

CABINET MEETING – 3 FEBRUARY 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Procurement of Services to Support Early Childhood and Childcare Services.

Author(s):

Executive Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report:

This report seeks approval for the procurement of three Early Childhood and Childcare Services. Firstly it seeks approval for the procurement of training for practitioners in Early Childhood and Childcare Services. Secondly it seeks approval for the establishment of a framework of training providers to train practitioners in these fields. Thirdly it seeks approval to procure childcare places for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, so that DCSF grant conditions can be met.

Description of Decision:

Cabinet is recommended to approve

- The procurement of training provision for the Early Childhood Services and Childcare Workforce
- The establishment of a framework of training providers who can provide training for practitioners working in Early Childhood Services and Childcare.
- To provide free childcare for disadvantaged 2 year olds as part of the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project.
- To provide free childcare for vulnerable children 0 – 5 year olds as part of Children's Centre family support childcare service

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework?

Yes

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

To enable the Children's Services Directorate to procure training that meets the needs of the Early Childhood Services and Childcare Workforce so that they can improve the quality of practice in early years and childcare settings and meet the requirements of the SSEYC grant conditions and the Childcare Act 2006.

The decision to establish a framework of training providers will provide a more cost effective and efficient method of procuring appropriate training as it will provide a bank of high quality training providers who can be asked to deliver training in direct response to identified need. This process will provide a speedy response to identified need. Training providers will benefit from the framework as it will mean they will only need to provide evidence of their competence and quality once rather than repeating the process for every training course that they tender for.

To enable Children's Services Directorate to procure the appropriate childcare

services necessary to meet the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families, and to fulfil the requirements of the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project and the Children’s Centre Core Offer for family support.

The decision will support the achievement of Sunderland’s statutory responsibility under the Childcare Act 2006 to improve the outcomes of all children and close the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers. The provision of free childcare supports the reduction of child poverty by enabling parents to access training and support to increase their chances of employment and by reducing the impact of child poverty on the children.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

Training for practitioners working in Early Childhood Services and Childcare

One alternative is not to procure training from external providers and require Children’s Services staff to deliver all the training. This is not recommended as there are not sufficient staff to deliver the amount of training required. Some training is very specialised and therefore needs to be procured from external specialists.

Another alternative option is to procure each separate training course individually. This is the current practice and is time consuming for both Council staff and for the training providers and is therefore not an efficient use of resources. This process:

- does not ensure best value is achieved; and
- does not allow for a quick response to an identified training need.

Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project and Children’s Centre Family Support Childcare Service

An alternative option is not to proceed with the procurement of the services. This option is not recommended as it would adversely impact on the Council’s ability to fulfil the requirements and grant conditions of the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project, and the Children’s Centre core offer for family support and their contribution towards key national indicators.

Another alternative is to purchase places for children on an individual basis. However this would not comply with Council’s Procurement Procedure Rules or demonstrate best value or ensure that a consistent service specification is in place with all providers.

Is this a “Key Decision” as defined in the Constitution?

Yes

Is it included in the Forward Plan?

Yes

Relevant Scrutiny Committee:

Children and Young People Learning

**PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES TO SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD AND
CHILDCARE SERVICES.**

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report seeks approval for the procurement of three Early Childhood and Childcare Services. Firstly it seeks approval for the procurement of training for practitioners in Early Childhood and Childcare services. Secondly it seeks approval for the establishment of a framework of training providers to train practitioners in these fields. Thirdly it seeks approval to procure childcare places for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, so that DCSF grant conditions can be met.

2.0 Description of Decision

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve

- The procurement of training provision for the Early Childhood Services and Childcare Workforce
- The establishment of a framework of training providers who can provide training for practitioners working in Early Childhood Services and Childcare.
- To provide free childcare for disadvantaged 2 year olds as part of the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project.
- To provide free childcare for vulnerable children 0 – 5 year olds as part of Children's Centre family support childcare service

3.0 Introduction and Background

3.1 The Childcare Act (2006) places duties on local authorities to improve the outcomes and narrow gaps as measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for all children up to the age of five through the provision of integrated early childhood services and to ensure there is sufficient childcare available for parents who want to work and train. These duties require supporting the development of a workforce that is more highly trained, understands integrated working and focuses on continuous improvement of services. The provision of free childcare, through the Extended 2 year Pathfinder project and the Children Centre Family Support Childcare Service, will support the duty to close the gap between the lowest 20% achieving children and their peers.

3.2 Training for practitioners working in Early Childhood Services and Childcare

3.2.1 The Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) provides funding through the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Grant (SSEYC) to support the implementation of duties within the Childcare Act (2006), the 10 Year Strategy for Childcare, the Every Child Matters agenda, and Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare (2009). The government's expectation is that there is a 'step-change in the quality of practice and the capability of the workforce in early years settings'.

3.2.2 The key priorities of the Outcomes, Quality and Inclusion section of the SSEYC grant are to:

- Meet the statutory duty to provide advice, information and training to early years and childcare providers.
- Support the continuous professional development of early years practitioners (including childminders) and help more of them to build up to a full and relevant Level 3 qualification.
- Develop a better understanding and use of practice and pedagogy which is most effective in helping the lowest-performing groups of children to achieve.
- Facilitate greater use of observation and tracking of children's progress so that practitioners more effectively tailor learning and development to each child's needs.
- Encourage and enable settings to adopt a cycle of continuous quality improvement through self-reflection and evaluation.
- Support practitioners delivering the core offer of Children's Centre services and Early Childhood Services.

3.3 Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project

3.3.1 Sunderland was allocated the 2 year Pathfinder Project in 2007. The aim of the Pathfinder Project is to provide free early learning and childcare places for disadvantaged 2 year olds. The Project has placed a total of 811 children from April 2007 until March 2009. All the childcare places were chosen based on parental choice.

3.3.2 From 1st April 2009, DCSF re-launched the project as the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project. The criteria of the project changed as follows:

- Places chosen for quality alongside parental choice
- All children's families had to be in receipt of benefits and additional vulnerability factors
- Hours increased from 7.5 hours to 15 hours over 38 weeks or 11.5 hours all year round
- All families to have access to family support and signposted to Children's Centre activities

3.3.3 DCSF have allocated £337,961 for 2010-11 revenue funding from the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare grant, for Sunderland to support

the delivery of childcare via the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project. The target number of part-time places in 2010-11 is 122.

- 3.3.4 The model of delivery requires childcare settings to integrate their services with existing Children's Centre services who will provide family support to those receiving childcare as part of the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project and can encourage families to use other Children's Centre services.

3.4 Children's Centre Family Support Childcare Service

- 3.4.1 The Children's Centre core offer requires Children's Centres to deliver family support to those families with additional needs. Sunderland Children's Centres deliver this service through a tiered approach based on the level of need for each family.

- Child and family service
- Family support service
- Community parents service
- Free childcare

- 3.4.2 Free childcare is available to support families with additional needs either on a long term basis to support children whose health or development is delayed or is at risk of becoming delayed or whose parents / carers ability to care for them is limited or short term to support a family through a particular crisis e.g. Homelessness; Fire; Flood

- 3.4.3 The budget for the Children's Centre Family Support Childcare Service is £152,639 in 2010/11. The funding is from the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare grant. This will fund 14.62 full time equivalent places.

4 Current Position

4.1 Training for practitioners working in Early Childhood Services and Childcare

- 4.1.1 Children's Services procures training to meet the needs of the Early Childhood Services and Childcare Workforce by assessing the needs of the workforce and co-ordinating a termly programme of training available across the city for practitioners. The budget for the training programme for 2010/11 will be £369,900 from the Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Grant.

- 4.1.2 The termly training programme provides training to support new practitioners entering the workforce, accredited training to improve the qualifications of the workforce, especially to support practitioners to reach a full and relevant level 3 qualification. The training programme also provides mandatory training, for example paediatric first aid, health and safety and signposting to Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Board training. The training programme supports practitioners' continuous professional development by providing training, for example on the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, Speaking and Listening skills development and working with boys. Integrated working

through Children's Centres is supported by training on working with fathers, child development, inclusion and mental health etc.

- 4.1.3 There are 2302 practitioners working in 461 settings (including childminders) within the early years and childcare workforce in Sunderland. In 2008, 4,234 training places were taken up by the workforce, with 3,449 training places having been taken up between April and December 2009.
- 4.1.4 Some training is provided by members of Children's Services staff with the remainder procured individually from external training providers following the Council procurement procedures.
- 4.1.5 Funding for the training of the Early Childhood Service and Childcare Workforce is part of the SSEYC grant which is available until March 2011. It is proposed to award contracts for the framework of training providers until 31st March 2011 with an option to extend for a further year to 31st March 2012, subject to funding and performance.

4.2 Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project and Children's Centre Family Support Childcare Service

- 4.2.1 Funding is secured for the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project through a ring-fenced grant in the Sure Start and Early Years Childcare Grant. The funding for the Children's Centre Family Support Service is part of the SSEYC grant for Children's Centres. Both funding streams are available until March 2011. It is proposed to award contracts as part of the tender process up to March 2011, with an option to extend for a further year to 31st March 2012, subject to funding and performance.
- 4.2.2 The practice within the current contract arrangements for the provision of childcare supports parents and carers to choose local childcare which best meets their needs, from the range available at the time of allocation. It is proposed that childcare providers are appointed through a procurement process which will secure a number of childcare places within a range of childcare provisions from both the maintained and PVI sectors throughout the City who meet the quality criteria required within the procurement process.
- 4.2.3 The new contract arrangements for this service will ensure that high quality childcare provision is available throughout the City which will meet the needs of vulnerable children and families, by offering a flexible approach. Within the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project, parents will be able to choose either 15 hours of childcare per week during term time (39 weeks per year) or 11.5 hours of childcare per week all year round (50 weeks per year). Within the Children's Centre Family Support Childcare Service, parents will be supported to access childcare within maintained or PVI settings which meets their individual needs, either on a long term or short term basis.
- 4.2.4 Parents will also be supported to access outreach and family support services via Children's Centres as part of the two services.

5 Reasons for the Decision

- 5.1 To enable the Children's Services Directorate to procure training that meets the needs of the Early Childhood Services and Childcare Workforce so that they can improve the quality of practice in early years and childcare settings and meet the requirements of the SSEYC grant conditions and the Childcare Act 2006.
- 5.2 The decision to establish a framework of training providers will provide a more cost effective and efficient method of procuring appropriate training as it will provide a bank of high quality training providers who can be asked to deliver training in direct response to identified need. This process will provide a speedy response to identified need. Training providers will benefit from the framework as it will mean they will only need to provide evidence of their competence and quality once rather than repeating the process for every training course that they tender for.
- 5.3 To enable Children's Services Directorate to procure the appropriate childcare services necessary to meet the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families, and to fulfil the requirements of the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project and the Children's Centre Core Offer for family support.
- 5.4 The decision will support the achievement of Sunderland's statutory responsibility under the Childcare Act 2006 to improve the outcomes of all children and close the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers. The provision of free childcare supports the reduction of child poverty by enabling parents to access training and support to increase their chances of employment and by reducing the impact of child poverty on the children.

6 Alternative Options

6.1 Training for practitioners working in Early Childhood Services and Childcare

- 6.1.1 One alternative is not to procure training from external providers and require Children's Services staff to deliver all the training. This is not recommended as there are not sufficient staff to deliver the amount of training required. Some training is very specialised and therefore needs to be procured from external specialists.
- 6.1.2 Another alternative option is to procure each separate training course individually. This is the current practice and is time consuming for both Council staff and for the training providers and is therefore not an efficient use of resources. This process:
- does not ensure best value is achieved; and
 - does not allow for a quick response to an identified training need.

6.2 Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project and Children's Centre Family Support Childcare Service

- 6.2.1 An alternative option is not to proceed with the procurement of the services. This option is not recommended as it would adversely impact on the Council's ability to fulfil the requirements and grant conditions of the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project, and the Children's Centre core offer for family support and their contribution towards key national indicators.
- 6.2.2 Another alternative is to purchase places for children on an individual basis. However this would not comply with Council's Procurement Procedure Rules or demonstrate best value or ensure that a consistent service specification is in place with all providers.

7 Relevant Considerations/Consultations

- 7.1 This proposal will support Children's Services to meet the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006, the SSEYC grant conditions and improve the quality of the Children's Workforce.
- 7.2 This proposal reflects the principle of the integration of services at local level through multi agency collaboration supported by the Childcare Act 2006 and supports the achievement of identifying children's needs early and closing the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers.
- 7.4 The Director of Financial Resources and Chief Solicitor have been consulted and their comments are incorporated into the report.

8 Financial Position

- 8.1 In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Cabinet approval is required for the tender of contracts with a value in excess of £250,000.
- 8.2 The procurement of the framework of training providers covers the period of 1 year from 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011 with an option to extend to 31st March 2012. The total spend of confirmed funding is anticipated to exceed £250,000. The exact amount each training provider will receive will depend on the training needs of the workforce. The exact amount each childcare provider will receive will depend on the location of individual referrals and will therefore vary according to the need for childcare places in each locality.
- 8.3 Funding is available for the training programme and the Children's Centre Family Support Childcare Service through the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Grant (SSEYC) which is confirmed until 31st March 2011. Funding is available for the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project through the ring fenced grant in the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Grant which is also confirmed until 31st March 2011.

9 Glossary

DCSF:	Department for Children, Schools and Families
SSEYCG:	Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Grant
EYFS:	Early Years Foundation Stage
PVI:	Private, Voluntary and Independent

10 Background Papers

- Children Act 2004
- Childcare Act 2006
- Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Grant and Aiming High for Disabled Children Grant: 2009-10 Memorandum of Grant
- Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare
- 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy
- Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce
- The Children's Plan
- Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance
- Every Child Matters
- DCSF criteria for the Extended 2 Year Pathfinder Project

