

SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP

Monday 11th November, 2024

MEETING OF SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP HELD REMOTELY AND IN THE CONOR ROOM

Members present: Councillor Duffy (Chairperson); and
Councillors Abernethy, I. McLaughlin and Smith.

External Members: Ms. B. Arthurs, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Mr. P. Anderson, Department for Communities;
Mr. M. Briggs, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Mr. J. Donnelly, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Ms. L. Euler, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
Mr. L. Gunn, Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
Ms. J. Irwin, Community Relations Council;
Dr. W. Naeem, Interfaith Forum;
Mr. G. Walker, Department for Communities; and
Ms. A. M. White, British Red Cross.

In attendance: Mr. G. McCartney, Good Relations Manager;
Ms. D. McKinney, PEACE Programme Manager;
Mr. D. Robinson, Acting Senior Good Relations Officer;
Ms. L. Dolan, Good Relations Officer; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Welcome

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. Michael Briggs to his first meeting in his capacity as a representative of the Community and Voluntary Sector.

Apology

An apology was reported on behalf of Father Martin Magill.

Ms. Anna Lo

The Partnership agreed that a letter of condolence be forwarded on its behalf to the family of the late Anna Lo.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 7th October were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

In respect of item 7, viz., PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan, Independent Members Mr. Donnelly, Mr. Briggs and Ms. Arthurs all declared interests in this matter since they were associated with organisations which had applied for funding for community empowerment projects under the Council's PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Since the report did not become subject of discussion, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

Presentations

Presentation - Active Communities Network (ACN)

Mr. J. Donnelly (Partnership Member and joint Chief Executive of ACN Belfast) and Ms. V. Moore (Project Manager with ACN Belfast) provided an overview of the work of the Active Communities Network. It was explained that the organisation supported young people from marginalised and socially excluded communities to address a range of issues, such as community cohesion, citizenship, crime and anti-social behaviour. Such work was delivered through grass roots projects, progression pathways, research and evaluation.

The Partnership was informed that ACN was primarily a youth and community development organisation, which utilised positive activities to enable change in young people and communities which had suffered from disadvantage. One of the key programmes delivered was tailored specifically to help empower women by focussing on three key themes, this is, violence, safety and relationships. That programme was one of four key initiatives which were delivered on both an individual and community basis under the themes of tackling inequality, creating opportunities and inspiring change.

The representatives of the Active Communities Network answered several questions which had been posed by Members and the Partnership agreed to note the information which had been provided.

Presentation - Victims Support Northern Ireland re: Anti-Hate Crime Campaign

Mr. Michael Avila, Hate Crime Project Manager with Victim Support NI, was welcomed to the meeting, and he delivered a presentation in respect of the above-mentioned matter. He explained that Victim Support was a charity that supported victims of hate crime and offered a free and confidential service. He gave an overview of the various types of crimes and how Victim Support had, since 2008, been contracted by the Department of Justice and the PSNI to deliver an advocacy service for the victims of such crimes. He outlined how support was provided through increasing the confidence of individuals to report crimes and to access the criminal justice system. In addition, Victim Support provided investigative support and signposted individuals to relevant support agencies.

Mr. Avila answered several questions which had been posed by Members and the Partnership agreed to note the information which had been provided.

Discussion then ensued regarding the use of language in discussing the recent race attacks and the perceived role of paramilitaries in relation thereto. The point was made that the racial attacks were, regardless of origin, acts of criminality and it was essential that the narrative in this regard be examined and challenged. It was suggested that the matter could be given further consideration in due course.

Noted.

Membership Update

Further to the Partnership's meeting of 7th October, when it had been agreed, given the level of race-related violence experienced across Belfast during the summer period, that it would be beneficial if a member of the Mears Group be co-opted onto the Partnership, the Good Relations Manager advised that he had sought the advice of the City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services in this regard.

The Partnership was informed that the advice received had indicated that it would be appropriate if a representative of the Mears Group would attend meetings on a quarterly or ad hoc basis to provide updates as necessary.

Arising from discussion, it was agreed that officers would liaise further with representatives of the Mears Group in respect of a series of questions which had been raised by Members at the meeting on 8th October.

Noted.

Community Recovery Fund

The Partnership considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23rd October it was agreed that Officers would develop an Action Plan for the Community Recovery Fund under four main themes: -

- **Theme 1 Good Relations Inclusion and Integration**
- **Theme 2 Wider University and Lower Ormeau**
- **Theme 3 Area Based Initiatives and Programmes**
- **Theme 4 Resource Recoupment**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 For members to agree the Action Plan for the Community Recovery Fund.

3.0 Main Report

The CRF is allocative and offers a flat rate of £600,000 to each eligible local authority, to be spent before the end of the Financial Year 2024-25.

Expenditure is eligible under this scheme if it is in response to the violent disorder that took place between July and August 2024 and is on, or in connection with:

- a. Immediate action to safeguard life or property.
- b. To prevent suffering or severe inconvenience.
- c. To reduce the risk of further disorder in the future.
- d. To rebuild social trust and promote cohesion between communities.

3.2 The Fund has deliberately sought to provide local areas with flexibility to design a package that responds to their circumstances. The following are examples of expenditure which may be covered by the grant, though this list is not exhaustive.

3.3 Community and voluntary activity:

- Projects which build connections between communities. For example, by bringing people together from different groups, including those of different faiths, around a shared goal/objective, such as through volunteering, befriending or mentoring schemes.
- Events, workshops, or campaign activities to educate on what constitutes a hate crime and supporting victims of hate crime.
- Projects in schools and universities which help address tensions/unrests, linked to hatred and intolerance, for example guidance for teachers on how to de-escalate tensions and respond neutrally to concerns.
- Initiatives which help counter or strengthen resilience to mis/disinformation and prevent false and harmful narratives spreading. For example, social media focused 'critical thinking' lessons in school.
- Temporarily increasing safety patrols.
- Measures to prevent anti-social behavior, crime and reduce reoffending including youth diversionary activities.
- Destination marketing and funding for the development and promotion of campaigns which encourage people to visit the local area.
- Campaigns to encourage local pride and to bring people back into the high streets.

- Campaigns to promote community cohesion and educate on hate crime.

3.4 Associated costs with the above activity:

- Legal, clerical and other charges incurred on any of the above work.
- Additional temporary employees or contractors, to work on the emergency or replace permanent employees diverted from normal work.
- Special overtime for employees, either during the emergency for overtime worked on the emergency itself, or afterwards to catch up on work from which they were diverted by the incident.

3.5 The above programmes will be additional to the departments core work, and an Action Plan for the said has to be agreed, with delivery by the 31st March 2025, that said this is a considerable investment for Belfast City. Officers have been in discussions with the relevant department in Westminster and providing programmes are committed Council may have the ability to deliver into the Financial Year 25/26.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.6 All the budget detailed within the report is at 100%, the biggest implication is that of resource to design, implement, manage and monitor the programmes, however Council will be able to recoup this under Theme 4.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

3.7 All the above aligns with Council’s Good Relations Strategic Framework, which seeks to improve Good Relations between people from different political, religious, and racial backgrounds.”

The Partnership adopted the Action Plan as presented in respect the Community Recovery Fund.

**The Executive Office - Dispersal Programme and
Refugee Integration Programme**

The Partnership considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Issues

11 To provide members with an update on the Asylum Dispersal Fund and Refugee Integration Fund

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 Members are reminded that In March 2023, The Executive Office (TEO) awarded Council £406,228 of Asylum Dispersal Funding to support projects for people that have sought asylum.

3.2 Following, the final award of funding to five further projects in June, this funding has now all been committed. In total 11 projects were supported through the fund.

3.3 In addition to the Asylum Dispersal Funding, in June 2024, TEO wrote to Belfast City Council, offering the Council £128,700 of Refugee Integration Funding, to support services to people that have been granted Refugee Status in Belfast.

3.4 Due to the requirement for the money to be spent this financial year, the Council developed an Open Call for organisations to submit proposals for small-scale projects that support the integration and inclusion of Refugees.

3.5 Following the closure of the call on the 16th October, Officers assessed the applications with all 15 projects being awarded funding.

3.6 The table below details the organisations funded.

Organisation Name	Funding award	Short Project Description
African and Caribbean Support Organisation NI	£10,945	This project will deliver physical and mental well-being sessions, for people who have been granted Refugee Status, it will also include a programme to provide volunteering opportunities as well as intercultural initiatives to support wider relationship building.

Artsekta	£7,000	This project will involve a series of creative classes to encourage social activity and new friendships. It will also involve a 14-week English language programme as well as educational visits to help support integration and inclusion.
Ashton Community Trust	£10,180	This project is for a 10-week programme of Integration initiatives, to build relations with people that have been granted Refugee Status in North Belfast and to encourage contact and relations with wider communities.
Counselling All Nations Services (CANS)	£2,650	This project will provide workshops on strategies to deal with the mental health related impacts for people that have went through the Refugee journey.
Diverse Youth N.I.	£11,600	This project is for a five-month initiative aimed at fostering integration and inclusion for refugee youth in Belfast. Through cultural-exchange workshops, conflict resolution training, and creative projects, the program will build positive relationships between refugee and local youth.
Diocese of Down and Dromore – Church of Ireland Suitcase Project	£10,340	This project will provide a Learning Hub focused on supporting Refugee families in East Belfast. The initiative will provide a homework club, English language classes, befriending opportunities and drop in facility for families and individuals.
East Belfast Community Development Association	£3,000	This project is focused on upskilling youth leaders and empowering them to challenge negative stereotypes that can lead to hate crimes and help to create a more welcoming community for newcomers.

<p>Ethnic Minority Sports Organisation N.I</p>	<p>£6,100</p>	<p>This Project is providing a weekly outlet for people, from the Refugee as well as host community, to meet by providing a pop in sporting activity.</p>
<p>Fitzroy Presbyterian Church</p>	<p>£9,918</p>	<p>This project will provide opportunities for Refugees to visit various spaces in Belfast enabling them to feel safe travelling around the city. It will also include an eight-week English conversational course for women.</p>
<p>GEMS N.I</p>	<p>£10,670</p>	<p>This project will deliver tailored support to help refugees integrate into Belfast's job market and build sustainable careers. The project focuses on pairing refugees with experienced professionals from various industries, who will be trained to provide personalised, one-to-one mentoring. This mentoring will guide participants through critical aspects of employability, including job search strategies, CV development, interview preparation, and navigating workplace culture in Belfast/Northern Ireland.</p>
<p>Horn of Africa</p>	<p>£12,320</p>	<p>This project will provide a befriending programme, developing community navigators to support the orientation and inclusion of Refugee Women.</p>
<p>International Organization for Migration</p>	<p>£11,500</p>	<p>This project will deliver a skills and reintegration programme to enhance the employability, skills profile and volunteering prospects of refugees and to improve their integration into the labour market in a manner which fosters their autonomy and human dignity.</p>

JoinHer Network		This project aim is to create strong connections between people seeking refuge and host communities, reduce social tensions, and empower people seeking refuge to participate fully in the life of Belfast. It will involve awareness raising of the NI cultural context for people seeking refuge, promoting civic participation and volunteering. It will invoice develop an anti-discrimination awareness campaign and organise a community inclusion and storytelling event.
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group	£4,460	This project will provide ongoing good relations activities and joint programmes to build trust between the refugee and wider communities.
Street Soccer	£8,250	This project will promote integration and inclusion through 3 elements: a Sports Café, English language classes and a training academy. The Sport Café will provide an initial welcoming space as a point of contact to meet other people and access signposting advice. It will also upskill refugees by providing language classes, and opportunities to participate in a sporting academy.
Total	£128,933	

3.7 Financial & Resource Implications

The proposals in this report are 100% funded through Home Office Dispersal Funding, and Refugee Integration Funding via the Executive Office, the main resource is Officer time around the management and governance of the funds.

3.8 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Implications

These proposals have strong good relations outcomes and complement the work being delivered through the Council's Good Relations Action Plan and the Belfast Agenda."

In response to a Member's question regarding the city-wide impact of the funding, it was indicated that, whilst there had been a positive response to the call for funding, certain areas had remained under-represented, but that it was anticipated that a funding would have an overall positive and beneficial impact. Officers pointed out also that they would be content to liaise with organisations from under-represented areas to discuss future opportunities related to the work.

A Member suggested that there remained a reluctance within certain areas to apply for funding since several factors which had contributed to the summer unrest remained unresolved. It was highlighted that the Council's Good Relations Grant Scheme was currently accepting applications and officers would be prepared to provide advice and guidance to organisations in this regard.

In response to a further question from an Independent Member regarding the Asylum Dispersal Fund, it was reported that confirmation had as yet to be provided from The Executive Office concerning the Fund. However, officers undertook to keep Members updated in this matter.

The Partnership noted the information which had been provided.

Peace IV - Secretariat Update

The Partnership considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

To provide the Shared City Partnership (SCP) with a progress update in respect of the reimbursement and closure of the PEACE IV Local Action Plan.

2.0 Recommendations

The Partnership is requested to note the contents of the report and recommend to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee that they also note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Claims Reimbursement

As members are aware, the Council has been managing a substantial and long-term debt associated with PEACE IV Local Action Plan claims reimbursement.

As reported in September 2024, this issue was further highlighted with the SEUPB Director. Over recent weeks SEUPB has been progressing the verification and reimbursement of outstanding claims.

3.2 Reimbursement of the CYP Claim 34.1 of £110,701 has been received, with minor financial corrections of £667 applied,

these costs will be offset by the office and administration payment.

Period 34 and 35 claims for the SSS theme, valued at £1,393,559 have proceeded to the first level control stage within SEUPB, although reimbursement has not yet progressed.

3.3 The following claims have yet to be progressed.

		BCC BPR Closure	£215,968.46
Claim 34.2	1 Feb 23 to 31 Mar 23	BCC CYP Closure	£121,527.16
Claim 36	1 Aug 23 to 30 Sept 23	BCC SSS Closure	£1,088,358.60
	TOTAL OUTSTANDING P34-36		£1,425,854.22

Officers will continue monitor outstanding claims and update members accordingly.

3.4 Financial and Resource Implications

PEACE IV programme expenditure totals £12.9m, with claims of approximately £10m reimbursed to date.

3.5 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

The draft plan has been equality screened and discussed at the Equality Consultative Forum on 13 May 2015. The Equality Consultative Forum was further consulted on 18 November 2020.”

The Partnership noted the contents of the report and agreed that that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 22nd November, be requested to note the report also.

PEACEPLUS - Council Local Action Plan – Update

The Partnership considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Shared City Partnership members with an update on the mobilisation of PEACEPLUS 1.1. Co-designed Belfast Local Community Peace Action Plan (LCAP).

2.0 Recommendations

Members note the contents of the report and recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to also note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Mobilisation of the PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan is proceeding at pace with key actions and progress detailed below.

3.2 SEUPB Approval / Letter of Offer

As previously reported (7 October 2024), a request was submitted to SEUPB for the Letter of Offer (LoO) to be issued in £ sterling, in line with the PEACEPLUS Programme Manual. However this request was declined, and a further rationale outlining key points which were beyond Council's control (as below) was also submitted and declined by SEUPB:

- 1. Delays in approval by SEUPB has resulted in an increased risk to exchange rate losses for Council, which was beyond our control'**
- 2. Council has been incurring project costs since January 2024 however the SEUPB JeMS system has not been available to Council to claim costs;**
- 3. The Council's approval letter states that the Controller arrangements must be in place before any claims are submitted. As SEUPB has not yet procured a controller framework this will create an initial backlog of claims;**
- 4. During the development phase of the Local Community Action Plan no advice or guidance was provided on currency issues or exchange rate fluctuations.**

Given the significant risk of exchange rate fluctuations and the delays in reimbursement to Council, formal correspondence is being issued to SEUPB's Chief Executive requesting they reconsider this decision.

Officers are also liaising with Council's Finance and Audit departments to discuss approaches that may help mitigate the risk to Council.

Members are requested to note that agreement on the Letter of Offer currency is delaying the issue of the Letter of Offer.

3.3 Mobilisation and Implementation

Public procurement of the PEACEPLUS projects is progressing as outlined in the procurement timeframe provided at the August SCP meeting.

Four public tender calls have been opened for TPC3 Youth Empowerment, TPC1 Community Empowerment, CDD5 Multiculturalism to Interculturalism and TPC5 Employability Language Up projects. Evaluations for the Youth Empowerment and Community Empowerment tender submissions are now proceeding. Contract awards are anticipated to commence in December 2024; however, members should note they will be progressed once the formal Letter of Offer is received and accepted.

Four further tender calls will open over the coming weeks for TPC6 Arts across the Genres, TPC4 Sports for Peace, TPC2 Health & Wellbeing and CDD1 Interfaith and Belief.

Pre-market engagement (PME) sessions are scheduled for

- CCD2 Community Connections on 5 November 2024, 10:00am – 12:00pm
- CCD4 Ex Politically Motivated Prisoner on 13 November 2024 10:00am – 12:00pm

It is anticipated that all contract awards should be in place by February 2025 with end dates of December 2027.

3.4 Staff Recruitment

Appointments for the Project Officer (PO) and Project Support Assistant (PSA) are progressing with staff due in post by December 2024. The recruitment of the Support Officers has also commenced.

3.5 Financial and Resource Implications

All expenditure associated with the PEACEPLUS LCAP will be eligible from this date and will be claimed retrospectively from SEUPB.

3.6 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

Plan has been submitted for equality and good relations screening as well as rural needs assessment.”

The Partnership noted the contents of the report and agreed that that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 22nd November, be requested to note the report also.

Chairperson