



Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Play Resource Warehouse
<b>Date:</b>	9 March 2010
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen, Director of Development ext 3459 Tim Husbands, Head of City Events and Venues ext 1400
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**Relevant Background Information**

Play Resource Warehouse was set up in 1983 by community workers from Belfast City Council working with other community activists involved in play development throughout the City. An initial grant from the Council, under the Belfast Areas of Need Scheme, enabled them to set up Play Resource's first home in an old warehouse in Tomb Street.

When this grant came to an end in 1986, Belfast City Council entered into a tri-partite agreement with the Department of Education and the DHSS to continue to fund Play Resource on a longer term basis through the Community Services Section. In April 2009, funding moved to a service level agreement which covered initially the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010. It was anticipated that, subject to satisfactory performance on the part of the organisation and with the approval of Council, the service level agreement would be renewed on an annual basis.

The Play Resource Warehouse has grown over the years to the point where it is now the largest and most successful play resource centre of its kind in the UK and Ireland. At the end of its first year of operation Play Resource had approximately 300 community groups as members. Today that figure is over 2,500 groups, with approximately 60% of those being in the Belfast City Council area.

In operating as a successful social economy model, the organisation employs 12 staff (8 full time equivalents) as well as 20 artists on a freelance basis, and meets 50% of its costs through generated income. Other major funders include the Arts Council and the Youth Council.

## **Key Issues**

Play Resource is a unique, city-wide, cross-community, organisation whose core purpose is to improve the quality of life for children and young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. It operates a successful social economy model and as such represents an effective organisational role model which is widely associated with the City Council through the latter's support. The organisation's Mission Statement is set out below:

"To create the opportunities to develop the creative potential of children and young people in Northern Ireland and thereby to enhance their quality of life and strengthen their ability to express themselves fully and freely".

In 2008/09 Play Resource had expenditure of £426,000 and income of £380,000. Funding received from BCC in this period was £30,000. This is equal to 7.9% of the total income. Play Resource generated £191,000 income from membership fees, hire of a training room, training and gift aid from the art and play shop. This is just over 50% of the total income.

At a time of recession Play Resource has seen its membership-derived income increase from £66,000 in 07/08 to £80,000 in 08/09. This is an increase of 21% and reflects the demand for Play Resource's services to community and play organisations which are now looking for alternatives to reduce costs. Play Resource also employs 20 artists on a freelance basis, spending approximately £45,000 on artist fees, hence contributing to the local economy.

The model demonstrates excellent value for money in providing a much needed and unique service which is consistent with the Council's development objectives, particularly in regard to play development, recycling, community development and as a flagship social economy organisational model.

### Play development:

Already established as a high priority for the Council, Play Resource enhances and supports play development throughout the City. It provides, under one roof, low cost resources, training, ideas and information which will support any future play development strategies. At a time when infant mental health is becoming recognised as a major government priority, the need for good quality play opportunities to support the development of children and young people, has become more relevant than ever.

In this Play Resource will continue to work in partnership with the most relevant play organisations in the City, in particular, Playboard and the Council.

### Reduce, re-use, recycle

In line with the Council's ongoing recycling campaign and its 'Waste - it's not rubbish' message, Play Resource has an important role to contribute to raising awareness of recycling and re-using with children and young people and community groups in general. The fact that Play Resource's main function is to supply safe non-toxic waste materials from commerce and industry for use in children's play and art means that this message is a fundamental and genuine part of the ethos of the organisation.

There appear to be opportunities for Play Resource and the Council's Waste Management team to work together on projects promoting the value of recycling and re-using, particularly as Play Resource has access to such a huge community-based

membership.

This has been identified in the Business Plan and is an area of priority for the Development Manager and Waste Team in 2010. Part of this will also be to form stronger links with Bryson House.

#### Community development

All of Play Resource's services are directed towards the most disadvantaged community groups and the organisation has a long and excellent track record of supporting community development through arts.

Play Resource was developed as a grass roots community organisation by local community workers who identified the need for support services for play and community development. It has worked hard over the years to ensure that that community ethos is continued. The fact that the vast majority of community-based groups have been members of Play Resource for most of its twenty six years is evidence of the value placed on the service by the community. Many community arts events throughout the City rely on Play Resource in some part – whether it is through materials, advice or training.

#### Flagship for the City

Play Resource is now recognised as the largest and most successful play resource centre in the UK and Ireland. It is seen as the Centre for Arts, Play and Education and as such provides an excellent range of relevant services which together meet the current and expressed needs of communities and children and young people in particular. It now regularly hosts visits from others wishing to set up similar projects elsewhere in the UK and Ireland.

#### Recent Developments

Since 2002, the organisation has been operating from modern purpose-built premises and during that time its capacity to generate income through membership fees, arts programmes, the rental of art room / training facilities and shop sales has increased by 32%.

The move to new premises enabled a huge shift in the organisation's ability to cope with expansion and development. It also meant that Play Resource took on a new level of challenge to take the service through a second stage of development – the move from that of a community project to that of being taken seriously as a major arts infrastructure organisation.

More recently, Play Resource has looked to its internal structures and processes to place itself in a strong position to plan for the next stage of growth and development. As detailed in the Business Plan 2007-2010, the objectives in terms of governance were to develop an exemplary model of good practice policies; to have a well trained and highly motivated staff team and to review the Board structure –all of which has now largely been achieved. A new staff structure was created with the recruitment of a Deputy Director and the formation of a senior management team. A highly effective system of project management has also been introduced which enables the Senior Management Team to match the operational plans to the aims and objectives of the Business Plan.

#### Plans for the Future

Play Resource plans to extend its current building, a modern purpose-built centre completed in 2002, to ensure the facilities and the additional space to cope with planned future growth and strategic development.

The aim is to develop Play Resource's wider capacity to expand and deliver services which support the development of creative activities for children and young people throughout Northern Ireland.

In order to ensure that services and programmes remain innovative and forward thinking and that it continues to meet real and current needs of children and young people, the organisation is concentrating its future strategic development in the four key areas of arts, play, education and youth. It is believed this will enable it to develop and deliver play and arts programmes to ensure maximum impact in improving the well being and personal development of children and young people and helping them to achieve their full potential.

The aim will be to work with the most relevant organisations and agencies in each of these areas to contribute to the strategic priorities of those departments and bodies responsible for children and young people.

#### Summary

For 26 years Play Resource has been at the heart of the community infrastructure - undoubtedly contributing to the sustainability, growth and empowerment of many community groups throughout Belfast. This has been demonstrated by the huge growth in membership, the high frequency of use on a daily basis and the support of a range of funding bodies including central government, trusts and private sector donors. The work of the organisation has been recognized also through various awards bestowed upon the organisation and, notably, being named as Lord Mayor's Charity of the Year 2003.

The organisation's track record has been based on providing creative and innovative activities, free resources, training, advice and support for the development of children and young people. It helps also to develop the skills and abilities of youth, play and community workers thereby contributing to the development of their communities.

The organisation has requested that Council consider the renewal of the service level agreement, at an increased level of £40,000 for the 2010/11 financial year. Monitoring of the organisation has confirmed that it has adhered to the conditions attached to the 2009/10 funding agreement as well as providing a range of developmental support, training and programmes as specified.

#### **Resource Implications**

Although the organisation has requested £40,000 for the renewal of the SLA, only £31,000 has been allowed for in the budget for the financial year 2010/11, which is in line with the previous year's allocation.

#### **Recommendation**

Members are asked to:

1. Agree to the renewal of the service level agreement for the 2010/11 financial year at a level of £31,000.



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