

Paper on Proposal for Belfast City Council to join Leisurewatch scheme

Leisurewatch

Leisurewatch is a membership scheme designed to protect children and vulnerable adults by preventing sexual offending in defined public spaces.

This involves:

- Training for 80% of front line staff to help them identify, assess and manage sex offender risk.
- Additional training for managers to co-ordinate and manage the risk.
- A site audit examining physical, design and security issues that enable potential offenders to operate more easily on Council premises.
- The establishment of an Official Protocol with the Police whereby concerns reported by staff will be acted upon.
- Provision of materials including signage that the premise is a member and regular newsletters providing information on key issues.
- Top-up training sessions for new members of staff.

Leisurewatch is run by The Derwent Initiative (TDI) throughout the United Kingdom. Links are made with the local Police Services. In Northern Ireland, the PSNI support the project financially and have an officer seconded to the project on a part-time basis.

There are currently 15 District Councils in Northern Ireland involved in Leisurewatch.

Difference between Leisurewatch and Child Protection

Leisurewatch is about perpetrator awareness. It trains staff to be aware of potential sex offenders who may come onto the premises to gain access to children. Concerns are fed to the police at an early stage and where an alleged incident may not have occurred. This may include a person hanging around a centre or park specifically at times when children are about. Child protection deals where a child or young person has been potentially harmed.

Benefits of membership of Leisurewatch

- More detailed training
- Branding – centres displaying posters will potentially put off sex offenders use of the buildings.
- Ongoing audit of facilities and advice regarding how to deter potential sex offenders
- Formal links with PSNI

Leisurewatch would not only be of benefit for leisure centres but could be adapted for all BCC premises where potential sex offenders could have access to children and young people.

Concerns

Previous meetings have taken place with Leisurewatch and attended by Blanche Thompson (Designated Officer) and Pat Seenan (Key Worker,

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Leisure). Concerns were raised which have now been resolved following a meeting on 27th January 2009. These included:

1. Input into training.

Feedback from other Council areas indicated that following the Leisurewatch training, staff were confused regarding when to follow Leisurewatch or their Council reporting procedures. A request was made that if BCC was to take on Leisurewatch that their child protection trainers were allowed to attend the training to have a short input into assisting to clarify when to use which procedure. Initially this was refused. They have now indicated that they would allow an input into the training.

2. Feedback

The different situations reported through the Council's Child Protection procedures have helped to inform policy changes and training. For example, a report that involved peer abuse has led to a number of workshops to increase awareness of this issue. A request had been made previously for information on incidents (without names) to be fed back to the Designated Officer to inform policy and training needs. This was previously stated not to be possible. It has now been resolved and information will be fed to the Designated Officer who can access the forms.

Belfast City Council's Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Key elements of training:

- What is abuse?
- Who abuses?
- Signs and Symptoms
- Dealing with Disclosure
- Code of Behaviour
- Belfast City Council's Policy and Reporting procedures

The training contains group exercises, including the following scenario:

A young man about 22 years old has started to come into the leisure centre on a regular basis. He starts to hang around the pool and is often seen playing with the children. Part of the play activity includes the game of tag. You ask one of the children if they know the man and she says no.

The scenario is to stimulate discussion around people who may attend centres to have access to children.

The training is currently being reviewed in line with the review of the Council's Child Protection Policy and Procedures, changes in legislation and the incorporation of vulnerable adults within the Policy. There is also recommendations for staff to undertake refresher training.

Reporting Procedures

BCC Child Protection Policy deals with incidents where a child has been potentially harmed. There are 3 reporting procedures:

1. Where a child has been potentially harmed by an external person (for example, parent, neighbour, stranger).

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2. Where a child has been potentially harmed by a member of staff.
3. Emergency procedures where a person is seen potentially harming a child.

The above procedures do not deal with incidents where there are concerns about a person and a child is not involved. In practice, staff have used the Council's procedures to report these concerns. These concerns are recorded and passed on to the local Police Station.

Costs for Implementation of Leisurewatch within Belfast City Council (the costs are approximate and there is the possibility of negotiating the costs)

The scheme costs about £1,000 per day to implement. This would potentially include the training of 2 leisure centres (20 staff) and site audits. Negotiations would have to take place for smaller sites smaller sites (Community centres, Parks). The project has the services of an Officer from the PSNI for this financial year who would be able to provide additional training free of charge that would enable 4 centres to be covered by the £1,000 daily rate.

Parks & Leisure Department

Leisure Centres:

- 5 centres x £1000 = £5,000
- 5 centres free of charge if trained during 2010)
- additional sessions = 3 x £1,000 £ 3,000
(where there are more than 20 staff per site)

Approximate total £8,000

Parks

- Training sessions 3 x £1,000 £3,000
- Site audits?

Total for first year £11,000

Development Department

Community Services

Based on site audits for 22 community and 6 play centres
Training for Supervisory staff, CDWs, CDAs and Play staff
Total for first year £7,000

Waterfront and Ulster Halls

Site audit and training

(based on training for permanent staff and 50% of temporary staff)
£2,000

Total for Development Department £9,000

Total initial costs

Parks & Leisure £11,000

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Development	£9,000
Total initial costs (approximate)	£20,000

Costs in subsequent years would be negotiated. The top band is normally £2,500. They have indicated that due to the size of Belfast City Council, the cost for annual membership would exceed this but did not give an indication. Their website states that costs can vary from £250-£350 per site.

Options

The Leisurewatch scheme is a whole package and therefore Belfast City Council would be unable to purchase specific elements.

1. Belfast City Council joins Leisurewatch incorporating the scheme within the Sections where potential offenders have greatest access to children and young people – Parks & Leisure and Development Departments (Community Services, Waterfront and Ulster Halls).

Benefits:

- Part of a nation wide scheme
- Expertise in terms of training and audit
- Mystery shopping to ensure maintenance of standards
- Newsletter with updated information
- Formal links with PSNI

If Belfast City Council is to join, it would be recommended that this be done on the basis that there is agreement regarding involvement in training and the sharing of information (as outlined previously regarding concerns).

2. A decision is made not to join Leisurewatch at this stage and for Belfast City Council to
 - a. undertake a further review of policy and procedures:
 - i. incorporating additional reporting procedures in regard to concerns of suspicious behaviour including report forms
 - ii. incorporating further elements within the training to specifically look at incidents where there is suspicious behaviour and to incorporate this within ongoing and refresher training
 - b. to develop a system for auditing buildings / sites. This could be done through an inter-departmental working group. It would involve identifying key members of staff to undertake this responsibility.
 - c. formalise links with PSNI. Current arrangements is ad hoc from station to station. More formal arrangements will depend upon the co-operation of the PSNI who have invested resources in Leisurewatch.

Implications:

- a. Review of policy and procedures

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- i. The policy and procedures have recently been reviewed and are due to go out for Council-wide consultation. The new reporting procedures could be incorporated at this stage with minimal resources.
- ii. The Child Protection training is due to be reviewed. This will include a recommendation for refresher training. As the training will be ongoing, there will be a minimal resource commitment at the review stage.

b. Audit

This would involve a resource commitment at an early stage from the respective Departments to develop a checklist to carry out the audit. This would need to be followed by having a nominated person to ensure the regular audits are carried out, the system is monitored and the checklist is updated.

c. Formalisation of links with PSNI

Although current arrangements are ad hoc, our experience has been receipt of full support and co-operation from the respective stations.

Recommendation

The Leisurewatch scheme has clear benefits and there has been increasing pressure from the Leisurewatch scheme for Belfast City Council to become a member.

There has been positive feedback from those Councils involved in the scheme regarding the training and support. With the exception of Lisburn, the Councils involved do not have an internal Child Protection trainer and are reliant on external consultants.

Belfast City Council has the internal resources and expertise to incorporate aspects of the Leisurewatch scheme without having to take on membership and the associated cost.

Although there are some benefits in joining the Leisurewatch scheme, there is a question mark over the value in the current economic climate for this additionality.

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