
DMT

July 2021

Report of the Director of People

New Early Years and Childcare Places on Lowfield Green

Summary

1. To seek agreement to the setting up of an Early Years and Childcare Capital Panel to consider applications from local providers to create new early years and childcare places to meet parental demand that will arise from a new sustainable development on Lowfield Green.

Background

2. The local authority recently agreed to a sustainable development at Lowfield Green (site of the former Lowfield School) for the provision of a range of housing, including affordable properties, a dementia care home and other community buildings. The Early Years and Childcare Service requested an early years yield from the development and this has generated a contribution of 104k towards creating 16 new early years places within the local vicinity. Council developers have asked the Early Years and Childcare Service to notify them once it is confirmed how the funding is to be spent so that there is an audit trail in place.
3. The number of developments across the city are expected to increase significantly in future years. The service is notified of these developments by council planners and it continues to seek an early years yield based on a formula similar to the one for primary schools. Given the number of planned developments and a tight infrastructure to deliver early years and childcare sufficiency capital projects the service will set up a new panel and draw up a revised light touch process in line with council procurement requirements. The creation of new places at Lowfield Green will be an opportunity to test the effectiveness of a light touch process.
4. It should be noted that when procuring new places some early years and childcare providers may always have limitations on space but others, with a reasonable amount of capital, may be able to extend or make adaptations to their premises to create new space and

reconfigure rooms for different age groups. By prioritising existing early years and childcare providers in the area of this development it is an opportunity to sustain existing provision and provide more flexible childcare to meet demand. However for larger future developments any clear provider gaps in the childcare market would necessitate an open procurement exercise requiring our specialist early years and childcare advice to local authority legal services in drawing up agreements with developers and possible attendance at legal proceedings where there is a public inquiry arising from disputes about the details of new provision.

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment – Lowfield Green Area

5. There are 23 early years and childcare providers within a one mile radius of the Lowfield development. This is made up of childminders, school nurseries, pre-school playgroups and day nurseries. When looking at capacity of early years providers it is usual to consider providers with occupancy levels above 80% as being at capacity and hence with limited availability. It is also necessary to ensure that ideally there is a range of provision available to meet differing family needs ie sessional care, full day care, term-time only provision and also provision which is open across the whole year.
6. Latest occupancy data suggests that there is almost no availability of places for under 2s, very limited availability for 2 and under 3s and limited availability of places for 3 to under 5s. It is anticipated that the housing development could yield approximately 16 early years places therefore it is likely that additional places are likely to be required to meet the additional demand created by the Lowfield Development. A Childcare Sufficiency Assessment for Lowfield Green is attached as Annex 1.

Next Steps

7. It is proposed to set up an Early Years and Childcare capital panel made up of representatives from childcare sufficiency, quality improvement, inclusion, finance and the private, voluntary and independent sector. The local authority will promote this tendering opportunity to existing providers set out in paragraph 5. Received bids will be considered by the new panel who will score and assess the bids against agreed criteria and make a recommendation to be brought back to DMT and the Executive Member for final approval.

8. There is an expectation that providers who bid for the funds should have a good or outstanding Ofsted judgement, provide evidence of a sound business plan and commit to creating new places within a reasonable time frame including a focus on prioritising and encouraging places for SEND and other vulnerable children aged 0-5.
9. Advice will be taken from the council's procurement team in advance of tendering to ensure that the planned process meets with all of the appropriate procurement guidelines.

Financial Implications

10. The proposed scheme of £104k will need to be added to the People Directorate Capital Programme, fully funded from the Developer contribution discussed in paragraph 2 of the report. This amount has already been received and is available to spend immediately to fund this scheme.
11. The addition of this scheme to the capital programme will require the approval of the Executive. Individual awards within this scheme, once it is incorporated into the approved programme, can be delegated to the Executive Member for Children and Young People or alternatively to People DMT as long all individual awards are less than £100k.

Recommendation

12. DMT and the Executive Member are asked to agree to the setting up a new Early Years and Childcare Capital Panel to commission new early years and childcare places. Also to receive a further report to consider the panel's recommendations and give formal approval to the successful bids for Lowfield Green.

Contact Details

13. Author and Chief Officer Responsible for the report:
Barbara Mands, Head of Early Years and Childcare Service
Maxine Squire, Assistant Director, Education, Skills and SEND

Report Approved Date

Annexes

14. Childcare Sufficiency Assessment – Lowfield Green (Annex 1)