



## Belfast City Council

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| <b>Report to:</b>         | Strategic Policy and Resources Committee   |
| <b>Subject:</b>           | Work Experience for Ex-Offenders   |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 19 September 2008  |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | Jill Minne, Acting Head of Human Resources   |
| <b>Contact Officers:</b>  | Eve Bremner, Health and Community Safety Manager, extension 3275 and Alison Long, HR Senior Specialist (Community Outreach / Diversity Monitoring), extension 3238 |

### **Purpose of report:**

The purpose of this report is to provide members with additional information on the widening the scope of the council's work experience scheme, on a pilot basis, to include the provision of unpaid work experience placements for ex-offenders<sup>1</sup>.

### **Relevant background information:**

In August, Committee deferred a decision to widen the scope of the council's Community Outreach Programme to include the provision of placements for ex-offenders.

Members requested further details on :

1. extending the provision of placements for ex-offenders to include those who would be referred by the Youth Justice Agency (YJA);
2. the implications for the council in respect of Access NI issues

### **Key Issues:**

#### **Work experience for ex- offenders referred by the YJA**

The YJA is concerned with restorative justice aimed at giving young people (aged 10 to 18 years) the opportunity to understand and make amends to their victims for the consequences of their offending and to take steps to stop future crime.

Following discussions with the YJA the following was confirmed:

1. while the YJA works with young people between the ages of 10 to 18 years, the council would only be asked to provide placement opportunities for those aged between 16 to 18 years.
2. the ex-offenders seeking unpaid placements with the council would be deemed suitable to carry out 'service in the community' and would be deemed low to medium risk e.g. criminal damage, disorderly behaviour. No individual deemed

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

to be high risk e.g. with a previous or present sexual offence or serious offence of violence would be seeking a placement with the council.

3. The nature of the offence would be shared with us and all the factors of the particular case would be taken into account before placement within the council.
4. The placements would require supervision at all times and an allocated worker from the YJA would hold quarterly reviews with the appropriate council line managers. However, more frequent contact arrangements can be made, if required.
5. YJA would prefer that, where appropriate, the 'service' would be carried out in the placements own community.
6. The main areas of interest for placements would be Parks, Community Safety, Waste Management, Cleansing and Leisure. It is anticipated however, that as a pilot, the placements will initially be based in Parks.
7. YJA has initially requested up to five placements per year. It is expected to be one to two days per week (depending on individual circumstances), until the 'service in the community' is completed.
8. If required by the council, the YJA will carry out awareness training with relevant council line managers.
9. In accordance with legal advice on insurance arrangements, a risk assessment will be undertaken to ensure that the work experience duties are suitable for the person concerned, appropriate supervision is exercised depending on the nature of the work, location etc, and compliance with all health and safety legislation is in place.

#### **Implications in respect of Access NI issues**

1. Both the PBNI and YJA have advised that in principle, there is no difficulty with the council requesting its own Access NI checks for the placements; however, due to the timescales involved in receiving information back from Access NI, there would be an impact on their processes. In the case of PBNI, it is a requirement that the community service order process commences within five working days of the court order being made (i.e. an induction interview must take place with the placement provider). This has been agreed with the Minister, Lord Chief Justice and approved by the Northern Ireland Office. While there may be more flexibility with the Youth Justice Agency, the timeframe for information being received back may cause a problem as other interventions may be required e.g. alcohol programmes
2. Both organisations have indicated that they will provide the council with criminal records for the placements. PBNI has also advised that if there is any other cause for concern, other agencies could be contacted, if required e.g. Social Services, Multi-Agency Offender Assessment and Management (MASRAM).
3. Due to the age of the placements referred by the YJA (16-18 years of age). Access NI checks will be required for employees who will be working with the placements. Many existing employees have already been through this process but YJA has stated that it will incur the cost for any agreed vetting in relation to a placement.

#### **Resource Implications**

##### Financial

There are no financial implications contained within this report as all council work experience placements are unpaid.

##### 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. The council's Trade Union Group has 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, on a pilot basis, to include the provision of unpaid work experience placements for ex-offenders. These placements would be self-insured by the council and, following information sessions for line managers, staff and trade unions to outline specific roles and responsibilities, would be piloted within the Parks and Leisure Department.

**Key to Abbreviations**

PBNI - Probation Board for Northern Ireland

YJA- Youth Justice Agency

MASRAM- Multi-Agency Offender Assessment and Management

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