with Play England to develop a revised programme of support that will be available from August onwards. It will be aimed at increasing the involvement of community & voluntary sector organisations in shaping local play opportunities and future provision, especially in relation to the play areas delivered through the capital programme. It will include a national helpline for all those involved in the play programme. There will be range of guidance available to all via the web and some bespoke support programmes for local areas with staffed adventure playgrounds. As part of the new programme Play England will invite you to be part of practice-sharing networks so you can share your experiences and access advice and support on play.

Play England will be in touch once the revised programme has been finalised. In the meantime, their websites (www.playengland.org.uk, www.playfulcommunities.org.uk, www.playshaper.org.uk) are still available, as are the guidance resources and materials.

Amanda Barrett and colleagues in the Play team are, of course, also on hand to provide advice.

National Evaluation

The Department has significantly reduced its central costs for the national evaluation that SQW/Ipsos MORI are undertaking for us.

We intend to fund a smaller scale, yet still viable, national evaluation which should provide evidence on the impact of the play investment to date which you will be able to use. If we are able to progress this scaled down national evaluation, SQW/Ipsos MORI will be contacting those play pathfinders who were involved in the baseline evaluation activity last year with one final request for data.

Signage

Many of you have enquired about changes to signage requirements for any play areas funded via our capital programme. Given the removal of the capital ring fence and reductions in revenue, there is now much more flexibility.

There are no longer any mandatory signage requirements from the Department for play areas funded, or part-funded, via the Play capital programme.

However a local authority can, if they so wish, add the Department for Education logo to any of their own signage and can reflect whether the play area has been funded or part funded by adding text as per the jpeg file (both graphics files are attached to the covering e-mail).

There remain guidelines about an exclusion zone that should be applied around our departmental logo so as to ensure that it does not become cluttered/lost in amongst other information on signage, and these guidelines can be found on the branding page of our website.

I would like to thank you for your hard work on the play programme. We realise that the reductions in funding outlined above will have an impact on play services in your authority, but would encourage you to continue working with your local communities - and young people - to involve them in decisions that are made about the future of play in your local housing developments, public parks and open spaces; and to help more volunteers support local play opportunities for children.

Yours sincerely



Anne Jackson
Director, Child Wellbeing Group
Children and Families Directorate
Department for Education

**PLAY PATHFINDER/PLAYBUILDER 2010-11 CAPITAL GRANT EXPENDITURE
INFORMATION REQUIRED**

This form should be completed by an authorised officer of the local authority and returned, by Friday 23 July 2010 to:

Amanda Barrett, Department for Education, Child Health & Wellbeing Division,
Ground Floor, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, Westminster, London SW1P
3BT

Expenditure incurred between 1 April 2010 and 14 July 2010:

<u>How much has been spent on completed play areas?</u>	£
<u>How many 2010-11 play sites have already been completed?</u>	
<u>How much is needed for projects already under construction (where groundworks / construction has commenced on site)?</u>	£
<u>How many 2010-11 play sites are under construction?</u>	
<u>What is the value of contracts that have been entered into, but groundworks / construction has not yet started on site.</u> (Supporting documentation may be called for at a later date). This would include for example: consultation, design, materials or equipment ordered for sites where groundworks / construction work has not yet started. It may be necessary to produce on request copies of contracts, orders, or paid invoices as evidence of the committed expenditure.	£
<u>How many play sites where contracts entered into contracts but groundworks/construction not yet started</u>	
<u>Total</u>	£

I certify that:

- no claim has been made for funding in respect of these items from any other body.

Signed by a person authorised to sign on behalf of the grant recipient	
Date	
Signature	
Name (please print)	
Position in organisation	