



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	European Social Fund
Date:	13 October 2010
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Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that, at the August 2010 meeting of the Development Committee, information was provided with regard to an upcoming call for projects under Priority 1 of the European Social Fund (ESF). The call for projects has now been issued. The deadline for submissions is 5 November 2010.

Key Issues

The European Social Fund (ESF) is one of the European Commission's Structural Funds which is used for training and employability projects. The Fund is administered locally by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland ESF is "helping people into sustainable employment". Projects funded under this priority should "concentrate on activities to extend the employment opportunities of unemployed and inactive people by helping them to enter, remain and make progress in work".

Projects should help improve the employability of those groups experiencing significant employment gaps such as people with disabilities, lone parents, older workers, young people not in education, employment or training, women and people with no or low educational qualifications.

Projects which are successful in receiving ESF funding are required to find 35% match funding.

At present, Belfast City Council is match-funding one project – HARTE (Hospitality and Retail Training for Employment). Our financial commitment to this current year is around £40,000.

At the August 2010, Members agreed a set of criteria to be used to guide the development of any potential application under ESF. It was also agreed that these

criteria would be used to assess any requests for match funding from potential partners.

The criteria include:

- The project aligns with the priorities and actions identified in the Belfast skills and employability strategy and action plan
- The project has a city-wide impact
- The project does not replicate other mainstream or pilot provision
- The project is focused on employment outputs
- The project aligns with those key industry sectors which are accessible to those who are not currently in the labour market. These might include hospitality, retail, financial services and the public services
- The project focuses on the long-term unemployed
- The project should be subject to performance-related targets to be agreed in advance.

Members suggested that, whilst the projects should have a city-wide impact, extra emphasis should be placed on areas with levels of high unemployment and low skills but within an overall strategic outlook for the city. They also noted that the sectors identified for prioritisation should not be mutually exclusive but should include other sectors such as manufacturing and entrepreneurship.

In anticipation of the call for projects, a meeting was held with officers from across all departments to determine potential areas of focus for any initiative in which council might get involved, in order to ensure adherence to council priorities. Officers have also been contacted by other partners who are interested in developing projects for submission. We have been liaising closely with DEL to ensure that project ideas do not replicate existing provision. At this stage, no specific projects have been formalised.

Resource Implications

The resource implications of the ESF match-funding are not clear at this stage but will not exceed current investment in employability initiatives. Once projects are defined, a report will be brought to Committee to request the approval of appropriate resources. Any submissions for funding will be subject to confirmation of resource availability which will not be confirmed until the estimates process has been completed.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the call for projects under ESF priority 1 with a deadline of 5 November 2010
- Note the engagement with DEL and other partners with regard to potential projects, ensuring congruence with corporate priorities
- Identify any additional issues which should be taken account of in developing an ESF project.

Decision Tracking

Details of projects submitted for funding will be brought back to Council for endorsement, including details of match funding required.

Timeframe: December 2010

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay