

**Monday 11th December, 2023**

**MEETING OF SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP  
HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Members present: Councillor Duffy (Chairperson) and  
Councillor Lyons.

External Members: Mr. P. Anderson, Department for Communities;  
Ms. B. Arthurs, Community and Voluntary Sector;  
Mr. T. Burns, Faith Sector;  
Mr. J. Donnelly, Community and Voluntary Sector;  
Mr. M. McBride, Education Authority;  
Ms. C. McMenamin, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;  
Ms. T. Mimna, Good Relations, TEO;  
Mr. W. Naeem, Interfaith Forum; and  
Ms. A. Roberts, Community and Voluntary Sector.

In attendance: Mr. G. McCartney, Good Relations Manager;  
Ms. D. McKinney, PEACE Programme Manager;  
Mr. J. Girvan, Neighbourhood Services Manager;  
Mr. D. Robinson, Acting Senior Good Relations Officer;  
Ms. L. Dolan, Acting Senior Good Relations Officer; and  
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

**Apologies**

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Copeland, Councillors I. McLaughlin, McMullan and Smyth; and Ms. J. Irwin, Supt. G. Kirkpatrick, Mr. G. Walker and Ms. A. M. White.

**Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 6th November, 2023, were taken as read and signed as correct.

**Declarations of Interest**

Ms. T. Mimna, declared an interest in respect of item 3, Good Relations Action Plan 2024/2025, and item 5, Peace Plus Local Action Plan, in that she worked for the Executive Office, and she left the meeting for the duration of those items.

**SCP Membership Update**

The Good Relations Manager advised the Members that two representatives from the Belfast Chamber of Commerce would hopefully be joining the Partnership in

the new year and that a new representative from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive would also join from January, 2024.

### **Good Relations Action Plan 2024/2025**

(Ms. Mimna, having declared an interest, left the meeting for the duration of this item.)

Mr. D. Robinson reminded the Partnership that, each year, The Executive Office (TEO) invited Councils to submit a Good Relations Action Plan. He advised the Members that TEO assessed each Council Action Plan and provided 75% of the costs associated with its delivery. He outlined that the current Audit, which was developed for 2023/24, was still applicable for the 2024/25 Action Plan.

Together, Mr. Robinson and Ms. L. Dolan provided the Partnership with an overview of the nine Programmes of the Action Plan for 2024/25.

The Good Relations Manager advised the Partnership that the draft Action Plan had been based on previous Action Plans, rather than the one that had been agreed for 2023/24 which contained a 47% reduction in funding.

He highlighted that Programme six, Embedding Good Relations, would include capacity building to aid organisations in preparing for procurement exercises.

The Partnership was also advised that the Stena Line partnership with Programme eight would end in June 2024 and that the Council was in discussion with the Shared Education Team within the Education Authority about developing the programme further, beyond June 2024.

A Member stated that, while there were plenty of organisations carrying out important community work within East Belfast, there seemed to be a disconnect with the Council's Good Relations Programme compared to other areas of the City. The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer stated that they would be keen to look at ways of addressing that.

A further Member thanked the Good Relations Team for their hard work on the Action Plan.

The Partnership noted the contents of the Action Plan and recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee would agree to its submission to The Executive Office for delivery in 2024/25.

### **The Executive Office** **Asylum Dispersal Funding Update**

Ms. L. Dolan provided the Partnership with an update on the projects which had been funded through the Home Office Dispersal Funding.

#### **“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Issues**

11 To provide members with an update on the projects funded through the Home Office Dispersal Funding

2.0 **Recommendations**

2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report and the risk that further funding through Home Office Dispersal Money has not been confirmed for 2024/25.

3.0 **Main report**

**Background**

3.1 Members are reminded that in In March 2023, TEO awarded Council £406,228 to support proposals to enhance and/or develop support and services for asylum seekers, which could be funded by TEO through Home Office Dispersal Funding.

3.2 Proposals were submitted to TEO and projects have been delivered over the past 9 months.

3.3 Table 1 illustrates the projects and support costs that have been committed with most projects now mobilised.

**Table 1.**

<b>Delivery Partner</b>	<b>Summary of project</b>	<b>Costs</b>
<b>Proposal 1: Red Cross  Mobilised and delivering Due to complete in March 2024</b>	<b>Asylum Support &amp; Triage Project, providing bilingual helpline and casework support.</b>	<b>£152,643</b>
<b>Proposal 2: Barnardos  Mobilised and delivering Due to complete in March 2024</b>	<b>Family Help Project – Supporting parents and children coping with displacement through conflict, with a focus on school readiness, child development and parenting.</b>	<b>£85,000</b>
<b>Proposal 3: Conway Education Centre  Mobilised and delivering</b>	<b>Language, mentoring, training befriending and integration programme</b>	<b>£41,125</b>

<b>Due to complete in March 2024</b>		
<b>Proposal 4: Lower Ormeau Residents Group  Completed</b>	<b>Community Integration Programme and trauma therapy intervention</b>	<b>£14,728</b>
<b>Proposal 5: Belfast City Council  Committed: procurement happening in Dec / January</b>	<b>Cultural Competence Programme</b>	<b>£20,000</b>
<b>Proposal 6: Belfast City of Sanctuary  Winter integration and well-being proposal  Procurement completed and awarded to Belfast City of Sanctuary  Delivery commenced Due to complete in March 2024</b>	<b>This proposal will run weekly drop-in support service during the Winter months, to provide social, health and well-being initiatives to help alleviate the pressures on people confined to hotels, with the aim of also linking asylum seekers to wider council and community support networks as well as volunteering opportunities.  Activity will be held in Sandy Row Community Centre and Ballynafeigh Community Centre</b>	<b>£12,000</b>
<b>Proposal 7: Immigration and Legal Advice Project  Tender not awarded – re-tender being considered</b>	<b>Immigration and Legal Advice Project</b>	<b>£72, 732</b>
<b>Proposal 8: Belfast City Council</b>	<b>Project Management &amp; Coordination Costs</b>	<b>£8,000</b>

3.4 Members should note that TEO is not in a position, at this stage, to advise Council in relation to future dispersal money and consequently a lot of the above projects that have been mobilised and operating successfully will not be able to continue beyond March. This will leave a major gap in the provision of services to asylum seekers and put further pressure on wider services and integration initiatives.

4.0 **Financial & Resource Implications**

4.1 The proposals in this report are funded through Home Office Dispersal Funding, via the Executive Office as well as through the Belfast Health and Development Unit.

5.0 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications**

5.1 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, as well as delivering on the recommendations arising from the research Council commissioned to examine the Inequalities experienced by Black, Asian, minority ethnic and Traveller communities in Belfast."

A Member stated that it was crucial that specialised support was provided to those seeking asylum, not least in respect of providing a bilingual advice service. She added that there were perhaps too many different services, which could be confusing, and that she felt better coordination was required.

In response to a Member's query, the Acting Senior Good Relations Officer confirmed that information on how the delivery partners had performed against the targets could be provided to the Partnership at a future meeting.

The Partnership noted the contents of the report.

**Peace Plus Local Action Plan**

(Ms. Mimna, having declared an interest, left the meeting for the duration of this item)

The PEACE Programme Manager presented the following report to the Partnership:

**"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

The purpose of this report is to provide Shared City Partnership members with an information update on the submission of PEACE PLUS 1.1. Co-designed Local

Community Peace Action Plan for Belfast, and note some key priorities following submission.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

That Members note the contents of the report and recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that they too, note the contents of the report.

## **3.0 Main report**

SCP members are aware that the development of the £15.1 million Local PEACE Action Plan is being delivered in three stages:

Stage 1 Co-design needs & opportunities  
Stage 2 Co-design long list of priority projects  
Stage 3 Action Plan submission

The plan will be delivered under the following 3 Thematic Areas

1. Community Regeneration & Transformation (Capital Projects)
2. Thriving & Peaceful Communities
3. Building Respect for All Cultural Identities

## **3.2 Current Status – Stage 3 Submission**

Since the last SCP in November both the Officer Team and the Consultant's Team have been working to include the relevant detail required for both Belfast City Council's Local Peace Plus Local Action Plan and the Funding Application to the Special EU Programmes Body.

It is anticipated at this stage the application has been submitted and Officers have attached a copy of the Belfast City Council's Peace Plus Local Action Plan in Appendix 1.

As agreed at the SCP meeting in November 2023, officers, through delegated authority made minor amendments to the Action Plan, where necessary, to ensure compliance with the assessment and funding requirements.

To arrive at this position has taken a considerable amount of time in terms of Co-Design. Since June 22 officers have been engaged in: -

37 Workshops across the City (External and Internal)  
5 Public Information Sessions  
More than 55 Working Group Meetings

**More than 25 Individual Stakeholder Meetings**  
**More than 20 Governance Meetings**  
**Internal Consolidation Meetings approx. 25**

Two public information sessions were held on the 6th & 13th November to report back to the community on all initiatives included in the overall plan for submission to SEUPB, and the plan was well received.

- 3.3 The Plan shows clearly that through Belfast's Peace and Reconciliation Plan, Council will have the ability to meet Common Needs under the themes above and improve the quality of life for residents in Belfast; i.e. the plan concentrates on what brings communities together rather than what divides them.

Further to this the co-design process also agreed the best delivery mechanism for the programmes in Themes 2 and 3 was through a procurement process. Officers have committed to work with our colleagues in Place and Economy and Procurement to develop the skills and capacity of local community organisations to enable them to bid for such opportunities i.e., prepare to procure. This has the potential to showcase Community Wealth Building and Inclusive Growth in Belfast City.

- 3.4 There are a number of key things to now progress: -

1. Respond to any queries in relation to the Peace Plus Action Plan to SEUPB
2. In advance of any Letter of Offer be in a State of Readiness therefore Council will progress the recruitment of staff
3. With Colleagues in Procurement agree a timetable for issuing Tenders
4. In a State of Readiness work with colleagues in Place and Economy and Procurement to develop a programme 'Prepare to Procure' (Targeted at Local Community Organisations)

- 3.5 **Financial & Resource Implications**

Within existing budget to be claimed retrospectively from SEUPB.

- 3.6 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

The Plan, has been screened for equality and good relations implications along with completion of a rural

**needs assessment, and forwarded to Council's Equality Team."**

She updated the Members and advised that the Action Plan would be submitted in a few days.

A Member stated that she felt that there was a lack of investment in health for the South Belfast area. The PEACE Programme Manager advised that she was aware of the Member's concerns but that officers were following the data.

A number of Members thanked the Good Relations Team for the considerable amount of time and effort which had gone into producing the Local Action Plan.

After discussion, the Partnership noted the contents of the report and adopted the recommendations.

**Rise in Race Hate Crime**

With the Chair's permission, a Member raised the issue of the recent rise in race hate crime in Belfast, which had been highlighted in a recent BCC Spotlight documentary. He stated that the Shared City Partnership should be looking at how to challenge it.

A number of Members agreed and expressed concern at the recent coordinated attacks and of the alleged paramilitary involvement. They stated that a lot of the tension centred around access to social housing and that it was crucial to challenge the myths and inaccuracies. Members stated that the recent Open Botanic event had a solidarity stall which had been helpful and had received positive feedback.

A further Member stated that, as a Muslim who had lived in Northern Ireland for sixteen years, he had seen numerous changes throughout that time, many of which were positive. However, he added that some simple gestures, such as providing a room for prayer within the city centre, would be appreciated by those with a Muslim faith.

The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer advised the Partnership that, when the Good Relations Steering Panel had first been established in 2003, it was intended that it would challenge the Council to address such issues. He added that demonstrating the benefits of Good Relations to the economic, social, educational and health fabric of our society could be a useful part of taking the issue forward, along with some practical initiatives that could be delivered as part of the Council's Good Relations Action Plan.

In response to a suggestion that the Partnership could visit a number of the key faith-based organisations across the City, such as the Belfast Multi-Cultural Association (BMCA), a Member stated that the Belfast Islamic Centre was due to open in new, larger premises in the next month or so. He suggested that it would be happy to host a future meeting of the Shared City Partnership there.

After further discussion, it was



Moved by Councillor Duffy,  
Seconded by Councillor Lyons and

Resolved - that a report be submitted to a future meeting providing the Partnership with information on what the Council was currently doing to tackle hate crime through its Good Relations and Police and Community Safety Action Plans and that a Workshop be held with the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships early in the new year to examine the issues and to come up with a plan of action.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised the Partnership that he would be attending a PCSP meeting in the coming days and that he would raise the request for the participation of the PCSPs in a Workshop.

Chairperson