

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 31 AUGUST 2011

COMMISSIONING OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PLACES

Report by Executive Director of Educational & Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to make recommendations to Cabinet in respect of the future commissioning of pre-school educational places in East Ayrshire.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 East Ayrshire Council currently commissions 345 fully loaded places from voluntary and private sector Partner Providers of pre-school education. Annual Service Level Agreements are developed between the Council and individual Partners.
- 2.2 In 1996/97, the former Scottish Office put in place a pilot scheme for delivery of the pre-school education voucher initiative. This allowed providers in the private and voluntary sector to deliver pre-school education on the satisfactory completion of a Profile of Education Provision which was assessed by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education.

Thereafter, the pre-school education voucher scheme was rolled out across Scotland which generated interest from 11 providers in East Ayrshire to enter into a partnership with the Council to deliver pre-school education.

The pre-school education voucher scheme terminated in 1998. However, the arrangements for the delivery of pre-school education in partnership with the voluntary and private sector continued across Scotland with such partners being paid a set amount of grant funding per place under the delegated function of Section 25 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1996: Pre-School Education.

Up until December 2001, all private and voluntary sector providers had to be registered with the then Scottish Executive Education Department to be eligible to receive grant funding.

From 2002 onwards, local authorities were passed the responsibility to take final decisions on applications by providers to become partners in the provision of pre-school education.

Arrangements were put into place to confirm the fitness of centres to act as partners through the completion of a Profile of Education Provision which was assessed by Officers from the Council.

- 2.3 The Council has continued with these arrangements to date and until 2009/10, if a provider approached the Council to become a partner of pre-school education, assuming that an appropriate statement of educational intent was submitted, then an organisation entered into partnership with the Council.
- 2.4 The landscape has changed for two main reasons, one linked to a decreasing level of resources and secondly in the Kilmarnock area, an increase in the number of private providers who are potentially interested in a Partnership.
- 2.5 In relation to the decrease in available resources, Cabinet approved a recommendation on 21 April 2010 not to enter into a new partnership agreement with Jacaranda Nursery as the local authority had sufficient places in that locality to provide an ante or pre-school educational place for all children whose parent wished one.
- 2.6 The review which was undertaken in respect of the above Cabinet decision, highlighted that there was no capacity in the Kilmarnock area, Irvine Valley or Stewarton area to reduce cost based on duplication of places between Partner Providers and local authority nurseries. Although in Kilmarnock overall, sufficient places exist in local authority nurseries they are not located in the right place. In the case of Auchinleck Learning Community, Cabinet made a decision to retain the Partner Provider in Mauchline.
- 2.7 The Council is aware of a small number of local authorities who procure their ante and pre-school educational places and officers have been in discussion with the Council's procurement section to discuss potential options for procuring external pre-school provision in the future.

3. PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The advantages to procuring a service, as opposed to continuing with existing arrangements include:
- Further clarity for Providers in relation to the number of ante and pre-school places required;
 - Establishes clear policy in relation to provision of places commissioned;
 - Avoids complacency with Providers in respect of assumptions that they will always be in partnership;
 - Gives Providers security over a three year period, assuming providers are compliant with the terms of the Service Level Agreement.
- 3.2 It is therefore proposed that a procurement exercise commences in September 2011 for services to commence in August 2012 over a three year period. Places will be procured for Kilmarnock, Irvine Valley, Stewarton and Mauchline area.

4. PERSONNEL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Depending on the outcome of tendering there may be TUPE issues for some existing Partners.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. The budget for Partner Providers in 2010/11 was £604,200.
- 5.2 Financial outturn against this figure depends on uptake of places.

6. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Nil.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to secure an ante and pre-school educational place for every child whose parent wishes one. In order to meet this statutory requirement places require to be delivered by Partner Providers as well as the local authority.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Members of Cabinet are asked to:
- (i) approve the recommendation to carry out a tender exercise for academic session 2012/13; and
 - (ii) otherwise note the content of the report.

Graham R Short
Executive Director of Educational & Social Services

16 August 2011
KG/SR

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

Members wishing further information should contact Kay Gilmour, Head of Service: Community Support, Tel: 01563 576104.

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