

AGENDA ITEM: 12

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Meeting	Cabinet Resources Committee
Date	21 July 2005
Subject	Capital Spend: Computers for Looked After Children
Report of	Cabinet Member for Children & Cabinet Member for Resources
Summary	Request to release £71,000 from Capital Budget for purchase of computers for Looked After Children

Officer Contributors	Phil Morris, Divisional Manager, Listening to Children
Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards affected	N/A
Enclosures	None
For decision by	The Committee
Function of	The Executive
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in (if appropriate)	Not applicable

Contact for further information: Phil Morris (x4532)

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That £71,000 be made available from the Capital budget 2005/6 for the purchase of computers for Looked After Children.**

2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- 2.1 Previous decision by Cabinet Resources Committee on 10/02/05 in respect of financial year 2004/5

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1.1 The improvement of educational outcomes for Looked After Children is an objective within the Corporate Plan in supporting the vulnerable within our community.
- 3.1.2 The education of looked after children is a government priority – the new Children Act places a new legal duty on the Council to promote the educational achievement of Looked After children. As Corporate Parents, this is a high priority within this council.
- 3.1.3 Improved Educational outcomes for Looked After Children were incorporated into LPSA targets and remain a high priority within the Children and Families and Education Services and comprise specific objectives within our Performance Management Plan.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1.1 Looked After children have often had considerable disruption to their education, which entails them catching up once they are settled in stable placements. The provision of home computers and associated soft ware to these young people in their placements is an essential element in helping them regain ground educationally.
- 4.1.2 Failure to provide this support will result in lower educational achievement for the young people and also failure to meet our targets in respect of outcomes for Looked After Children.

5. FINANCIAL, STAFFING, ICT AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Following the introduction of the new capital finance regime from 1st April 2004, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has changed the way that councils receive support for capital expenditure. Under the new system Barnet has been notified that it will receive Revenue Support Grant to finance the borrowing of £71,000 for Children's Services. This capital allocation is classified as "single capital pot" monies, so although the amount awarded is distributed using a similar basis to children's revenue funding and the guidance notes refer to this as the children's element of the single capital pot it is not ring-fenced to Children's Services. [Notification was received via LASSL (2003)9]

6. LEGAL ISSUES

- 6.1 None.

7. CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS

- 7.1 Constitution, Part 3 - Responsibility for Functions, Section 3 - Powers of the Executive, paragraph 3.6 - terms of reference of the Cabinet Resources Committee.

8 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 8.1 Funding for computers for Looked After children was introduced as part of the Quality Protects initiative which commenced in 1999. Separate funding through Quality Protects was provided to enable Local Authorities to purchase computers for Looked After Children to assist them with their homework as part of the overall objective to improve their educational outcomes.
- 8.2 Quality Protects funding ceased to be ring fenced on 31st March 2004 after which the funding was incorporated into Local Authority mainstream budgets.
- 8.3 £71,000 Information and Communication Technology funding, intended for the purchase of computers and associated software for Looked After children in 2005/6 has been incorporated into the Council Capital budget.
- 8.4 Anticipated breakdown of expenditure on computers for Looked After Children this year is likely to be: £25,000 on computers (including laptops) for Care Leavers, and £30,000 on PC packages for young people still Looked After and/or foster placements. The remaining money will be spent on software packages, including 'Care Zone' – a specific package for Looked After Children and other items such as security equipment for the machines in the residential units, specialist software and/or peripherals, and additional service/upgrade costs for machines already installed. The machines do come with a three-year service contract and guarantee, but there have been instances where work has been required beyond what this covers.
- 8.5 As agreed at the February meeting of this committee, Information Systems are leading a review with us of the supply arrangements for computers for Looked After Children, including facilities available on those computers. Pending the outcome of that review, it has been agreed that the existing arrangements with Elonex should continue in order to ensure that young people in urgent need receive PCs prior to the end of school term.

.9 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 None.

BS: JEL
BT: CM