

Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday, 5th September, 2023

MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOVED VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Doherty, S. Douglas,
F. McAteer, R. McLaughlin and Smyth.

In attendance: 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. Christy, HR Manager (Development);
Mr. E. Clarke, Employability and Skills Officer;
Ms. C. Hutchinson, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer;
Ms. N. Irvine, Enterprise and Business Growth Officer;
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Officer;
Ms. K. Murtagh, Enterprise and Business Support Officer;
Ms. C. Patterson, Policy and Programme Manager,
Inclusive Growth;
Mr. K. Quinn, Employability and Skills Officer;
Ms. M. Robinson, Belfast Business Promise Programme
Co-Ordinator;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business, Research and Development
Manager;
Mr. J. Yohanis, Employability and Skills Officer; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Election of Chairperson

The Working Group agreed that Councillor Doherty be elected to serve as Chairperson for the period to end on the date of the annual meeting of the Council in June 2024.

(Councillor Doherty in the Chair.)

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 14th February were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Update on Actions

The Working Group noted the contents of a report providing information on those actions which were now complete and those which were still active.

Social Value Procurement Policy Delivery Report

The Working Group was reminded that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 28th March, 2022, it had approved the revised draft Social Value Procurement Policy. The Policy had been implemented on 1st June, 2022 and applied to any new applicable open tender exercises with approval from that date.

The Strategic Category Officer drew the Working Group's attention to a report, covering the period from 1st February to 30th June, 2023, on the delivery of social value outcomes via open tender competitions awarded in accordance with the Social Value Procurement Policy. The report also provided an update on those tenders which had been awarded by the Physical Programmes Unit where, due to project funding rules, social value had been considered and included, in accordance with the Construction and Procurement Delivery Buy Social Model.

He went on to report that a Social Value Review Team had been established to assess how the Social Value Procurement Policy was being implemented, along with any lessons learned which needed to be applied following the conclusion of tender competitions. Areas which the Team was currently reviewing included, but was not limited to:

- i. trends in the use of Reserved Contracts and any further guidance required for officers on when these should be used;
- ii. trends in the selection of Social Value Organisational Behaviours by officers when using the Social Value Toolkit and any further guidance required for officers on when these should be applied; and
- iii. the quality of social value offers by suppliers (the scored submissions) and if further guidance is required in terms of how these are evaluated by officers. In addition, any further guidance required for suppliers to improve their understanding BCC expectations in line with Belfast Agenda aims and associated strategies.

He pointed out that it was envisaged that the Social Value Review Team would meet every two months, in line with meetings of the Social Policy Working Group, with

the format of this report to be reviewed and further information included as more social value data became available.

After discussion, the Working Group:

- i. noted the contents of the report and agreed that it be submitted, on a quarterly basis, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for information;
- ii. agreed that any amendments to the Social Value Procurement Policy be presented to the Working Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval; and
- iii. agreed and that any operational changes to the Policy be included within the Social Value Procurement Policy Delivery Report for noting.

Consultation on Procurement Bill

The Working Group considered a report on the Government's consultation on the secondary legislation required to implement the new public procurement regime established by the Procurement Bill, following which it was agreed that the Head of Commercial and Procurement would forward to each Member a short summary document for consideration by their Political Party, with an overall draft Council response to be presented alongside the minutes of this meeting, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 22nd September for approval.

Belfast Business Promise

The Belfast Business Promise Programme Co-ordinator reminded the Working Group that the Belfast Business Promise, which was a key commitment within the Belfast Agenda, the Belfast Agenda Refresh and the Inclusive Growth Strategy, focused on creating an inclusive City by working in collaboration with partners. The overall model had been co-designed with the help of an external business working group, with input from over 25 organisations and 130 individuals and reflected good practice encountered in employment charters in other regions.

She reviewed the progress which had been made since the last meeting of the Working Group and confirmed that a six-month pilot initiative had commenced on 24th April, with the aim of testing and refining the model in advance of a full roll out thereafter. Twenty-two organisations of varying scale and across different sectors, including the Council, had now signed up to this pilot, all of which had met the criteria, in terms of being an employer based in Belfast.

She reminded the Working Group further that it had played a key role in drafting the following eight Pledges, which underpinned the Belfast Business Promise initiative:

1. Provide Fair Wages and Contracts (**Core Pledge**);
2. Offer Opportunities into Work;
3. Support the Local and Social Economy;

4. Recruit Inclusively;
5. Improve Training, Engagement and Wellbeing;
6. Pay Promptly;
7. Work in Partnership with our Communities (**Core Pledge**); and
8. Protect our Environment (**Core Pledge**).

She went on to provide the Working Group with details of the Belfast Business Promise three tier accreditation process, which was based around the aforementioned pledges and pointed out that organisations had the opportunity to attain Supporter, Member and Ambassador status. The Working Group was then provided with details of the partner organisations which were providing specialist and other expertise for participants in the pilot scheme.

In terms of other areas of progress, the Belfast Business Promise Programme Co-ordinator pointed out that:

- three officers had been appointed on temporary contracts to oversee the Belfast Business Promise initiative and an additional officer was providing interim support for the duration of the pilot;
- the Council's management information system was managing expressions of interest/applications and monitoring progress;
- the accreditation and criteria process had been agreed and mapped with the external partners and internally;
- Technical Panels had been scheduled to test the independent assurance on the assessment and accreditation process;
- Promise Learning Days were ongoing, with a focus on Pledges 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8;
- some light communications work had been undertaken to highlight the pilot initiative and Promise Learning Days; and
- the review of the pilot initiative was ongoing, as were discussions on the future delivery model.

The Belfast Business Promise Programme Co-ordinator concluded by confirming that the future steps in the Belfast Business Promise process would include the hosting of an independently facilitated workshop to measure the impact of the pilot scheme, with recommendations on the future roll-out to be presented to the Working Group at its meeting on 14th November.

The Enterprise and Business Support Officer then provided the Working Group with an update on the Council's participation in the Belfast Business Promise programme to date and its progress towards attaining accreditation.

She reported that an internal assessment of performance had been completed in January and an internal working group had been established and had been holding meetings on a monthly basis. The Council's application and assessment had been completed in July and a baseline accreditation profile which had been undertaken at that stage had revealed that it was demonstrating 100% compliance with Pledges 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8. She pointed out that there was Council representation on Technical Panels, that Council officers facilitated workshops at Promise Learning Days and that discussions were ongoing at management level on the future delivery and staffing model for the Belfast Business Promise programme, post pilot.

She went on to state that the first Technical Panel was due to meet within the next week and that officers would be putting forward Pledges 2, 3 and 4 for assessment. It was envisaged that the key actions for the remaining Pledges would be implemented in time for them to be presented to the Panel in January.

In response to a number of issues which had been raised by the Members, the Belfast Business Promise Programme Co-ordinator confirmed that:

- an event had been held earlier in the year to promote the Belfast Business Promise programme to anchor institutions and a number were currently giving consideration to becoming a supporter organisation;
- the Council would be 100% compliant with Pledge 5, once the People Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy had been launched and with Pledge 7, in relation to JAM Card membership and Volunteering Policy consideration;
- mechanisms would be put in place, post pilot, to ensure that participants progressed through the Belfast Business Promise process within a pre-agreed timeframe; and
- there would be active engagement with the community planning sectoral leads, hospitality and other groups/sectors with the aim of increasing the number of participants moving forward.

The Chairperson thanks the officers for their presentation, following which the Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Update on Inclusive Growth Index and Toolkit

The Working Group considered a report providing an update on the progress which had been made to date in developing an Inclusive Growth Index and Toolkit, including the planned next steps for implementation.

It was pointed out that, as a key commitment in the Inclusive Growth Strategy and refreshed Belfast Agenda, the Index and Toolkit would:

- enable the Council to develop a monitoring framework for fostering inclusive growth by tracking a series of consistent outcome metrics which collectively provided insight into the extent to which Belfast was an inclusive City; and
- provide practical guidance for Council officers to encourage inclusive growth through the development, design, monitoring and evaluation and delivery of programmes, projects and services.

The Working Group's attention was drawn to the three key inter-related challenges which had been identified through the engagement process as needing to be addressed in order to deliver on inclusive growth, namely, Supporting Social Mobility, Fostering an Inclusive Labour Markets and Creating Inclusive Places, which formed the domain areas for a series of related indicators. A proposed series of indicators aligned to these challenges and initial baseline data for Belfast was being considered and work was continuing to validate and ensure their appropriateness.

The point was then made that the emerging Inclusive Growth Toolkit had been structured in line with the four stages of a project lifecycle and provided a range of practical actions which could be considered at each stage to embed inclusive growth, along with a range of best practice case study examples from across the Council and links to local resources to assist with implementation.

The Working Group noted the progress which had been made on the development of the Inclusive Growth Index and Toolkit and approved the proposed direction of travel.

Employee Diversity Bi-Annual Report

The Working Group was reminded that, at its meeting on 22nd November, 2021, it had agreed that a report be submitted on a bi-annual basis on the number of staff residing within the Belfast City Council area, by Department, postcode and diversity.

Accordingly, the Working Group noted the information which had been provided as of 4th August, 2023.

Chairperson