

COUNCIL
23 FEBRUARY 2010

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

**QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLOR STEVE OLDRIEVE
TROWBRIDGE PAXCROFT DIVISION**

**TO COUNCILLOR LIONEL GRUNDY, CABINET MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Question 1

Can you confirm that WC have received a request from Bellefield School, Trowbridge to be exempted from the tendering process for Childs Centre provision.

If so how will this be dealt with by the Council.(who makes a decision on this?).

Response

A letter was sent from the Headteacher, Mr Steve Wigley and Chair of Governors, Mrs Jane Goldstone of Bellefield Primary School, Trowbridge on 2 February and received into County Hall on 4 February. It was addressed to Dr Keith Robinson, asking him to grant exemption from the procurement process for Bellefield Children's Centre, Trowbridge. A reply was sent from Stephanie Denovan, Service Director for Schools and Learning on 11 February which explained the reason for undertaking the procurement process.

As you are aware, the competitive tendering process is a requirement under European Union Procurement Directives and the Public Contracts Regulation 2006 to ensure open and fair competition amongst the member states of the European Union. Public procurement is based on good value for money which, in this case, means looking at cost and quality to meet requirements which should be achieved through competition unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary. These compelling reasons would be extraordinary situations where procurement would be impossible. We do not feel that this applies to any of our Children's Centres. I am sorry that on this occasion I cannot grant exemption from the tendering process for the Children's Centre at Bellefield.

This statement is based on information received from the Corporate Procurement Unit "The EU rules reflect and reinforce the value for money (vfm) focus on the government' procurement policy. This requires that all public procurement must be based on vfm defined as 'the optimum combination of whole-cost and quality to meet the user's requirement' which

should be achieved through competition, unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary. (EU procurement guidance)

The contracts for the 30 children's centres all end on 31 March 2011. They are presently managed by a range of different providers. Twenty are managed by voluntary sector organisations, 3 by Wiltshire Council and 7 by school governing bodies. It was agreed by the Wiltshire County Council Cabinet meeting on 23 October 2008 that the management of all the Children's Centres would be opened to competitive tendering using the normal procurement process from April 2011.

Question 2

In previous discussions with Officers I was given an assurance that school's wishing to take part in the tendering process would be given support to make applications. I am not sure this is happening, could you please confirm in detail, what arrangements are in place to assist governing bodies to undertake this exercise.

Response

The question about support through the tendering process was raised at the briefing session for providers and stakeholders on 28 January 2010 at the Corn Exchange, Devizes. As commissioners, the Council cannot provide support as well. An offer of training was given by Ali Perry, representing VAK (Voluntary Action Kennet) who has received funding to enable the voluntary sector to engage with the strategic agenda. At the meeting she welcomed all present providers whether they were from a voluntary organisation or not, to attend a session being held on 16 February from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm. It was organised by Voluntary Action Kennet and Develop, "Getting to Grips with Commissioning and Collaborating for Success". This was free as it was funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council. School governing bodies are included in this as they are Trustees. Two representatives from Bellefield Primary attended this session. There will be a further half day session on 17th March about the commissioning process and Voluntary Action Kennet has offered free help to anyone who requests it. The commissioning session held on 16 February has had excellent feedback