



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee.
<b>Subject:</b>	Review of Belfast City Council Play Service
<b>Date:</b>	11 June 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Marie Therese McGivern Director
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### Relevant Background Information

Belfast City Council currently provides play services for children and young people through 22 community and 6 play centres. The play development service provides support to enhance these services, to organise central events and to provide support for the voluntary sector.

The play centres are located in six specific areas which are historical and had been inherited from when service was part of the Park Section. The format in which the service has been run has remained the same providing a pre-school playgroup, after school club and holiday playschemes.

Changes within both the internal and external environment have impacted on the way play service provision should be delivered to meet the needs of children and young people in Belfast. In order to inform our response to these changes, a decision was made and ratified by Belfast City Council at their meeting on 4 July 2005, to undertake a review of Council owned Playcentres. An independent consultant, *Venturei* was appointed to undertake the review which involved looking at both the internal and external environments; relevant legislation and consulting with a range of internal and external stakeholders.

The report, ( **Appendix 2**) with the key recommendations, was presented to the Development Committee on 14 May 2008 where a decision was made to defer to allow further time to consider the report and recommendations.

### Key Issues

The Review considered both internal and external factors that have impacted on the delivery of the current service and the report concluded:

1. There has been no city-wide approach taken in response to identified need.
2. Duplication and gaps in service provision have not been considered.

3. The nature of the service is resource intensive providing for a limited number of children.
4. Changes in the demand for pre-school playgroups services have resulted in the closure of three out of the six centres and the remaining centres providing primarily for children outside the targeted age group.
5. There is limited flexibility in developing the service.
6. The nature of the service does fit in with the Community Services ethos and the Community Support Plan.

The Review of the Play Service made two key recommendations

1. To exit from pre-school playgroups. This part of the service has been impacted on most by external factors including demographic changes and government funding. This has resulted in the closure of three out of the six playgroups resulting in a reduction from 104 available places to 48. Currently only 90% of the places in the remaining playgroups are filled with only 25% from the targeted age group. **Appendix 1** indicates the current position within each of the Playcentre Pre-school Playgroups. Other concerns are that the service is most resource intensive and provides for a limited number of children. Pre-school services are the main responsibility of the Education and Social Services.
2. The play service should become more strategically focused, with a needs led approach that is more flexible in the delivery of services. This would include the extension of the age range to enable the play service to cover 4-16 years; to undertake a needs analysis; and to develop the service to enable it to provide a range of services to be more responsive to the needs of local communities. This will also enable the development of internal and external partnerships and maximising the use of all BCC assets.

**Resource Implications**

Financial

To take place within existing resources.

Human Resources

No implication on the current allocation

Asset and Other Implications

There is no impact on any physical BCC asset.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that Members

1. Consider and accept the content of the Venture*i* report.
2. Consider and accept the recommendations of the Venture*i* report
3. Approve the Action plan to implement the recommendations of the Venture*i* report.

<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
BCC – Belfast City Council

<b>Documents Attached</b>
Appendix 1 – Current position – Play Centre Pre-School Play Groups. Appendix 2 – Venture <i>i</i> Report Appendix 3 – Play Service Action Plan

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