



The Belfast Agenda

Statement of Progress
2021-2023



CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

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Foreward:

The Belfast Agenda, our community plan, was first published in 2017, setting out a joint vision for the city up to 2035. We have come a very long way as a city since then, experiencing significant economic, social and environmental changes in recent years. This Statement of Progress looks back at the last two years and reports on our progress towards realising the long-term outcomes and ambitions in the Belfast Agenda, along with our partnership's impact through the delivery of our collaborative priorities and actions.

In that period, businesses have invested over £1.2 billion in the city, over 16,000 new jobs have been created, the number of businesses has increased by almost 12 per cent, and over 7,800 additional people are now living in Belfast.

During this time, we have faced unprecedented challenges, navigated through difficult circumstances, and forged new innovative collective approaches to help and support people in Belfast who are negatively impacted. As a partnership we have remained committed to our 2035 vision, albeit through the lens of these new challenges.

This phase of delivery has also coincided with the first formal review of the Belfast Agenda. This provided the opportunity to build on the extensive community action and partnership working that we saw during the global pandemic and the continuing cost of living crisis, to refocus our resources and energy to support recovery and growth within and across our city.

City partners have been proactively engaging our residents, stakeholders, and organisations to identify local challenges, priorities and opportunities and to co-design interventions to ensure that our collective efforts are targeted to where we can make the most difference. As part of this journey, the Belfast Agenda has been reviewed and updated to reflect current priorities and actions to be delivered over the next four years 2024 – 2028.

Collectively, we are committed to achieving 'inclusive growth' on a scale that we haven't before, creating new and better jobs, promoting training and employment opportunities, tackling the climate emergency, reducing inequalities, and helping alleviate the impact of poverty on those most vulnerable across the city.

This Statement of Progress outlines the latest stage of our journey as a partnership to deliver the Belfast Agenda ambitions and priorities and the future direction of travel we are collectively committed to. Together we are on a journey, to create the city we know Belfast can be.

Community planning and city partners



The Belfast Agenda and the community planning process is a significant catalyst for the city, bringing partner organisations, regional government departments and agencies, the council and local communities together to work collaboratively to deliver our shared vision. It's about creating real and sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of our residents.



Our vision for Belfast in 2035 is:

Belfast will be a city re-imagined and resurgent. A great place to live and work for everyone. Beautiful, well connected and culturally vibrant, it will be a sustainable city shared and loved by all its citizens, free from the legacy of conflict. A compassionate city offering opportunities for everyone. A confident and successful city energising a dynamic and prosperous city region. A magnet for talent and business and admired around the world. A city people dream to visit.



Focusing on outcomes

Residents and city partners identified five key outcomes they want to achieve by 2035 working together.

Belfast will be a city....



Our ambitions

There are many things that we need to do to make our vision a reality. We therefore set ourselves four very bold ambitions to be achieved by 2035. Our progress against these longer-term targets is detailed below and benchmarked against initial baselines.

Our economy supports.

46,000
additional jobs.

The number of jobs in the city has grown by 7 per cent, creating an additional 16,286 jobs. This equals a third of 2035 target of 46,000 additional jobs.

Our city is home to an additional

66,000
people.

The city's population has increased by 2 per cent, equalling around 7,811 people. The increase accounts for 9 per cent of the 2035 target of 66,000 additional people.

There will be a

33 per cent
reduction in the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods.

The life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods has widened for both men (10.8 years) and females (7.7 years) from the baseline year.

Every young person leaving school has a destination that fulfils their potential.

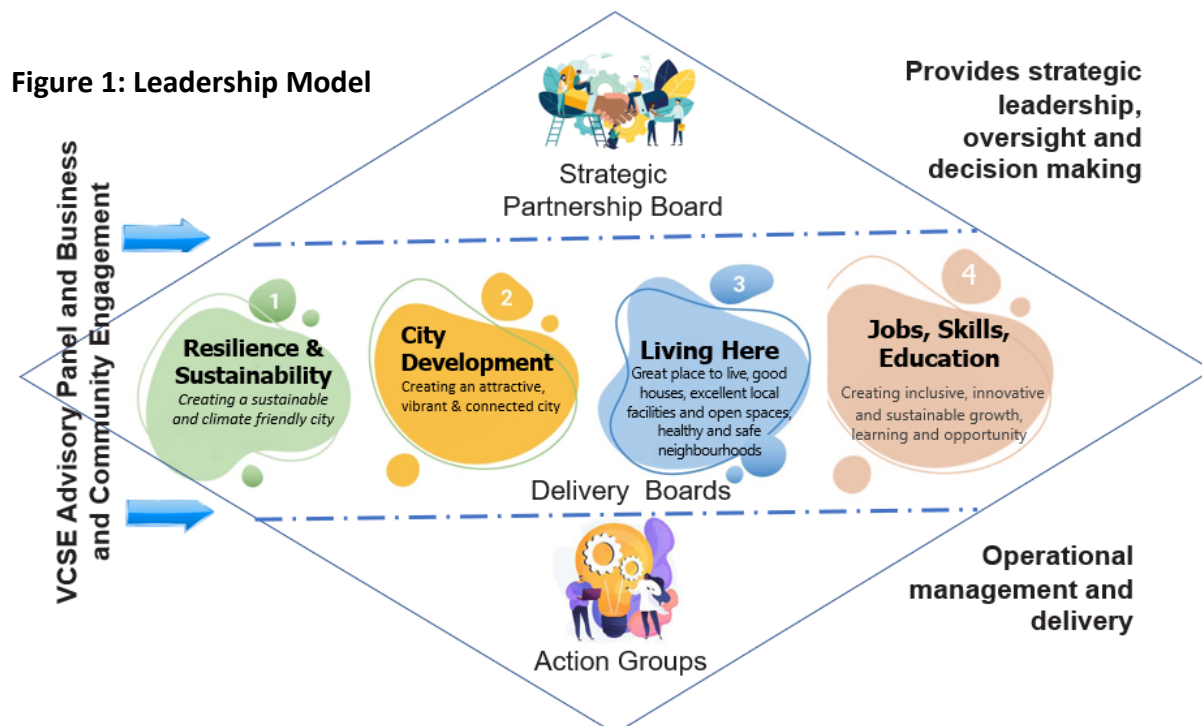
94.6 per cent of school leavers entered further or higher education, employment, or training, which is marginally higher than the 94.0 value of the baseline year.

KEY: ■ Positive change ■ No significant change ■ Negative change

Collaborative city leadership model

The Belfast Community Planning Partnership (CPP) was established in February 2018 with a shared aim to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of our communities and all citizens.

With a focus on delivering outcomes, investment, and improvements across the city, the CPP continues to lead and provide collective city leadership and oversight. The delivery is supported by four thematic Delivery Boards and a number of action focused delivery groups who drive forward specific priority areas, seek to problem solve, innovate and develop focused action plans. An agile approach to delivery was adopted as we respond to ongoing changing circumstances.



Connecting with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector

Recognising Belfast's vibrant and active voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, and to further strengthen the sector's involvement in the community planning process, a new pioneering VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel was established in spring 2020.

The Panel comprises 15 representatives, drawn from Belfast's large and diverse voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, reflecting a spread of themes, areas of the city, and large and small organisations.

Its aims are:

- to ensure that the sector's voices are represented in the community planning process
- to develop and improve cross sectoral relationships and partnerships
- to promote effective community engagement.

Delivering together

Since publishing the Belfast Agenda Statement of Progress in November 2021, together we have delivered success in a number of areas.



Jobs, skills and education

Connecting people to opportunities



- Signed funding agreements for **Belfast Region City Deal** projects with a value of **£430m**
- Invest NI have provided **£233m support to businesses**, leveraging a total investment of **£1,398m**, which will create **11,100 jobs over the 3-5 years**.
- Provided **venture capital funding** of almost **£60m to 250 Belfast based companies**, which will leverage a total investment of **£239m**.
- Increased **investment in the development of skills** from **£2.3m to £16.3m**.
- **Increased Investment in locally owned businesses** by 16% from **£71m to £82m**.
- Supported **922 individuals** to develop a business through the **Go for it Programme** supporting the **creation of 578 jobs**.
- Supported **719 Businesses, Social Enterprises and Cooperatives** with **one-to-one mentoring, advice and guidance**.
- Launched the **Vibrant Business Destinations Programme** in partnership with DfC and supported **7 organisations to develop area-based action plans**.
- Established and strengthened Belfast's **Labour Market Partnership**, to increase the range and scope of employability and skills activity in the city.
- Delivered a wide range of employment academies and interventions that have connected **3478 people with new or better employment opportunities**.
- Over 4,000 learners completed **English language courses** at BMET.
- Worked in collaboration with RSA Cities of Learning, Navigator and Badge Nation to develop and issue **3,753 digital badges and skills passports** to individuals.
- Secured the only UNESCO City of Music designation on the island of Ireland and achieved a **UNESCO Learning City Award** in 2021 for outstanding progress in providing learning opportunities for residents in Belfast.
- Co-created an Inclusive Growth City Charter for employers across Belfast - **the Belfast Business Promise** with commitment from over 20 organisations in the first 6 months.

Living here

Making life better for all our residents



- Delivered over **£1.6m in Hardship Programme** funding, which has supported over **15,000 people** in need.
- Supported **414 vulnerable households** through the Belfast Warm and Well Programme.
- Launched a **Social Supermarket Programme** in 2021 and provided **£944,000** to support **21 projects**.
- Invested **£75m** in **60 capital projects in neighbourhoods** across the city.
- Invested **£25m** in **two new world-class leisure facilities**.
- Progressed a **£10m neighbourhood regeneration fund** to drive recovery and transformation in local areas and communities.
- Delivered the **Complex Lives programme**, helping **50 vulnerable people** per year.
- Allocated **£27k** to deliver the first **Participatory Budgeting (PB)** process - **2,497 votes** received, and **27 groups** funded (30% non-constituted).
- Established the first **Ukraine Assistance Centre (providing one-stop multi-agency advise and support)**, welcoming more than **4,300 attendances** from approx. **2,800 individual Ukrainians**.
- Progressing towards completion of the **Belfast Peace IV Programme Projects** and co-designed and submitted the Local Community PeacePlus Action Plan proposal.
- Launched a **multi-agency intervention in the Wider University and Lower Ormeau** area to help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, improve community cohesion and improve the wellbeing of residents.

Delivering together

Since publishing the Belfast Agenda Statement of Progress in November 2021, together we have delivered success in a number of areas.



City development

Creating an attractive, vibrant and connected city



- **Built 518 new social housing units**, representing a cumulative total of 1,887 social homes (since 2017).
- Formal adoption of the Belfast City Council's **Local Development Plan Strategy**.
- Completed the disposal of land adjacent to the Gasworks Estate with the benefit of planning permission for **94 housing units**.
- As of 1 April 2023, the Housing Monitor identified over **340 hectares of land available for new housing** with the potential to accommodate **20,901 units**.
- Strategic Site Assessment work has informed the launch of a public procurement process to attract a private sector development partner to take forward **£630m of residential led regeneration** across the city.
- Progressing the delivery of almost £1bn of major development schemes, including the successful opening of the **Ulster University Belfast Campus**.
- Progressing the Belfast **"Grand Central Station"** at pace.
- Commenced delivery of the **£1m Vacant to Vibrant Pilot Capital Grant Scheme for the City Centre** with delivery of projects valued at £15m implemented through the lens of achieving **A Bolder Vision**.
- Developed the **Waterfront Promenade Framework** to identify and prioritise projects for funding including feasibility work - Sailortown to Queens Island Bridge.
- In 2021 / 2022 we saw a **2% growth in the rates base** (arising from additional development), which has resulted in additional rates growth of £3.3m every year.

Resilience and sustainability

Creating a sustainable and climate friendly city



- Belfast received an 'A' award from the **Carbon Disclosure Project** and was the top performing Council in Northern Ireland on the UK Climate Emergency Scorecards.
- Belfast ranked 11th in the world as a sustainable tourism destination on the **Global Destination Sustainability Index**.
- Continued investments in **low-emissions public transport** - half of all Belfast Metro bus services scheduled to be zero emission by 2025 and all Metro services planned to be Net Zero by 2030.
- Established the **Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub** in 2022 to bring together the construction industry and other key stakeholders to catalyse retrofit activity across the city.
- The draft **Belfast Electric Vehicle Strategy** is under review and seven EV charging infrastructures recently went live across Council sites, with a number of pilot and consortium projects in the pipeline.
- Completed a strategic outline business case for **connected circular economy hubs** as part of a Shared Island funded partnership between Belfast and Dublin City Council. The study identifies four unique opportunities to support a Connected Circular Economy.
- Continued to deliver the **One Million Trees** programme with 91,313 trees planted and 6,380 people across the city engaged in the programme since its launch in 2021.
- Adopted the Belfast Tree Strategy in 2023.

Improving health & wellbeing

The Community Planning Partnership and other organisations have been working collectively to create a healthier city for all, but especially those who are most vulnerable, to live, healthier, happier, and fulfilling lives.

Supporting vulnerable people with complex lives

The Belfast Complex Lives initiative supports some of Belfast's most vulnerable people with complex needs. Not everyone who is supported through the initiative has the same issues. However, all of those involved have very challenging needs and many live very chaotic lives. With the support of a multi-agency partnership and an assigned intensive support worker, vulnerable individuals gain access to stable accommodation, addiction support services, mental health support and healthcare.

Move More and Eat Well – to Feel Better

In February 2023, the Active Belfast Partnership took forward our first 'test and learn' pilot of Participating Budgeting (PB) in Belfast.

The 'Move More and Eat Well – to Feel Better' initiative focused on promoting and encouraging physical activity and healthy eating. The initiative was led by local people who submitted and voted on small-scale projects (i.e., £1,000) that would have a positive impact on physical activity and healthy eating in their area.

It gave residents a voice, brought people together and perhaps most importantly, enabled them to have the final decision on which projects are brought to life.

A total of 2,497 voters decided to fund 27 groups to deliver a wide range of physical activity and healthy eating projects supporting a variety of people from very young to old, teenagers, parents, families, those living with dementia, those that were sedentary, socially isolated, ethnic minorities and asylum seekers.



The success of this initiative will enable others to learn and inform the development of future participatory budgeting approaches across the city.

For more information, including project evaluation and videos, please see: <https://makinglifebettertogether.com>

Creating an Age-Friendly Belfast

An age-friendly city is one in which organisations work together to make sure the quality of life for people is enhanced as they age.

We are acutely aware of the challenges which may face many people and families within the city as they age including housing conditions, social isolation and poverty.

A key focus has been:

- supporting the return of **older people to volunteering** working with Volunteer Now and hosting an annual Older Volunteer Celebration event
- addressing mental health issues through promotion of the **Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing**
- programming events to encourage older people to become involved in physical activity (e.g., **Tea Dances and walks**)
- delivery of the annual **Positive Ageing Month** programme in October 22 and 23 with over 150 different events and activities held to encourage older people to reconnect and increase levels of wellbeing.
- addressing loneliness and social isolation through initiatives such as **'Warm Places'** which guaranteed an extra warm welcome to older people during winter period with an extended programme of activities.



Responding to the cost-of-living crisis

We continue to provide support and advice to help people across the city with the high cost-of-living.

During this period, older people also faced additional pressures linked to the cost-of-living crisis. Age Friendly Belfast provided advice on available services such as dedicated Belfast City Council warm spaces programme in Winter 2022, winter warmth packs and the 'Make the Call' initiative.

The Age Friendly Belfast Plan 2023 - 2027 was launched in May 2023. Four main strategic themes have been identified, with associated targets and actions to be delivered. The Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP) oversees the delivery of the Age Friendly plan.

Hardship Support

'Delivered £1.6m funding to support over 15,000 individuals and families in need.'

Over the past two years households have faced pressures relating to inflation and the rising cost of living, which is having an adverse impact on the most vulnerable in society, widening inequalities and increasing the prevalence of social isolation. Mitigating the worst impacts of the cost-of-living crisis and tackling increasing poverty levels within the city is a key community planning priority.

As part of our ongoing commitment to help alleviate the rising cost of living we have delivered over **£1.6 million in funding, which has supported over 15,000 people in need.**



This has included working with community partners to deliver a Fuel Poverty Hardship Programme, which provided electric, gas and oil vouchers to individuals and families in need and enhancing the capacity of existing organisations who already provide much needed services across the city. We have also produced a cost-of-living support guide to help raise awareness and signpost people to support and advice services available in Belfast.

Social Supermarkets Programme

Between April 22 – March 2023, we supported **5743 individuals** through the social supermarket programme.

We have supported the creation of a network of **Social Supermarkets** across the city with **£944,000 provided to 21 projects.**

Supported through funding from the Department for Communities, social supermarkets enable individuals to access food as well as being offered wraparound support and signposted to key services such as benefit checks, debt advice, training and employment advice and childcare.

There are different models which exist across the city as they respond to the needs of their own communities. Some are set-up as a shop within a community organisation while others offer support to particular interest groups such as those impacted by domestic violence and people living with a disability.



Investing in our communities and local assets

We continue to invest in our communities and in creating local assets and facilities across the city that people can access and enjoy. Such investment creates opportunity and empowers communities to improve their local places.

Creating local assets and facilities

Since our last statement of progress in 2021, we have invested **£75million** and completed **60 projects** resulting in new local assets, facilities and services across the city: creating jobs, training opportunities and making a real difference to people's lives and behaviours. Examples of projects delivered across the city include:

- **£7.2m investment in the transformation of St Comgall's** into a multi-use community hub.
- **£4.3m in the redevelopment of Marrowbone Millennium Park** transforming the area with state-of-the-art facilities and assets.
- new **£2.8m visitor centre at the Belfast City Cemetery**, a heritage project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Department for Communities and Belfast City Council
- significant investment in **upgrading the Belfast Zoo**, a key visitor destination in the city.
- Completion of phase one of the **£4.3m Lagan Gateway project** including a new pedestrian and cycle bridge at Stranmillis.
- Significant investment in upgrading our playing fields across the city including the redevelopment of **Blanchflower Playing Fields** including two new 3G pitches, a pavilion and a 200-seater stand, and access improvements at **Strangford Avenue Playing Fields**.
- Progressing the new **£10 million neighbourhood regeneration fund** which will help transform local areas and communities across the city.



“St Comgall’s will be an economic, social and cultural driver for the area and its completion has brought great pride to the local community. The building provides top class office accommodation as well as event spaces that will be used by the local community. The newly renovated St Comgall’s is a building that Falls Community Council and the local community

Liz Grove

Chair Falls Community Council





Leisure transformation programme

Since the Belfast Agenda was published, we have continued to invest in transforming Belfast's leisure provision, through the £105m Leisure Transformation Programme, with six of the seven new states-of-the-art facilities now open.

Since 2021, £25 million has been invested in developing modern, state-of-the-art leisure facilities across the city, which will enable active and healthy lifestyles for our citizens whilst also delivering on key priorities such as reducing life inequalities, improving neighbourhoods and creating employment and opportunity.



During this period two new facilities opened in the heart of communities across the city - £8m Avoniel opened in November 2021 and £17m Templemore Baths in June 2023.

Each centre has a unique selling point, as well as state of the art pools, fitness suites and pitches. Working collaboratively with GLL, our leisure service delivery partner, significant health and wellbeing outcomes

have been realised, creating jobs and skills opportunities for local people. A business case for Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility (the last of the seven centres) will be submitted to DfC early 2024. Construction could start in summer 2025, subject to securing funding and planning permission.

Key highlights from the investment in new leisure facilities:

- 13,800 live pre-paid members (59.5% of the city's total)
- 3,415 live members of swim schools (67.2% of the city's total)
- 1,545 love junior gym members (60.4% of the city's total)
- Over 1.4 million user visits
- 653,500 swim visits
- 601,000 gym and class visits
- 1,676 health referrals to LTP sites in the past 12 months
- Over jobs and promotions created
- 21 Leisure Employment Academies delivered.
- Over 200 leisure employment academy participants successfully achieved industry specific qualifications and commenced careers in leisure.
- Small business friendly procurement policy and working with social enterprises and local businesses to deliver café model in centres.
- £75,000 donated to local sporting athletes per year through the 'GLL Sports Foundation'.
- Over 2,800 children enrolled in holiday schemes in 2023.

Creating safe and shared places

We continued to work with communities and city partners to create a safe, inclusive, and shared city and places through the delivery of the Good Relations Strategy and collective actions through working the Shared City Partnership. Together we have secured significant investment, through the now closed Peace IV Programme and the new Co-Designed PEACE PLUS Local Action Plan, into communities to create shared, vibrant, and connected places and spaces.

Some delivery highlights include:

- **Development of £15.1m PEACE PLUS Local Action Plan (2024-2027)** - investing in 16 cross-community projects which will result in improved, shared and inclusive local services, facilities and spaces and make a significant and lasting difference to the quality of people's lives.
- **Shared Spaces and Services** – completed £8m Forth Meadow Greenway project which connects and animates existing open spaces in north and west Belfast along a 12km route from Clarendon Playing Fields to the new Transport Hub in the city centre. The investment enables local people to enjoy this important community greenway and improve their health and wellbeing through walking and cycling.
- **Building positive relations** – continued support provided to people to participate in projects that focus on building positive relations including network development, creative arts, leadership and understanding shared history.
- **Supporting new and minority communities** – promoted the inclusion and integration of new communities, including the facilitation of the Migrant Forum which seeks to ensure access to services for new communities. Further to this, additional funding was received from the Executive Office, to deliver five programmes to support asylum seekers in Belfast City.
- **Grant aid** – supported local responses to locally identified good relations issues.
- **Interface Programme** – worked with interface communities to develop relationships, create shared spaces and remove barriers.

This helped boost feelings of civic pride and confidence across the city



City development

Housing-led regeneration

A key focus has been to work together to address the housing pressures facing the city whilst also supporting the ambition to grow our population. Covering the full range of housing tenures, including affordable and social housing, community planning has brought partners together to develop a housing-led regeneration approach to unlock development across the city, contributing to the population growth ambitions and ensuring that everyone has access to a high-quality, affordable, and sustainable home.

Since 2021:

- 518 new social housing units have been built across the city, representing a cumulative total of 1,887 social homes since the Belfast Agenda was published in 2017.
- Published the NI Housing Executive's "**Ending Homelessness Together 2022-2027**" strategy reflecting a continued need for partners to work together to address the complex factors which lead to homelessness, many of which extend beyond accommodation.
- Completed a comprehensive **mapping of public lands** to assess potential availability of land for housing and to facilitate housing led regeneration; work has now commenced on planning and feasibility studies to assess the potential for mixed tenure development on a number of these sites.
- Release of land adjacent to the Gasworks Estate with the benefit of **planning permission for 94 housing units**
- The development of an **Intermediate Rent model** for the housing market has been progressed with DfC Public Consultation completed; this marks an important milestone to support meeting the affordable housing need.
- Launch of a public procurement process to attract a private sector development partner to take forward **£630m of residential led regeneration across the city.**



Local Development Plan launched.

The Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP): Plan Strategy, was adopted in May 2023, a significant milestone for Belfast as it will guide future investment and development decisions to enable sustainable spatial growth of the city up to 2035. It underpins the city's ambitions to increase the population by around 66,000 residents while providing more than 30,000 new homes and 15,000 new jobs. The supporting policies to be brought forward next will support the delivery of sustainable economic growth alongside measures to address climate change and biodiversity.



Eastern Transport Plan

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) are currently preparing a new transport plan which will set the framework for making transport policy and investment decisions up until 2035. The Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) 2035, previously known as the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP), will provide attractive and viable alternative modes of transport to reduce unnecessary car journeys, which in turn will create safer, healthier communities by reducing carbon emission and improving air quality.

The first step is to agree the vision of what we are trying to achieve and then check if the future transport networks will assist in its delivery. This approach shifts the focus to creating places for people, built around a healthy, safe and carbon neutral vision for the future.

Creating conditions for growth & opportunity

Since 2021 we have continued to work with partners to ensure that Belfast is a well-connected, vibrant and attractive place to live, work and visit with the right infrastructure to succeed.

Since 2021 we have:

- Launched **Belfast Waterfront Development Framework**
- Launched the **£475k Vibrant Business Destination Programme** to strengthen the competitiveness and create more vibrant local business destinations, enhancing the profile of local areas and driving footfall to local and neighbourhood centres.

- Achieved **UNESCO City of Music** status in 2021, celebrating the city's rich musical heritage.
- Hosted the **One Young World Conference in 2023**
- In 2022/23 Ulster University welcomed an **additional 15,000 students** and staff to its new Belfast site
- Completed site assembly for the **£100m Belfast Region City Deal Belfast Stories** attraction in the city centre and appointed design-team.

Positioning the city to compete

Work continued at pace through the 'Belfast City & Region Place Partnership' to position Belfast and wider city-region to compete on a region and global scale and maximise investment into the city and support inclusive economic growth. This is the time of unique possibility for the city and wider region.

Bringing together leaders from across the public private and third sector to create spaces and paces that sustainability boost employment, improve tourism and cultural infrastructure, deliver homes and support community and neighbourhood regeneration.

"With collaboration stronger than ever before, we must be unashamedly ambitious for our city region and work together to keep bringing our story across the globe and to the right audiences, highlighting the very best that we have to offer".

Joe O'Neill, Chief Executive of Belfast Harbour
Chair of the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership.

Improving educational outcomes

All children and young people deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential and achieve the best educational outcomes and life chances possible. We must raise our ambition for change in improving educational outcomes.

Community Planning Partners recognises the fundamental contribution of education to improving individuals' wellbeing and life opportunities, as well as the wider societal benefits to our communities and economy.

We have established a task group who are focussed on collaboration and innovation across the public, voluntary and community sectors to address educational inequalities in the city. This work is aligned with the regional direction provided in the Department of Education's Fair Start Strategy & Action Plan.

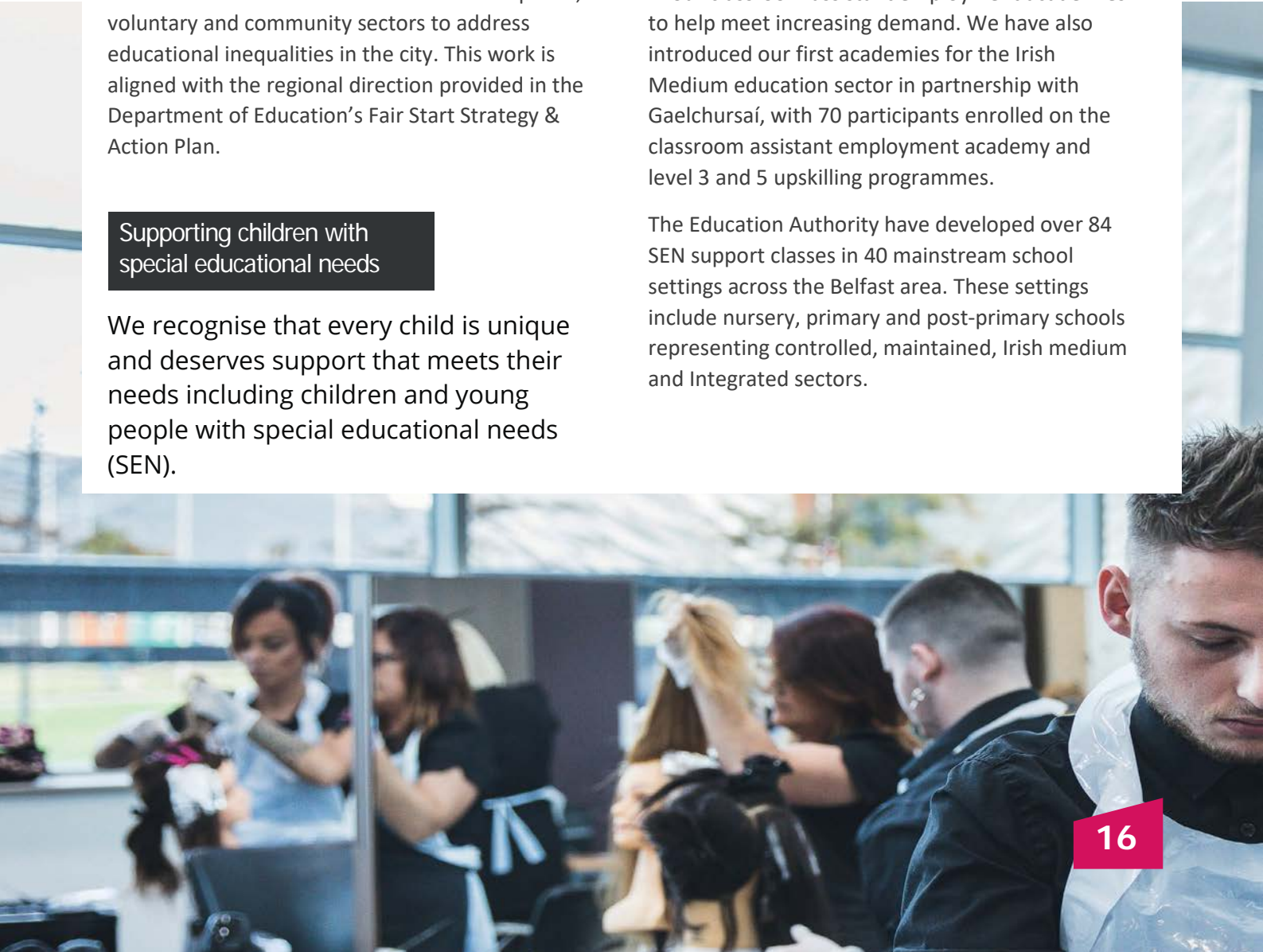
Supporting children with special educational needs

We recognise that every child is unique and deserves support that meets their needs including children and young people with special educational needs (SEN).

The one-to-one support offered by a classroom assistant can positively impact the quality of education and help children with SEN reach their full potential.

Working in partnership with Stranmillis University College and People 1st 301 people have taken part in our classroom assistant employment academies to help meet increasing demand. We have also introduced our first academies for the Irish Medium education sector in partnership with Gaelchursaí, with 70 participants enrolled on the classroom assistant employment academy and level 3 and 5 upskilling programmes.

The Education Authority have developed over 84 SEN support classes in 40 mainstream school settings across the Belfast area. These settings include nursery, primary and post-primary schools representing controlled, maintained, Irish medium and Integrated sectors.



GCSE Support Programme

Delivery of a citywide GCSE revision programme in partnership with the Area Partnership Boards. This innovative learning initiative provides tailored support for young people who are not expected to achieve a Grade C in their GCSE Maths and English, with over half of those supported were entitled to Free School Meals.

In the 2022-23 academic year the programme supported 434 pupils, with the majority receiving at least 14 hours targeted revision support. An average of 59% of those young people supported through the programme achieved at least a Grade C in either English or Maths GCSE.

Support to Schools

Community planning partners are committed to strengthening our relationship and collaborative working with schools across Belfast. Schools are civic organisations which not only support academic development of our children and young people but also contributes to wider community wellbeing and stability.

The Education Authority lead our Educational Inequalities Task Group and has undertaken the following activity with schools across Belfast:

- 13 Primary principals and 1 Nursery principal from Belfast form part of the EA NI School Leadership Forum, which provides a consultative mechanism to strengthen and shape the NI Education system.
- 128 schools in Belfast received Extended Schools funding totalling over £2.4 million per year.
- 95 schools in Belfast are involved in the Pathways into Partnership Programme funded via 'A Fair Start'. This programme supports the development of best practice, staff development and professionalism across the school network with the ultimate aim of improving learning outcomes for children.

☐☐ I would recommend the GCSE Support Programme to anyone struggling with Maths. It helped to build my confidence and to get a pass in my GCSE exam. ☐☐

Year 12 student

Schools Support Programme

In October 2023, Belfast City Council, in collaboration with the Education Authority and Department for Communities agreed to allocate **£250,000** to support the implementation of a **Schools Hardship Programme**.

The programme is open to all schools across Belfast and will provide funding to design initiatives to mitigate the rising cost of living and enhance the wellbeing of children. This may include school breakfast clubs, healthy eating initiatives.



Supporting people into employment

Belfast Labour Market Partnership

The Belfast Labour Market Partnership (LMP) is focused on improving Belfast's employability outcomes and labour market conditions by working with a wide range of partners, being flexible to meet local needs and helping to connect employers with employees. It enables us to increase the range and scope of employability and skills opportunities.

We developed the partnership with funding from the Department for Communities and Department for the Economy. The LMP provides a platform for engagement with government departments, community partners and business organisations as a means of refocusing regional programmes more effectively within the Belfast area.

LMP partners recognise that, while there are gaps that have been identified that will necessitate the creation of new interventions, not all activity need be new. Sometimes it is equally important to join-up, profile and support existing interventions.

Key deliverables include:

- **Gateway to Choices Service:** helping people to navigate and find the right support, at the right time, to help them get a job or move them towards positive job, skills, and qualification outcomes. Since being rolled-out in mid-2023, the service has supported over 700 people through the Gateway.
- **Belfast Jobs Fair:** Since 2021, we have brought together more than 100 employers under one roof to share information about over 1,800 employment opportunities (jobs) to over 1400 people who attended the fairs.



Bridges to Progression: has been developed to provide extra support for those young people at risk of leaving education or training with no positive destination. It focuses on supporting people through key transition stages and offers wrap-around support for young people who are facing social, financial, or other life issues impacting on ability to continue education or training journey. In 2022-23 the programme supported 193 young people through their Skills for Life & Work journey with 173 either moving onto a positive destination or remaining on course to achieve. In 2023-24 we are on track to support an additional 120 young people.

Building an Inclusive Labour Market Conference: Attended by over 200 delegates, representing employers, government agencies, providers and key stakeholders, the conference facilitated discussion and instigate actions to address economic inactivity and champion inclusive employment. The conversations focused on the need for, and value of, creating a more inclusive labour market, one that can improve outcomes for citizens and support a more competitive and productive economy.

Assured skills academies

The *assured skills* programme offers pre-employment training to give you the skills needed to compete for new employment opportunities. Funded through the Department for the Economy and delivered through the Belfast Metropolitan Colleague, the programme is designed to upskills individuals and help them compete for guaranteed job vacancies.

Since Nov 2021, there were **572 participants on 35 Assured Skills Academies** in key growth sectors such as cyber-security, data analytics, software development and professional business services. We also delivered the first Civil Service Academy, developed in collaboration with the Department for the Economy and the Executive Office, with 75 appointments made from 80 participants by mid-2023.

Recognising talent and enhancing skills

Working with RSA Cities of Learning network, Navigator and Badge Nation, we have developed delivered a digital badges and skills passport for Belfast which gives people a portable record of achievement through employability interventions. Since the introduction of this initiative, 263 digital badges have been designed and published with 3753 issued to individuals across the City, 43 pathways have been created, these pathways map out the necessary skills and training requirements into employment and career opportunities.

Digital badges give employers a new way to connect with talent in cities – an alternative to the standard practice of asking for evidence of academic qualifications and work experience. We now frequently see individuals sharing their digital accreditations on social media and elsewhere.



Employment Academies

Across community planning partners a range of tailored 'Employment Academies' are being designed and implemented to better connect local residents to employment opportunities, removing barriers to participation and improving skills development.

From Nov 2021 until Dec. 2023, we have continued to help Belfast residents get jobs and help meet increasing employment demand across businesses sectors including tech, professional services, logistics and transport, leisure, construction, working with children, health and social care and working at sea.

During this period **1392** people accessed the Employment Academies, with 535 still undertaking an academy. **79%** of those who completed the academies have gone on to secure a new or better job.

Securing investment, creating jobs and opportunities.

City partners are working closely with Invest NI, the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Department for the Economy, who have a regional responsibility, to secure investment and bring forward targeted programmes to support and enable local businesses to grow and compete globally.

Belfast Region City Deal

The signing of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) in December 2021 was a key milestone for the city and wider region as it secured a financial commitment of the UK Government, NI Executive and BRCD partners, to work with industry to deliver a £1bn programme of investment that offers a 'once in a generation' opportunity to accelerate inclusive economic growth for the region.

The investment will help further develop the city's innovation and digital offering and support those sectors where we have the potential to become world class including life and health sciences, the digital and creative industries, and advanced manufacturing. It will support next generation digital capabilities, boost tourism including a new £100m visitor destination in Belfast, and support the region's regeneration, underpinned by infrastructure developments and skills investment to connect people to jobs and services.

Over the lifetime of the deal, the following benefits are anticipated:

- Support the creation of 20,000 new jobs.
- Connect local people to new and better jobs.
- Place the region at the top table of digital innovation.
- Deliver £400 million in GVA directly on-site and within the region.
- Target delivery of almost £1 billion of private sector leverage
- Create compelling world class visitor attractions.
- Help to regenerate major towns and cities.

In 2022/23 BRCD partners have moved from development to delivery with eleven outline business cases approved and an additional three at advanced stages of the approval process. In addition, seven contracts for funding and funding agreements have been signed, which will enable project delivery with an approximate value of £430 million. Another key milestone was the commencement of construction on the first project on the Studio Ulster site at Giant's Park in October 2022.

2022/23 also saw work commence on the skills assessment process to understand and respond to the labour and skills implications and opportunities of the City Deal investment projects. Two well attended market engagement events were held in March 2023 to raise awareness among local businesses of upcoming construction and professional services opportunities through the BRCD.





Supporting local business and enterprise

Over the past two years we have continued to work with city partners and the business community to understand the needs and pressures facing local businesses and to co-design a range of support packages and interventions to address these and support business enterprise and start-ups.

Key achievements over the past two years:

- Supported **922 individuals to start a business** through the 'Go For It Programme', supporting the creation of 578 jobs.
- Supported **116 social enterprises and cooperatives** with one-to-one mentoring, advice and guidance.
- Supported **603 businesses to implement growth strategies**, become more resilient, enhance their digital and online presence, improve tendering skills and access specialist support for businesses with high growth potential.
- Launched the '**Vibrant Business Destinations**' programme in partnership with the Department for Communities. The programme aims to strengthen the competitiveness and create more vibrant local business destinations, delivering interventions that drive footfall and create vibrancy in areas outside of the city centre. So far, we have supported 7 business associations across the city to develop area-based action plans.

Belfast Business Promise

We are committed to ensuring that the success of the city reaches everyone.

We have co-created with our business sector an Inclusive Growth City Charter for employers across the city. Known as the **Belfast Business Promise**, the free accreditation scheme is open to all employers working to improve Belfast. Build around eight pledges of excellence, such as providing fair wages, the scheme helps develop and embed better employment practices.



Since launched in March 2023 with the participation of 20 organisations to help test and refine the model, the scheme continues to grow with 37 organisations signed-up to the Belfast Business Promise in December 2023 and are committed to improving how they do business together.

Growing local economy

Since the Belfast Agenda was published in 2017, Invest NI has provided support totalling **£233m to 4,244 businesses in Belfast**. This assistance will leverage a total investment of **£1,398m** and over the next 3-5 years will lead to the creation of over **11,100 new jobs**.

Other key highlights include:

- Providing venture capital funding of almost £60m to 250 Belfast based companies, which will leverage a total investment of over £239m.
- Increasing investment in skills from £2.3m in 2021-22, to £16.3m in 2022-23, which includes investments from companies such as Dale Farm, Portview Fit out, FinTru and KPMG to improve the skills of their workforces.
- Over the last year investment in locally owned Belfast businesses has increased by 16% from £71m in 2021-22 to £82m in 2022-23.
- Launching a new competitive programme, Ambition to Grow, to support local businesses that are innovative and seeking to export and to grow from Northern Ireland

Tackling climate, resilience, and sustainability

Belfast faces major challenges related to climate change and sustainability. These challenges will have a profound impact on economic and social objectives unless they are addressed with urgency and in a collaborative manner.

Changes to the environment are amongst the biggest threats we face. We must become a sustainable city that meets the needs of the present without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

From the way we heat our houses, how we use water or how we choose to travel have significant long-term impacts on our local environment and quality of life.

City partners share focus on climate adaptation, mitigation and decarbonising the city's economy and delivering the goal to transition Belfast to an 'inclusive, net zero-emissions, climate resilient city'.

Together we have delivered:

- The **Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership** was re-established in 2022 to bring focus to key challenges for the food system in Belfast including tackling climate change, enabling urban farming and community growing, reducing food waste, food poverty and diet related ill-health.

- Development of a **Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP)** to inform investment decisions to accelerate the transition of the city to a low emission energy system.
- A programme of interventions to help increase energy efficiency and reduce costs for homes and businesses across the city (e.g. **retrofitting, solar PV**) is under development with associated funding models being explored.
- Work continued with the Place Based Climate Action Network to develop a **pipeline of investable climate projects** to help us fund our net zero ambitions for the city.
- Investments in **low-emissions public transport** continued with half of all Belfast Metro bus services scheduled to be zero emission by 2025 and all to be Net Zero by 2030.
- Delivery of the **Belfast Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP)**, launched in Nov. 2021, to improve the ambient air quality and reduce air pollution within Belfast and improve public health and wellbeing.



Working with public and private sector partners, to extend the Belfast Bikes scheme, creating 8 new docking stations across the city during 2021-2023.

Part of almost £1m investment to create 15 new docking stations with seven further stations planned as Phase 2 in 2023-24.

The scheme connects the city and provides a sustainable form of transport for citizens, visitors, and business users. The scheme provides greater access to places and destinations across the city as well as helping improve the health of users by encouraging people to integrate exercise into their daily transport routine.

With 56 docking stations across the city with a capacity for up to 588 bikes, there was 29,974 active members in December 2023. Since the launch of Belfast Bikes scheme there has been more than 1,422,196 journeys made across the city.

Understanding the city's population indicators

To enable the community planning partnership to understand the changing dynamics of Belfast and to enable us to identify where we need to bring shared focus, 48 population indicators have been identified and tracked to understand the wellbeing of our city's population (refer to figure 2 below). They reflect the conditions of the whole population within the city and take account of wider societal, environmental, or economic shocks.

There is no doubt that the city and its people have experienced significant challenges over the past two years including recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, accelerating cost-of-living crisis, political instability, climate change and budget constraints.

Figure 2: City Dashboard: Population Indicators Snapshot

Everyone in Belfast benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy		Belfast is a welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive city for all.		Everyone in Belfast fulfils their potential		Everyone in Belfast experiences good health and well-being		Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainability city.	
	Trend		Trend		Trend		Trend		Trend
1 City productivity levels	↑	14 Number of victims of any crime	→	21 Proportion of working age population who have attained Level 4 or above	↑	29 Life expectancy at birth	→	40 Air Quality	↑
2 Investment into Belfast	→	15 Number of hate-motivated crimes	↓	22 Proportion of school-leavers achieving Level 2 or above including English and Maths	↑	30 Gap in life expectancy by depriv.	→	41 Percentage of household waste that is reused, recycled or composted	→
3. Size of Belfast Economy	↑	16 Proportion of people who feel safe	→	23 Gap between percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieving at least Level 2, including English and maths, and their peers	↑	31 Proportion of babies born at a low birth weight	↓	42 Percentage of all journeys which are made by waiting, cycling or public transport	↑
4 Business Demographics	→	17 Number of ASB incidents	↑	24 Proportion of school-levers entering employment, education or training	→	32 Preventable deaths	↓	43 Visitor numbers	↑
5. The proportion of the population in absolute and relative poverty	↑	18 The number of people who agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together	↓	25 School attendance rates	↓	33 Proportion of the population of adults/children who are obese	→	44 Engagement in culture and arts activities	↓
6 The total number of jobs in Belfast	↑	19 Proportion of population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society	↓	26 Volunteering	→	34 Proportion of population who smoke	↑	45 Number of miles of cycle lanes, footways and footpaths	↻
7 Working-age employment rate	→	20 Proportion of young people who think that local facilities are shared and open to all	↓	27 Self-efficacy	→	35 Proportion of adults drinking above sensible drinking guidelines	→	46 Proportion of homes that are energy efficient	↻
8 Employment rate by deprivation	↻			28 Proportion of Working Age Population with no qualifications	→	36 Proportion of people who rank themselves as having high levels of wellbeing.	↓	47 Satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live	→
9 Economic inactivity rate (ex-students)	→					37 Proportion of adults who undertake at least 150 minutes of physical exercise per week	↓	48 Carbon Emissions	→
10 Average earnings	↑					38 Number of households in housing stress	↓		
11 Total spend by external visitors	→					39 Number of people in treatment for problem drug of alcohol misuse	↑		
12 Supply of housing	↑								
13 Disability employment rate	↑								

KEY ↑ Positive change → No significant change ↓ Negative change ↻ No update

The Statement of Progress clearly identifies specific areas where the work of community planning partnership has contributed to the delivery of the Belfast Agenda ambitions and agreed stretched goals. However, it is important to recognise that moving the curve on the city's population indicators requires much more than the work being taken forward through community planning, will take significant time to realise and will need a collective and sustained commitment across all levels of government and society.

There is a strong leadership commitment and shared focus across the Belfast Community Planning Partnership in those bid challenges facing the city and the curves we wish to change, including addressing health inequality issues, through the delivery of the refreshed Belfast Agenda (2024-2028). This provides the catalyst and call to action across city stakeholders on those issues where more needs to be done. Our vision, ambitions and outcomes as set out in the Belfast Agenda are long-term and intended to improve the lives of everyone in Belfast.

Next steps

Over the past year we commenced our first formal review of Belfast's community plan. To complete the review, a "Continuing the Conversation" consultation and engagement programme was rolled out citywide in three phases.

The purpose of this was to reengage residents, city partners, stakeholders and organisations in a conversation on the community plan which would ensure their needs and aspirations remained at its core.

In phase one we sense-checked our vision, priorities and outcomes and you told us that you were happy that these stayed the same. In phase two we looked at our strategic intents, the stretch goals we should use to measure success and the actions we should undertake to get us there.

In phase three we carried out a public consultation. The rich and diverse feedback we received has been shaped into this revitalised strategy and its accompanying action plans.

Strengthened by the partnership working which came to the fore during the pandemic and in the spirit of turning crisis into opportunity, the time has proven right to build back better, drive recovery and look at ways to lever change.

The Community Planning Partnership would like to thank every person who attended one of our workshops, contributed to the conversation online or submitted a survey. Your insight has been invaluable in shaping the refreshed Belfast Agenda.

We now intend to bring forward and embed the refreshed Belfast Agenda and supporting action plans for the period 2024-2028. Our focus will be on delivering on the priorities identified, supporting individuals, families and businesses across the city, improving life opportunities, health and wellbeing.



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Access to information

As part of our commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, we want to ensure that everyone is able to access the documents we produce. This document is available in alternative formats such as Braille, easy-read, audio, large print and also in other languages on request by contacting: 028 9027 0234.



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