

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Education Committee	Subject: MEETING THE CHILDCARE CHALLENGE
From: Director of Education	
Date: 21st September 1998	
Ref: JMcG/LL	

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise committee of funding which has been made available by central government in the current financial year to begin implementation of its national childcare strategy as set out in the green paper "Meeting the Childcare Challenge".

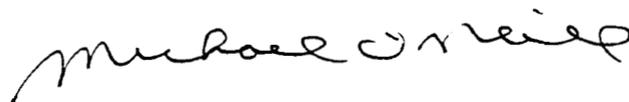
RECOMMENDATION

The education committee is asked:

- (i) to note the contents of the report and authorise the director of education to progress expenditure of the £238,000 available in line with the proposals set out in sections 2 and 3.
- (ii) to request an end of year report from the director of education summarising the final pattern of actual expenditure involved.
- (iii) to refer the report to the personnel services, social work and finance committees and to the policy and resources (equal opportunities) sub-committee for information.

Members wishing further information should contact,

Michael O'Neill, Director of Education on 01236 812336 or
Jim McGuinness, Head of Support for Learning on 01236 812313.



NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL : DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

“Meeting the Childcare Challenge”

Report by Director

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1. At the previous meeting of the education committee on 1 September 1998 members noted and homologated the contents of a North Lanarkshire response to the government consultation paper “Meeting the Childcare Strategy” which set out a framework for a national childcare strategy.
- 1.2. Significant finance will be made available over the next 5 years to take the strategy forward and in the current financial year each local authority has been allocated an initial sum of money to address childcare issues in advance of the formal findings of the green paper consultation exercise.
- 1.3. A total of £238,000 has been allocated to North Lanarkshire, of which £150,000 is available to support new and existing childcare projects. The balance of £88,000 will be available for a number of other purposes including:
 - an audit of current provision and demand for childcare
 - the provision of information services
 - the establishment of local childcare partnerships
- 1.4. The childcare element of the package is available to support three key childcare areas. These are:
 - daycare for 0-3 year olds
 - the integration of care and education for 4 year olds
 - out of school care for children up to the age of 14.

However it has been made clear that the use of the available funding should reflect support to parents associated with their work commitments or their pursuit of training and education opportunities. The Scottish Office will monitor council arrangements and will require information on key aspects of spending including:

- the number of new projects and childcare places created

- the number of existing projects supported and childcare places saved as a result
- the number of projects for lone parents and places created/saved
- the number of projects targeted at children with special educational needs
- the overall costs and locations of each project supported
- the effects on the labour market (if possible to determine)
- the priority given to PPA status

1.5. In addition monitoring reports will seek information on progress with the development of information services and local childcare partnerships.

2. EXPENDITURE ON DAYCARE : SOME PROPOSALS

2.1. After careful consideration of the available guidance there are a number of options for expenditure of the finance currently available. Priority would be given, where possible and practical, to projects within the North Lanarkshire PPA area.

2.2. A programme of adaptations could be undertaken to make certain early years accommodation more appropriate to the needs of younger children. This work would complement planning now underway to extend the government's pre-school education initiative to 3 year olds. Steps are already being taken to identify establishments where floorspace or adjoining ground exists to allow a programme of adaptation or extension to go forward. Particular attention would be given to the issue of adaptations such as ramps, toilets etc designed to meet the demands of children with special educational needs. It is proposed that a sum of £40,000 be set aside for this adaptations programme.

2.3. Funding could be made available to create a voluntary sector support fund. Bids from voluntary sector groups would be prioritised against the Scottish Office criteria. Proposals from groups within the PPA and regeneration areas would be given additional priority.

It is proposed that a challenge fund of £30,000 be established and bids invited from the voluntary sector as quickly as possible.

2.4. Related to the above proposal consideration should be given to the development of linked care schemes involving particular voluntary sector groups working in tandem with council establishments. This idea will require further thought and negotiation with potential link groups and may therefore be more appropriate for funding in the next financial year.

2.5. Many parents prefer domestic care arrangements for younger children and a scheme should be established to promote and encourage childminding as an option for residents particularly focused on the PPA and regeneration areas. Under such a scheme financial assistance could be given to enable potential

new childminders to reach the necessary registration standards under the 1989 Children Act, particularly where the costs would otherwise be prohibitive for the individuals concerned. Clearly such a proposal would have a beneficial effect in the creation of local employment opportunities. It is proposed that a sum of £15,000 be set aside for this purpose, including the costs of an associated publicity campaign.

- 2.6. In the longer term , providing the necessary funding is maintained, it would be possible to offer supported placements with childminders in cases where the parents meet the eligibility criteria set out in the government green paper.
- 2.7. The community education service has considerable experience of developing and supporting home/school partnerships and related out of school learning projects such as evening homework clubs. The service also provides a variety of adult education opportunities supported by creche facilities. It is proposed that a sum of £25,000 be allocated to community education to extend its network of home/school projects.
- 2.8. A number of other innovative suggestions are currently being discussed with officers in various council departments, including chief executives and social work. The possibility of developing further links with the employment services is also being explored.
- 2.9. Colleagues in the social work department have expressed a desire to develop further joint work related to the childcare strategy and have suggested a number of areas where funding could be targeted at collaborative ventures. These include:
 - a possible extension of the “partnership in play” scheme which is currently operating as a small pilot providing increased access to mainstream play facilities for children with a disability out of school time including holiday periods. The scheme has input from education, social work, leisure services, Lanarkshire Development Agency and a voluntary organisation called “Sparky”.
 - a joint social work and community education initiative to support pregnant teenagers, particularly in relation to their integration into school. Such an initiative would also tackle issues such as parenting skills and may attract funding from the health board for young women who decide to keep their babies.
 - programmes targeted at out of school support for young people with emotional and behavioural problems, particularly over school holiday periods. Such initiatives could also be extended to involve parents in adult education or skills groups.

- 2.10. Clearly the allocations of funds referred to in some of the preceding paragraphs can only be regarded as indicative at this stage and will require adjustment over the remaining months of the financial year as expenditure is incurred. Further reports on the outcomes of spending proposals would be brought back to committee as required.

3. NORTH LANARKSHIRE AS EMPLOYER

- 3.1. The green paper states that the government will be "encouraging employers to review and wherever appropriate adopt the forms of childcare and family friendly employment practices which best suit the needs of the business and its employees." The business case for "family friendly" policies is becoming more compelling as patterns of work and family life continue to change. There are many ways in which employers may assist their employees with childcare. Options for childcare need to be flexible to take into account the needs of employers as well as the needs of employees with childcare responsibilities.

- 3.2. In order to progress the council's commitment to equality of opportunity and "family friendly" employment practices it is proposed that a feasibility study be undertaken to ascertain:

- the level of demand for childcare provision among North Lanarkshire Council employees
- the options available to promote "family friendly" initiatives
- how New Deal applicants can be assisted to overcome barriers in relation to childcare in returning to the labour market
- the cost/benefit to the council of implementing innovative childcare and "family friendly" employment practices.

- 3.3. A brief for the study would be devised by the Head of Personnel Services and the Assistant Chief Executive (Operations) with a view to the work being undertaken and completed before 31 March 1999. Any contract offered would be subject to the normal tendering procedures of the council. At this stage the cost of such a survey can only be estimated but would be likely to be of the order of £20,000 to £30,000.

4. OTHER ISSUES

- 4.1. As indicated in paragraph 1.3. a sum of £88,000 is available in the current financial year to enable an audit of supply and demand, to provide information services and to help establish local childcare partnerships.

- 4.2. The scale of the required audit is such that it would be necessary to engage the services of an external consultant. At the present time advice is awaited from the Scottish Office on the conduct and scope of the audit.
- 4.3. A computerised information system is commercially available and officers are currently examining its appropriateness as well as the costs involved.
- 4.4. The education department has already established 3 early years forums and it is envisaged in the green paper that these would be developed further in order to provide the basis of local childcare partnerships involving a range of key players, including providers and consumers of services. The relationship between these new partnerships and the various other partnership forums already established in North Lanarkshire will require further careful consideration. Once again the results of current Scottish Office research in this area is awaited with interest.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1. The education committee is asked:
- (i) to note the contents of the report and authorise the director of education to progress expenditure of the £238,000 available in line with the proposals set out in sections 2 and 3.
 - (ii) to request an end of year report from the director of education summarising the final pattern of actual expenditure involved.
 - (iii) to refer the report to the personnel services, social work and finance committees and to the policy and resources (equal opportunities) sub-committee for information.

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