



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Shopmobility - Request for Support
Date:	11 August 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

Relevant Background Information

Members may be aware that, for the last decade, Shopmobility Belfast has received financial support from Council through its Economic Development Unit for the promotion of accessibility services within the city. Prior to 2007, this support was match funded by EU funds. However this activity is no longer eligible for match-funding from the EU and therefore this request for support relates to Council rates monies only. The organisation also receives some small levels of support from the Parks and Leisure Department for work undertaken in the Parks and Open Spaces.

A request for support for the financial year 2010-2011 has been received from the organisation.

Key Issues

Shopmobility Belfast provides motorised scooters and manual wheelchairs, free of charge, to enable those with mobility problems to access the city centre and surrounding areas.

The organisation is based at a number of locations in the city and it also provides an outreach service at events such as Rose Week and the Balmoral Show. The organisation has also placed a number of scooters at Belfast Zoo and in Ormeau Park.

Shopmobility Belfast has recently carried out a survey which indicates that a typical member using the service brought two other shoppers with them and spent around £50 in the city. There were over 6400 trips into the city last year and this brought in additional revenue estimated at around £970,000.

The organisation's running costs for the year are around £260,000. They have asked Belfast City Council for a contribution of £25,000 towards this budget.

While this service is clearly a valuable resource, the direct approach for financial support to Economic Development Unit is at odds with the business planning process. No other organisation makes a direct approach for financial support in this manner. Because of this, it is proposed that, should the request for financial support be approved in this financial year, notification be given to the organisation that this approach will not be considered in future years. Instead, it may be appropriate to consider a corporate view to funding the organisation, possibly in conjunction with our support for Belfast City Centre Management. Alternatively, the preferred approach may be to maintain the arrangement of paid-for services at specific events, as is the case presently, particularly for Parks and Leisure Services events.

Resource Implications

The request from Shopmobility is for £25,000 for this financial year (2009/2010).

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee agrees to the proposed allocation of funding, subject to stipulations around future funding options, as outlined above.

Decision Tracking

If recommendation is accepted, an update will be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

Time frame: February 2011

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay