

Extract from minutes of –

DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

11th NOVEMBER, 2009

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“Economic Development Unit Update

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East Belfast Mission – Request for Funding

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

At the April 2009 Development Committee, Members agreed to provide match funding to four organisations which had been successful in securing financial assistance through the European Social Fund (ESF). These organisations were East Belfast Mission, North Belfast Partnership, Women into Business and Training for Women Network. The approval granted was to provide funding for the 2009/10 financial year only and, as a condition of the funding, the four groups were not to request any further money from the Council in connection with the 2010/2011 aspect of their ESF projects.

Recently, East Belfast Mission has written to the Council seeking match funding of £52,509 to further support the Work 4 U project in the 2010/2011 financial year.

Key Issues

East Belfast Mission, through the Stepping Stone Project, currently delivers the Work 4 U project, funded by ESF and match-funded by the Council. The aim of this programme is to work with unemployed individuals in East Belfast, including those deemed economically inactive, and assist them to find employment.

When Members agreed in April 2009 to co-finance support for all four projects, it was agreed that as a condition of the year two funding, all groups in receipt of match funding must not request further money from the Council in connection with the 2010/2011 aspect of their ESF projects. This condition was written into all four separate Funding Agreements - all of which were signed by the individual parties and returned for the Council’s official seal of approval.

Whilst the Work 4 U project is worthy, it is for the reason noted above, that the Development Department has not made provision in its revenue estimates for 2010/11 for groups participating in European Social Fund Projects.

The Council believes it is imperative there is a more strategic, co-ordinated approach to tackling the skills and employability needs of its residents and is currently taking steps to address this issue. In response to this, Members agreed in December 2008 to a proposal to open discussions with Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and other key skills and employability partners in order to develop an agreed strategy for our City.

Members are advised that the Council convened a Belfast Employability and Skills Board in May 2009, including representatives from Central and Local Government, Universities, Colleges, sector skills councils, trade bodies and the local community. Since this group first formed, regular meetings have taken place and a 'Belfast Employability & Skills Action Plan' is currently in development which will help address current and future needs facing our City. This document is expected to be finalised in January 2010 and is intended to help shape the Council's future role in employability and skills related activity – in particular advancing joint activity with key partners and stakeholders in responding to the economic downturn.

Members are asked to note that if financial assistance is offered to the Work 4 U project it is likely we will be asked to support other ESF projects that we are currently financing, including Local Employment Access Partnership (LEAP), Women into Business and Training for Women Network. Members are also reminded that there are 47 ESF projects in total in the Belfast area and we cannot rule out the possibility that some of these projects would not approach us for year three funding.

Members should also be aware that, given that ESF activity is funded by the EU, any agreement to co-finance these projects will preclude the draw-down of monies from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) (i.e. the money for co-financing will have to come from rates monies only).

Resource Implications

The budget for the Work 4 U project over a 12 month period would be £52,059.

Recommendation

It is recommended this proposal is not funded given the lack of funding within Council and the decision taken by Members in April 2009 – that is, groups in receipt of match funding must not request further money from the Council in connection with the 2010/2011 aspect of their ESF projects. In addition, agreeing to co-finance the Work 4 U project for one further year would adversely affect other activity planned, most notably, that of the Belfast Employability and Skills Board.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required if recommendation is accepted.”

The Committee agreed, in view of its decision of 20th April, not to provide funding in the 2010/2011 financial year to the East Belfast Mission in connection with its Work 4 U project.”

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