



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Rate Relief project – Make a Difference Events
Date:	24 January 2012
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>In 2011 Council was approached by Land and Property Services (LPS) to partner them in their efforts to increase the uptake of rate relief in Belfast. This relief has three categories of recipient:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Older people;- People with disabilities; and- People on low incomes.
1.2	<p>Of particular importance to the Council was the fact that, according to LPS's own figures the lowest uptake of relief in Belfast is by older people. The aims of the project directly tied to the Council's priority of support for older people and to the programme of work relating to our emerging Poverty and Inequalities framework.</p>
1.3	<p>There are a number of practical ways the Council already supported the LPS in encouraging greater uptake by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Distributing and displaying Rate relief leaflets in all Council buildings- Holding staff information sessions with the LPS outreach officer and- Publishing articles in City Matters, Interlink and the Council's website
1.4	<p>Another effective way proposed by the LPS is hosting 'Make a Difference' events, which are usually hosted by the Local Authority. The aim of the events is to support those who work directly in communities with older and vulnerable people, such as advice providers, community groups' representatives or health visitors. These workers may not be experts on benefits so the events will give them enough information to allow them to signpost vulnerable people to a range of services.</p>

1.5	People affected by poverty are also welcomed to attend the sessions but are not directly targeted. The aim is to equip people to act as 'signposters' in their community and with people directly affected by poverty, especially older people and people with disabilities.
1.6	These LPS information events are free and across the region, usually organised by the local council in partnership with LPS, National Energy Action, Access 2 benefits, Warm Homes and the Citizens Advice Bureau.
1.7	LPS organised eight 'Make a Difference' events in partnership with seven local councils in 2010: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Larne - Ballymena - Ballymoney - Coleraine - Newtownabbey - Magherafelt - Armagh

2	Key Issues
2.1	Council's engagement with the Lands and Property can directly contribute to the emerging corporate Poverty framework and to our commitment to partnership working. This project is practical and can make a significant difference to people affected by poverty from all areas in Belfast.
2.2	Each event will be for two hours with modest refreshments. They will include short presentations by each partner organisation (LPS, National Energy Action, Access 2 benefits, Warm Homes and National Energy Action) including Belfast City Council's Fuel Poverty team and Accident Prevention Officer.
2.3	The proposal is for five events covering East, North, Shankill, South and West Belfast. Where possible (in terms of availability and access) the events have been planned for council venues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 21 February, Spectrum Centre - 5 March, Whiterock Leisure Centre - 9 March, Dee Street Community Centre - 13 March Olympia Community Centre - 20 March, Groundwork Offices, Duncairn Gardens
2.4	All the events will be held between 10am and 12 noon. LPS are keen to have Councilors at these events. Their past experience has indicated that this has helped raise the profile of the events and make them more successful.
2.5	Lands and Property Services would also be keen to present their work on Rate relief to the Development Committee.

3	Resource implications
3.1	The Council's contribution to the project would be approximately £2,500, a sum which is included within the Policy and Business Development unit budget for 2011/12. Also some officer time would be required to coordinate the project and events.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	This project will be of positive benefit to people in poverty across the city that are disproportionately represented by Section 75 groups.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve five Make a Difference events to be held across Belfast 2. To agree to a presentation to the Committee by LPS.

6	Decision Tracking
Timeline: March 2012	
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7	Key to Abbreviations
LPS – Land and Property Services	