



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Employability Support – Proposals Received and Proposed Approach
<b>Date:</b>	22 February 2011
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	Members will be aware that they have given endorsement at previous meetings to developing an agreed approach to employability initiatives across the city and to sharing information on performance across a range of initiatives.
1.2	A separate report deals with requests for ESF (European Social Fund) support which will contribute towards some of the operational objectives of a city-wide plan. A number of applications have recently been received to provide support for the governance and management of this work, as well as a wider programme of activities.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Under the auspices of the Task Forces for West Belfast and the Greater Shankill areas, a number of structures and initiatives were created to address the significant challenges of economic deprivation and low skills and employment levels in those areas.
2.2	Two groupings were established to address the employability issues in particular. These were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Employers' Forum</li><li>– Employment Services Board</li></ul>
2.3	<u>Employers' Forum</u> The Employers' Forum was established in 2003 by Business in the Community (BiTC), with the support of Bombardier Aerospace. The Forum provides an interface with up to 40 employers, working within 6 sectoral "clusters". These include construction, engineering, contact centres, retail and IT. The employers are committed to helping those furthest from the labour market to find work by providing support to help develop employability skills, identifying opportunities for work experience and ultimately providing sustainable employment opportunities. Through the Employers' Forum, a number of initiatives have been developed with local employers to improve the job-readiness of the long-term unemployed, with a view to moving them into the world of work. Since its inception the Forum has supported 991 long term unemployed into jobs.

2.4	<p>The Forum has, to date, been funded by the private sector, principally Bombardier Aerospace. The current funders are Bombardier and Northstone. Business in the Community (BiTC) who operate the Forum are seeking funding from Belfast City Council of £40,000 per annum towards the operation of a city-wide Employers' Forum. This would enable the roll-out of the learning from west Belfast and Shankill across the city. The principal activities to be undertaken would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Engaging employers to provide training, work experience and placements as well as jobs to long term unemployed across the city</li> <li>– Providing a forum in which employers may share experiences, ideas and support relating to key labour market issues across the City</li> <li>– Engaging more employers to participate in providing opportunities to the long term unemployed.</li> </ul>
2.5	<p><u>The Employment Services Board</u>  The Employment Services Board (ESB) aims to “link and broker the needs of unemployed people in West Belfast and Greater Shankill to employment and enterprise opportunities and to review and develop the range of support interventions available.”</p>
2.6	<p>The Board consists of a range of representatives from the statutory and community sectors who are dealing with issues affecting the employment of those furthest from the labour market. There is Member and officer representation from Belfast City Council. The Board is facilitated by a small core secretariat and is chaired by Padraic White.</p>
2.7	<p>In addition to the work in the west and Shankill areas, ESB has also provided the “stakeholder forum” function for the LEMIS programme – a community-based targeted employment initiative that operates across all of Belfast as well as in Derry and Strabane. This forum is charged with providing quarterly updates to DEL on the progress of LEMIS as well as highlighting potential barriers to service delivery and identifying opportunities for collaborative initiatives and promoting the LEMIS service. Participation in the Stakeholder Forum is made up of representatives from all Area Partnership Boards (BAPs) across Belfast as well as officer representation from Belfast City Council. Laterally, LEMIS delivery agents have also been invited to these meetings.</p>
2.8	<p>The current contract with DEL for this work is valued at around £60,000 annually, having been reduced from £80,000 in previous years. In March 2010, ESB was officially informed by DEL that they work resource the organisation to focus on the stakeholder forum work only and that this contract would not be extended beyond March 2011.</p>
2.9	<p>Both organisations work closely with the Job Assist Centres (JACs) in these areas. The JACS were also established in response to the Task Force reports, as a means of bringing together under the auspices of a community-based organisation, a range of employment and employability services. These organisations continue to be funded by Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).</p>
2.10	<p>Difficult</p> <p><u>Wider discussions with DEL</u>  Following initial contacts with DEL made during the development of the Belfast Employability and Skills Plan, the issue of information sharing and developing collaborative initiatives to target identified need on a city-wide basis was</p>

	<p>identified as a critical priority.</p> <p>DEL have suggested that they are still supportive of this and would be keen to consider resource support to allow this work to be undertaken, should Belfast City Council agree to take the lead in this regard. Further discussions between DEL and Belfast City Council will be required in order to scope this work in more detail and to identify the resourcing implications.</p>
2.11	
2.12	<p>Research undertaken in developing the Belfast Employability and Skills Plan suggests that, while many organisations are delivering vital services on the ground, there is a lack of coordination and working to an agreed goal. In this regard, it is difficult to build critical mass or to see progress towards target. In the current economic climate, it is becoming increasingly important to consider greater collaboration and synergy, while maintaining service delivery, particularly for those in most need. In this regard, DEL will be a key partner in building a strong partnership for enhancing employment opportunities for the citizens of Belfast.</p> <p>There is also an opportunity to link with the major employer organisations such as CBI, CEF and Northern Ireland Chamber. These organisations have recently launched their “jobs plan” – an ambitious plan to create 94,000 by 2020. This coalition approach reinforces the merits of collaborating to address the current employment challenges in the economy.</p>

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The funding requests from the Employment Services Board and the Employers’ Forum are likely to exceed £100,000. At present, these resources are not available within existing departmental estimates.</p>
3.2	<p>The financial and wider implications of leading on a city-wide approach within council resources will require ongoing dialogue with DEL and will be dependent on the nature and scope of the work. Any approval to proceed would be subject to committee agreement.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>The coordination role will be managed within the Economic Development Unit. Discussions will be undertaken with DEL should additional staffing commitments be required, possibly in the form of a secondee from the Department.</p>

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	Any proposed approach will be subject to equality proofing.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Note the requests for support from the Employment Services Board (ESB) and the Employers’ Forum at a total cost of around £100,000 per annum. This sum has not been provided for in current estimates.</li> <li>– Note the discussions underway with DEL with a view to creating a platform for sharing information and developing collaborative initiatives on a city-wide basis, with a view to enhancing provision and addressing the current employment challenges in the city and agree to the continuation of this approach.</li> </ul>

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
Should the proposal to work with DEL be endorsed, an update report will be presented to Committee in April 2011.	
Timeframe: April 2011	Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
CBI – Confederation of British Industry CEF – Construction Employers' Federation DEL – Department for Employment and Learning EF – Employers' Forum ESB – Employment Services Board LEMIS – Local Employment Intermediary Service	