

SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP

Monday 9th December, 2024

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

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

External Members: Ms. B. Arthurs, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Mr. L. Euler, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
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;
Mr. M. McBride, Education Authority;
Father M. Magill, Faith Representative;
Ms. T. Mimna, The Executive Office; and
Mr. G. Walker, Department for Communities.

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

Apology

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland and Independent Member Ms. A. M. White.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 22nd November, subject to an amendment to reflect that the Chairperson had declared an interest in the item under the heading 'PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan – Update'. It was reported also that the Committee had amended the decision under the heading 'Community Recovery Fund', to reflect that additional data and information would be referred to that Committee in order to agree the geographical areas to be included in the development of the mini-area plans.

Declarations of Interest

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

Presentation

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. E. Henry, Creative and Strategic Lead of the Belfast Stories project, together with Ms. J. Smith, representing the Council's external consultants in the project.

Ms. Henry provided the Partnership with an overview of the aims and objectives of the Belfast Stories project. She reported that it was anticipated that the development would showcase Belfast, its people and stories, together with encouraging visitors to explore the various communities of the city.

The Partnership was advised that it was envisaged that the following benefits would be realised through the project under the following headings:

1. Better together – creating a quality public space to enjoy and explore, where visitors would appreciate Belfast's heritage and the sense of community;
2. Welcoming to all - the new visitor attraction would help people orientate themselves and understand Belfast and to see and experience the city's reputation as a visitor destination; and
3. Inspiring creativity - a creative hub to meet, learn and collaborate enabling people of all ages and backgrounds to become involved in one of the fastest developing sectors of the local economy.

The Partnership was provided with an overview of the draft plans for the development, which would include public spaces, visitor experiences, a creative hub, food stories and administration areas. Ms. Henry advised that a second public consultation had been launched on 19th November. The purpose of that consultation would be to promote the project, raise awareness and oversee the completion of an equality impact assessment.

Both Ms. Henry and Ms. Smith answered questions in respect of the development and the Chairperson, on behalf of the Partnership, thanked the deputation for the information which they had provided.

Good Relations Action Plan 2025/2026

The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer reminded the Partnership that, each year, The Executive Office (TEO) invited councils to submit a Good Relations Action Plan for its consideration. He advised that each Action Plan was assessed, and, if and when approved, councils would be eligible to recoup 75% of the costs associated with its

delivery. He reported that each Action Plan was drafted in accordance with the findings of an audit, which had been developed for the three-year period which had commenced in 2023/24.

Accordingly, the Partnership considered the draft Action Plan for 2025/26, and officers outlined a range of details contained therein and gave an overview of the various programmes anticipated for 2025/26.

The Partnership noted the contents of the Action Plan and recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 13th December, be requested to agree to its submission to TEO for delivery in 2025/26.

The Executive Office – Additional Funding

Arising from discussion, the Good Relations Manager reported that TEO had, on 2nd December, corresponded with the Good Relations Unit to advise that additional in-year funding had been identified within 2024/25 budgets. Accordingly, TEO had requested that expressions of interest be submitted by the afternoon of 3rd December.

The Partnership was advised that the Good Relations Manager had reviewed the Action Plan for 2024/25 and had submitted a bid for additional funding towards BCC2, that being, under the theme of Cultural Expressions. In addition, under BCC3, that being the provision of beacons, which was also under the theme of Cultural Expressions, it was reported a bid had been submitted to address an overspend incurred within that category. Further bids had been submitted for additional funding to support the development of a three-year strategy for the Good Relations Action Plan, as well funding to offset staff costs incurred in the 'East Meets West' events which had taken place as part of Good Relations Week.

The Partnership endorsed the course of action undertaken by the Good Relations Manager and it was noted that further detail in this regard would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 13th December.

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 to request that members approve the approach and recommend to SP&R

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to approve the proposals detailed in the report which have been forward in draft to TEO in relation to the Asylum Dispersal Fund and recommend to the S P&R committee to agree the content and recommendation detailed in this report.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 On 11 November 2024, TEO wrote to the Council, asking for funding proposals under the Full Dispersal Funding up to the value of £302,759. This quantum, allocated for Belfast, has been worked out through a baseline funding amount of £15k plus £287,759 based on the percentage of people seeking asylum in the council area. There was an eleven-day turnaround for submissions to be received by TEO.

3.2 Submissions must be focused on work supporting asylum seekers.

3.3 Table 1 below is a list of proposals that have been submitted to TEO for consideration

Table 1: Overview of project proposals and costs

Proposal	Procurement method	Costs
Proposal 1: Organisational Development and Capacity Support Programme	Proposal to be procured.	£100,000
Proposal 2: Place Based Community Asylum Support Link Advisers	Proposal to be procured	£100,000
Proposal 3: Integration and inclusion outreach	Open Call to support up to 8 community integration projects	£95,000
Administration support		£7,759
		Total: 302,759

3.4 Summary of proposals

Proposal 1

‘Organisational Development and Capacity Support Programme’

Background

As asylum seekers are now accommodated in new geographical areas of Belfast, that have not had a history of accommodating people seeking asylum, an increased number of community and voluntary organisations are finding a change in the communities now accessing their services. Many of these community support organisations have reported that they do not have the specialised knowledge to provide advice and case work support for asylum seekers but wish to provide services for all living in the locality.

The service

This proposal aims to invest in the organisational capacity of organisations to ensure that people seeking asylum can access, accurate and quality advice across Belfast.

The purpose of the programme is to build the capacity of Belfast-based voluntary & community sector organisations to support the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees within their communities.

The proposal aims to develop the capacity of organisations currently providing advice to asylum seekers or organisations that are new to this area of provision. It will do this through the provision of a training programme, supported by the development of a Knowledge and Learning Network to strengthen the capacity of organisations to provide quality advice to people in the asylum process.

Proposal 2

'Community place-based asylum support link advisers'

Background

Over the past number of years, Belfast has witnessed an increase in the number of people that have sought asylum in the city. Many of these new communities find it hard to navigate services when they arrive in the city and are accommodated in local communities. In addition, the shifting backdrop of national policy and changes in immigration law have led to the need for more specialised advice and support responses.

Currently, the demand for free, independent and specialised advice is far outstripping supply within the city. It is well documented that early specialised advice is crucial if asylum seekers are to navigate life in Belfast; understand their rights and entitlements, access essential services and feel integrated

and included as well as developing their own autonomy and independence.

The purpose of this proposal is to increase the spread of specialised advisors that can provide advice and case work support to asylum seekers in their community settings.

This proposal, led by an organisation / consortium with specialised knowledge of providing asylum advice and case work support, will support the development of a minimum of 2 Community Outreach Advisors who will provide case work support and advice for asylum seekers in community settings.

The service

The project will be led by an organisation or consortium that has the capacity and knowledge of providing case work support to asylum seekers, they will be expected to partner with community organisations in areas where asylum seekers have not been traditionally accommodated.

The project must provide community case work they must work with community organisations enabling the provision of advice and support to be delivered in community settings. The methodology of delivery could be by supporting Family Hubs or providing clinics in community group settings.

Proposal 3

'Supporting localised integration, inclusion and contact projects'

Background

Given the increasing spread of people that have sought asylum across Belfast, this proposal provides organisations and community groups with the opportunity to develop small scale projects to support the localised integration and inclusion of people that have sought asylum and to link them with local communities.

The Service

Through an open call, organisations will be invited to submit proposals up to £10,000, that support the integration and inclusion of people that have sought asylum. The proposal will support projects that: engage host communities and people who have sought asylum, projects that can support awareness raising in host communities of the reality of asylum related matters, projects that can foster contact and connections with host communities to improve the welcome that people who

have sought asylum receive, projects that encourage and support groups to involve people who have sought asylum in the life of their communities through participation in local activities, networks and organisations, including voluntary work, projects that are delivered in areas where, to date, there has been limited infrastructure / funding for interventions supporting the inclusion of people seeking asylum.

Proposal 4

Administration Costs

The final proposal covers a small cost, from Belfast City Council, relating to the administration of the proposal

Financial & Resource Implications

The proposals in this report are 100% funded through Full Dispersal Funding via the Executive Office, the main resource is a significant amount of Officer time around the management and governance of the funds as well as time spent procuring projects.

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."

The Good Relations Officer outlined the principal aspects of the report and the three proposals contained therein. She clarified that the programme applied specifically to asylum seekers who had not, as yet, been designated refugee status.

A Member suggested that further information would be welcome in respect of three proposals considered. He referred in particular to Proposal 3, that being, 'Integration and Inclusion Outreach' and pointed out that there could be a perception that the areas where the worst of the unrest had occurred during the summer would not benefit to the extent that would have been anticipated under the terms of the fund.

The Partnership approved the proposals within the report which, it was noted, had been submitted in draft format to The Executive Office for consideration under the Asylum Dispersal Fund. The Partnership agreed also that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 13th December, be requested to endorse the recommendation within the report.

Peace IV - Secretariat Update

The Partnership considered a report which provided an overview in the above-mentioned matter. The Programme Manager reported that Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) was progressing with the verification of the three outstanding claims, which were

valued at £1.4m. She added that officers continued to monitor outstanding claims and would update the Partnership accordingly.

The Partnership was advised further that SEUPB had selected the Council's PEACE IV Action Plan for an Article 27 Audit for the Third Semester of 2023/24. The Programme Manager added that the audit would be conducted by the Audit Authority (AA) and further detail on the extent of the audit, including the sample and process, would be provided in due course.

The Partnership noted the contents of the report and agreed that that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 13th December, 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 that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Mobilisation

Mobilisation of the revenue projects within the PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan is continuing with progress and key actions outlined below.

3.2 SEUPB Approval / Letter of Offer

The Chief Executive contacted SEUPB's Chief Executive to reaffirm the request for the PEACEPLUS Local Acton Plan Letter of Offer (LoO) in £Sterling. SEUPB has advised that the issue of a £Sterling LoO is only by exception, Officers are still trying to finalise a position in terms of this with SEUPB.

Members are requested to note if the LoO is issued in Euro, exchange rate fluctuations and the delays in claims reimbursement by SEUPB may result in significant financial risk to Council. Officers are currently liaising with Finance to consider potential mitigations to manage this risk.

3.2 Procurement and Pre Market Engagement

All pre-market engagement sessions for projects under the Thriving and Peaceful Communities and Celebrating Cultures and Diversity themes have now been completed.

Tender evaluations are progressing the Youth Empowerment, Community Empowerment and Language Up projects. It is envisaged that contract awards will be progressed over the coming weeks.

As reported in October 2024, public procurement calls are open, via e-Sourcing and OJEU, for several projects, and responses to clarifications are progressing.

Tender calls for the CCD4 Community Empowerment for Ex Politically Motivated Prisoners and CCD3 will be opened by early December 2024.

3.4 Mobilisation of Community Regeneration and Transformation

Planning for the mobilisation of projects within the Community Regeneration and Transformation (CRT) theme is underway

Critical to the mobilisation of the CRT infrastructure and works elements is the allocation by SEUPB of a representative from Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD), who will provide advice on the procurement for all capital works. Once the formal LoO is signed and returned, SEUPB will appoint the representative.

A further report on the mobilisation timeframe and animation strategy will be presented to members at a future meeting.

Members are requested to note that following the recent announcement by SEUPB on Investment Area 1.4 projects, the Annadale application by local community groups was not successful. Given the close alignment of the 1.4 project with the Council's CRT2 Annadale Open Space, further consideration of the scope of the project may be necessary. Internal discussions are currently progressing and with proposed options to be considered by the Programme Board.

3.5 Staff Recruitment

Two new PEACEPLUS staff have been appointed, Ciaran Duffy as Project Officer and Laura Magill as Project Support Assistant. The recruitment of the three Project Support Officers is progressing and once appointed, only one post remains to be recruited.

3.6 Financial & Resource Implications

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

3.7 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

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

In response to a Member's query regarding information reported in respect of the timeline for the consideration of tenders under the Action Plan, the Programme Manager undertook to examine how such information could be circulated to stakeholders through the PEACEPLUS contact database.

The Partnership noted the contents of the report and agreed that that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting 13th December, be requested to note the contents of the report also.

Chairperson