

Committee:	Cabinet
Date:	15 December 2004
Title of Report:	Proposed Children's Centre at Willingdon Trees, Eastbourne
By:	Director of Education and Libraries
Purpose of Report:	To agree the allocation of capital expenditure for the project and to delegate authority to negotiate the transfer of accountable body status from the Eastbourne Primary Care Trust (PCT) to East Sussex County Council (ESCC).

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) approve the capital plans for the proposed Centre (see Capital Application for Sure Start funding at Appendix A) as a basis for further detailed development, including arrangements for the management and implementation of the capital project, should accountable body status transfer from Eastbourne Primary Care Trust to the County Council;**
 - (ii) provisionally approve the addition of £908,081 to the Education and Libraries capital programme to cover capital development of the Children's Centre at Oakwood Primary School, Eastbourne, which will be fully funded by grants for this local programme from the Government's Sure Start Unit and the General Sure Start Grant, subject to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources being satisfied that funding for the project is secure; and**
 - (iii) delegate authority to the Director of Education and Libraries and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources to negotiate with the PCT on the transfer of the accountability arrangements from the PCT to ESCC, including for design and management of the project**
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1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The Cabinet approved on 3 August the overarching proposal for the use of the Children's Centre capital allocation within the General Sure Start Grant (GSSG) for 2004-2006. Of the two Children's Centres proposed for Eastbourne, Willingdon Trees will receive £459,081 from the local Sure Start capital grant already allocated by the Government to the current accountable body, Eastbourne Downs PCT. An additional Children Centre capital allocation of £449,000 will make up the remainder, bringing the total for the project to £908,081.

1.2 This report proposes that the Council takes over the "accountable body" responsibility for the Eastbourne Sure Start programme from the PCT. If the proposed Children's Centres were to prove unsustainable the Council would be required to return the capital grant to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). This would be at the market value at the time of clawback being invoked and not the original capital grant. This is in accordance with the guidance to the accountable body on SureStart capital projects issued by the DfES. Were such a situation to arise, it is unlikely that the County Council would wish to dispose of this Centre which will form part of the school site, preferring to return the agreed capital sum to the DfES.

1.3 The sustainability of the Centres depends on the viability of both full time day childcare (expected to be commercially self sustaining), family support and other services which make up the "core offer". At both of the Eastbourne Centres the childcare will be provided by independent providers, who will have a contract with the Council for the use of the premises. At Willingdon Trees this will involve the construction of a new 26 place nursery. It will be a condition of the contract with the independent provider that the financial risks are borne by the provider and not by the accountable body. This will be reviewed and reported to the Lead Member for Children and Young People; and Libraries annually.

1.4 The level of recurrent funding for Children's Centres to be provided by the Government through the General Sure Start Grant after 2006 is uncertain. If there are shortfalls they will need either to be met by partner agencies or addressed through a management plan, which might need to include reducing or ending services. A management risk action plan for each Centre will need to be reported annually to the Lead Member, identifying the size of the potential problem in 2009/2010 which is when funding for this programme will cease and the management actions taken to mitigate this. Appendix B sets out current revenue funding plans up to and including 2008-2009 for the Eastbourne Sure Start programme as a whole, including Willingdon Trees.

1.5 In relation to the childcare provision, the private provider will be charged a rent which is cost neutral to the County Council in relation to the running and maintenance costs for that element of the building. Officers have asked the design team to review the proposed footprint of the Centre so that it makes better use of land available and does not impact on the playing field.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The local PCT is currently the accountable body for the Eastbourne Sure Start programme and would normally be expected to remain so until March 2006 when this function is required by the DfES to be transferred to ESCC. The PCT has expressed an interest, however, in negotiating the early transfer of the accountable body status to ESCC. This would help to secure more streamlined management of the Children's Centres, without the need to deal with the PCT as an intermediary.

2.2 The PCT will be seeking a deed of indemnity for the grant the PCT has received from the Sure Start Unit for the Sure Start local programme capital funding. It is proposed that the PCT indemnify ESCC up to the date of the transfer of responsibility, and ESCC will indemnify the PCT thereafter. If agreed, this would mean that the County Council would take on the responsibility for claw-back once the accountability has been transferred. It is considered that this risk is manageable.

2.3 Having assessed the proposals for the Willingdon Trees Centre carefully, the Early Years Development and Childcare Team and the Children's Services Commissioning Unit are confident that it is sustainable (Appendix C - Willingdon Trees Children's Centre Business Plan and Appendix D - Willingdon Trees Childcare Cashflow). In relation to childcare, market testing/consultation suggest that there is significant demand. As far as other services are concerned, the location also makes the site a good one from which to deliver a range of community services, building on existing provision.

2.4 Officers of CRD Property and the Education and Libraries Department are reviewing the current progress of the scheme, and whether it can be completed by March 2006 as required by the terms of the grant. The initial view is that there is a risk of the programme not being met within the timescales of completion by March 2006. It is therefore recommended that, in order to ensure that no further time is lost, the scheme is provisionally placed in the County Council's capital programme, subject to further work, and that the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources is given delegated authority to approve a final scheme, and to determine the further design and management arrangements.

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations

3.1 The proposed Children's Centre would directly contribute towards the Council's strategic priorities of tackling deprivation and inequalities and promoting lifelong learning. The proposal to take over the formal accountability role for Sure Start in Eastbourne, in principle from April 2005, will enable the Council to discharge its responsibilities for the Children's Centre programme in the town more effectively.

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