

APPLICATION FOR FURTHER FUNDING TO ADDRESS RACIAL TENSIONS / IMPROVE SOCIAL COHESION

TOTAL AMOUNT BID FOR: £27,000

1. Please outline the emerging / existing need in your council area, relating to issues around social / racial cohesion

Belfast is an incredibly diverse city and benefits from ethnic minority communities making important cultural and economic contributions, yet this growing diversity is accompanied by enduring structural inequalities and longstanding patterns of segregation. Recent events in Belfast have highlighted the fragility of intercommunity relations, with a pressing need to strengthen social and racial cohesion across the council area.

PSNI statistics show that Belfast consistently records the highest number of racist incidents and hate crimes in Northern Ireland, reaching a peak with the race riots in Summer 2024. These figures almost certainly underestimate the problem as hate crime remains significantly underreported as demonstrated through anecdotal conversations with support organisations. Alongside these trends, far right and anti – immigration groups have mobilised in a number of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, using social media and public demonstrations to exploit local grievances and disseminate hostile and untrue narratives about migrants and the ethnic minority population. Such activities have now begun to normalise anti migrant rhetoric and inflame community tensions.

The race riots of summer 2024 exposed the depths of these problems and has caused long lasting tensions and fear within the ethnic minority community. Minority owned businesses were attacked and in some cases, destroyed with many residents faced intimidation and harassment. Although political leaders and support organisations responded with public condemnation and action, the riots deepened perceptions of exclusion.

More recently, there have been credible reports of self styled 'patrols' and other forms of vigilante activity targeting individuals perceived to be migrants or members of ethnic minority groups. These incidents which are often documented on social media have contributed to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. Families and business owners from minority backgrounds remain disproportionately exposed to risk, which some feeling compelled to restrict their participation in public life.

Belfast City Council area therefore faces a clear and urgent need for sustained action to promote social and racial cohesion. Strengthening hate crime enforcement, investing in community dialogue, supporting those affected by racist violence and addressing the socioeconomic deprivation are all necessary to rebuild confidence and ensure that all residents can participate fully and safely in the city.

- 2.

Following an open call for the Community Recovery Fund, Council proposes allocating **£17,205.75** to the next two eligible projects: -

- Refuge Language requested £13,943.75
- Whiterock Children and Family Centre requested £3,262.00
- **Combined total requested: £17,205.75.**

With the remainder of the funds earmarked for a contingency pot to address arising crisis situations - **£9,794.25** therefore totalling the £27,000 made available by TEO.

Refuge Language has developed a targeted project in direct response to the ongoing racial tensions and the 2024 race riots during which both staff and students were directly affected. During the disturbances, classes had to be suspended and it was necessary to arrange emergency transport to ensure that students could still attend critical exams and appointments. The organisation's South Belfast classes, which were located at the centre of the unrest were particularly impacted. To address these challenges, Refuge Language proposes to deliver multiple weekly community conversation classes designed to build trust and foster positive relations between local residents and migrant communities. Volunteers will be recruited to participate in these sessions which will include structured discussion on culture alongside two integration activities aimed at encouraging mutual understanding. Another key component to the project will be to provide training to 120 refugees and asylum seekers, on how to recognise and report hate crime. Delivery will be in partnership with GEMS in South Belfast and 174 Trust in North Belfast, ensuring strong local reach. This initiative represents good value for money by combining existing volunteer capacity with targeted training and community-based dialogue, allowing a relatively modest resource to reach a wide and diverse audience. It aligns closely with the T:BUC strategy by promoting community relations, fostering mutual respect and supporting safer, shared spaces. This programme also complements the BCC Good Relations Action plan through its emphasis on intercultural engagement, practical support for those affected by hate crime and collaborative delivery with well established partners.

Whiterock Children's Centre proposes a community integration programme built around three separate, four week cookery courses that bring together women from host and migrant residents to share skills, recipes and conversation. To remove a common barrier to participation, the centre will provide on site childcare throughout the session. The programme will culminate in a joint celebratory trip that reinforces the relationships formed. By using the centre's existing kitchen facilities and group-based delivery, the initiative achieves strong value for money, relatively modest costs and generates opportunity for cross community interaction and skill sharing while also supporting parents who may be otherwise excluded. The project aligns with T:BUC strategy by creating safe, shared spaces that foster mutual understanding and respect amongst diverse communities. It also complements the BCC Good Relations Action Plan by promoting positive intercultural engagement and strengthening neighbourhood connections through practical, family friendly activities.

The remaining funds will be retained in a dedicated contingency reserve to ensure the Council can respond swiftly and effectively to unforeseen challenges and emergencies. This reserve will not be used for routine expenditure, instead it will be held solely for genuine crisis situations where immediate action is required to safeguard communities or meet urgent community needs. By planning for contingencies in this way, the council can ensure that critical services can be funded in the event of a crisis.

it focuses on supporting local project delivery, achieves value for money and aligns to one or more key aims of the T:BUC Strategy

3. Please outline how the impact of the additional funding on racial / social cohesion will be measured

The impact of the additional funding on racial and social cohesion will be measured through a combination of quantitative indicators, qualitative feedback and long term outcome tracking. These will be tied into the specific objective of each funded programme and will include; baseline and follow up surveys to measure the participants attitudes towards other ethnic or cultural groups, and sense of belonging of those from a minority ethnic background and their perception of safety.

Participation and attendance trackers will be used record the demographics of each participant and repeat participation within a programme. This will indicate how many people are brought together through a programme and whether diverse groups are engaging.

Qualitative evidence will be recorded through structured interviews, focus groups and engagement with council officers.

Hate crime statistics and reports of racially motivated incidents will be monitored with the hope that these will indicate a downward trend as a result of the programmes or alternatively, an increase in confidence to report hate crime.

Long term community indicators will be tracked to analyse trends such as increase in joint projects between host and migrant communities, the representation of ethnic minorities in local committees and in civil life.

This mixed method will provide a robust overview of how the additional funding is helping to strengthen social cohesion and reduce racial tension whilst aligning to the principles of the T:BUC strategy and the BCC Good Relations Action Plan.

PLEASE NOTE

1. Any funding received through this scheme remains subject to the terms and conditions of the DCGRP, as per your existing 2025/26 Letter of Offer.
2. The extra funding **does not require** matched funding.
3. The desire is to see money flow through the council to local groups in their area, where possible.
4. Upon written confirmation of a successful application, councils may commence delivery immediately – Letters of Variance will be drafted in due course.
5. Applications must be submitted by **5pm on 22 Sept 2025**.