

Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday, 13th August, 2024

MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP

**HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Members present: Councillor Doherty (Chairperson); and
Councillors F. McAteer, I. McLaughlin and
Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of
Corporate Services;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;
Ms. C. Patterson, Policy and Programme Manager,
Inclusive Growth;
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Manager;
Ms. M. Quigley, Adaptation and Resilience Advisor;
Mr. K. Quinn, Employability and Skills Officer; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Election of Chairperson

Moved by Councillor Smyth,
Seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin and

Resolved – that Councillor Doherty be elected to serve as the
Chairperson of the Working Group until the date of the Annual Meeting of
the Council.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Copeland and
Councillor R. McLaughlin.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 4th May, 2024 were approved by the Working
Group.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Actions Update

The Working Group noted the update on the Decision and Actions Tracker.

"Right to Food" Notice of Motion – Response from Department for Education

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 At their meeting in November 2023, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee have referred the attached response from the Department for Education in relation to the Notice of Motion on ‘Right to Food’ to the SPWG for consideration.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to

- (i) consider the attached response received from the Department for Education.**
- (ii) note the continued commitment of Council to work with partners to help alleviate the impact of food poverty within the city.**

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 The Council adopted the ‘Right to Food’ Notice of Motion at their meeting in November 2023 which recognised the impact of food poverty in the city and agreed to support the Right to Food campaign and to join other cities such as Manchester and Liverpool in becoming a Right to Food city. In addition, the Council agreed to write to the Department for Education Permanent Secretary calling for the restoration of the School Holiday Food Grant Scheme and to prioritise the needs of the most disadvantaged children and young people when allocating resources.

3.2 Attached at Appendix 1 is a copy of the SP&R report and the associated response received back from the Department of Education. The correspondence states that the DoE recognises the challenges faced by many families in accessing affordable and nutritious food and recognises the role of the Department in helping to tackle food poverty in the context of the work being led by the Department for Communities to develop the Executive’s Anti-Poverty Strategy. In its response, the Department acknowledges the important support provided through the School Holiday Food Grant (SHFG) to low-income families, however, states that

with the challenging financial pressures and significant budgetary cuts it had no alternative to discontinuing the SHFG from 31 March 2023.

- 3.3 As the Council's inclusive growth strategy recognises the imperative of tackling poverty and inequality in order to create a more inclusive city where everyone has the opportunity and aspiration to succeed and fulfil their potential, the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee have referred the response from the Department for Education to the SPWG for consideration.
- 3.4 Members will be fully aware of the complex challenges facing many individuals and families experiencing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Many people are in the position of having to make hard choices around spending which is impacting on health and wellbeing and widening inequalities across the city.
- 3.5 The recently published refreshed Belfast Agenda (2024-2028) sets out a clear commitment to work with partners to tackle the deep and persistent inequalities that may hold people back and restrict their life chances, such as education, health, housing and income. Given the cross-cutting nature of inclusive growth and anti-poverty, there are specific actions Council are taking forward, in partnership, under the auspices of the Belfast Agenda. These include, for example:
- **Hardship Scheme - delivery of a £1million+ hardship programme in 2023/24 which provided assistance to a range of cohorts including children and families, vulnerable individuals and families in emergency need and to enhancing the capacity of existing and high-impact support programmes. The scheme supported 121 schools to deliver food initiatives to 21,000 children across the city; supported 23 community day care provides to deliver 16,042 hot nutritious meals to 1,187 children across the city; enabled Trussell Trust to support 4,514 people through 3 food banks and enabled Fareshare to distribute over 37 tonnes of food to their network of community food banks in the city.**
 - **Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership – Council officers continue to lead the coordination and work of this partnership, identifying and maximising opportunities to support community-based approaches to sustainable food and work towards the development of a city-wide Sustainable Food Strategy. A food access working group has been convened by Dr Sinead Furey from Ulster University under the Partnership and is currently working collaboratively with city partners to identify priorities for the next**

3 years with the goal of increasing access to healthy, nutritious and sustainable food across the city.

- 3.6 Members may be aware that the Council has sought a series of All-Party meetings with the incoming new Executive Ministers with a view to discussing the key challenges and opportunities facing the city (and wider region) and advocate on key strategic issues including the need to bring forward the Anti-Poverty Strategy and to address inequalities which exist. A date for Party Leaders to meet with the Minister for Education is to be confirmed. The Minister for Communities has declined the offer to meet and directed the Council to the Partnership Panel which has been established to provide a formal means for political and policy liaison between Executive Ministers and local government elected members on matters of mutual interest or concern.**
- 3.7 Members will also recall that the Inclusive Growth Toolkit is being piloted with both the Hardship scheme and Sustainable Food Strategy (Food Access) to practically test and improve how we can add value to the decision-making process in order to increase the inclusive growth impact of projects/programmes. Following this pilot period, the Toolkit will to be shared with community planning partners as a tool to assist organisations deliver more inclusive practices. The SPWG will be kept informed of progress and views sought following the pilot period.”**

A number of Members thanked the officers for the work which had been done to date and commended them on taking action so quickly.

During discussion, a number of Members stated that the NI Executive needed to take urgent action to address food poverty and to respond to the impact of the increasing cost-of-living crisis experienced across Northern Ireland. The Members highlighted the need for the long-awaited Anti-Poverty Strategy to be brought forward by the NI Executive.

The Working Group adopted the recommendations.

Social Value Procurement Policy - Delivery Report

Social Value Procurement Policy Delivery Reports

The Strategic Category Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the delivery of social value outcomes via open tender competitions awarded in accordance with the Council's Social Value Procurement Policy (SVPP).

He also provided an update on tenders which had been awarded by the Property and Projects Department where, due to project funding rules, social value had been considered and included in accordance with the CPD Buy Social model.

The Working Group was reminded that SVPP applied to any new applicable open tender exercises with approval dated from 1st June, 2022.

The Category Manager explained that, in order to help officers and suppliers understanding the SVPP and how to apply it to applicable tender competitions, the Commercial and Procurement Services 'CPS' team had developed:

- online guidance on interlink which took officers through key considerations in line with the SVPP. This guidance was developed and communicated to officers ahead of the 'Go Live' date in June 2022;
- a new Supplier Guidance document had been launched in September 2023 which included step by step guidance for suppliers in how to offer social value as part of their tender and how their social value offers were evaluated (new innovative approach); and
- Social value evaluation training based on the new approach developed from September 2023. That had been rolled out between October 2023 - January 2024 and was now included in CPS evaluation training.

The Working Group was advised that the Supplier Guidance would be made available on the Council's website but that officers wanted to ensure it was fully tested before doing so. He advised the Members of the two key parts to the consideration under SVPP.

In relation to the CPD Buy Social Model, he explained that it was applied where external central government funding of 50% or greater was provided for a capital/works project managed by Property and Projects. The CPD Buy Social Model was broadly similar to the Council's SVPP in terms of achieving the social value outcomes.

The Working Group was provided with the details of tenders valued over £30k which had been awarded during the reporting period.

It was reported that a Social Value Review Team had been established to review how the SVPP was being implemented and any lessons learned that needed to be applied following the conclusion of tender competitions. The Team was currently reviewing:

1. trends in the use of Reserved Contracts and any further guidance required for officers on when those should be used;
2. trends in the selection of Social Value Organisational Behaviours by officers when using the Social Value Toolkit and any further guidance which would be required for officers on when those should be applied;
3. the quality of social value offers by suppliers (the evaluated submissions) and if further guidance was required in terms of how those are evaluated by officers. In addition, any further guidance required for suppliers to improve their understanding the Council's expectations in line with the Belfast Agenda aims and associated strategies.

In response to a Member's query, the Strategic Category Manager advised the Working Group that social value had been overlooked in two tenders in the reporting period and that training to raise awareness with the relevant officers had since taken place to prevent it from happening again.

During discussion a Member also raised that the Belfast Stories project should seek to benefit the working class communities who lived closest to it. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that officers were cognisant of that, and she reassured the Members that there was an entire programme regarding inclusion opportunities which were planned as part of the project which was discussed at the Members' Belfast Stories Working Group. She advised the Working Group that officers would seek to make those plans more visible to all Members.

Noted.

Belfast Business Promise (verbal update)

The Employability and Skills Officer provided the Working Group with an update on the Belfast Business Promise. He advised the Members that Belfast City Airport and the West Belfast Partnership had recently signed up as supporters, with a total of 49 organisations now on board.

He provided an overview of the next steps, which included quarterly meetings of the Technical Panel scheduled for 2024/25, including a meeting in September. He outlined that further development of the website was planned to enhance visibility and to enable resources to be shared across the Belfast Business Promise Network. The Working Group was provided with an update on the intention to bring a report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in August, outlining proposals to bring forward a JAM Card Friendly bursary scheme for up to 40 organisations (Micro, small businesses and VCSE) in 2024/25.

Noted.

Maximising Corporate Social Responsibility – proposed approach (verbal report)

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty provided the Working Group with an update on exploratory work underway to consider how the Council could engage with key business partners to identify opportunities to align corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments to support the delivery of City priorities. He explained that the approach would build on the interest and support that the Belfast Business Promise had generated as well as the implementation of the social value procurement policy. He provided some examples to the Working Group of initiatives that CSR could support.

A number of Members suggested that a Workshop could be held on the topic to help inform any emerging approach.

In response to a Member's query, the Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty agreed to check whether an officer had been employed regarding alleyway regeneration in the City.

Noted.

Chairperson