

## Development of Play Services

### Background

A recommendation has been made for Belfast City Council to move from the static facility based service approach of pre-school playgroup provision. This recommendation does not indicate a complete withdraw from working with this age group or from the respective geographical areas.

The move from pre-school playgroup provision will release resources to enable the play service to maximise the impact across the city through a more flexible needs led delivery approach. This will include extending the age range, geographical reach, piloting new areas of work, training and resource development, partnership working, advice and practical support for the voluntary community sector.

### Current position

The decision relates to the three playgroups based at Avoniel, Ballysillian and Olympia Playcentres. In the remaining Playcentres based at Whiterock, Loop River and North Queen Street, the playgroups closed five years ago due to falling numbers. The resources made available through these closures have been utilised to develop and enhance the range of work that the current play service offers.

This work includes:

#### 1. Play for All

Community Services has been working to support the inclusion of children with disabilities within mainstream play services in community and play centres. A Playworker co-ordinates this work through:

- Identifying children
- Liaising with community and play staff
- Identifying support needs
- Contact with families
- Ascertaining relevant information regarding abilities to support the needs of children attending
- Providing information on adapting activities for staff
- Supporting schemes throughout the summer
- Evaluating the scheme

#### 2. Central Events

Community Services run two central events each summer that are attended by 2000 children from summer schemes across Belfast. Play staff are involved in the planning, booking and running of the events.

The play staff were also actively involved in both the preparation and running of the EU50 Playday which was attended by 10,000 people.

### 3. Play in the Park

Four events during the mid-term holidays (February 2009) were run in parks across Belfast for local children.

### 4. Training

Play staff are involved in the delivery of child protection, play and summer scheme training. Two staff are NVQ Playwork Assessors.

### 5. Resource Library

A library providing a range of resources to be used by groups working with children and young people is being developed and will be based initially at Avoniel Playcentre.

### 6. Resource Packs

Play staff are involved in developing a range of resource packs that can be used by groups to support work with children and young people. The packs include the following themes:

- a. Bullying
- b. Summer schemes
- c. Seasonal themes
- d. Diversity and Inclusion
- e. Venue book

### 7. Policies

Play staff have been reviewing both policies used for work in playcentres and across the Section to promote good practice for working with children and young people.

### 8. Saturday Club

The inclusion of children with disabilities primarily occurs during the summer as the children often attend schools outside the area. Avoniel Playcentre runs a Saturday club once a month to enable the children with disabilities to attend a local play club.

### 9. Youth Forum

Play staff have started to support the work of the Youth Forum providing practical support for the Children & Young Person's Co-ordinator.

### 10. Harmony Community Trust

Avoniel Playcentre has been working with Harmony Community Trust to develop cross-community links. The programme is primarily residential based.

## **Future Development**

If the recommendation is agreed for Belfast City Council to move from the static facility based service approach of pre-school playgroup provision, resources would be further freed to enhance the current work, pilot new areas of work,

## **Appendix 2**

extend the geographical and age range of the current service. This would maximise and extend the impact of the play service within current resources (multiplier effect).

The direction of the work would initially involve a needs assessment and better co-ordination through partnerships both internally and externally. This would lead initially to a three year plan for the play service that would be evaluated and inform future practice.

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