



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Work Experience for Ex-Offenders
Date:	22 August 2008
Reporting Officer:	Jill Minne, Acting Head of Human Resources
Contact Officers:	Eve Bremner, Health and Community Safety Manager, extension 3275 and Alison Long, HR Senior Specialist (Community Outreach / Diversity Monitoring), extension 3238

Purpose of report:

To seek approval to widen the scope of the council's work experience scheme, on a pilot basis, to include the provision of unpaid work experience placements for ex-offenders¹.

Relevant background information:

Currently we mainly facilitate requests for unpaid work experience opportunities from either students in full time education or from individuals with disabilities, with some approved exceptions such as promoting opportunities for targeted under-represented groups.

Key Issues:

- Belfast City Council's Safer City Group has been asked by the Probation Board for NI (PBNI) to support the rehabilitation and re-integration of offenders by offering suitable unpaid work experience placements within the council.
- The role of the PBNI is to reduce crime and the harm it does by working with the courts, other agencies and partners to reduce re-offending and assist in integrating offenders successfully back into the community.
- Following a meeting with the PBNI the following was confirmed:
 1. the ex-offenders seeking unpaid placements with the council would be considered low to medium risk e.g. motoring offences, crimes of dishonesty but excluding anything where violence or threats of violence were used. No individual deemed to be high risk e.g. with a previous or present sexual offence or serious offence of violence would be considered for a placement with the council;
 2. the nature of the offence would be shared with us (in agreement with the individual concerned) and all the factors of the particular case would be taken into account before placement within the council;
 3. the placements would require supervision at all times and a Community

¹ Ex- offenders are individuals serving out community service orders which range from 40 to 240 hours

- Services Officer from the PBNI would be in regular contact with the appropriate council line managers;
4. the main areas of interest for the unpaid placements, as a pilot, would be Parks and Cemeteries Services with two or three placements starting for one day a week and progressing to a maximum of three days per week until the community services orders were complete. The Parks and Leisure Department is willing to facilitate these placements given the council's corporate commitment to creating a Safer Belfast; and
 5. if the council agrees the pilot, the PBNI will carry out information sessions and induction training for relevant council line managers, staff and trade unions to outline roles and responsibilities and it will provide induction and health and safety training for the ex-offender prior to the placement starting.

In accordance with legal advice on council insurance arrangements a risk assessment will be undertaken to ensure that the work experience duties are suitable for the person concerned; appropriate supervision of the placement is exercised depending on the nature of the work, location etc; and compliance with all relevant health & safety legislation is in place. On this basis, the placements would be self-insured by the council.

Resource Implications

Financial

As the placements are unpaid there is no direct financial implication although the self-insurance aspect is a financial risk. Due to the stringent risk assessment approach being carried out, this risk will be managed.

Human Resource

There are no human resource implications as all work experience placements within the council are dependant on the relevant department having the capacity to accommodate such a request and all placements are offered and accepted on the basis that no permanent offer of employment will follow, without strict adherence to the council's recruitment and selection processes. The council's Trade Union Group has also endorsed the initiative.

Asset and Other Implications

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

Recommendations

Members are asked to approve widening the scope of the council's current work experience scheme, in principle and on a six month pilot basis, to include the provision of unpaid work experience placements for ex-offenders in the Parks and Leisure Department. Following this pilot, and subject to an evaluation and any further improvements being put in place, Members are also asked for the Director of Corporate Services to be given delegated authority to extend the scheme across the council, as appropriate.

Key to Abbreviations

PBNI - Probation Board for Northern Ireland