



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Recruitment of craft apprentices
Date:	14 th December 2012
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	George Wright – Head of Facilities Management (Ext.6206/6232)

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware of the range of employment opportunities and employability obligations set out in the Investment Programme. One very effective way of helping to meet these obligations is through the creation of craft apprenticeships, which provide opportunities for young people to learn valuable and marketable skills working alongside qualified craftspeople, often with the possibility of guaranteed employment at the end.
1.2	Members will also be aware that the Facilities Management Section has, on 3 separate occasions in the relatively recent past, taken on craft apprentices in a number of disciplines in both the Property Maintenance and Fleet Management units, with a total of 21 apprentices having successfully completed their training in the period 2000-2009. Opportunities to provide such apprenticeships are, however, often problematic because of the quite significant costs involved.
1.3	Members will also be aware that one of the likely implications of the Review of Public Administration will be the transfer of property assets from other councils (and potentially also from central government departments). In addition, the council's own Investment Programme and Pitches Strategy etc will itself generate significant new maintenance obligations, so that the recruitment of craft apprentices at this time could potentially align well with the significant increases in maintenance obligations which will come on-stream from 2015 onwards, thus raising the possibility of permanent employment for at least some of the successful apprentices.
1.4	In the light of the above, the Director of Finance & Resources has confirmed that it will be possible, on a non-recurring basis, to make provision to fund a number of craft apprenticeships to commence in the 2013/14 financial year. In the light of this the Section is proposing to create 7 craft apprenticeships (3 x Electrician, 2 x Painter and 2 x Fleet fitter).
1.5	These apprenticeships will be full apprenticeships of 3 years duration (4 years for Electricians), and will involve 3½-days per week of on-the-job training plus 1½-days of academic study. Apprentices will also have the opportunity to acquire the ECDL basic ICT course and will be supported in terms of sitting the standard driving test.

1.6	The direct cost of providing these opportunities for 7 apprentices on the basis described (incl. on-costs) is set out below:-																																			
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1.7	NB: these apprentices would be recruited on the basis that if vacant posts exist in the relevant disciplines at the time of successful completion these will be offered to the apprentices first; where there are more apprentices than posts a ring-fenced selection procedure would be necessary. This would mean that, if RPA etc proceeds as anticipated, the structure would be increased at the appropriate time and this would create vacancies to be offered to the apprentices; if not we can simply certify the apprenticeships as complete and make no offer of employment in the normal way.																																			
1.8	The recruitment of apprentices involves a long lead-time and consequently the process would need to start in February 2013 if we are to have the individuals tested, selected and in place and the academic places booked etc by September 2013, hence this report.																																			

2.	Key Issues
2.1	The key issue is whether or not the Committee wishes to make the necessary resources available at this time to fund craft apprenticeships of the types suggested herein. It must be emphasized that at time of writing the resources can only be made available on a non-recurring basis, i.e. there can be no guarantee that the apprenticeships will evolve into permanent posts. This is certainly a possibility, but will depend in large measure on the out-workings of the RPA process.
2.2	If the property portfolio of the council expands significantly on foot of RPA and the other factors set out above there will be a clear need for additional resources at a number of levels, however should this not occur – or the scale and scope of change be less than that currently envisaged – then it may not be possible to make offers of permanency.
2.3	It should however be emphasized that even where no offer of permanency can be made, the apprenticeships offered by the council are of high quality and are generally recognized as such, and will therefore equip the successful apprentices with both an excellent skill-set and also formal qualifications in much sought-after trades, all of which will enhance their employability considerably.

3.	Resource Implications
3.1	As illustrated above, the recruitment of 7 craft apprentices will involve staffing costs of approx. £450,000 plus the various other costs (academic training, ECDL, driving test etc) over a four year period. The resources are available only on a non-recurring basis as part of the Investment Programme financing package.

4.	Recommendations
4.1	It is recommended that the Committee authorise the Director of Property & Projects to recruit 7 craft apprentices on the basis and in the disciplines set out above, on a non-recurring basis.

5.	Decision Tracking

Key to Abbreviations

Documents Attached