

Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday, 13th May, 2025

MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP

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

- Members present:** Councillor Doherty (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors F. McAteer, I. McLaughlin and R. McLaughlin.
- In attendance:** Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director
of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic
Services;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Ms. N. Bohill, Head of Commercial and Procurement
Services;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;
Ms. C. Hutchinson, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer;
Ms. C. Christy, HR Manager (Development);
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Manager;
Ms. C. Patterson, Policy and Programme Manager,
Inclusive Growth;
Ms. M. Robinson, Belfast Business Coordinator;
Ms. K. Murtagh, Enterprise and Business Growth Officer;
Mr. K. Quinn, Employability and Skills Officer; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Smyth.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th February, 2025 were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Actions Update

The Working Group noted the Decision and Action Tracker.

Social Value Procurement Policy (SVPP)

SVPP - Review

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

To provide Members with an update on proposed amendments to the current Social Value Procurement Policy ‘SVPP’ and ask Members to approve and/or provide further feedback on the proposed approach i.e. publish a new Sustainable Procurement Policy.

2.0 Background

The Council has two procurement policies in place:

1. [Social Value Procurement Policy](#) - this external facing policy, introduced in June 2022, outlines the Council’s commitment and strategic approach to embedding social value into its procurement processes, supported by a two-step toolkit and officer training. It sets the expectations for suppliers and stakeholders in supporting the Council’s ambitions around inclusive growth and sustainability
2. [Procurement Policy](#) - this internal policy (currently being updated in line with the Procurement Act 2023) sets out the standards of behaviour, actions, and procedures expected of Officers when procuring goods, services, and works for the Council. It also includes defined requirements around sustainable and ethical procurement practices, ensuring that these principles are embedded in day-to-day procurement activity. It incorporates:
 - Sustainability aims aligned with the Belfast Agenda and Inclusive Growth Strategy
 - Ethical procurement expectations for both officers and suppliers, underpinned by the Council’s Code of Conduct
 - Compliance with legislative requirements (e.g. Modern Slavery Act, Fair Employment)
 - Guidance on local supplier inclusion for low-value quotations
 - Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply ‘CIPS’ Ethics Kite Mark accreditation and annual training for officers

Together, these policies ensure procurement activity reflects the Council's values of fairness, transparency, inclusion, and environmental responsibility.

Since these policies have been implemented, the Council has committed to a number of other strategies and action plans which will require extending the scope/ influence of the Council's procurement policies. These include:-

1. Climate Action Plan (and Corporate Plan) which sets out a number of procurement actions including:
 - Develop a sustainable/ low carbon procurement policy and supplier guidance documents to support a transition to an inclusive, net zero
 - and resilient future
 - Through sustainable procurement, aim to use local suppliers to the Council to reduce miles travelled within the confines of procurement legislation and Local Govt Act restrictions
 - Scope out a strategy to increase renewable and low-carbon energy use through corporate power purchase agreements
2. Single Use Plastics 'SUP' Policy (draft/ in development) which includes a number of procurement related actions to reduce the use of SUP in the Council's supply chains.
3. Sustainable Food Policy (draft/ in development) which includes a number of procurement related actions about how we procure food in a sustainable way.
4. Notice of Motion at Feb 25 SP&R and update paper at March 25 SP&R regarding developing a new ethical procurement policy
5. Race Equality Action Plan – to be reviewed when available

At April's S,P&R, members approved a review of the Social Value Policy to include wider ethical procurement considerations. As per the paper approved by members, this review would ensure an aligned 'sustainable procurement policy' is put in place setting out clear expectations of standards for suppliers regarding ethical, social value and environmental/low carbon considerations, having regard to the international guidance set out in this report, and how this might be factored into tender evaluations.

3.0 Sustainable Procurement

The term 'Sustainable Procurement' is widely accepted across organisations in the public and private sector to mean the

integration of ethical, social, economic and environmental criteria into an organisation's procurement processes.

Some examples include:

[Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply](#) defines it as *'Sustainable procurement supports the sustainability goals of the organisation and optimises the environmental, social, and economic impacts over the life cycle of the product or service.'*

Sustainable Procurement Task Force defined it as *'a process whereby organisations meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole life basis in terms of generating benefits not only to the organisation, but also to society and the economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment.'*

[The International Organisation of Standardisation \(ISO\)](#) (ISO 20400 sustainable procurement accreditation) defines sustainable procurement/ development as *'integrating the goals of a high quality of life, health and prosperity with social justice and maintaining the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity. These social, economic and environmental goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Sustainable development can be treated as a way of expressing the broader expectations of society as a whole.'*

A recent benchmarking exercise conducted by CPS when considering a new sustainable/ low carbon procurement policy, found that across the UK and Ireland 'sustainable procurement' is used as an overarching term that includes ethical, social, economic and, environmental/ low carbon considerations.

Some examples include:

- [The City of Edinburgh Council](#) - Sustainable Procurement Policy
- [Cambridge County Council](#) – Sustainable Procurement Strategy

In order to address current open actions as described in section 2, it is an opportune time to develop one externally facing procurement policy, positioned as a Sustainable Procurement Policy.

The most effective way to achieve this is to update/develop our SVPP and any associated toolkits and guidance.

3.0 Potential development/improvements of the current SVPP for the new Sustainable Procurement Policy

At this stage the following areas have been considered as key development/improvements areas:

Ethical Procurement

- Expand further on the visibility and scrutiny of our supplier's supply chains and associated business operations to ensure supply chain practices adhere to ethical standards. These standards typically include labour rights, environmental sustainability, fair trade practices, and human rights. This might include supply chain audits/mapping, associated reporting and application of contract remedies for any found unethical practices e.g. termination.

Social Value

- Build on the good work done to date with the SVPP but refine certain areas based on lessons learned to date e.g. short duration projects and review initiatives, points and weightings to ensure these are fit for purpose

Align the current social value initiatives, associated scoring and evaluation with developments in ethical and environmental/ low carbon procurement

Environmental/ Low Carbon

- Set out expectations from our suppliers on Scope 3 emission data reporting and how the Council will use this data
- Suppliers to publish and report progress on carbon reduction plans
- Develop a toolkit for Officers to use to improve consistency when including low carbon standards in specifications when procuring goods, services and works to help lower the Council's carbon footprint. This would include procurement related actions under SUP policy and Sustainable Food policy.

Current supplier guidance document and toolkit for Officers would be updated to incorporate these requirements.

All updates/additions will also be reviewed in line relevant legislation to ensure compliance i.e. Local Govt Act and Procurement Act.

4.0 Recommended approach

It is recommended that the SVPP and associated guidance and toolkit is updated, as outlined above, to create a new Sustainable Procurement Policy.

Benefits of doing so include:

- Alignment with definitions and wider understanding of what Sustainable Procurement incorporates and approaches by other GB and Irish councils
- Simplified approach and consistent message to our suppliers with one externally facing procurement policy
- Allows us to build on the positive outcomes the SVPP has delivered to date and refine/ develop these further
- Provides a clear message to our suppliers of the Council's approach to procurement and the associated ethical, social, economic and environmental standards expected
- Easier to manage and co-ordinate guidance and training for Officers
- Easier to monitor and manage outputs under the one policy
- Easier to manage future developments in line with sustainable procurement best practice and Council strategies and corporate plans.

In addition, the Council's internal facing Procurement Policy would be reviewed and aligned with the content of the Sustainable Procurement Policy.

5.0 Proposed timescales and next steps

The most complex area of work is in the environmental/ low carbon standards workstream which will take longer to finalise due to the level of work involved in researching and developing the low carbon toolkit including wider stakeholder engagement required. This is to ensure any standards included are achievable, affordable and will make a material impact to the Council's carbon footprint.

Interim policy updates could be adopted sooner and applied via work instructions to Officers whilst the Sustainable Procurement Policy is finalised should any be a priority during FY25/26 e.g. ethical procurement considerations.

The aim is for the Sustainable Procurement Policy to be drafted and implemented before the end of FY25/26 subject to any public consultation and Council ratification, if required.

Progress updates will be presented and discussed at each SPWG during 25/26.

Members are welcome to send through any feedback/ input to the Sustainable Procurement Policy content to Lewis Murray in CPS at any time for consideration.”

During discussion, the Head of Commercial and Procurement Services, in response to a Member’s question in relation to the Council’s internal Procurement Policy and the measures that were in place to ensure supplier compliance with legislative requirements, advised that further information in respect of best practice would be brought back to the Working Group.

In response to a Member’s query regarding ethical procurement and the timescales associated with the implementation of ethical procurement provisions within the current SVPP, the City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services advised that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Working Group to provide further detail on the issues raised.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed that a report on ethical procurement be submitted to a special meeting of the Working Group in June.

SVPP - Short Duration Projects

The Working Group considered a report that outlined a proposed amendment to the SVPP to provide officers with flexibility in applying social value to tender competitions for short duration contracts of six months or less.

The Working Group approved the recommended amendment to the SVPP.

SVPP - Delivery Report

The Head of Commercial and Procurement Services provided the Working Group with an update on the delivery of social value outcomes via open tender competitions awarded in accordance with SVPP for the reporting period 1st December, 2024 – 31st March, 2025.

Noted.

Belfast Business Promise

The Belfast Business Promise Programme Coordinator presented the Working Group with a progress update on the Belfast Business Promise (BPP) that included:

- **Accreditation:**
 - 173 pledges accredited to date;
 - 16 organisations had achieved ‘Member’ accreditation to date; and
 - 8 organisations had achieved ‘Ambassador’ accreditation to date.

- **Technical Panels** - Site visits scheduled June – August, 2025 and Technical Panels scheduled for August, 2025.
- **Belfast City Council Progress** - Achieved 'Ambassador' accreditation in May, 2025 and JAM card e-learning ongoing.
- **Staffing** - Officer posts extended December 2025.
- **Peer Support Networks:**
 - 'Work in partnership with our communities' – Ulster Bank, 4th June 2025;
 - Real Living Wage Accreditation - Belfast City Council, July 2025; and
 - 'Better on Board' – Translink, Autumn 2025.
- **Communications:**
 - Further development of website to enhance visibility and share resources across BBP Network;
 - BBP coverage in Belfast City Matters June magazine;
 - Digital Badges went live in April, 2025 with 8 organisations availing of offer to date including Labour Relations Agency, Mount Charles Group and West Belfast Partnership Board; and
 - BPP Newsletter went live in February, 2025.
- **JAM Card Bursary** - Up to 80 organisations to be supported (Micro, SME and VCSE) and BBP organisations undergoing JAM card e-learning.
- **Promise Learning Days** - 11th September and 27th November, 2025.

The Working Group thanked the Programme Coordinator and the BBP team for the work that had been undertaken and highlighted the success of the programme to date.

Noted.

Forward Work Plan

The Working Group considered a report in relation to the development of a renewed forward work programme.

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty reminded Members that the terms of reference for the Working Group were agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in 2021 and highlighted that it had been the key driver in helping the Council progress towards inclusive growth with notable achievements including:

- The first Council in Northern Ireland to secure Real Living Wage accreditation;
- The development and implementation of the Social Value Procurement Policy and Toolkit;
- The co-design and testing of the Belfast Business Promise;
- The identification of inclusive growth priority groups;
- The continued development of demand driven employment academies and the Labour Market Partnership;
- The on-going development of an Inclusive Growth Index and Inclusive Growth Toolkit to further embed inclusive growth across the Council; and
- The embedding of inclusive growth as a priority in the refreshed Belfast Agenda (2023 – 2028) and associated action plans.

He further highlighted that, as these were now in the delivery stage, the role of the Working Group had shifted towards a focus on monitoring progress and that, given a review of governance arrangements was currently being progressed, it was now an opportune time for the Working Group to reconsider its role and focus by developing a forward work programme to ensure the continued delivery of social value and inclusive growth ambitions.

It was recommended that, given a number of emerging priorities had been identified through discussions within the Working Group and Committees, officers further engage with the Members and their Party Groups to inform the development of a forward work programme which would seek to:

- Reflect on progress to date and identify how this could inform future focus;
- Identify strategic opportunities to continue to deliver Members' inclusive growth ambitions and add value; and
- Maximise the role of Social Policy Working Group in helping to shape relevant emerging policies and ensuring the agreed programme of work is delivered.

The Working Group agreed that a workshop be held to enable Members to provide feedback on the engagement with their Parties and inform the development of the Working Group's forward work programme.

Chairperson