

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS & LEARNING

DATE: 3 DECEMBER 2013

LEAD OFFICER: NICK WILSON, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

SUBJECT: APPROVAL TO PURCHASE EARLY YEARS LEARNING RESOURCES FOR TWO YEAR OLDS



SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

In accordance with the county council's Financial Regulations, Cabinet Member approval is required to purchase early learning resources for children accessing Free Early Education for Two Year Olds (FEET) in Surrey settings.

The funding is available as part of the £2.8m capital allocation in the 2013/18 Medium Term Financial Plan for Early Years Schemes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning approve the provision of early learning resources to settings across Surrey at a cost of £210,000.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

In order to meet the statutory duty of building sufficient places for two year old children entitled to access Free Early Education, the Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS) is working with providers across Surrey.

The aim of the service is to encourage providers to offer places to FEET children, ensuring they have resources which promote a quality early learning environment.

EYCS has managed to grow the market to 1100 places without any capital investment as there is already some capacity to pick up these two year olds, combined with some direct work provided by EYCS. EYCS is now at the point where further incentives are required to build capacity to 3000 places by September 2014. The gap in provision is 1,900 places and investment in the market is needed in order to bridge the gap.

By investing £630 with 340 settings, each provider will commit to providing places for two year olds so that the target of 3000 places can be achieved. This represents good value as there is an investment of £630 per setting with the potential to achieve between five and six places per setting.

The equipment that is being purchased is of the highest quality and providers will undertake a specific training programme regarding providing a high quality environment for two year olds before they are allocated any resources.

DETAILS:**Background**

1. The Childcare Act 2006 places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess the local childcare market and to secure sufficient childcare for working parents. The level of childcare provision is only deemed to be sufficient if it meets the needs of the community in general and, in particular, those families on lower incomes and those with disabled children.
2. The county council has a further statutory duty to provide access to free early education for all three and four year old children in Surrey, their entitlement of up to 15 hours/week for 38 weeks/year. Over 19,000 three and four year olds took up their entitlement in the Summer Term of 2013.
3. From September 2013, the county council had an additional statutory duty to ensure that 20% of the most disadvantaged two year old children in Surrey, including looked after children, can also access free early education for up to 15 hours/week. This currently equates to more than 1700 children, and on 1 September 2014, the duty will increase to 40% of all two year olds - for Surrey around 3000 children.
4. Prior to September 2012 there were 199 two year olds in places. As at 1 October 2013, there were 1100 two year olds placed in Surrey settings.
5. The Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS) regularly assesses early years provision in Surrey to ensure that there are sufficient childcare places available and to identify those areas in the county where there is a need to work with the sector to build capacity.
6. Sufficiency must be assessed in terms of two, three, and four year old places in order to make sure that families can access the full range free entitlement in settings of their choice. Places for two year olds cannot be delivered at the expense of places for three and/or four year olds. Further, parents of two year olds have indicated that they would wish their children to continue their free entitlement at the same setting on reaching their third birthday, rather than move to an alternative setting.
7. There are areas in Surrey where the capacity does not meet the demand for three and four year old places and this lack of places has also been impacted by the new statutory duty around two year olds. The service is beginning to realise its efforts in building places for two year olds with more than 1100 children now placed.
8. Further capacity must be built so that the statutory duty is met and the service is working with the sector to establish ways in which this additional capacity can be found. Initiatives, other than the play equipment, have to date included encouraging child minders to place their contact details on the Surrey County Council Childcare Finder, and the provision of training.
9. As well as building the capacity, the service must ensure that all provision is of a good quality and promotes physical and creative development for two year olds, and that the provision is sustainable.

10. One of the options considered as a means of building places is to “award” settings a set of early learning resources, suitable for two year olds and in keeping with the quality environment principle.
11. Following a procurement exercise the service identified resources supplied by Community Playthings, via the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO) framework agreement (number 000201), and a discount of 2% on the catalogue prices was achieved as a result.
12. Settings are able to apply for a set of resources but will be required to attend a specific training programme around working with two year olds, and also commit to offering places for funded FEET children for a sustained period of time. There are six packages available and settings can choose which package they wish to apply for. The cost of each package is circa £630. **Annex 1** gives details of the equipment in each package. To date, around 275 settings have attended the workshops.
13. The Department for Education allocated capital funding to the county council to support capacity building and this underpins the £2.8m currently allocated to Early Years in the 2013/18 capital programme. This is the funding source for the purchase of the early years resources. The Procurement Review Group and the Investment Panel have both approved the business case.

CONSULTATION:

14. The Investment Panel considered and approved the business case on 5 September 2013 and a report was taken to the Procurement Review Group on 17 September 2013, and approved.
15. A number of Surrey settings which have previously purchased resources from Community Playthings were approached and asked if they considered that the resources were of good quality and suitable for the proposed use. They agreed that they represented good value for money.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

16. Early years providers will be required to undertake a specific training programme regarding providing a high quality environment for two year old children before they are allocated a set of equipment.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

17. The equipment has been sourced via the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO) framework agreement (number 000201) and a discount of 2% on the catalogue prices was achieved as a result.
18. Each set of resources has a ten year guarantee.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

19. The section 151 officers confirm that the funding for this scheme (£210,000) is available in the 2013/18 Medium Term Financial Plan as part of the approved capital allocation for the Early Years service of £2.8m. It is acknowledged that the service has negotiated a 2% discount on the published catalogue prices and that the Provider is a recognised supplier. It is

understood that the County Council will not be responsible for the maintenance of this equipment.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

20. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Equalities and Diversity

21. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report and the service has not carried out an Equality Impact Assessment.

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

22. Looked after children are eligible for a place providing they meet the FEET eligibility criteria and, where being offered, an early education place is in line with their care plan.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- Workshops for providers commenced October 2013
- The equipment will start to be delivered from November – December 2013
- Evaluation of training and resources November 2013
- Phase 2 – Two additional sessions will be offered to settings not in a position to access the packages in October 2013
- The service will continue to monitor the levels of FEET places available across the county.

Contact Officer:

Phil Osborne
Head of Early Years and Childcare Service
01372 833861

Consulted:

Surrey County Council Investment Panel
Surrey County Council Procurement Review Group
Early years settings in Surrey – sample.

Annexes:

Community Playthings – supporting your two year olds brochure
