

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 15 AUGUST 2019

EARLY YEARS EXPANSION PROGRAMME – GRANT APPLICATION SCHEME

REPORT BY PAULINE STEPHEN, DIRECTOR OF SCHOOLS AND LEARNING

ABSTRACT

This report provides Committee with an update on the Grant Application Scheme administered as part of the Early Years Expansion Programme, and seeks approval to increase the initial budget for the scheme following discussions with grantees and the council's professional adviser.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) notes the additional information on the successful grant projects in section 4;
- (ii) approves the reallocation of existing funds from elsewhere within the expansion programme to increase the scheme budget from £500,000 to £1,000,000;
- (iii) delegates authority to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, following consultation with the Director of Schools and Learning, to agree the terms and conditions of the individual grants as set out in section 4, so as to protect the council's interests in line with the measures noted in report 158/19, and upon agreement, sign the grant agreements on behalf of the council;
- (iv) delegates authority to the Director of Schools and Learning, following consultation with the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, to pay out the individual grants in accordance with the agreed terms and conditions; and
- (v) delegates authority to the Director of Schools and Learning to approve any further grant scheme budget variations, up to a maximum additional allocation of 25% and within the overall programme budget allocated by Scottish Government.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS LOCAL OUTCOMES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:

The best start in life for children
Improved physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing
More opportunities for people to achieve success

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Reference is made to Committee Report No 335/18, approved by the Children and Learning Committee on 6 November 2018, regarding the proposed opening of a grant application scheme for partner early learning and childcare (ELC) providers as part of the expansion of early years.
- 3.2 Reference is made to Committee Report No 158/19, noted by the Children and Learning Committee on 21 May 2019, informing Committee of the outcome of the awards panel for the grant scheme and advising of the terms and conditions to be attached to the grants.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 10 grant applications were approved by the grant scheme awards panel on 25 April, as noted in report 158/19. Discussions with several of the grantees have since led to further refinement and development of their proposals. The initial reports compiled by the professional adviser, appointed under contract by the council to review the projects and ensure feasibility and value for money, have raised the possibility that some of the applicants' initial cost estimates were conservative.
- 4.2 The applications received from Playspaces and Smallworld (both Brechin) and Rompers (Montrose) have been reviewed by the professional adviser and while no concerns have been raised about the feasibility of the proposals, it has been suggested that the cost estimates on these projects may be conservative.
- 4.3 The application received from Helping Hands (Arbroath) is currently subject to a procurement process in line with the policies of Dundee & Angus College, the nursery's parent company. A review of this proposal will be conducted by the professional adviser after a contractor is appointed and initial costs are further developed.
- 4.4 The application from Busy Bees (Monifieth) does not require to be reviewed by the professional adviser as it is below the threshold of £50,000 and will therefore require only a monitoring agreement, currently being developed by the council's legal service.
- 4.5 Discussions regarding the application from Letham Playgroup are ongoing. The expansion programme is committed to supporting the preservation of this service to ensure the expanded ELC entitlement can be offered flexibly in this locality, and will continue to explore options to ensure the playgroup has appropriate premises from which the service can be delivered.
- 4.6 The remaining four applications from Ferryden Playgroup, Inverbrothock Playgroup, Ladybird Playgroup and Muirfield Playgroup will be undertaken by the council's Estates service as part of phase two of the capital expansion workstream, for completion by August 2020. The projected costs of the proposals submitted by these five providers may therefore be subject to change as the proposals are jointly refined and more accurate costs are obtained by the council's Estates service. No direct grants will be awarded to any of these applicants, and the projects will be reported and monitored through the Capital Projects Monitoring Group.
- 4.7 It is necessary at this stage to request a budget that ensures the expansion programme can meet the eventual costs of the grant projects without the need for further committee approval, as any delays in the completion of these projects may result in a failure to meet new statutory requirements from August 2020. The requested budget is therefore above the current projected spend on the approved grant projects, acknowledging the professional adviser's comments regarding potentially conservative cost estimates from some of the applicants.

5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 To note the additional information on the successful grant projects in section 4.
- 5.2 To approve the reallocation of existing funds from elsewhere within the expansion programme to increase the scheme budget from £500,000 to £1,000,000.
- 5.3 To delegate authority to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, following consultation with the Director of Schools and Learning, to agree the terms and conditions of the individual grants as set out in section 4, so as to protect the council's interests in line with the measures noted in report 158/19 and upon agreement, sign the grant agreements on behalf of the council.
- 5.4 To delegate authority to the Director of Schools and Learning to pay out the individual grants in accordance with the agreed terms and conditions.
- 5.5 To delegate authority to the Director of Schools and Learning to approve any further grant scheme budget variations, up to a maximum additional allocation of 25% and within the overall programme budget allocated by Scottish Government.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The multi-year funding package allocated to Angus for the early years expansion included an initial budget of £500,000 for the grant application scheme. The cancellation of the proposed extension at Maisondieu Primary School, which is no longer required due to the successful applications from Playspaces and Smallworld, released an additional £396,000. The additional £104,000, or £354,000 if an additional 25% is required under delegated authority, will be funded by Capital From Current Revenue (CFCR) transfer using unspent revenue grant allocated by Scottish Government.
- 6.2 The additional capital costs incurred by the four projects to be carried out by the council's Estates service, as additional work in phase two of the capital expansion programme, will be partially met through existing capital grant allocation from Scottish Government and partially by CFCR transfer using unspent revenue grant.
- 6.3 There is no expected impact on council budgets as a result of any of the proposals outlined in this report.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

8. CONSULTATION

The Director of Finance and the Director of Legal and Democratic Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

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