

26. SOUTH LEARNING CENTRE - REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

General Manager responsible:	General Manager Community Services, DDI 941-8537
Officer responsible:	Libraries and Information Manager
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Council on progress made on finding sustainable funding arrangements for the South Learning Centre school programmes and to recommend a way forward.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Following the Ministry of Education decision to discontinue funding for the programmes to schools from the South Learning Centre, efforts to secure funding to date include securing commitment for services from South schools for 2008 and promoting programmes to the wider school community, on a school pays basis.
3. Community Education programmes which are funded by the Council will continue, maintaining the existing level of service, and will be run in parallel with programmes offered to schools (Monday–Friday from 9am to 3pm). Options for consideration to resolve this issue are presented in clause 28, namely that schools request support directly from the Community Board's discretionary fund to access school programmes at the South Learning Centre up until 30 June and/or the Community Board utilise a proportion of the proposed grant of \$50,000 to investigate the need for and viability of a community led and operated trust.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4. No further Government funding for school programmes. Council has decided it should not fund past December 2007. Funding for school programmes into the future therefore must be at no cost to the ratepayer.

Do the Recommendations of this Report Align with 2006-16 LTCCP budgets

5. N/A

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

6. None at this stage. However legal advice will be required in order to set-up the trust appropriately.

Have you considered the legal implications of the issue under consideration?

7. Preliminary advice on trust establishment has been sought.

ALIGNMENT WITH LTCCP AND ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT PLANS

8. Library Programmes Events and Learning

Do the recommendations of this report support a level of service or project in the 2006-16 LTCCP?

9. As above

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIES

10. Strengthening Communities Strategy
Lifelong Learning Strategy – to be developed

Do the recommendations align with the Council's strategies?

11. See item 10

CONSULTATION FULFILMENT

12. There have been ongoing discussions with the relevant schools, the Ministry of Education and the Spreydon/Heathcote Community Board.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council:

- (a) Notes the steps currently being undertaken to ensure long term sustainability of programmes to schools from the South Learning Centre through the exploration of alternative sources of funding.
- (b) Supports the provision of learning programmes for schools at South Learning Centre on a school paying basis.
- (c) Note that school programmes will continue for 2008 funded directly by participating schools, the extent to which being dependent on the levels of participation.
- (d) Alter resolution 23(b) of the Council's resolution of 21 June 2007 to the effect that, while the Christchurch City Council will not fund the service beyond the end of the 2007 school year (as per its 21/6/07 resolution), the Council consents to the Spreydon/Heathcote Community Board making a one off grant of \$50,000 to a trust yet to be formed from the Board's funds to allow the school pays model to be implemented as in (b) above.
- (e) Confirms its position that funding the delivery of education programmes to schools from its learning centres is not the Council's responsibility and that central Government should either fund schools to the level where they can assess programmes on a user pays basis or fund the Council directly for the costs of delivering the school programmes under a partnership relationship.
- (f) Notes that current community education programmes continue unaffected in accordance with the level of service as outlined in the Council's LTCCP.
- (g) Considers the options put forward in clause 28 for resolving this issue, namely that schools request support directly from the Community Board's discretionary fund to access school programmes at the South Learning Centre up until 30 June and/or the Community Board utilise a proportion of the proposed grant of \$50,000 to investigate the need for and viability of a community led and operated trust.

BACKGROUND (THE ISSUES)

13. The South Learning Centre opened in September 2003, following the closure of Sydenham Primary School. There was a strong desire among local schools, the Ministry of Education, the Christchurch City Council and the local community to provide new learning opportunities for both students and the community.
14. At the time, Christchurch City was in the process of building a new library in the south of the city and an agreement was reached to combine the learning centre with the Council's library and service centre. The Council built and equipped the centre as part of the \$6 million library/service centre development.
15. The Ministry of Education provided an initial sum of \$850,000 to cover Learning Centre expenses related to its use by local schools. This funding was intended to last three years but with careful management lasted until 30 June 2007. (NB: When this funding was granted, the Ministry said it was a "one time grant and that the Ministry is not obliged to provide further funding".)
16. In December 2006, the Council applied to the Ministry for an ongoing financial commitment from the government for the next five years of \$205,000 annually or \$20 per student per annum. Work on this application began in May 2006 in consultation with the schools and with advice from the Ministry of Education's local office. This application was considered a partnership proposal with central government, being endorsed by the 23 schools which use the facility to receive leading edge technology and innovative learning opportunities.
17. The application requested funding to cover teacher costs, a contribution to building maintenance/depreciation and funding to undertake a research project to measure the learning outcomes generated by this already successful model of educational innovation.
18. On 21 May 2007 the Minister of Education, Steve Maharey, notified the Mayor that the Ministry "was unable to find a ready source for ongoing funding of the Centre" and that "the Ministry does not have a role in providing resources for the Centre".
19. Over the next month the Council, via the Mayor, twice requested that the Minister review the decision. In addition, the principals of the 23 schools collectively wrote to the Minister as well as communicating with local Labour MPs. Parents and children were asked by the school principals to take action by writing to the Minister and contacting the local MPs and the media.
20. Principals wrote to the Mayor on 15 June requesting that the Council "seriously consider" continuing the services to their schools for the remainder of the academic year.
21. At the 21 June meeting, the Council resolved to underwrite the service to end of school year (up to \$70,000) and to inform the Ministry of Education and schools that Council funding will not extend beyond 2007 on the basis that the Council considers provision of learning programmes for schools at South Learning Centre to be a central government responsibility. It was also agreed that the Council would make urgent representation to local MPs, the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister to secure ongoing funding.
22. Since June the Ministry has upheld its decision not to provide ongoing funding to the Council for South Learning Centre and has advised schools to use their operations grants to fund services from the centre.
23. Council staff developed a user pays model for schools which was incorporated into a programme proposal for 2008. Programme offerings included regular class sessions, professional development for teachers, Horizons programmes, Innovation projects and video conference hire. The response from schools has been that they will use the service selectively and on a user pays basis, mostly charging their school communities. They do not favour using their operational grants given the high level of existing demand on this resource. Most schools view the South Learning Centre Horizon programmes as a priority.

24. Five schools in the South area have committed to using the South Learning Centre programmes on a user pays basis for 2008. Other 'South' schools may commit prior to or during the new school year. These funding will secure a half time fixed term teaching position. At this point the balance of programmes provided by the centre will be for community education.
25. School programmes have also been offered to the wider Christchurch school community on a user pays basis. There has been some interest but no firm commitment to date.
26. Council staff have been in discussion with the local Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry of Social Development about alternative sources of funding. To date, no firm options have been forthcoming although opportunities will continue to be explored with local contacts from these places. Advice from MSD, MOE and a private funding strategist was that a trust would be the most effective vehicle to attract funding applications from alternative sources, including sponsorship.
27. Council staff have investigated applicable trust models for South Learning Centre and consider that a community led trust, established to directly support schools through funding them to access the centre programmes and services, would be an effective mechanism to attract alternative funding and ensure long term sustainability.
28. Staff presented information on this issue to the Spreydon/Heathcote Community Board on 20 November 2007 and the Community Board made recommendations at its meeting on 27 November 2007. The Board's recommendations are contained in the separate report from the Chairperson of the Spreydon/Heathcote Community Board on this agenda. Staff suggest that the Council consider two options:
 - (a) Schools could request support directly from the Community Board's discretionary fund to assess school programmes at the South Learning Centre up until 30 June, while other long term sustainability options are explored.
 - (b) The Community Board could utilise a proportion of the proposed grant of \$50,000 to investigate the need for and viability of a community led and operated trust with the balance of the monies forming the basis of a trust fund. This would provide funding directly to schools to enable access to school programmes provided by the Council at the South Learning Centre. Note that this would not be a Council controlled trust.