



## Belfast City Council

**Report to:** Health and Environmental Services Committee

**Subject:** **Investment in Joint Posts and Projects between Belfast City Council, the Public Health Agency and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust**

**Date:** 9th September, 2009

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### Relevant Background Information

Belfast City Council's stated overall purpose is to improve quality of life now and for future generations but it is clear in Belfast, as in other cities, that health and illness follow a social gradient; the lower the socioeconomic position the worse the health. This 'health gap' and indeed the general health of the population of Belfast is worse than many other UK cities. For example, smoking levels remain high and smoking is still one of the main causes of preventable death; economic inactivity in Belfast is among the highest in the UK, and obesity is increasing. Misuse of alcohol continues to place an enormous burden on the health and wellbeing of the people of Belfast. Alcohol misuse kills more people directly than illegal drugs; it is closely linked to violence and crime and contributes to mental illness.

The Council has a key role to play in addressing these issues and has included the development of a healthier city as one of its key cross cutting priorities under the Supporting People and Communities theme of the corporate plan.

When setting the revenue estimates for 2009/10, Members agreed that a "thematic budget" of £500,000 should be allocated to support the implementation of the various themes within the corporate plan and at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> June 2009, it was agreed that £100,000 be allocated to the Health and Wellbeing theme. This broad allocation of the 'thematic budget' was based on an initial scoping of possible projects and programmes.

The purpose of this report is to highlight to the Committee the more detailed proposals for utilising this budget to bring about better joined up working across agencies in developing and delivering outcome based, high impact programmes

that tackle the city's main health and wellbeing issues. Specifically, these proposals recommend using a proportion of the thematic budget to invest in a number of jointly funded posts and projects, namely:

1. A health and wellbeing manager post for the new joint public health unit, jointly sponsored by the Council and the Public Health Agency;
2. Two fixed-term project manager posts jointly funded by the Council and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
3. A number of neighbourhood based programmes addressing obesity and alcohol misuse among young people, linked in with programmes in Parks, Leisure and Community Services.

These posts would be subject to the normal vacancy scrutiny procedures currently in place.

### **Key Issues**

The Council is already working with the new Public Health Agency on establishing joint working arrangements for tackling the main health priorities in the city. These new arrangements will not focus on primary care, but on the socio-economic and lifestyle issues that contribute to ill health in the first place. In other words they will not be about hospitals or doctors or dentists or making sick people well again but will be about making the lives of the people of Belfast better so that fewer become ill in the first place. Much of the work of the Council is already contributing to this aim through, for example, the provision of parks and leisure, economic initiatives, community safety, good relations, environmental health, etc.

Improving health and wellbeing is a significant challenge as it cuts across many different aspects of life in the City from housing to education to delivery of services by the Council, the police, Belfast Trust and others. It is essential therefore that we work together to coordinate what we do and make better use of the staff and money we have to do this work.

The new arrangements will involve establishing a joint team in a Joint Public Health Unit. The team's role will be to identify priority actions that can address some of the key problems which lead to ill health in this city and to ensure that the key agencies (represented on a wider partnership) re-align or combine resources behind delivering programmes that are known to work. This is a forerunner for community planning and, given the current financial climate, it is important for the Council to work closely with organisations such as the Public Health Agency and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to maximise its impact on improving health and wellbeing of people in Belfast.

The Public Health Agency will be placing a number of staff into the joint team and the Environmental Health Service will also contribute up to four staff from existing resources (through a re-structuring of its health development team, involving the redeployment of 2 existing members of staff and amendments to 2 existing vacant posts). The proposals to create a Joint Public Health Unit will enable the existing Health Development Team in the Environmental Health Service to carry out its work and programmes in a way which will have much

more impact in communities and in a context where there is an agreed strategic direction and priority work programmes between all of the key agencies.

It is vitally important that the entire Council is linked into the work of the new team and this is being done by the establishment of an interdepartmental group and the development of a Healthier City Plan for the Council.

It is proposed that additional resource within the health and wellbeing thematic budget is used to part fund a joint health and wellbeing manager post along with the Public Health Agency. This would give the Council much more effective ownership of the new team and ensure that action is progressed using effective accountability arrangements. If the Council was to contribute half of this salary, it is much more likely that the Public Health Agency would do likewise. Such a jointly funded management post would also give the Council an important leadership role which will benefit future community planning arrangements.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has also expressed an interest in joint working with the Council. It is actively involved in health improvement and community development and is keen to work with the Council in these areas. It has proposed establishing two jointly funded and managed posts. One post will focus on the health and wellbeing of children and young people concentrating on issues such as alcohol and obesity and the second post will focus on using neighbourhood renewal as a framework and linking programmes to various community settings such as the work of healthy living centres, health and wellbeing centres, leisure and community centres. The main focus will be on practical, on the ground programmes in local areas which will involve local communities.

These posts could also be located within the Joint Public Health unit once it is established.

In respect of allocating part of the budget to programme work , it is considered that the post covering alcohol and obesity will need some finance set aside to support programmes as they are developed.

## **Resource Implications**

### **Financial**

Given the fact that the decisions on the thematic budget allocations were not taken until June 2009, it is now unlikely that the entire budget of £100,000 will be spent within the 2009/2010 financial year and it is likely that savings of £20,000 will be made. The breakdown of the estimated expenditure of the remaining £80,000 is as follows;

Health and Wellbeing Manager Post :	£17,000
Joint Posts with Health Trust:	£25,000
Project work :	£38,000

The above costs take account of the fact that there will only be five months remaining of the financial year by the time the positions are filled. In 2010 / 2011 and beyond, a similar bid will be made for any thematic budget to finance the remaining terms of the joint posts.

However, should this thematic budget not be available in future, it is planned to divert the costs from the 2 vacant posts in the existing structure (which are subject to an ongoing review) to pay for the new joint posts. It had been planned to divert these posts into the Joint Unit for other specific projects, but if faced with financial constraints on the thematic budget, it would be preferable to continue to make use of the joint funding from the Public Health Agency and the Trust as, in effect, this allows 3 posts to be devoted to this work (only half of which will be paid for by the Council).

Therefore, in the case that there is no further thematic funding, the joint posts can in future years be financed without further increase in the revenue estimates.

### **Human Resources**

The appointment of the posts would be subject to the normal scrutiny procedures put in place for vacancies and new posts.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to agree that the £100,000 set aside under 'thematic budget' for Health and Wellbeing work, be invested in a number of jointly funded posts and projects, namely:

1. A three year fixed-term health and wellbeing manager post for the new joint public health unit, jointly funded by the Council and the Public Health Agency
2. Two one-year fixed-term project manager posts jointly funded by the Council and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
3. A number of programmes aimed at reducing alcohol misuse and obesity among young people.

### **Decision Tracking**

The Head of Environmental Health will bring back reports on progress with the development of the Joint Public Health Unit.

### **Documents Attached**

None.