



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Community Outreach
Date:	23 May 2008
Reporting Officer:	Trevor Salmon, Director of Corporate Services, extension 6083
Contact Officer:	Jill Minne, Acting Head of Human Resources ext 3220

Purpose of report:

The purpose of this report is to:

- provide an update on the council's community outreach activities;
- provide information in respect of council funding to the Citywide Employability Consortium (CEC) to develop pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed.

Relevant background information:

Committee agreed in February to engage with the Citywide Employability Consortium to develop pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed.

The decision as to whether or not the council should part fund this initiative (a proposed contribution of £10,000 per annum, for three years from the corporate workforce development budget) was however deferred.

Members requested a further report on the current council funding to the CEC and an update on the council's community outreach activities.

Key Issues:

Update on community outreach activities:

- The council's community outreach programme was launched in 1998 to promote Belfast City Council as an attractive, equal opportunities employer with wide and varied job opportunities.
- We operate an extensive work experience placement scheme which deals with, on average each year, 200 unpaid work experience placement opportunities for students from schools and further education / university establishments and 40 unpaid disability work experience placements from a range of disability organisations.

- We attend jobs and careers fairs; conduct 'site visits' to promote the council as an attractive employer; provide training and development opportunities for young people on interview awareness skills using mock interview sessions; and deliver presentations to students, teachers and representatives from other organisations e.g. ethnic minority and disability groups to advise them of job opportunities and the council's recruitment and selection procedures.
- The programme has created eight basic grade posts specifically 'ring-fenced' to disabled applicants; operates a 'guaranteed interview' scheme for people with disabilities; has a confidential care-line for applicants whose first language isn't English; has skilled up to 50 front-line council officers on sign language techniques; and issues details of all council vacancies to under-represented groups within the ethnic minority and disabled communities.
- The programme holds the NIACRO award for the fair recruitment of people with criminal convictions; has engaged in an extensive partnership project to encourage women into non-traditional roles; and has attained the 'Gold' Opportunity Now benchmarking award for gender equality. More recently, it has agreed to engage with the CEC to develop pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed.

Council funding to the CEC to develop pre-employment training programme for the long term unemployed:

- The council currently co-finances, along with the European Social Fund (ESF), projects which are currently run by two of the organisations which comprise the CEC. These two organisations, LEAP (North Belfast) and Stepping Stones (East Belfast), are financed as local employment initiatives to bring together the supply and demand ends of the labour market for private sector development:
- LEAP (North Belfast) receives £48,864 per annum from the council to assist with a project to enhance employer and client engagement in North Belfast with a view to increasing employability of local people. The project aims to place approximately 300 local people in employment over the three year period of the programme; and
- Stepping Stones (East Belfast) receives £32,665 per annum to assist with a project to enhance employer and client engagement in East Belfast, focussing on addressing the needs of small businesses. The project aims to place approximately 220 local people in employment over the three year period of the programme.
- In terms of this employment initiative, which is to develop pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed, the council's finances would be targeted towards public sector development.
- Members should note that while part-funding (£10,000 per annum, for three years from the corporate workforce development budget) by the council may represent an opportunity for us to enhance our corporate social responsibility and take a leading role in the development of the pre-employment training programmes, it is not essential to our participation in the CEC public-sector programme.
- Should members have concerns in relation to the part funding the council will proceed with the programme on a non-funding basis, as previously agreed by committee.

Resource Implications:Financial

If it is agreed that a contribution of £10,000 is made, it is recommended that this funding should be given for one year only (i.e. £10,000 contribution for 2008/09) with funding for year two and three of the programme being dependant on successful evaluation of the first year of the programme and further agreement from committee in this regard.

Human Resource

There are no additional human resource implications contained within this report.

Asset and Other Implications

There are no assets and/or other implications contained within this report.

Decisions required:

Members are asked to note the information on the council's community outreach activities and decide whether or not the council should part fund the CEC's pre-employment training programme for the long-term unemployed as outlined above.

Key to Abbreviations

CEC- Citywide Employability Consortium
ESF – European Social Fund
NBPB- North Belfast Partnership Board

