

1. ST ALBANS EDU-CARE PRESCHOOL - RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report is in reply to a resolution passed by the Council on 1 July 2004 in response to a Notice of Motion by former Councillor Ingrid Stonhill. A reply was presented to the Council at the meeting of 1 July 2004, however, the decision was deferred in order to obtain further information on alternative sources of funding.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The site at 280 Westminster Street (ex Westminster St yards) is the only Council owned site currently available within the St Albans area that meets the minimum site requirement of 1000 square metres. The Council has resolved to offer this site to the St Albans Edu-Care Preschool for use as a preschool.
3. The Council has budgeted \$350,000 for building a new Preschool for St Albans Edu-care. This sum has been carried forward into the 2004/5 budgets.
4. The Ministry of Education has subsequently advised that it is unable to guarantee that the Preschool would be able to obtain any additional funding for building, under the Discretionary Grants Scheme. Should the Preschool apply to this fund they require security of tenure on a site prior to application.
5. The Ministry of Education analysis characterises the St Albans area as an area of low need. The combination of socio-economic factors indicates mid to high socio-economic status, with the unemployment rate lower than the national average and income higher.
6. There are a number of competing uses for the ex works yard land and building which the Greenspace Unit are currently working through under a longer term plan. It is therefore imperative that we have a 'sunset' clause within the resolution to allow for the Preschool occupation of this site.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the resolution of 27 May 2004 stands and a further clause be added as follows:

- (a) That should the St Albans Edu-Care Centre not choose to use the site at 280 Westminster Street by 31 March 2005, the offer of this site be withdrawn to enable the Greenspace Unit to plan with certainty the future use of the site.

BACKGROUND ON ST ALBANS EDU-CARE PRESCHOOL

7. The St Albans Edu-Care Centre requested and received from the Council, an amount of \$350,000 in 2001, to assist with building a new Preschool.
8. The current site at 3 Thames Street is too small to build a new facility on, and the existing Council owned building is in need of repair. A request was therefore made to find Council owned land within the area which would be suitable for the Preschool. The Preschool advised Council staff that a minimum area of 1000 square metres of land would be required for a new site.
9. The Council has sought to assist the St Albans EduCare Centre with their new accommodation demands since 2001 and has considered several reports on this matter with the latest of these on 27 May 2004. The purpose of that report was to provide the property options available to the Council. The Council resolved:

That part of the ex-Works Yard land and administration building at 280 Westminster Street be made available to St Albans Educare for the purpose of retrofitting/developing into a preschool facility subject to:

1. *The current budget allowance of \$350,000 being carried forward into the 2004/05 financial year.*
 2. *The \$350,000 budget to include remediation, construction and fit-out costs and landscaping.*
 3. *That a shared car park be developed for preschool and future park use to the rear of the existing administration building at Council cost and that it be recommended to the Annual Plan Subcommittee that this be provided for in the Council's 2004/05 budget.*
 4. *That on completion of the new building the existing preschool facility be sold by public tender and part of the funds received be used for topping up any costs associated with the remediation works, which costs cause the total project cost of \$350,000 to be exceeded.*
 5. *That the property at 278 Westminster Street be reviewed immediately through the property decision-making flowchart with a view to disposal.*
10. Former Councillor Stonhill then presented a Notice of Motion at the Council meeting of 1 July 2004 as follows:
1. *That the current budget allowance of \$350,000 be carried forward into the 2004/05 financial year.*
 2. *That St Albans Edu-care be given more time to explore additional funding sources and speak to the Ministry of Education.*
 3. *That other, more appropriate locations for the pre-school including the Council owned St Albans /Courtenay Street sites be investigated in a more timely manner.*
 4. *That on completion of the new building, the existing preschool facility be sold by public tender and the funds received be used for any additional project costs (exceeding the \$350,000 budget allocation).*

11. At the meeting of 1 July a report was presented by staff on the Notice of Motion, which set out in response to clause 3 of the motion, the options available in relation to alternative sites. This report concluded that:

“With the exception of the outcome on the offer back of 177 St Albans Street, which should be resolved shortly, we do not consider further time to investigate options and issues will produce any other material information to assist a decision on this matter.

As can be seen from the chart above, the best financial outcome within existing budgets, is for the child care facility to relocate to the former Works yard at 280 Westminster Street.”

12. The Council then resolved that consideration of the motion be deferred, to allow the Facility Assets Manager to submit a further report to the 29 July Council meeting.
13. The intention of this resolution was to obtain further information from the Ministry of Education on funding and demographics.
14. Since the Council's consideration of this matter in July 2004, aside from the property at 177 St Albans Street being sold through the offer back obligation to the previous owner, no further property options have come to light nor is there any additional information to warrant a change in the previous advice to the Council.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION FINANCE

15. The resolution of the 1 July meeting was for Councillor Stonhill's motion to be deferred, to allow a further report to be obtained. This report was to allow Edu-Care to obtain further information on availability of additional funding. This information is now available from the Ministry of Education as follows: (copied in its entirety)

“The Discretionary Grants scheme criteria has been broadened to include funding for Retention of Spaces – this is only for services that have had their lease terminated, or who have to vacate their premises for serious health and safety reasons and still does not ensure success for any application.

There is no guarantee that your group will receive funding as the Discretionary Grants Scheme is almost always over-subscribed, therefore those groups who meet the targets stated above are prioritised accordingly. The applications are prioritised by an allocation committee at a local level, then again at a National meeting against all applications from around the country, then the final decision is made by the Minister on successful applicants.

After completing a network analysis of the St Albans area it would appear that:

- The Westminster site is in close proximity to an existing provision and may have an impact on that service's viability and vice versa. There would also appear to be a great deal of community concern at the perceived contamination of this site, which may indicate that the service could not meet the needs of its community. These are certainly factors that would be considered by the allocation committee.*
- A site on the other side of Cranford Street would be preferable in terms of potential to continue to feed into the local schools, and to lessen impact on existing services.*

The Ministry of Education has no jurisdiction over the proposed site, however this is taken into account as part of the prioritisation of Discretionary Grants applications.

The application form states clearly that to be eligible the group must have security of tenure on their chosen site, along with a full set of plans and a quantity surveyors report and resource consent in order to be eligible. St Albans Edu-care are obviously unable to apply until they have secured a suitable site.”

DEMOGRAPHICS

16. The Network Analysis summary compiled by Ministry of Education from the 1996 and 2001 census data and from the 2003 roll-return data from schools and Early Childhood Education (ECE) is as follows:

Census statistics (2001) indicate that there are a total of 1005 children aged 0-4 in the St Albans, Rutland and Mairehau areas combined. 542 are enrolled in at least one of the local ECE services, leaving a possible 463 children not participating. However, participation rates at the local schools are high, indicating that these children are likely to be attending an ECE service outside the area. The ECE Network co-ordinator is unable to clarify how many 0-2 year olds may be included in this number.

Within St Albans and Mairehau current ECE provision appears inadequate for the identified 0-4 cohort if we compare population, licensed number of places, and spaces available.

There is little capacity in the community based services, and small wait lists at six of the eight services. However, participation rates indicate there is no significant shortage of spaces.

As the expected population decline is slight the impact on sustainability of current services is minimal. There are relatively low numbers of Maori and Pacific Island population in this area; these are the high priority communities for increasing ECE participation under current Government policy.

The Board **decided** that this matter be referred to the People Matters – Strong Community Portfolio Group for discussion.

BOARD RECOMMENDATION

That the funding of \$350,000 be carried forward to the 2005/06 budget to allow the St Albans Edu-care Preschool to pursue other options if necessary.

(Note: Following the Board meeting, the Facility Assets Manager received a telephone call from the Chairman of St Albans Educare, advising that they would accept the Westminster Street site subject to assurances that they would not be sharing the facility with an inappropriate group(s). The Facility Assets Manager will therefore be concluding the necessary arrangements for the use of the Westminster Street site once this advice is confirmed in writing, and after the conditions attached to the St Albans Educare's decision to utilise this site have been clarified and confirmed.)