



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Request for Funding - Ashfield Girls School</b>
<b>Date:</b>	19 June 2009
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	David Cartmill, Acting Head of Corporate Services Directorate
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	David Cartmill

### Relevant Background Information

This paper presents for consideration a request from Ashfield Girls School for financial assistance towards participation in the UK finals of Rock Challenge 2009 in Sheffield Arena. Ashfield has been selected as one of 12 finalists from over 380 schools throughout the UK which entered the 2009 challenge.

Under Section 115 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972, the Council has discretion to consider exceptional requests for financial assistance. A Special Expenditure budget within the Corporate Services Department is available to provide support which may be made available providing:

- (i) The Council has statutory authority to make such payments.
- (ii) Assistance is not available from the remit of another Committee.

The criteria for assessing requests for assistance which would fall within the Council's Special Expenditure budget are included at Appendix 1.

### Key Issues

Rock Challenge is an international performing arts competition for schools and colleges focusing on a positive message about crime prevention and substance abuse. In view of the contribution made by the programme towards Council objectives, the Committee provided £3,000 funding towards the staging of the Belfast heat of Rock Challenge which was held in the Waterfront Hall in March.

Ashfield Girls School qualified from the Belfast event to attend the Northern UK Winners Final which was held in Grimsby in May. The Belfast school achieved further success at this event to qualify for the UK national finals which take place in Sheffield in July.

The 2009 UK national final is the first to be held where the top schools from the Northern Region Finals will compete against the winning schools/colleges who qualified from the Southern Region Finals. The event is likely to be a 'one-off' which was secured due to additional sponsorship obtained by the Rock Challenge organisers (Be Your Best Foundation).

Ashfield School propose to take the entire cast of approximately 140 pupils to the event in Sheffield. They will be accompanied by 17 volunteer teaching staff. The cost to the group to attend is estimated at some £20,000 to include hire of transport for participants and to transfer props, staging, costumes, etc. No specific funding for attending the event is available from the Department of Education although a contribution from the school general budget is being considered. Support of £5,000 has, to date, been received from private sector sponsors.

Ashfield School has represented Belfast and Northern Ireland for several years at the Northern Region Final of Rock Challenge. The school has participated in the competition since 1998 and has established a formidable reputation of success. Participation in Rock Challenge is an extra-curricular activity involving many thousands of hours of voluntary input from teachers and parent support groups.

In line with the Council's commitment to creating a safer city, Rock Challenge offers an opportunity to encourage young people to make positive lifestyle choices. Moreover, recent public consultation has highlighted that underage drinking and antisocial behaviour continue to be key concerns for residents of the city. A survey of Belfast participants in the 2008 Rock Challenge event indicated a higher percentage consumed alcohol, smoked or used drugs compared to participants across the UK. Survey evidence suggests the vast majority of pupils had either stopped or reduced consumption as a result of the Rock Challenge programme.

Records maintained by Ashfield show a clear correlation between those pupils who participate in the programme and improved performance/behaviour in the school environment.

### **Resource Implications**

Resources are available from current budget.

#### Financial

The Committee may wish to consider a contribution of £2,000.

#### Human Resources

None

#### Asset and other implications

None

### **Recommendations**

Many Belfast schools have, and will continue to bring accolade to the city through achievement in competitions outside of Northern Ireland. Support for Ashfield must not, therefore, set a precedent whereby the Council would be expected to contribute to schools that are deemed to be representing Belfast.

The Committee may, however, wish to consider this request, specifically, in a context that reflects:

- (i) Council support for the Rock Challenge programme generally.
- (ii) Ashfield's participation in Rock Challenge since 1998 including representation at the North Region Finals in England for five consecutive years (2005-2009).
- (iii) The opportunity for the school to represent Belfast at a first time national final.

It is recommended that the Committee considers a 'one-off' contribution of £2,000 towards the participation of Ashfield Girls School in the first ever UK national final of the Rock Challenge award and passes the undernoted resolution.

That the expenditure in respect of the aforementioned event be approved under Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, it being the opinion of the Committee that the expenditure would be in the interest of, and would bring direct benefit to the District, and inhabitants of the District, with the Committee being satisfied that the direct benefits so accruing would be commensurate with the payments to be made.

### **Decision Tracking**

The decision of the Committee, following ratification by Council, will be communicated to the applicant in **July 2009** including payment towards participation, if agreed.

Officer responsible: David Cartmill

### **Documents Attached**

Appendix 1 - Criteria for the assessment of requests for financial assistance.

## APPENDIX 1

B Policy and Resources Committee,

2772 Friday, 18th June, 2004

Special Expenditure Budget - criteria to be applied in the assessment of requests

- (1) whether there are sufficient funds remaining in the Council's Special Expenditure budget for the relevant financial year;
- (2) whether the application for financial assistance links to any of the Council's Corporate Objectives;
- (3) whether the direct benefit to be obtained is specific to the Council or its district or inhabitants;
- (4) whether the activity or initiative in respect of which assistance is being sought is being promoted by a person or organisation living or operating, or otherwise having a direct connection with, the City;
- (5) whether the request for financial assistance relates to an event or initiative which falls within the remit and statutory power of any other Committee of the Council (in which case it should be so referred);
- (6) whether the request relates to a specific event, activity or initiative as distinct from a request for a contribution to general funds;
- (7) whether the benefit to be obtained will be commensurate with the payment to be made.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Council would nevertheless reserve to itself the right to give special consideration to any particular request for financial assistance if the Members consider that special circumstances apply and legal advice has been sought where appropriate.