



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Belfast City Council Youth Forum
<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
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Catherine Taggart, Community Development Manager ext 3525

### Relevant Background Information

Belfast City Council Youth Forum was established in March 2006 and sits within the Community Services Section of the Development Department. It was set up as a vehicle whereby Council could consult with young people on their views of Council issues and policies, as well as offering a conduit through which young people could raise issues of importance to them. In turn, each of the Political Parties within Council has a designated "Youth Champion" who engages with the members of the Youth Forum.

The current membership of 36 young people will serve until June 2010. Members are drawn from different areas of the City and reflect the diversity of the City in regard to religions, social backgrounds and cultures. The vision and mission statement, as formulated by the members of the Youth Forum, are set out below.

#### Youth Forum Vision

'We are a changing City – this is recognised by Belfast City Council Youth Forum as we prioritise our Young Citizens and build a future together.'

#### Youth Forum Mission Statement

'Belfast City Council's Youth Forum seeks to represent the issues of Young People in Belfast. It will consult young people and all stakeholders who are responsible for the needs of young people in the City. The Youth Forum will seek out opportunities to inform Council policy and improve service provision so that Belfast becomes a better place for Young People to live.'

The Youth Forum is divided into 3 sub-groups: each of these groups consists of members tasked with performing a piece of work and reporting to the political party youth champions and officers within the Community Services section of the Development Department. It is part of the responsibilities of a Children and Young People's Co-ordinator to manage the Forum.

## **Key Issues**

Since being established, the Youth Forum has been involved in a wide range of developmental, participatory and representative activities. In breaking new ground, the operation of the Youth Forum has served as a model of best practice and, as such, has brought significant recognition to the Council as well as attracting widespread interest, including that of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, in regard to the setting up of a NI Youth Parliament.

Previously, in 2008, Council endorsed the findings of an independent review of the Youth Forum in regard to the need for such a mechanism, its operation and its value for money. Since then, further political commitment has been given to the positioning of the Youth Forum as an integral aspect of a Children and Young People's Unit within Community Services. Key areas of work and major achievements since January 2009 are summarised as an appendix to this report.

The term of the current Youth Forum expires at the end of June 2010. In planning for the future, several contextual issues should be noted.

1. Belfast remains a young City, with approximately 24% of the population aged 18 and under. The importance of this group has been recognised by Members in regard to consideration of their needs and better engaging with them in the formulation and delivery of a broad range of services. There exists, consequently, strong cross-Party political support for children and young people as a key group of interest.

2. The broad theme of children and young people has emerged as an increasingly important policy area with policy frameworks now cascading from international, European, national and regional levels. It is vital therefore that the Council continues to lead from the front in terms of local authority initiatives, alongside young people, promoting themes of participation, inclusion and citizenship, in offering 'voice and choice' to young people.

3. A shared responsibility to introduce efficiencies across the public sector points to the imperatives of greater integration and better targeting of resources. The principle holds internally, across Council, as well as externally, with a range of key stakeholders. The Youth Forum, in providing a vehicle for engagement and consultation, offers a mechanism that can assist in better formulation and delivery of policies and programmes not only by Council but by other public bodies.

The confluence of political, policy and financial interests points to an area of growing importance and in which Council is recognised as being a leader in the field. It is vital therefore that Council build on the success of the initial phase of the Youth Forum and give impetus to the next phase of development through a planned and comprehensive programme.

From the outset, the role of Young People's Co-ordinator has been pivotal to the success of the Youth Forum. Key achievements have included:

- Raising the profile of the Youth Forum at regional and national levels
- Liaising with OFMDFM in regard to the proposed operation of a NI Youth Parliament
- Promoting improved service delivery with outside bodies such as DOE, NIHE, Council for the Homeless
- Influencing policy development through participative consultation workshops and written responses
- Promoting improved co-ordination and co-operation across City Council departments
- Commissioning and managing independent evaluations of the contribution of the Youth Forum and its effectiveness.

To date, the post has been supported on a fixed term basis. The current post holder is seconded on a temporary basis until March 31 2010. This secondment will be extended to enable a review of the job description in order to ensure alignment within the new Children & Young Persons Unit within Community Services.

The co-ordinator would lead the process beyond the recruitment and induction of new Youth Forum members, and engage at a strategic level to ensure alignment and complementarity with the operation of the NI Youth Parliament. Critically also, the role will explore how to develop and nurture systematic linkages at neighbourhood level through existing structures such as Neighbourhood Renewal and Area Based Partnerships, to ensure that opportunities for engagement and participation are accessible to all young people across the city.

### **Resource Implications**

Excluding salaries, the Youth Forum represents an annual developmental investment of some £50,000 by the City Council. In return, some 3,750 volunteer hours have been derived annually from the participation of young members.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to endorse the following recommendations:

1. To approve the operation of the BCC Youth Forum for the period 1st July, 2010 to 30th June, 2012
2. To agree to the ongoing nomination within each political party of a Young People's Champion to act as a key point of contact for Youth Forum members.

### **Decision Tracking**

Further to approval the recommended actions to be completed.

Time line: June 10

Reporting Officer: C Taggart

<b>Key Abbreviations</b>
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DOE – Department of Education NIHE – Northern Ireland Housing Executive
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<b>Documents Attached</b>
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Appendix 1: Summary report of the activities undertaken by the Youth Forum for the period January 2009 to January 2010.
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