

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS AND LEARNING

DATE: 17 JULY 2014

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

SUBJECT: INVESTMENT IN THE SPINNEY CHILDREN'S CENTRE TO ENABLE TWO YEAR OLD CHILDREN TO ACCESS THE FREE EARLY EDUCATION ENTITLEMENT



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SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

This paper is to seek approval from the Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning to move forward with the plans for capital investment in a building attached to the Spinney Children's Centre so that two year old children can access the free early education entitlement.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that, subject to Investment Panel approval of the business case, the Cabinet Member approves the action to move forward with the plans for capital investment in the Spinney Children's Centre so that two year old children can access the free early education entitlement.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Department of Education requires all local authorities in England to secure free early education places for two year old children who meet the eligibility criteria based on household income. This report will ensure that plans are in place to make provision for such places in the Westborough area of Guildford in Surrey where there is a current shortfall in provision.

DETAILS:

Business Case

1. The Department of Education (DfE) has set out a policy that requires local authorities to ensure that there are sufficient early education places for two year old children to access 15 hours of free early education a week for 38 weeks. The policy has been put in place as a result of research that demonstrates that children from families with low incomes have lower educational attainment, and are less ready for starting school, than children from families with higher incomes. The aim of the policy is to offer free early education for two year olds from families with low household incomes so that the children will benefit from access to high quality early education for a year before such eligibility is available for all children following the term they turn three.
2. The first phase of the policy is well underway and there are currently around 1,300 two year olds accessing a place in an early years setting, in Surrey.

The second phase was put in place during the summer term 2014 and is targeted at families where the household income is below £16,190. For Surrey County Council this will lead to 2,800 children being eligible for a place from September 2014. Surrey County Council's Early Years and Childcare Service has undertaken an analysis of the need for places based on information on potential families provided by the DfE, population data held by the County Council and on data on available places in early education and childcare settings across the county. One of the areas in Surrey where there is a shortfall in places for two year olds is in the Westborough area of Guildford.

3. Most parents are offered a place for their eligible child in existing provision in Surrey, but there are areas across the county where access to places is limited and providers have been encouraged to extend the number of children that they can take or open additional sessions in the afternoon. However, in those areas where there is not the capacity to extend places in this way, there is a need for capital investment to provide access to the early education provision. In reaching a decision on which provider is chosen to meet the need a number of criteria are taken into account: settings with a proven track record of delivering high quality places for two, three and four year olds; places that are part of the offer of a children's centre within or close to the area where places are needed; where the grant will extend existing provision or improve the sustainability of existing provision; and finally where there are strategic links with a maintained school that is providing additional support to families and the extension of places for two year olds will enhance the impact on improving the outcomes for the most vulnerable children in the areas of greatest disadvantage. Value for money is a consideration in all potential projects but the criteria listed earlier may override a more straightforward financial case due to these strategic aspects.
4. The Spinney Children's Centre currently has a nursery for 3 – 5 year olds on site which is fully integrated with the Foundation Stage of Guildford Grove Primary School. The maximum capacity is 24 children. The room is used for a very successful After School provision at the end of the school day catering for 3 – 11 year olds. Within the reach area of the children's centre: 20% of 0 – 4 year olds are living in poverty, with 30% in the Westborough ward. Surrey Early Years have identified that, in September 2014, there will be 53 children in the Westborough ward entitled to free early education for two year olds (FEET). The children's centre is a prime location for the provision of a FEET setting. Parents and children, particularly from the most disadvantaged parts of the centre's reach area, access the centre readily and feel supported and comfortable in this environment. Outreach workers provide additional support for many local families and regularly refer children for FEET funding. Currently there is only one other preschool within the area and one childminder that offer FEET places and there is a need to create additional places through capital investment. Plans are in place to create another preschool in Westborough to offer FEET places primarily from the neighbouring Stoughton ward where there is also a shortfall. This will not be sufficient to meet the need for FEET places in Westborough and additional provision at the Spinney is needed. In considering the criteria used in selecting a particular setting as set out in the previous paragraph, whilst this is not a low cost option, the other criteria would be met by the investment in the Spinney Children's Centre.

5. The centre receives a number of enquiries from parents who would like their children to access some provision before their free early education (FEE) for three and four year olds entitlement starts. As a setting with two nurseries, there is a great deal of expertise on the needs of younger children. The current nursery provision is viewed as an exemplar, with practitioners from many other settings coming to see best practice. Enabling two year old children to have access to highly qualified practitioners and teachers will impact positively on their readiness for school and provide them with a wealth of experiences that they will not necessarily receive at home. The centre provision can be extended in order to accommodate a 2 year old setting for 12 children in the morning and 12 children in the afternoon. This setting can also include some free flow with the children's centre nursery, providing additional socialising and peer interaction opportunities.
6. The Spinney Children's Centre covers one of the most disadvantaged areas in the county and it is essential, for its ongoing sustainability, that the centre is able to support families including accessing early education places. Consequently the Spinney Children's Centre is ideally placed to offer places for two year olds. However, there is not sufficient space to provide these places within the existing building without using the rooms in the Children's Centre that are currently being used for family and community services. These existing rooms are adjacent to the current provision of three and four year old places which will enable the schools and children's centre to deliver an integrated early education offer for all the children. The family and community services still need to be made available so the capital investment would be used to replace the family and community rooms in another part of the school site, adjacent to the Children's Centre.
7. The Guildford Grove Primary School and Spinney Children's Centre have commissioned an architect to design the building containing the family and community rooms before going out to tender for the construction. At this stage, the estimated overall cost of the build will be £350k, though the precise cost will be determined by the design of the building. This paper is therefore seeking the approval of the Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning to proceed with these plans. Further approval will be required when the estimate for the actual cost of the building is received.

CONSULTATION:

8. There is no requirement for any formal consultation on this decision.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

9. Guildford Grove Primary School and the Spinney Children's Centre are already providing a range of education and family support services to this part of Guildford. By offering places for two year olds, the children will progress into an early education place when they are three and many will be eligible to apply for a Primary School place in the year in which they are five. The Children's Centre will be able to support the children's parents in their understanding of how they can assist their child's development and education. The combination of all this integrated working will make a significant impact on how well the children are prepared for their education. Guildford Grove Primary School has already gathered some evidence of the difference that supporting children, and their families, through the children's

centre can have when they start school compared with similar children that have not attended any sessions at the children's centre.

10. Consequently, there is a risk that if places are not made available within the Spinney Children's Centre, this integrated approach will not have the impact on eligible children from the local area. There is also the associated risk that, if places for two year olds are not made available at the Spinney and if parents can find an alternative place, it could have an impact on the school's nursery class and children's centres early education provision and make it difficult to sustain places for three and four year olds.
11. There is a requirement on Surrey County Council to ensure that two year old places are made available to eligible children and there is a risk to the County Council's reputation if it is not able to fulfil this requirement.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

12. In principal approval is sought to a scheme to create 24 places for two year olds that will help to meet the need for FEET places in the Westborough area of Guildford. The estimated overall cost of the scheme is £350,000. Final approval to proceed with the scheme will be sought once full design work is complete and price has been tested through a tendering exercise.
13. As part of financial governance the business case for all capital schemes is reviewed by the Council's Investment Panel in order to provide assurance that proposals are robust. This scheme is due to be considered by the panel on 15 July 2014. The views of the panel will be reported at the Cabinet Member meeting on 17 July 2014 and approval is sought subject to Investment Panel approval of the business case.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

14. Within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) a capital budget of £3.5m has been approved to support the development of early education and childcare places in the areas of greatest need where a private provider will not create such provision or is unable to secure the full investment themselves. This capital budget is in part funded by £2.2m of capital grant made available by the Department for Education.
15. Of the £3.5m capital budget, £815k has already been allocated to schemes leaving £2,685k for the remaining programme for FEET places.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

16. The only legal implication within this report is the duty on Surrey County Council to ensure that there are sufficient early education places for eligible two year olds and the Cabinet Member approval will support the programme of work to respond to this duty in the Westborough area of Guildford.

Equalities and Diversity

17. A full equalities impact assessment has not been undertaken on this proposal as it is unlikely that the proposal would have a negative impact on any groups with protected characteristics. The proposals within this report are targeted at sections of the community that are already at risk of not accessing services.

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

18. The DfE has stipulated that Looked after Children are eligible for a FEET place. The Children's Service has been informed of this and places have been taken up by Looked After Children.

Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults implications

19. There are no significant implications arising from this report. However, access to a FEET place is part of the County Council's early intervention programme and with the support offered through the children's centre, any concerns will be addressed earlier.

Public Health implications

20. There are no significant implications arising from this report.

Climate change/carbon emissions implications

21. The County Council attaches great importance to being environmentally aware and wishes to show leadership in cutting carbon emissions and tackling climate change. The new buildings will comply with, or exceed, Building Regulations. The contractor will be required to provide a Site Waste Management Plan.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

22. The next steps that will follow any decisions taken by the Cabinet Member will be:

- For the Spinney Children's Centre to discuss and agree the outline design with representatives of the Schools and Learning Service.
- For the Spinney Children's Centre to obtain three estimates for the construction of the proposed building.
- For approval on the preferred provider to be reached within the County Council and by the Cabinet Member.
- For the Spinney Children's Centre to move forward with the construction of the proposed building together with any planning requirements that will need to be followed.
- Representatives of the Schools and Learning Service will inform the Spinney Children's Centre and Guildford Grove Primary School of the outcome of the decision taken by the Cabinet Member.

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

Finance service within Surrey County Council
Peter-John Wilkinson, Assistant Director, Schools and Learning

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