

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AWARDS 2010
APPLICATION FORM – WORD VERSION**



Award Category Details

BEST LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICE TEAM

Sponsored by Association for Public Service Excellence [APSE]

Submissions will be accepted from teams providing both larger scale services such as refuse collection, street cleansing, environmental health or leisure services, and smaller teams responsible for, for example, community safety, abandoned vehicles or cultural services.

BEST INITIATIVE BY A COUNCILLOR

Sponsored by National Association of Councillors [NAC]

This award will be presented to the most innovative project led by a councillor which contributes to the well being of the local community. Entries will be accepted in relation to social, environmental or economic projects.

BEST SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Sponsored by Northern Ireland Local Government Association [NILGA]

This award will be presented to the most innovative project or initiative demonstrating local government leadership and commitment to action on sustainable development principles, including projects focusing on an integrated approach to social, economic and environmental well-being within a target area, and/or issues based projects dealing with e.g. climate change mitigation or adaptation, energy management, carbon reduction, sustainable procurement, community environmental action or green or social economy.

BEST BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Sponsored by Northern Ireland Local Government Association [NILGA]

Delivering improved services within an increasingly challenging economic climate means local government will often be required to challenge traditional methods of service delivery to meet citizen expectations, delivering more for less or more for the same resource. This award will be presented to the business improvement project or initiative that has been able to demonstrate significant improvement in either service delivery or business performance, through improved use of technology, process or organisational redesign or innovation in service delivery.

BEST JOINT INITIATIVE

Sponsored by the Northern Ireland branch of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers [SOLACE NI]

This award will include all partnerships that councils have been involved in with councils or other organisations in the wider public, private or voluntary sector. This category highlights the benefits of collaborative working. Submissions should note the advantages gained from cases where councils and other organisations have worked together and the benefits to citizens, partners, councillors, staff and the wider community.

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by the William Johnston Memorial Trust [WJMT]

This category is intended to give public recognition to employees, who, through their enthusiasm, activities, innovation, commitment or other positive attributes, have made a commendable contribution to the performance of the council.

WORKFORCE EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS AWARD

Sponsored by the Northern Ireland Joint Council for Local Government Services (NIJC)

The award recognises the place of councils as core to, and reflective of, their wider communities. It will be awarded to the council demonstrating the greatest levels of innovation, leadership and achievement in promoting equality and good relations within the workforce. It will focus in particular on effective practice that goes beyond compliance, shows new and innovative approaches, demonstrable political and managerial leadership and engagement with the workforce and trade unions.

Category and Contact Details

Each submission must have a title and one of the categories on the previous page must be included in the relevant section of the application form. Submissions may be entered for more than one category, in this case all categories entered must be included. Contact details for the author of the submission must be clearly entered. Projects submitted to these awards must have commenced after 31st December 2007. All completed forms must be emailed to pbrennan@apse.org.uk by 4.00pm Friday 17th December 2010. An email receipt for your entry will be sent, if you do not receive a formal receipt by email within two working days, please contact Phil Brennan at APSE on 0161 772 1810.

PROJECT, SERVICE, TEAM OR INDIVIDUAL NAME:

Departmental Improvement Programme (Parks and Leisure)

AUTHOR'S NAME:

Victoria Law

POSITION:

Lead Communicator

AWARD CATEGORY:

Best Business Improvement Project

COUNCIL / ORGANISATION:

Belfast City Council

ADDRESS:

**Parks and Leisure Department
Belfast City Hall
Donegall Square
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Section 1: Executive Summary

An Executive Summary is compulsory and will be included in the awards booklet produced for the awards dinner. If you do not include an appropriate summary (of up to 150 words, within the overall 2000 word count limit) promotional details of your entry will not be highlighted in the booklet should you reach the final. This should be a short précis of the key points from the overall submission.

Belfast City Council's Parks and Leisure Department was formed in 2007. In February 2008, the new director presented an initial improvement plan to Council, identifying potential developments that would lead to more efficient, more professional and better value for money parks and leisure services for the public.

Supporting recommendations from consultants, SOLACE Enterprises were presented to Council in September 2008 and the department began its official improvement programme, known to staff as the 'Change Programme'. Improvements included structural realignment and cultural change, creating better working arrangements between the newly-combined services, tackling absence and reliance on overtime, embedding formal business planning and performance management processes, as well as developing management capacity and communications. An internal programme governance structure was developed, engaging Trade Unions and involving staff at all levels.

Supported by a comprehensive communications plan, the improvement programme has been commended by Investors in People assessors as the epitome of excellence.

Section 2: Background

This should provide an overview for your submission detailing the historical context and the key issues identified for action.

The 2007 formation of the new Parks and Leisure department combined two very distinct and culturally diverse services. Although a transition board had been established to assist in managing the restructuring, it became apparent that a long-term business improvement strategy would be fundamental to the modernisation of the new department.

Drivers for the change also included:

- the increasingly difficult economic and financial climate
- growing citizen and visitor expectations
- the need to improve co-ordination, business planning, structures and performance measurement, and
- the impending Review of Public Administration (RPA, subsequently delayed) in terms of efficiency and collaboration.

A consultant was appointed through SOLACE Enterprises to assist the department and Members of Council in defining the new strategic direction for the department and to highlight major areas for improvement, including:

- Operational efficiency savings such as the removal of annualised hours, over-reliance on overtime and use of agency staff
- Traditional working arrangements and inflexible job descriptions
- The requirement for local area working and better community engagement, and
- Maximising opportunities in income generation, marketing and customer relationship management.

The challenge for the new department was to define and agree the business improvement approach to deliver the change and meet the overarching aim of creating a modern-day department to deliver contemporary services to meet changing user needs and expectations. To this end, an interim Head of Service (Parks and Leisure) was appointed in the department.

A governance structure was agreed consisting of a management tier (Departmental Improvement Board – DIB) and a range of sub groups to focus on areas such as operational efficiency, customer and commercial development, planning and performance, and resources. A number of additional pilot groups were also established to deliver operational projects, such as the presence in parks pilot, helping to increase community confidence on the ground, and the standards pilot group, who are currently working towards achievement of the national Green Flag standard for parks and cemeteries. With the exception of the Departmental Improvement Board, all of the groups were open to any member of staff wishing to take part. The Head of Service led staff briefing sessions to explain how the improvement structure and processes would work and take up for all of the sub groups was high. An excellent cross-section of officers were involved and engaged from the outset.

Each of the sub and pilot groups continue to meet frequently and staff have undertaken many additional duties and responsibilities in order to contribute to successful management of the improvements. Senior managers on the Departmental Improvement Board meet every other Friday to consider reports from the lead officers of the sub groups, and to make decisions on the findings from each group and the way forward.

To provide a challenge function and to ensure the wider engagement of staff, reference panels were established for each of the sub groups. The panels were formed by open invitation, encouraging any individual within the department to get involved in any area of work that they are involved in through their job, or any other area that they have an interest in. The panels act as a 'sounding board' and have been vital in ensuring staff and Trade Union buy-in to the change.

Initial problems were reported by staff in relation to communications. Although staff had attended the Director's and Head of Service's briefings, as well as seminars and workshops; given the pace of the improvement programme, they found it difficult to follow what was happening in each area of the department. As a result, a staff newsletter was developed to explain each step in the process in a clear and easy-to-follow format. It is now distributed to staff regularly with their payslips. With minimal outlay, this has also helped to overcome the challenge that the majority of parks and leisure frontline staff are not PC users. The corporate Team Brief system is now also being used to help communicate activities throughout the department and to colleagues in other departments.

Resistance to change has been minimised through the governance structure, as staff and Trade Unions have been involved in the process and consulted with on an ongoing basis. Any issues that have required additional meetings have been undertaken directly with the Head of Service, ensuring that staff views are heard and acted upon.

In undertaking the substantial amount of work associated with the improvement programme, consideration has been given to pressures on staff time. Requiring meticulous and careful management, the department has ensured that no officer has experienced undue stress or too heavy a workload. Indeed management has witnessed many instances and received extensive evidence that staff are willing to go the extra mile to bring about change and the improvements that will help the department deliver modern and efficient services going forward. Staff commitment to the improvement programme has been considerable and commendable.

Section 3: Improvements Achieved

To promote the achievements of the initiative, service or individual through a range of source evidence such as customer feedback, performance outcomes, internal/external benchmarks or management data.

Benefits for the service user / citizen

- Citizens receive more modern, customer-focused services
- Services are more responsive and attuned to user needs
- Services are delivered more cost effectively, resulting in a decreased impact on the rate base
- Local communities are better engaged and consulted with as the department strives to encourage participation in active living.

Benefits to the organisation

- Department now contributes more effectively to the Council's vision for Belfast becoming a better place to live in, work in and visit; and is better equipped to deliver the Council's strategic outcomes
- Greater efficiency and better use of resources, for example principles and protocols have been agreed for authorising and managing overtime
- Raised standards and an increased focus on outreach work, increasing visibility of Council services
- Improved image and reputation of Council services
- Better alignment between financial, planning and performance cycles
- Traditional working methods have been modernised and flexibility improved, for example park ranger staff are now able to record antisocial behaviour using handheld devices (PDAs), enabling it to be dealt with more promptly and allowing quarterly reports to be generated more easily and paper-based administration to be reduced significantly
- Departmental KPIs have been streamlined and made to be more meaningful.

Through the departmental improvement programme, Parks and Leisure will make a contribution of £269,676 to the corporate efficiency programme in 2011/12.

Efficiency savings will be made as follows:

	£
1. Review of overtime and agency costs	50,000
2. Review of marketing and communications	50,269
3. Review of fees and charges	55,000
4. Increased income from Events	20,000
4. Gas tender procurement	13,407
5. Floral tender review	15,000
6. Playground/Sports equipment tender review	40,000
7. Commercial premises efficiencies	25,000
8. VOIP installation	1,000
Total Departmental Efficiency Savings	£269,676

An additional £271,000 savings will be made through the removal of voluntary redundancy posts as part of the departmental restructuring process.

Benefits to councillors

- Councillors are better engaged and informed about the improvement work of the department
- Councillors have more frequent and direct input into the departmental improvement and change agenda
- Councillors have participated in regular business improvement workshops where progress is shared, enabling them to develop a real understanding of service issues and areas for development
- In benchmarking Belfast City Council's business model for parks and leisure services, Councillors attended a study visit to Liverpool. Liverpool was chosen as 2010 marks the Liverpool region's 'Year of Health and Wellbeing'. Councillors met with Liverpool City Council's senior managers and a range of their partner organisations to discuss the city's Active City strategy and business improvement activities undertaken in the city's parks service.

Benefits to officers

- Staff are better informed and better connected
- Relationships between management and operational staff have improved significantly
- Staff are motivated and keen to remain involved in shaping the future of the department
- Middle management (parks managers, leisure centre managers) receive better administrative support
- With improvements in performance, teams and officers understand what is expected from them and are more accountable for their agreed objectives
- All staff will now receive customer service training and many of those directly involved in the change programme structure have participated in Change Leadership training
- Two officers are now fully qualified Green Flag judges and are assisting other UK Councils to raise standards in parks.

Feedback received from staff on progress to date:

(samples from evaluation following staff seminar 20/7/10)

"Did involve all staff and everyone given an opportunity to get involved."

"Good cross section of staff from P&L [Parks and Leisure] involved in the reference panels and groups."

"Proper staff consultation with staff views taken on board."

Benefits for the wider community and partners

- Improved visitor experience through better services
- Department has the capacity and vision to more effectively contribute to regeneration, social inclusion, good relations, health and wellbeing, and environmental sustainability
- Partnership working with stakeholders will be further developed through new approaches to area planning and the new departmental consultation and engagement strategy being developed.

Section 4: Future Targets and Goals

This section should include aims/targets for the future, any proposed or considered changes impacting from change of circumstances on the service, team or individual and how they will develop in coming years.

2011 will see the continuation of the improvement programme in Parks and Leisure. Originally, a greater proportion of modernisation efforts have focused on parks, with the focus shifting to leisure in the past 6 months. Both work streams will run simultaneously as the two services continue to be brought closer together.

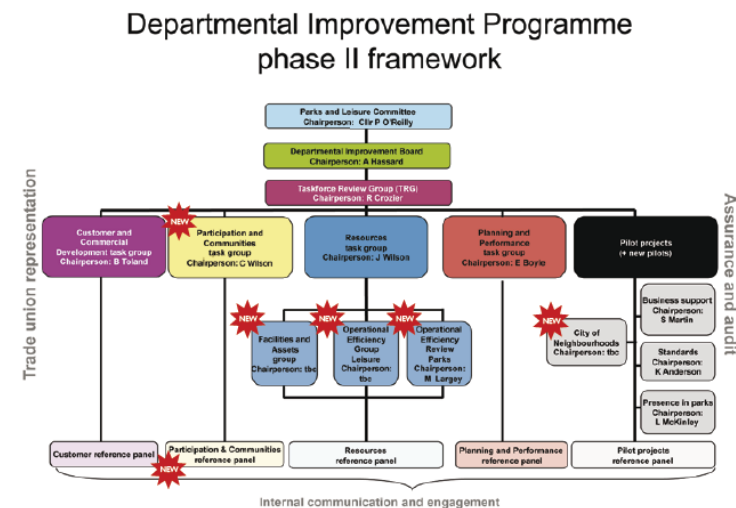
New sub groups and pilot projects have been added to the improvement programme (image 1) and staff continue to work together to drive the change. Senior and middle managers are approaching the end of their leadership training and are already beginning to put ideas into practice, for example through peer learning.

Parks and Leisure CHANGE PROGRAMME

The next steps

The following diagram represents the next step of the change programme. Since we began the change programme, new groups have been added and a new pilot project introduced.

Image 1: the next steps of the Parks and Leisure business improvement programme



Future service areas to be reviewed include the operational tier of the Leisure service, a review and merging of the development functions in the department (Policy and Business Development, Leisure Development and Landscape Planning and Development) and a review of the Outdoor Leisure function. Learning from the business improvement experience gained to date, the department will continue to work towards full integration, a co-ordinated approach to service delivery and more robust planning and performance processes.

A comprehensive consultation and engagement methodology is under development and will be implemented. This will define ongoing improvements to customer service and associated satisfaction measures. These will inform the development of real quality of life indicators for the department.

Although RPA has been delayed, the department will maintain its efforts to prepare for new ways of working, such as community planning and the anticipated transfer of services to local government, and to take account of the ongoing economic pressures.

Section 5: Supplementary Evidence and Documentation

To support submissions it is recommended to include supplementary evidence and documentation, although it is at the discretion of the author. If included, it must be attached with the application form and should fit within the 2,000 word and 2 megabytes file size limits.



Image 2: staff intranet used to communicate regular updates on the change programme



Image 3: staff newsletters complementing information on the intranet. Proven to be very effective as many frontline parks and leisure staff are not PC users



Image 4: Councillors' study visit to Liverpool regarding business models for parks and leisure services

Visit to the refurbished Isla Gladstone Pavilion in Stanley Park, north Liverpool. Pictured back l-r: Paul Scragg, Parks and Greenspaces Manager, Liverpool City Council; Chairman of the Parks and Leisure Committee, Cllr Peter O'Reilly; John Turner, Relationship Manager, Liverpool City Council; front l-r: Director of Parks and Leisure, Andrew Hassard; Head of Parks and Leisure, Rose Crozier; Cllr Tom Ekin; Cllr Tom Hartley and Cllr Frank McCoubrey.