

Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday, 14th February, 2023

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

- Members present: Councillor O'Hara (Chairperson); Alderman Copeland and Councillors Collins, Heading and Hutchinson.
- 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. S. O'Regan, Employability and Skills Manager;
Ms. N. Bohill, Head of Commercial and Procurement Services;
Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business, Research and Development Manager;
Mr. P. Brown, Universal Basic Income (UBI) Lab; and
Ms. V. Smyth, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for the inability to attend was reported on behalf of Councillor Murray.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th December 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.

Universal Basic Income - Feasibility Study Emerging Issues

The Senior Manager, Economy, provided a brief update to the Social Policy Working Group on the feasibility work which was underway into the development of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot in Northern Ireland. She introduced Mr Patrick Brown from the UBI Lab who presented an update on the work undertaken. He thanked the Senior Manager and the team within Belfast City Council for the support provided.

The Members were reminded that, in September 2019, Belfast City Council had passed a Notice of Motion to support the implementation of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) trial in Northern Ireland. Similar Notices were passed in a number of other councils across the region, including Derry and Strabane District Council. In 2020, a steering group was formed to explore how this work could be moved forward. This steering group was coordinated by the UBI Lab Network, a global UBI advocacy movement with a local Northern Ireland group. A key area of focus was to move forward on a feasibility study to consider how a UBI trial would be planned, delivered and measured. This study would also identify the likely outcomes of such a trial and create a foundation on which a Northern Ireland-wide UBI might be delivered and resourced by the Northern Ireland Executive.

Mr. Brown advised that the feasibility study was due to complete in March, with the write-up planned for the summer months, the intention was that a report launch would coincide with the NI Executive sitting. A UBI calculator had been developed and economic modelling completed. Community outreach had been planned to trial the proposals; this would include communities in Belfast. Engagement was also planned with government representatives from the Welsh and Irish Governments along with officials from the Department for Communities (DfC). An invitation would be extended to Belfast City Council. He explained the parameters set around the modelling, which was based on monthly income top-up levels at £200, £300 and £400. A demonstration of the UBI calculator was provided which would allow individuals to assess the impact of UBI on their income levels.

In response to a query about the role of NI Government Departments in the absence of an Assembly, Mr. Brown clarified that in his view political leadership would be needed to move forward on a trial, as was the case in the Welsh and Irish governments which were currently trialling UBI for specific cohorts, those leaving care and artists respectively. However, DfC had shown interest in the work, attending the All-Party Working Group. Central government involvement would be essential, and the feasibility study had been designed to answer the queries Departments might have before embarking on a trial, which would be 2-3 years in duration. The potential for UBI as a tool to address poverty and inequality was noted.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Brown for his presentation and asked that slides be circulated to Members.

Noted.

Social Value Procurement Delivery Reporting

The Head of Commercial and Procurement Services (CPS) 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).

Following the feedback from the December meeting of the Social Policy Working Group (SPWG), the report format had been revised for the period 1st December to 31st January for consideration. The Members were reminded that this report would be a standing item on the SPWG agenda and would then be taken to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting for notation.

The Members were reminded that the SVPP was approved by Committee in April 2022 with a 'Go Live' date of 1st June 2022. SVPP was applied to any new applicable open tender exercises with approval dated from 1st June 2022.

Within this reporting period being considered by the SPWG, social value applied to 10 of the 27 tenders. As six tenders were below the £250k threshold only part 1 was considered:

1. Reserve the tender competition to a social enterprise/VCSE sector, taking into consideration levels of market competition; and
2. Include organisational behaviours – ethical procurement, environment and HR policies and procedures, taking into consideration relevance to the goods, services, works being purchased and relevance to the market.

The Members were asked to note that, from April 2023, for all tender competitions valued over £30k, the following be included (in addition to the above in Part 1):

1. Payment of the Real Living Wage by suppliers to their employees;
2. The prohibited use of zero hours contracts by suppliers; and
3. The inclusion of a social value weighting (10% or 15%) and scoring.

It was noted that this report would develop as the application of the SVPP was increasingly adopted and that the mechanisms to monitor and authenticate the delivery of the commitments relied on contract management arrangements, which would be supported by the Council's Procurement team. The delivery of commitments would be reported to the SPWG in future reports.

The Members confirmed the report layout was useful and provided the required information for consideration by the SPWG going forward.

Living Wage Accreditation Update

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy informed the Working Group on the outcome of the Council's application for Living Wage accreditation and updated the Members on the next steps of the process.

The Members welcomed the report and noted the next steps.

Belfast Business Promise Update

The Strategic Planning and Policy Officer presented an update on the Belfast Business Promise (BBP), referring to the slides previously circulated.

Internal training and awareness sessions have been ongoing across Council departments to raise awareness of Belfast Business Promise aims and to ensure a

consistent brand message, promotion and knowledge base across the organisation. The Brand and Marketing materials have been updated in conjunction with the Marcomms business partners, including a short video and the construction of the website. These would be important over the next year as the pilot goes live.

The resources to deliver on the BBP, progress with the CRM system, accreditation process and the emerging work on the development of the Promise 'offer' was noted. A significant level of engagement had been carried out with further sessions planned for February and March 2023. There had been a high level of interest with 10 organisations agreeing, in principle, to sign-up as early adopters. Key events such as the Labour Relations Agency conference on 22nd February and a strategic engagement event hosted by the Lord Mayor in March were noted as providing further opportunities to promote the BBP and encourage sign-up.

An overview of the indicative self-assessment of Belfast City Council's position against the BBP Pledges was provided. The Strategic Planning and Policy Officer explained that this provided an assurance to Members of the Council's ability to the BBP standard within 18-24 months. She reminded Members that work continued to refine and define the pledge criteria and assessment process for implementation and the Council would be subject to the full assessment and action planning process once the pilot goes live.

It was noted that a significant amount of work was in progress which would continue to require resource and effort to deliver on the commitments. There was also scope for the areas where gaps had been identified to be factored into these plans and strategies, for example, volunteering policy.

Clarification was sought on those signing up to be Early Adopters in terms of the scale of their workforce and procurement opportunities. The Strategy Planning and Policy Officer explained that there were a number of large private sector employers and further engagement was planned with the city's anchor institutes. However, the website and the pilot would be key to promoting the benefits of membership and providing the associated promotional/reputational benefits. It was agreed that the Council's position against the BBP would continue to be tracked and progress reported at the next SPWG meeting.

In response to a question, the Director of Human Resources advised that a Workforce Planning group was considering the various initiatives that could be used to support the Council to staff key roles, for example, waste collection. Employment academies were one example. An update would be provided to the SPWG at future meetings.

Noted.

Community Wealth Building

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty provided an update and overview of Council interventions mapped against the core pillars of Community Wealth Building.

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty explained that some areas of work were further developed such as Human Resources and the Real Living Wage accreditation, the work to support employability and skills, Social Value Procurement, Planning, Developer Contributions and the Local Development Plan process. However, there was more that could be done. He reminded Members that the levers and projects

delivering on community wealth building ambitions were being brought forward through the Council's approach to inclusive growth and would be central to it.

In terms of next steps, the Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty stated that momentum was needed to embed and drive Community Wealth Building forward and the Belfast Agenda refresh was a key part of that process. He highlighted immediate next steps included reinvigorating the Procurement and Commissioning Working Group, mapping of Belfast's social economy to refresh the social economy action plan and the bespoke community management asset transfer pilots.

A Member commented on the importance of community wealth building being owned by communities, focused on working in co-operation with others to ensure that communities benefit from wealth. The merits of explicit reference to community wealth building and maximising the relationship with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) as advisory experts on community wealth building were also raised. Assurance was provided that the relationship between the Council and CLES was long-standing and based on partnership working, recognising their role as a critical friend.

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty clarified that the anchor institutions involved in the recent CLES procurement spend analysis process now included Belfast Harbour and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust along with the Council, South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, Queen's University and Ulster University.

Noted.

The Chairperson thanked Councillor Heading for his contribution to the Social Policy Working Group given that it was his last meeting as he would not be standing at the next Election.

Chairperson