

Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday, 13th December, 2022

MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor O'Hara (Chairperson);
Councillors Heading, Hutchinson, McLaughlin and Murray.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;
Ms. C. Patterson, Inclusive Growth-Policy and
Programme Officer;
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager - Economy
Ms. C. Hutchinson, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer;
Ms. N. Irvine, Enterprise and Business Growth Officer;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Ms. M. Robinson, Employability and Skills Officer;
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Manager; and
Ms. V. Smyth, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for the inability to attend were received from Alderman Copeland and Councillor Bunting.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th October were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Actions Updates

The Working Group noted the actions update report which had been circulated in advance.

Social Value Procurement Reporting

The Strategic Category Manager updated the Social Policy Working Group on the delivery of social value outcomes via open tender competitions awarded in accordance with the Council's Social Value Procurement Policy 'SVPP' for the reporting period, 1st October 2022 to 30th November 2022.

The Strategic Category Manager advised that it was intended that this report would be provided every 2 months in line with scheduled Social Policy Working Group meetings. He referred to Appendix 1 and the tables contained therein which had been circulated in advance with the report. There was discussion about the rationale for the selection of the social value organisational behaviours for inclusion in the applicable contracts, and the need for greater clarity to understand the use of the social value organisational behaviours and the social value weighting. It was suggested that the inclusion of an explanation for the rationale for the selection of organisational behaviours at Table 2 might assist in providing greater transparency and assurance. It was agreed that the Strategic Category Manager would also provide Members with a specific session on worked examples and the application of the Social Value Procurement Toolkit in the New Year to ensure Members were confident with the approach.

The Strategic Category Manager informed Members that as this was an evolving area of work, an internal review team had been set up to capture the learning and continually improve and develop the process.

The Members agreed that officers continue to refine the report in order to further develop the reporting process in advance of it being presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The report would therefore be presented to the February meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for notation purposes, subject to the discussion at the next Social Policy Working Group.

Belfast Business Promise Current Status

The Strategic Planning and Policy Officer provided an update on the Belfast Business Promise Progress which included details of the dedicated staff resources that would join M Robinson who has been appointed as the Belfast Business Promise Co-ordinator to form the Belfast Business Promise team. She advised that the brand and marketing materials had been updated and referred Members to the engagement pack included at Appendix 1. Details were also provided on the engagement activities and the current status in relation to the accreditation process, partners and programme of support. A detailed update, including the internal Council assessment against the Belfast Business Promise pledges would be brought to the next Social Policy Working Group meeting.

It was noted that the Lord Mayor would host an event for the anchor institutions to secure their support to the Promise on 9th February and the input from the Working Group at this would be valued. In response to a query, the Strategic Planning and Policy Officer provided clarity around anchor institutions being those large locally rooted organisations in the city.

The engagement to date has resulted in a number of organisations expressing interest in becoming early adopters of the Belfast Business Promise for inclusion in the pilot. It was noted that Belfast Trust would be a key anchor and would be included as an early adopter and that NICVA should also be approached. The Strategic Planning and Policy Officer confirmed that NICVA would be included, along with the VCSE Panel. She highlighted the importance of securing a mix of organisations for inclusion in the pilot which would go live in March 2023. The Chairperson welcomed the new staff working on this process.

Noted.

Living Wage Accreditation (Verbal Update)

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised Members that the application had now been submitted to the Living Wage Foundation and it was hoped that positive news would be received after Christmas.

Discussion highlighted the value of engaging with the work that was taking place organically within communities, for example, in East Belfast. It was noted that the public relations and positive messaging around the accreditation would be maximised, once the Council's accreditation was secured.

Noted.

Employee Diversity Report

The Director of Human Resources provided the Working Group with information on the diversity of the workforce living within the Belfast City Council area, and detail on the post codes that those staff lived in. This was the bi-annual update to the Working Group, with the next report scheduled for June 2023.

The Members noted that some of the diversity information was collected from staff on a voluntary basis, that is, ethnic origin and disability. This information was collected through the recruitment process or through a voluntary monitoring exercise. A further voluntary monitoring exercise was due to be completed in 2023. The Director of Human Resources agreed to confirm the timing of this exercise.

She advised that there had been minimal change over the past 6 months, with 51.8% of employees residing in the Belfast City Council area. A number of these changes were referenced and, as information from the Census 2021 was released, this would be incorporated into future reports, which may identify more changes.

Clarity was sought in terms of the extent to which positive discrimination could be applied to encourage under-represented groups to apply for jobs, for example, ethnic minorities, and whether there was scope for additional measures to attract younger people into the organisation, for example, graduates, non-graduates and those without 5 GCSEs.

In response, the Director of Human Resources provided details of the activities that were currently used, including welcoming statements on job advertisements. She advised that the organisation carried out a review of the composition of the workforce and employment practices (Article 55) and liaised with the Equality Commission in this regard and that the new census would provide focus. She emphasised the importance of the outreach work in specific areas with under-represented groups to remove barriers.

The Director of Human Resources confirmed that the age profile of the Council was weighted towards the older population, and there was a need to look at how to attract younger people into the organisation. Human Resources was working with Economic Development in relation to establishing academies, graduate schemes and internships, and had engaged with the Belfast Metropolitan College pre-COVID19. However, there were budgetary implications. She stated that the matter needs considered holistically and CMT would be looking at the issue of succession planning. It was suggested that

this might need to be driven centrally in order to develop mechanisms to support succession planning across the organisation.

A recent report at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee 'Improving Employability Outcomes' was referenced and suggested as useful item for consideration at a future meeting of the Working Group. The Director of Human Resources referenced the Council's participation schemes such as the JobStart scheme and agreed to follow up on the report with Economic Development.

A Member raised the matter of sexual orientation and disability and referred to recent statistics showing that Northern Ireland was lagging behind the rest of the UK in terms of disability employment levels. The Director of Human Resources provided assurance that the organisation worked closely with disability organisations and occupational health to ensure reasonable adjustments and support were provided for those with disabilities.

The Working Group noted the contents of the report.

Community Wealth Building

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty provided an update on the recent publication of the DFC Ministerial established Independent Expert Advisory Panel on Community Wealth Building recommendations report and how this related to work underway within Council.

The Panel report published set out 26 recommendations of differing scale and complexity covering 6 pillars of policy, legislative and practical changes.

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty explained that the report highlighted the need for the principles and practical approaches to Community Wealth Building (CWB) to be incorporated within any emerging Programme of Government. It also acknowledged the challenges around capacity building and that a locally based approach owned by communities should be the focus. The report acknowledged the good practice already underway within the region which should be recognised and built upon. It was noted that the Council was progressing many of the areas and approaches recommended and, whilst not explicitly referred to as community wealth building, the Council's approach to Inclusive Growth and the underpinning enabling levers and key projects being brought forward would help deliver the ambitions of community wealth building.

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty advised the Members that further updates would be brought to the Working Group on the continued delivery of the pillars of work as well as how other levers would contribute to the ambitions and principles around Community Wealth Building. It was noted that this model would continue to evolve and be brought forward through the Social Policy Working Group.

Discussion ensued and the Members accepted the report, highlighting that community wealth building needed to benefit the community and that clarity was needed to understand the opportunities, community needs and expectations. It was noted that a more detailed assessment would help to inform an action plan and next steps for the Social Policy Working Group. The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty agreed to bring back a more detailed assessment and critique of the current position in relation to community wealth building pillars, identifying the gaps and opportunities.

Schedule of 2023 Meetings

The following dates had been identified for meetings of the Social Policy Working Group for the period from January to December, 2023.

- Tuesday 14th February
- Tuesday 15th August
- Tuesday 14th November

(All meetings will commence at 2.00 p.m.)

There was discussion around the agreed schedule in the context of the elections and the mandate of the current and post-election Working Group.

A Member requested that the legal advice on the use of Zero Hours contracts included in the Social Value Procurement Policy be brought to the next meeting, prior to the elections, as the timeframe for the social value weighting to be implemented for tenders over £30k was April 2023.

A Member brought an article to the attention of the Working Group which aligned with the Community Wealth discussion and made use of the circular economy. The article which was circulated to the Working Group related to a Scottish model for foodbanks and might be worth exploring as to whether this is a model that could be applied locally. The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty advised that work was underway around sustainable food with the Climate team and that a report would be brought back to the Working Group.

Chairperson