



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Leisurewatch
Date:	13 April 2011
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Cate Taggart, Community Development Manager ext 3525

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed at their meeting on 7 August 2009 and on 1 September 2009 Council subsequently ratified a decision that Belfast City Council should become members of the Leisurewatch Scheme. The cost to Belfast City Council to implement the scheme within Leisure, Community Services, Waterfront and Ulster Halls was £18,500 for the first year. The advance planning for the full implementation has involved audits of facilities and training of front line staff.
1.2	Leisurewatch scheme is a UK scheme run by The Derwent Initiative (TDI), an independent UK charity which works "to improve public protection by finding creative and practical multi-agency solutions to the problems of sexual offending". They offer research, consultancy, training and trademarked public protection schemes, including Leisurewatch.
1.3	The Leisurewatch scheme involves training staff in order to raise their awareness of adults who may seek to use public facilities such as leisure centres to gain access to children and young people. The training involves helping front line staff to identify, assess and manage sex offender risk. Additional training is provided for managers to co-ordinate and manage the risk.
1.4	A site audit is undertaken that examines physical, design and security issues. Materials, including signage, are provided to confirm that the premise is a member of Leisurewatch.

	<p>The programme involves the establishment of an Official Protocol with the Police whereby concerns reported by staff will be acted upon. In Northern Ireland, the PSNI support the project financially and have an officer seconded to the project on a part-time basis.</p>
1.5	<p>Leisurewatch thus trains staff to be aware of potential sex offenders who may deliberately seek to come onto premises to gain access to children. This may apply, for example, to a person waiting around a centre or park specifically at times when children are about. Under the scheme, any such concerns should be reported to the police at an early stage through a bespoke procedure and copied by fax to the organisation's headquarters of Leisurewatch which is based in Newcastle, England. Belfast City Council's designated officer would also be notified.</p>
1.6	<p>In essence, Leisurewatch was regarded as a useful complement to Council's existing Child Protection Policy which promotes protection. This policy is applied, through explicit procedures, where a child or young person has been allegedly harmed, or where there are concerns regarding suspicious behaviour by a person using a Council facility.</p>
1.7	<p>Under Council's Child Protection Policy, designated Child Protection Officers deliver in-house training to some 250 staff on an annual basis. In addition, training is provided annually to approximately 110 temporary summer scheme staff. Training is also provided to a number of community organisations in order to improve practice standards within the local community sector.</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The results from the Leisurewatch audits reaffirmed the robustness of Belfast City Council's current policy and procedures for the protection of children and young people. The assessor stated on all site reports that:</p>
2.2	<p>"Site is very well managed and controlled and the members of staff are all aware of safeguarding and highly vigilant. BCC have also invested in training for staff and volunteers to achieve a high level of safety"</p>
2.3	<p>The main recommendation made in the audit report relates to safeguards being put in place in regard to the use of external contractors on sites with potential access to children. This issue had previously been raised internally within Belfast City Council and guidelines are in the final stages of formulation. The draft guidelines, which are being developed in consultation with other BCC services, will be tabled for COMT consideration at the earliest opportunity. Should Committee approve further funding, training would be provided for those staff who have not yet participated as part of Leisurewatch's current contract.</p>
2.4	<p>Participant feedback from training has been generally positive. Staff felt that the training increased their general awareness. Uptake of training across relevant Council services has reached an overall level of 64% (405) of relevant staff having received a Leisurewatch Standard course.</p>

2.5	The overall co-ordination, in conjunction with TDI, of the initial phase of auditing and training has been through the Council's Designated Child Protection Officer based in Community Services. Implementation in Leisure and Waterfront and Ulster Halls has been overseen by respective officers within each Section, each of whom is also a Key Worker within the Child Protection reporting procedures.
2.6	The first year of the Leisurewatch programme finished on 31 December 2010. A decision is therefore required by Council in regard to continued membership. The cost to Council will be a total of £6,700 – broken down as £2,000 for Waterfront and Ulster Halls; £2,500 for Leisure Services and £2,200 for Community Services.
2.7	<p>This would provide the following for Belfast City Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Top-up training for relevant staff (one session per Section) - "Mystery shopper" to 4 selected sites – where visits would be made to assess if the facility was adopting appropriate procedures - Branding – centres displaying posters will potentially put off sex offenders use of the buildings. - An annual review of the audit of facilities and advice regarding how to deter potential sex offenders, which will be completed primarily through a self-assessment system.
2.8	In taking cognisance of financial constraints it may nevertheless appear reasonable on the part of Council, given the investment to date in necessary preliminary activities (training and site audits), to continue to fund the scheme for a further year to assess its added value.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p>The direct cost to Council will be a total of £6,700 for the period 1 January to 31 December 2011.</p> <p>This does not include additional training costs for Sections that may require more than one session.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	Adoption of the recommendation would have a neutral impact upon Equality and Good Relations outcomes.

5	Recommendations
	<p>It is recommended that Committee agree to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve continuation of funding for Leisurewatch for 2011.

6	Decision Tracking
Time line: April 11 Reporting Officer: Catherine Taggart	

8	Abbreviations
TDI – The Derwent Initiative DHSS&PS – The Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety	