

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES – 6 JULY 2010

APPROVAL OF LARGE CAPITAL GRANT PROJECTS FOR EARLY YEARS PROVISION

Report by Director for Children, Young People & Families

Introduction

1. On 16 September 2008 the Cabinet approved the Oxfordshire Early Years Capital Programme 2008-2011. This sets out the plans for expenditure of £7.8 million that has been made available by the Department for Education (DfE) to secure significant investment in early years provision, mostly to benefit children in the non-maintained sector.
2. Expenditure must be completed by 31 March 2011.
3. Advice has been provided by Council legal, finance and procurement officers as to the most appropriate forms of funding agreement and contractual processes for awarding and distributing grants.

Assessment of Projects

4. 59 expressions of interest for Large Grants (> £10,000) were originally received in January 2009 from early years providers. The expressions of interest were initially shortlisted according to need and according to risk.
5. For the 10 largest externally-managed projects (for grants in excess of £25,000 to replace, extend or substantially refurbish a building) the providers were next invited to submit a full application form, together with supporting evidence, for return to the Council by 31 March 2010 at the latest.
6. On-site visits were then arranged for meetings between Council officers, the early years provider and the landowner or school (as appropriate).
7. The projects were then closely examined to assess the benefits and how successfully risks would be managed.
8. To date the Cabinet Member has approved grant funding (subject to contract) for 9 out of 10 of these large externally-managed projects.
9. The final project is now recommended for approval, subject to appropriate contractual agreement:
10. Stepping Stones Day Nursery and Nursery School Ltd in Witney requests a grant up to a maximum of £100,000 towards the costs of a 2-storey extension.

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This will accommodate children under 3 on the ground floor and provide an after-school club on the first floor.

11. Currently the children under 3 are on the 1st floor of the old building and so do not have direct access to the outdoors. The after school club currently operates from an unsuitable old pre-fab building.
12. There are 122 children in total on the nursery's register, many of whom will directly benefit from this project. The after-school club will be of particular benefit to pupils at West Witney Primary School.
13. The nursery is privately owned. The owner/ manager has confirmed matched funding of £150,000. The project cost is estimated at £250,000.
14. The application for planning consent for the extension is supported by West Oxfordshire District Council but does not yet have a decision date.

Financial and Staff Implications

15. The grant requested is £100,000. The total estimated cost of the project recommended for approval is £250,000. Matched funding of £150,000 is available.
16. The Council is scrutinising all capital schemes planned for the next 5 years. At the same time the Council will ensure that confirmed grant provision up to 31 March 2011 is fully utilised.
17. The Early Years Capital Grant programme has confirmed funding from DfE for expenditure up to 31 March 2011. The project recommended for approval will utilise grant funding in this financial year and there will be no contractual obligation in future years. There is also the opportunity of utilising the substantial amount of matched funding. Note that this is the final project in the programme that will be recommended for approval.
18. The costs of staffing and running the new accommodation will be met by the Stepping Stones Day Nursery and Nursery School Ltd from the per-pupil funding provided by Oxfordshire County Council for eligible pupil attendances, and from charges to other users of the facilities. The county council will have no responsibility for revenue costs.

Equality and Inclusion

19. The Early Years Capital Grant is for the improvement of the learning environment in early years settings to support young children's play and learning with a view to raising achievement and narrowing the gap between disadvantaged children and the rest.

Sustainability

20. It is recognised that each project (that involves a new building, extension or major refurbishment) will not necessarily match the assessment criteria of the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) it will however seek to meet those principles and seek to achieve the level of 'GOOD'.

RECOMMENDATION

21. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to approve the application from Stepping Stones Day Nursery and Nursery School Ltd for funding up to £100,000 from the Early Years Capital Grant, subject to planning consent being obtained and subject to appropriate contractual agreement.**

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