

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 16 October, 2008

## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

### DCSF – QUALITY AND ACCESS FOR ALL YOUNG CHILDREN – EARLY YEARS CAPITAL GRANT

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report informs Cabinet of an additional DCSF Early Years Capital Funding Stream, from April 2008 to March 2011, in addition to previously reported Children's Centre and Extended Schools Capital. The Grant is primarily, but not exclusively intended to support capital investment in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector. The report puts forward recommendations for the allocation of the grant in 2008/9 and 2009/10

#### 1. Background

- 1.0 The DCSF Early Years Capital Grant has three aims:
- i) To improve the quality of the learning environment in early years settings
  - ii) To ensure all children, including disabled children are able to access provision
  - iii) To enable PVI providers to deliver the extension of the free offer for 3 and 4 year olds and to do so flexibly.
- The DCSF expectation is that the majority of the capital grant is used to improve the quality of the environment in PVI settings, both to support higher quality experiences for young children and ensure that all children can access services.
- 1.1 The grant comprises £1,238,960 in each of three years, 2008, 2009, and 2010 and it is for the LA to "decide how best to deploy the grant for maximum impact". The grant can be used for investment in premises, fixtures, fittings and equipment above the Surestart capital threshold of £2,500 inc VAT. Eligible expenditure would include packages of smaller equipment items, ordered to this value and above.
- 1.2 There are a significant number of PVI groups supporting the development of young children on Wirral, many of which pre-date the development of Surestart. A number of these groups are located on school sites. This reflects the policy of encouraging the development of such groups and providing school site locations where possible, prior to the national Surestart initiative. The groups located on school sites mainly occupy spaces which have become available as a result of falling rolls, including mobile accommodation. A small number of groups have sourced their own mobile accommodation and brought it onto school sites. In a number of cases this mobile accommodation is now in very poor condition and the long term future of the relevant PVI groups is insecure. The new capital funding stream has the potential to secure the long term future of these groups and greatly improve the experiences, environment and safety and well-being of the young people and the adults who make up those groups.
- 1.3 It is therefore proposed that for 08/09 and 09/10 the capital allocation is split on an approximate 50/50 basis in the following way:
- i) Approximately half the available funding, (£600,000 approx) be allocated to replace poor quality, temporary accommodation at two sites, ensuring the continued operation of the relevant PVI provision. In 08/09 the two groups

whose accommodation is reaching the end of its life are based at Brookhurst Primary School and Brackenwood Infant School. Subject to approval of this proposal, a review would be taken of accommodation of other groups on school sites, to bring forward two further schemes in 09/10. The proposal at this stage is to be replaced by the old mobiles with new standard modular build units, specific to Early Years, which could be re-located should the need for provision change to another site in the future. Again, subject to approval of this proposal, further option appraisal will be carried out to ensure best value and the most appropriate accommodation solution

- ii) The remaining half of the funding be used to fund works and/or supply packages of equipment to other PVI groups, with all groups being invited to bid and the bids being scored against the DCSF guidance for the capital grant in respect of Quality, Access and Delivering the Free Entitlement. As this is a substantial three year programme it should be possible to meet many outstanding capital needs in the sector.

The above proposal secures provision which is increasingly at risk due to deteriorating accommodation and allows all groups to bid for additional capital investment.

## **2.0 Financial Implications**

The capital implications are set out in the main body of the report above. All bids will need to meet the DCSF guidance on use of capital and capital thresholds and there will be a need to monitor investment at all relevant private, voluntary and independent groups and locations.

## **3.0 Staffing Implications**

It is envisaged that the grant will be administered by existing staff in the department's Early Years and Capital Teams. Specific project management will be required for capital works on council owned sites.

## **4.0 Equal Opportunities Implications**

This initiative forms part of the strategy to ensure "sufficient provision, distributed appropriately across the authority to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, access by all to Early Years Services". (DCSF guidance).

## **5.0 Community Safety Implications**

Advice will be sought on location and design of any new accommodation in respect of safety/security issues.

## **6.0 Local Agenda Implications**

The proposed accommodation projects will replace old, temporary accommodation which is in very poor condition and very energy inefficient with new accommodation to current standards.

## **7.0 Planning Implications**

All relevant planning permissions would be obtained via The Director of Technical Services.

## **8.0 Anti-Poverty Implications and Social Inclusion Implications**

The capital proposals in this report are intended to secure and support early years education and support for all children and families, which in turn contribute to the Anti-Poverty strategy. All PVI settings are required to have an inclusion policy setting out “how they will meet the needs of all children” (DCSF guidance).

## **9.0 Local Member Support Implications**

Under the proposals in this report capital funding could be bid for by PVI groups across the borough. In respect of the two specific projects at 1.3 above, Brookhurst Primary is located in Clatterbridge Ward and Brackenwood Infant School is located in Bebington Ward.

## **10.0 Background Papers**

DCSF Capital Grant guidance  
CTPD Working Papers, asset records.

## **11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i) That the 08/09 and 09/10 DCSF Early Years Capital Grant be allocated as set out in 1.3 above, 50% approx on two accommodation renewal schemes for Private Voluntary and Independent groups (PVI) based on school sites and 50% open to all PVI groups, to bid for against DCSF criteria
- ii) That the grant be the subject of further reports recording final allocations to groups.

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