



Belfast City Council

Report to	Development Committee
Subject:	First Steps Early Years' Group: Request for interim funding
Date:	17 September 2013
Reporting Officer:	Cate Taggart, Community Development Manager, ext 3525
Contact Officer:	Elaine Black, Children and Young People Manager, ext 3783

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	This paper is being tabled at the request of Councillor Keenan asking the Committee to consider interim funding for the First Steps Early Years' Group. The request has the support of a number of elected Members from West Belfast.
1.2	The First Step Early Years' Group is based in Lenadoon and for the past 16 years has delivered Early Years provision to pre-school children. In addition, it manages a parent and toddler group for local families and provides family support to parents.
1.3	The Group received funding from the BELB for the provision of Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) places. This funding is made available to support final year pre-school children.
1.4	The Group originally operated out of Horn Drive Community Centre, however, for the last 3 years demand has meant that it was able to expand its services to the Glen Community Centre as well.
1.5	Each location must have a demand for at least 8 places and is allowed to cater for up to 18 children. If the full allocation of 18 places is not met by PEAG recipients, the remainder of the places can be filled by children in their penultimate pre-school year.

1.6	This year there has been a reduction in the number of applications from final pre-school year children who are the target group for the PEAG funding. As a result, the BELB have decided that the requirement for this age group can be fully met by the Horn Drive Community Centre which has resulted in no allocation of funding for Glen Community Centre. As a result of this there will be no provision for children in the younger age bracket.
1.7	The request, therefore, is for emergency interim funding to continue to deliver a service at Glen Community Centre on 2 mornings per week from 9.00 am - 1.00 pm for 12 families with children aged 2 and 3 years old with special or additional needs.
1.8	The interim funding requested is £8,000.00 over 20 weeks and covers salary costs historically sourced from PEAG's funded places.
1.9	The Group has a block booking for free usage of both Horn Drive and Glen Community centres from September to June (approximately 55 hours per week.)
1.10	The funding request is to provide interim cover funding pending identification and securing alternative funding sources.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>In the consideration of the request Members may wish to consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The statutory provision for Early Years and Education Services rests with both Belfast Health and Social Services Trust (BHSCT) and the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). The Council does not fund services like this in any other location in the City; • The Council's policy position, agreed as part of the last Play Review, is to focus its resources on primary school age and upwards and outreach programmes to support existing groups. Surestart is one provider of services for the age range noted in the proposal; • Although the initial request is for short term funding to bridge an immediate gap there is no evidence of how the service will be sustained after that and Council may well receive a further longer term request to support the project.
2.2	The changing financial climate would suggest an increase of this type of request and Members previously expressed a concern that there was a perception within certain bodies and agencies that the Council, would accede to requests for assistance when all other funding streams had been exhausted.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	The cost to the Council if it were to meet this request would be £8.000.
3.2	No provision has been made in the current service or departmental budgets to resource this funding request.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	Equality and good relations implications, in relation to this policy, are still under consideration. Further updates will be sent to the Equality and Diversity Officer in due course.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>It is recommended that Members do not agree to this request on the basis that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory provision for Early Years' Services rests with Belfast Health and Social Services Trust and BELB; • There is no budgetary provision to meet the request; • The request lies outwith the Council's policy framework; • Agreement could create a precedent and a demand from similar groups which the Council could not meet.

6	Decision Tracking
The Children and Young People manager will implement the agreed actions.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
<p>PEAG: Pre-School Education Advisory Group BELB: Belfast Education and Library Board</p>	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1: First steps early years' group proposal to Belfast city council for interim funding. (22 August 2013)	

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