



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Update on the Community Oil Buying Clubs Pilot Project
Date:	16 September, 2014
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In June 2014 Members agreed to establish a pilot project to promote and to support the development of community oil buying clubs across the city. This paper provides a short update on the progress to date and offers information on a provisional launch date for the project.
1.2	As Members have previously noted, the issue of fuel poverty has been one of growing concern to the residents of the city with 42% of households defined as being in fuel poverty. One contributing factor is that Northern Ireland remains particularly reliant on increasingly expensive home-heating oil. In response to this a number of community groups across Northern Ireland (and here in Belfast) have set up local 'oil buying clubs' to negotiate for more competitive deals from oil suppliers.
1.3	The council pilot project is aimed at encouraging local communities to set up their own club; to offer some practical advice as to how to go about it; and to arrange for a number of Council-funded Capacity Support organisations to provide practical support in the setting up of the oil clubs.

2	Key Issues
2.1	With support from the Public Health Agency, the Belfast Strategic Partnership, Bryson Energy and Community Foundation NI, officers have now developed a practical guide for setting up a club aimed particularly at community groups and workers across Belfast. (Copies of the latest draft of the guide will be distributed to Members at Committee.)
2.2	As Members previously noted, while setting up such a club is fairly straightforward, experience elsewhere has shown that it does take quite some time, effort and a little cost. A successful club needs a few committed volunteers with organisational and meeting skills; access to a meeting room; access to a computer; a mobile phone; printer; photo-copying facilities, etc.
2.3	With this in mind, officers are negotiating with a number of organisations already contracted by our Community Services section under their 'Capacity Support' Grant

	Scheme to extend their support role to include groups seeking to set up a club in their area (or to enhance an existing club).
2.4	This support role would include offering clubs access to meeting rooms and computer suites; small admin support; signposting to relevant bodies such as Bryson Energy, the Consumer Council and CFNI. Each Capacity Support organisation is being offered an additional £1,000 uplift to their current grant to meet the costs of this extended role.
2.5	To date eight Capacity Support organisations have expressed an interest in providing this role. They are being invited to a workshop in September to clarify their role and to meet with bodies such as Bryson Energy and CFNI, who have existing experience of establishing such clubs. Members of a number of existing oil clubs will also be invited along to share their experience.
2.6	After finalising the role and number of participating Capacity Support organisations, officers will work with Corporate Communications to prepare a public launch of the oil club guide at City Hall on Tuesday, 28 October at 10am. This will be hosted by the Lord Mayor. Invitations will be issued to Members once details have been finalised. The public launch will form part of a broader media campaign, via City Matters and other media, to promote the guide and the concept of oil buying clubs. Copies of the guide will distributed to Members, community workers and made available in our centres.
2.7	A follow up workshop is also planned for February 2015 to refresh interest in the concept and to encourage membership drives amongst clubs (and to encourage saving across the year for future oil purchases). There will also be an evaluation of the programme in April 2015.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	As previously agreed by Committee the H&ES contribution to the project is £6,000 which has been identified from within existing 2014/15 Revenue Estimates. The Development Department is also prepared to make a contribution of £8,000 to the budget.
3.2	The Public Health Agency, who provide a range of support to address fuel poverty in the city, and who have worked with officers on the oil club guide, have indicated that they are willing to contribute £10,000, subject to final agreement on the detail of the programme.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no equality or good relations implications at this stage. However all new policy and strategy work detailed within the plan will be subject to equality screening in line with the Council's standard processes.

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is requested to approve the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the contents of the draft oil buying guide 2. To agree to the 28 October launch event and to note the invitation to Committee Members to attend.

6	Decision Tracking
6.1	The Director of Development will bring a further update to Committee in January 2015.

7	Key to Abbreviations
7.1	CFNI – Community Foundation NI PHA – Public Health Agency