

Belfast City Council

Good Relations Strategy 2026-2035



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Foreword

TO BE WRITTEN FOR THE LORD MAYOR (OR PARTY GROUP LEADERS?)

INTRODUCTION

In the period of the last Belfast City Council good relations strategy there were a few watershed moments commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement and the 30th anniversary of ceasefires. The delivery of ceasefires and the Agreement, and marking their anniversaries, all occurred in Belfast.

As moments that symbolised the closing of a communal conflict that had affected and traumatised a generation, the ceasefires and Agreement ushered in an era of hope and aspiration for the city that it could not have imagined during the darkness of the conflict period.

Since that time Belfast has become almost unrecognisable. The physical and economic regeneration has been breathtaking for those that lived through The Troubles. The city centre is used and utilised by people from all backgrounds in a way that the parents and grandparents of the young people who now socialise freely, could not have imagined for themselves and are grateful to witness for their children.

Belfast is a different city from that in the 1990s, barely recognisable for people over 40 years old. Those under 40 years of age, who have grown up in a society relatively free from violent conflict, can imagine nothing else.

The courageous relationship-building and reconciliation work of many people from across the community can take credit for it.

And yet, Belfast is not a normal city. While there are 'normal' issues of poverty, dislocation, unlawfulness, and adapting to the changing and shifting challenges of a European region, there are deeper issues of segregation and legacy, mistrust and distrust, that are left over from the conflict years.

Our undoubted good relations progress facilitated groundbreaking community responses to the Covid pandemic; and helped formulate coordinated approaches to the more recent cultural expression and racism-related issues that have been experienced across these islands.

However, with the progress made and significant and serious relationships built, and while new relationships need nurtured and existing ones sustained, there is a need to go beyond good relations to a new iteration of a peace process that originated in Belfast. Conscious of old fears and issues still to be addressed, amid the new fears and challenges, there is need to create a new dynamic of cohesion and belonging for the city that teaches others how to do it. This is something that this City can lead on, because Belfast, much more than other areas, knows the alternative.

The city has achieved so much since the end of conflict in the late 1990s, and building on those successes it is time to offer new direction in its peacebuilding leadership.

This strategy offers this new direction engaging a *Whole Community and Whole Council* approach with a focus on what needs to change and cross-sectoral measurement of that change.

In a city where people at different times are prone to criticise or undermine because of a real or perceived slight to community background, good relations is also a process of resilience. The Council can therefore be rightly proud of what its good relations programmes have achieved over the years. While recognising those achievements, it is ready to further normalise the work it does to build a more cohesive city where all people feel a stronger sense of belonging, regardless of where they are in the city or whatever their background and beliefs.

This strategy sets challenges for the city for 2035 and targets for 2050 that recognise the positives in difference and the strengths of diversity. Progress is not taken for granted; complacency and indifference have no place in the strategy while cohesion and belonging are pursued robustly.

Through a focus on transformative rather than performative activities, the strategy challenges all sectors and all sides of the community to build a more cohesive city that values belonging for all.

CONTEXT

Belfast City Council is one of, if not the, leading advocate for and deliverer of good relations work in Northern Ireland. Its status as the largest local authority with leadership from all political parties, and the quality and impact of its work on good relations to date, is widely recognised and very well regarded.

Good relations focuses primarily under Section 75(2) of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act on promoting positive relationships between people with different political opinions, racial background or religious beliefs.

At its core, good relations manages, counters and reduces racism and sectarianism.

A definition of both includes:

Racism is defined in many ways in different sources, but the fundamentals come back to:

- Feelings of inherent superiority based on background.
- Prejudice and disrespect.
- The continued play out of issues at a local level through things like graffiti and vocalisation of prejudice.
- Systemic or institutional racism developed sometimes over a prolonged period.
- Subsequent issues around decision-making processes, lack of involvement in decision-making and lack of recognition of contributions made.

As a result, the strategy includes references to:

- Systems and procedures by agencies and others that may include unconscious bias.
- Capacity building to raise abilities to tackle or address every day or systemic racism and sectarianism.
- Identification of positive role models.
- Dialogues on the consequence of racism at an individual and structural level, and how to challenge it.

Sectarianism is defined in many ways in different sources, but the fundamentals come back to:

- Narrow-minded or parochial attitudes toward people of different faith beliefs.
- Being confined to the limits of a particular denomination or being biased toward people and beliefs of a particular denomination.
- Sectarianism in Ireland is often related to people from a Protestant or Catholic background, but could equally relate to differences between people of other faith backgrounds.
- There are often links from the denomination to other cultural, historical and political differences.

As a result, the strategy includes references to:

- Inter faith collaboration; because while there can be a diluted relationship between religion, beliefs and political, historical and cultural differences, nevertheless sectarianism can still play a part even if those differences are increasingly less clear in a city such as Belfast;
- Parochialism or limited engagement and loyalty locally is important to sectarianism, and so the benefit of looking beyond the local and exploring good practice elsewhere can be important.

While there are many definitions of what constitutes racism, most agree that sectarianism is a subset of racism especially in systemic manifestations. In Belfast in recent years that includes a focus on Islamophobia, or prejudice against other faiths, as well as Belfast's traditional religious divides.

Belfast City Council's good relations strategy exists within a context of a wide-ranging policy context especially from The Executive Office, at Stormont, which supports financially the delivery of the actions.

The most pertinent over-arching policy document is the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy which is aligned with the detail and recommendations within this strategy.

The Together Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy was produced in 2013 and is currently being reviewed by The Executive Office. It has four over-arching strategic themes:

Our Children and Young People aims to continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations.

Our Shared Community aims to create a community where division does not restrict the opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone. Specific actions include the creation of four urban villages and ten new shared neighbourhoods.

Our Safe Community aims to create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears about safety. Specific actions include working to build a culture where people feel comfortable to report when they have been the victim of intimidation or harassment and the creation of an interface barrier support package.

Our Cultural Expression aims to create a community, which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced.

These four strategic priorities are at the heart of Belfast City Council's new good relations strategy and evidenced throughout.

The good relations indicators produced by The Executive Office are foundations for the indicators suggested for the Shared City Partnership in this strategy. The Shared City Partnership is a working group of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the Council and oversees and drives the Good Relations work of the Council. Its make-up and function are detailed later along with proposals for a refined role for this unique body.

The Council will adopt a new framework for measuring its impact, which embraces a focus on making Belfast a more cohesive city beyond the good relations indicators and challenging all sectors to contribute to the work as well as measuring impact. As such, the approach is a *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach to its new, good relations strategy.

The Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 is also produced by The Executive Office. It has four specific outcomes:

Equality of service provision:

People from a minority ethnic background can access and benefit from all public services equally.

Elimination of prejudice, racism and hate crime:

Effective protection and redress is provided against all manifestations of racism and racist hate crime and a victim centred approach.

Increased participation, representation and belonging:

People from minority ethnic backgrounds participate in and are represented fully in all aspects of life – public, political, economic, social and cultural – and enjoy a shared sense of “belonging”.

Cultural diversity is celebrated:

The rights of people from minority ethnic backgrounds to maintain their culture and traditions in line with human rights norms and to pass them on to subsequent generations are recognised and supported.

Recent research from The Executive Office suggests that key barriers to integration include social inclusion, education issues, leadership in government, and lack of understanding. Many respondents to the consultation on the draft strategy agreed with its vision, and that increasing engagement, involving community groups, and improving diversity were important.

The Refugee Integration Strategy, published in May 2025 included a vision for ‘a cohesive and shared society where people seeking protection, are valued and feel safe, are integrated into communities and are supported to reach their full potential’.

The strategy has four high-level outcomes which are as follows:

Outcomes:

- 1: *People who seek asylum and refuge are valued and respected.*
People who seek asylum and refuge are respected as members of our communities and their presence, knowledge and contribution to society is recognised and valued.
- 2: *People who seek asylum and refuge are safe and feel secure.*
People who seek asylum and refuge feel welcome and live here safely without fear of persecution or discrimination resulting from their immigration status outcome.
- 3: *People who seek asylum and refuge exercise their rights and responsibilities.*
People who seek asylum and refuge are integrated into diverse and inclusive communities and are aware of and able to exercise their rights and responsibilities.
- 4: *People who seek asylum and refuge are supported to achieve their full potential.*
People who seek asylum and refuge have access to services and support to achieve their full potential.

In Northern Ireland as a whole, in 2024-2025, there was a significant increase in race hate motivated incidents and crimes - 1,807 incidents (an increase of 454 on the previous year) and 1,188 crimes (an increase of 349 on the previous year). There were nearly double the number of race hate incidents (1,807) than sectarian hate motivated incidents (910) and more race hate motivated crimes than all other hate related crimes put together: 1,188 compared to 947.¹ It is important to note that this data is based on reported incidents, it is clear there is a large number of unreported hate crime which means the above statistics in reality are much larger.

The Council's good relations strategy is consistent with the Belfast Agenda community plan including its five themes of people and communities, economy, place, planet and compassion, and takes on board all of the key issues and challenges.

¹ PSNI report to NIPB June 2025

Existing Delivery

The Council's existing good relations action plan included support for 36 programmes broadly split between the four TBUC strategic themes of Children and Young People (eight programmes), Shared Community (ten programmes), Safe Community (six programmes), and Cultural Expression (12 programmes).

The unit cost is highest for Safe Community at £400 per participant and lowest for Children and Young People at £118 per person.

Total good relations investment in programmes is £784k, most of which comes from Council (57%) and the balance from TEO.

The largest item of investment is in good relations small grants (£280k) with other programmes including St Patrick's Day, a positive cultural expression bonfire beacons programme, a civic engagement programme, minority ethnic equality and inclusion programme, an interface engagement programme, a shared education schools programme, and a strategic connections programme.

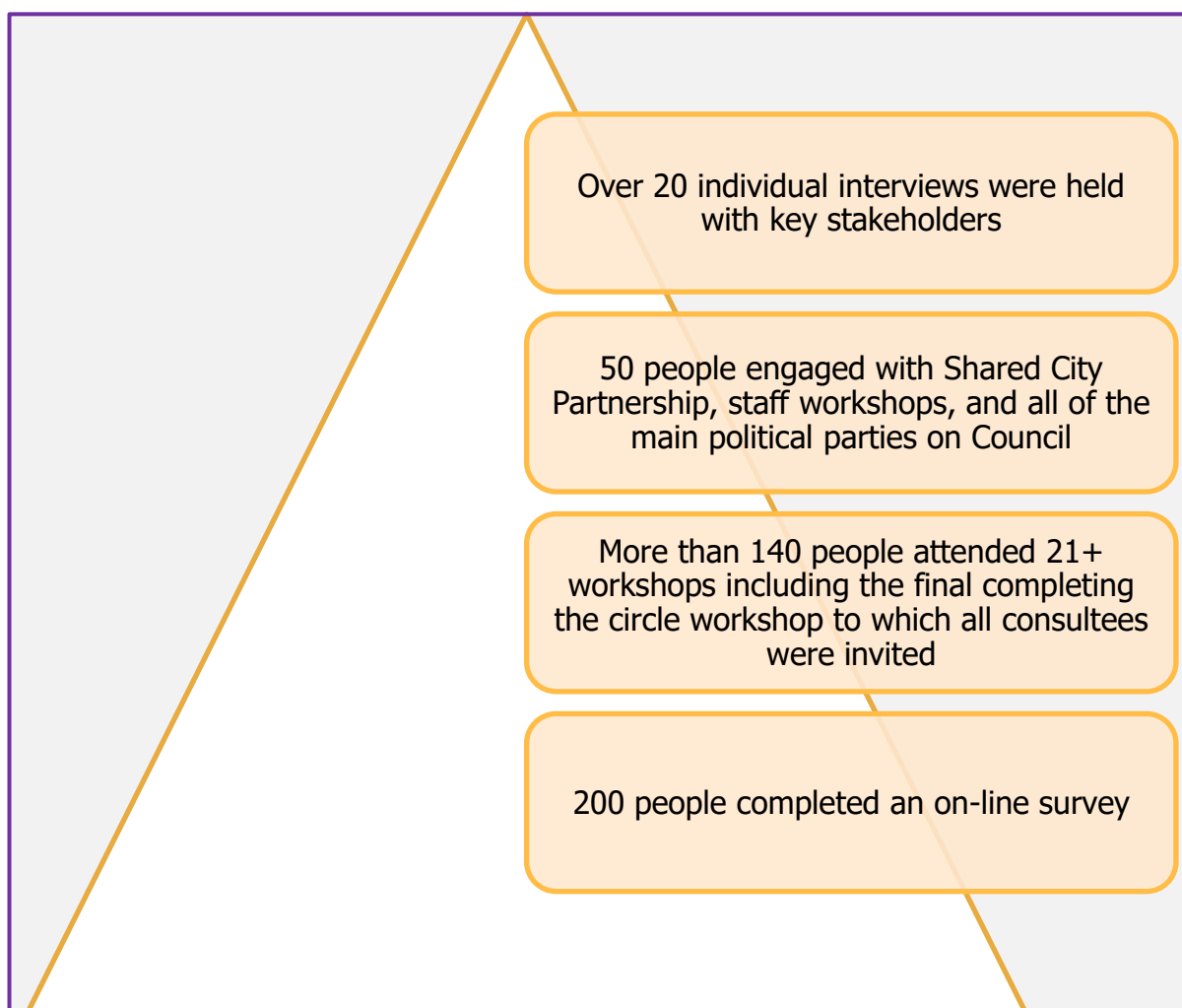
There are detailed and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the existing strategy and the programmes are well regarded and considered effective. Many of the projects are consistent with the criteria linked to building a positive peace or/and an integrated social cohesion framework.

WHAT WE WERE TOLD

Overall, more than 400 people participated in the consultation process, events and activities in the development of this new Good Relations Strategy, such as attending any of 21+ workshops and/or completing a survey. All the main political parties were consulted and interviews offered to all 60 elected members with an additional half-day open session for all elected members.

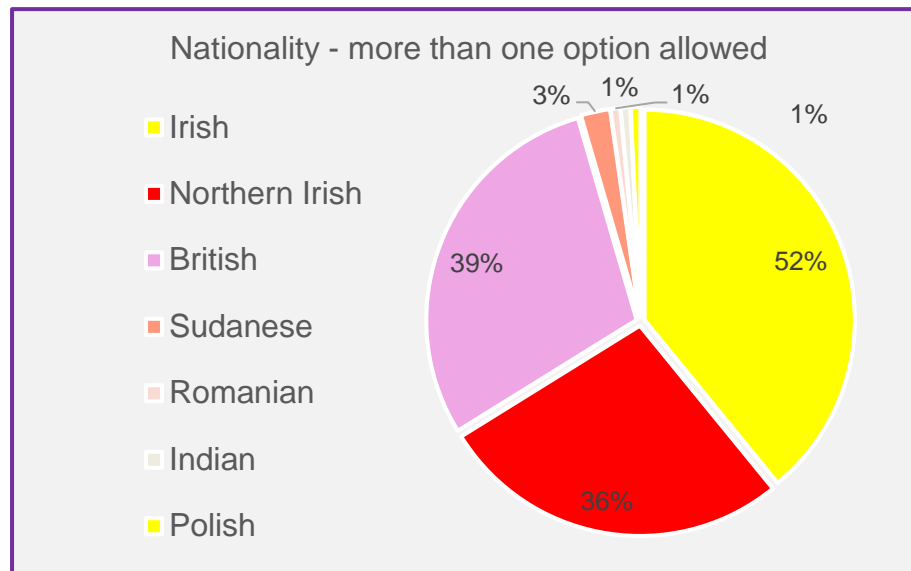
Consultation activities included:

- 0 Workshops targeting minority and equality protected people and organisations.
- 0 One to one meetings where relevant.
- 0 Several sessions with Council staff.
- 0 Meetings with and further liaison with Sinn Féin, DUP, Alliance, UUP, SDLP, Green Party.
- 0 Offer of one-to-one interviews with all elected members and a half-day open session.
- 0 An on-line survey that could be broken down to community, geographic area, community background, sector.



Survey

The survey provided a clear context and direction regarding issues raised, ideas to prioritise and issues that inhibit the development of good relations.

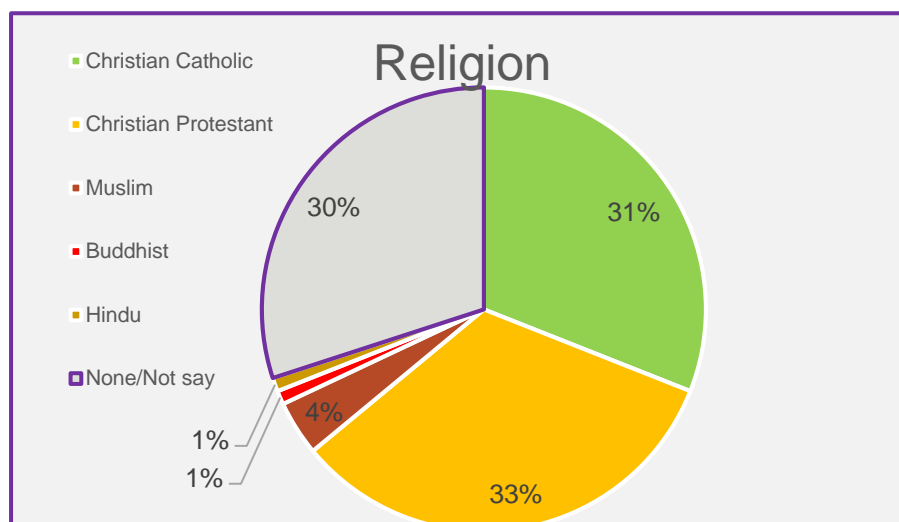


The religious profile is broadly reflective of the city. The number of young people completing the survey was fewer than the average population.

More women than men returned the survey, however, 41% male return rate is

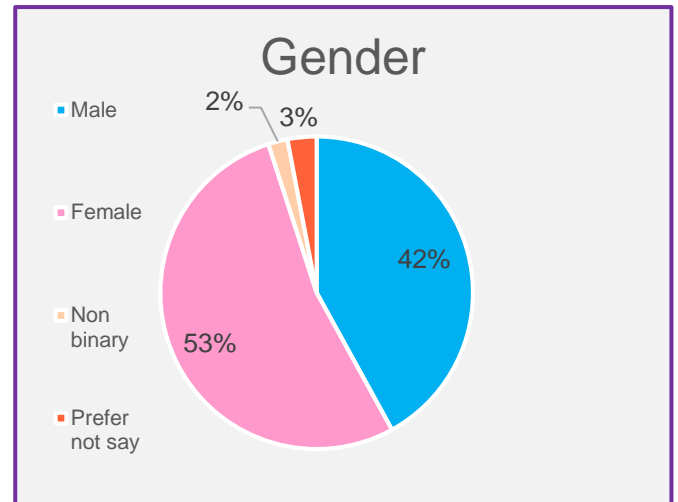
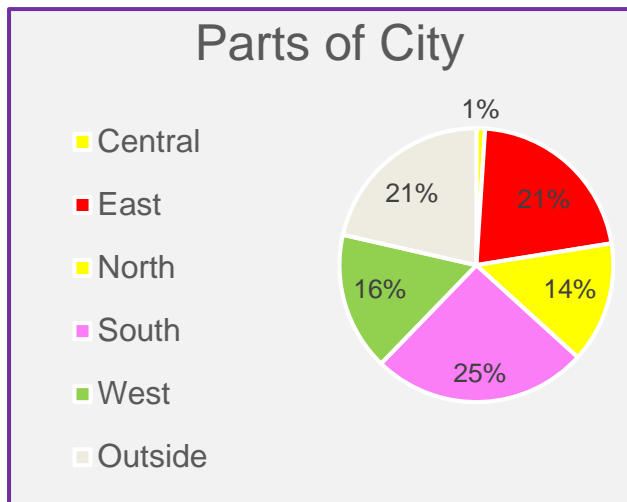


good and broadly reflective of the city.



The city the survey was completed proportionately by people from the North, South, East and West Belfast.

In addition, respondents' nationalities are self-defined, with more than one answer allowed.

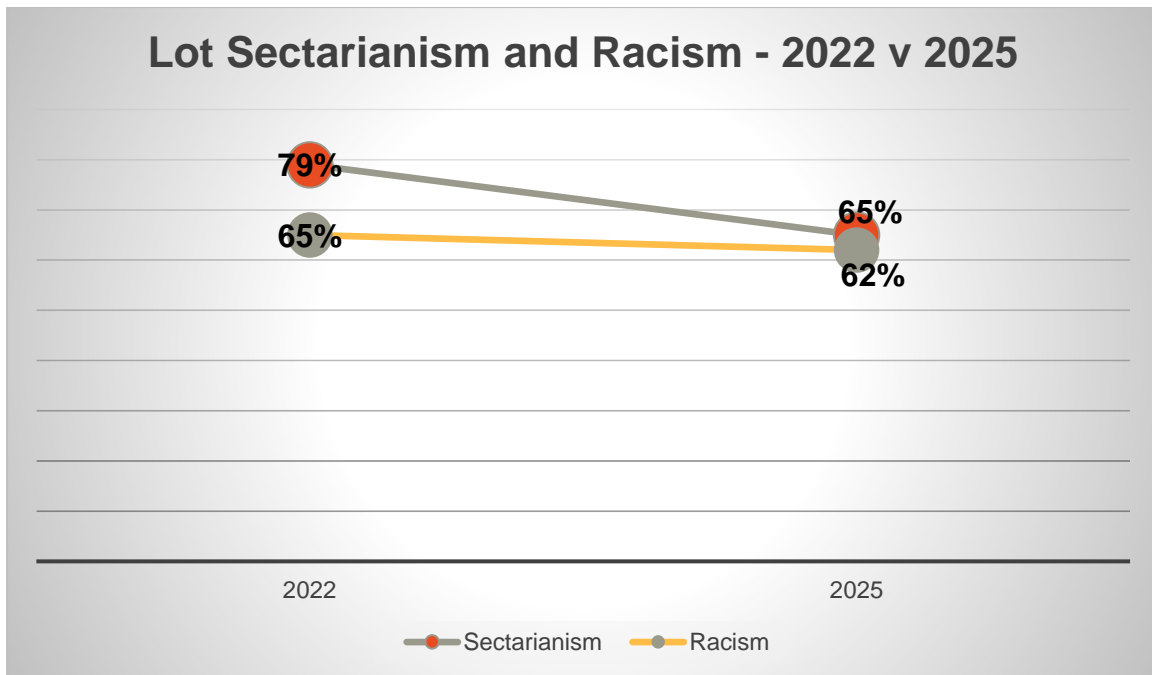


Given the demographic returns, we estimate in the survey responses overall a confidence rate of 94% and a margin of error of +/- 5%. High level results included:

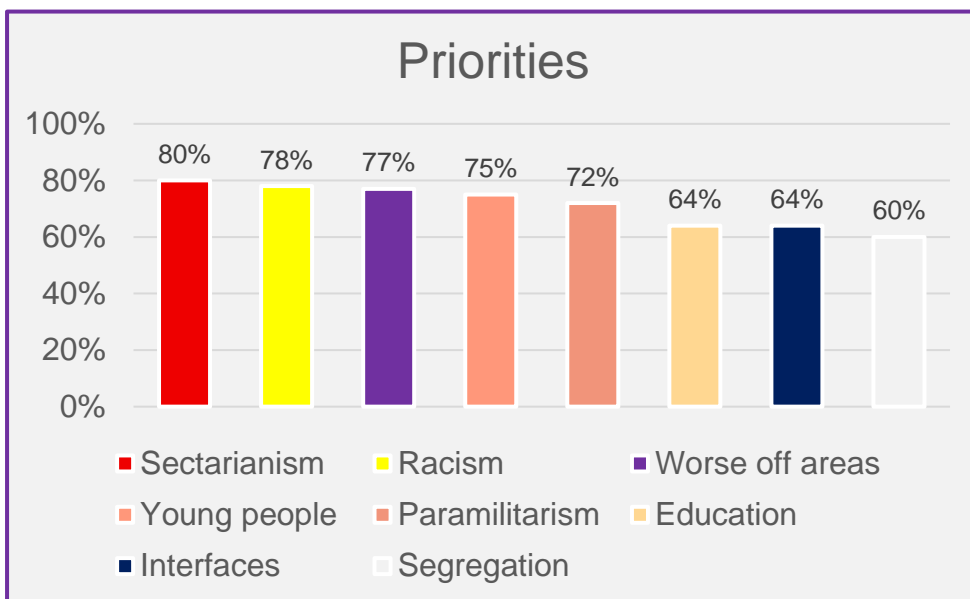
- 0 92% believe good relations are very important for the city.
- 0 While 11% feel the city is very shared, 9% believe it is not at all shared - the majority (79%) feel it is a bit shared.
- 0 A significant number (43%) always feel a sense of belonging in the city compared to just 6% who never feel a sense of belonging – the balance, (52%), sometimes have a sense of belonging to the city.
- 0 While 18% feel their cultural identity is always respected, just 9% believe it not at all respected. The balance, (73%), believe it is sometimes respected.
- 0 24% believe they can always express their cultural identity compared to 14% who say they never can express their cultural identity. 62% feel that they can sometimes express their cultural identity.
- 0 Most people (65%) would like to see multi-annual grants being provided for Good Relations work. 4% would prefer no grants and 8% grants of just one year.

Most people still believe there to be substantial amounts of sectarianism and racism in the city.

There has been some improvement in the degree of racism and sectarianism perceived in the city from 2022, though still significant issues remain, as statistics show.



Almost all respondents believed good relations was a very important part of what Council does (91%) – just 8% saying it was fairly important and 1% that it was not at all important.



The key priorities for those replying are highlighted in the table. A focus on educational underachievement, socio-economic issues, interface communities and the important needs around challenging sectarianism, racism and

paramilitarism are all considered key priorities for the strategy.

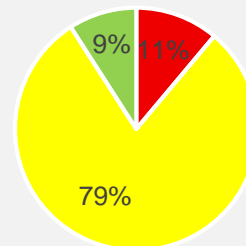
While just 11% believe the city very shared, most (79%) believe it a little shared and 9% not at all shared.

However, many people (43%) always feel a sense of belonging while 52% sometimes feel a sense of belonging.

When asked whether their cultural identity or background is respected in the city most say sometimes (73%), with 18% always and 9% never.

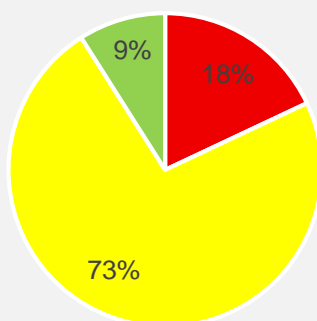
There are no significant differences between people from different backgrounds.

Is Belfast a shared city?



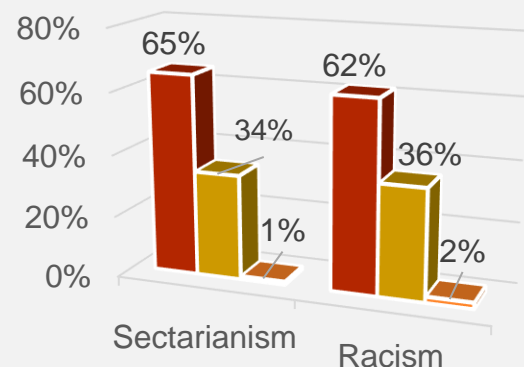
■ Very shared ■ Little shared
■ Not at all shared

Is your cultural identity/background respected?



■ Yes always ■ Sometimes ■ Never

Degree of Racism and Sectarianism



■ Lot ■ Little ■ None

At a similar level, 29% believe they are always able to express their own cultural identity or background while 62% believe they can sometimes, and 9% never.

Most people believe there to be substantial amounts of sectarianism and racism in the city.

When asked whether Council should offer grants at all, or whether they should be one-year or multi-annual, a significant majority (65%) believe grants should be multi-annual. Just 8% support one-year grants while 4% do not believe there should be grants at all. The balance suggested 'other' though the options provided by those in an open comment box supported multi-annual (sometimes for five years) and others with other options.

Interviews and Workshops

During the consultation, more than 20 workshops and over 20 interviews with key community, voluntary, faith, and public sector representatives were conducted. Meetings were offered with every elected representative as well as sessions involving each political party. In addition, three workshops with Council staff, and a session with the Shared City Partnership were held.

In total, more than 400 people were engaged in the consultation through the survey, workshops, interviews or seminars.

The main feedback from the workshops and interviews included:

- 0 A lack of investment to deal with demographic change including inadequate recognition of the pressures it creates on both established and newcomer communities.
- 0 The benefits of longer-term funding, such as three years, that will better help planning and delivery, but with recognition that some community groups with lower capacity benefit from small, one-year funding availability.
- 0 Trust in public agencies is important especially when dealing with sensitive issues of relevance to Council, such as policing, youth work and others. Issues such as racism, coercive control and paramilitary presence, use of social media and radicalisation of young people were issues raised during the consultation which is of relevance to trusting key agencies to manage and prevent harm. Political influence on public opinion was also raised.
- 0 A comprehensive integration strategy and cultural awareness or competence was considered helpful.
- 0 There was a perceived lack of transparency in decisions around resourcing and funding.
- 0 Developing the capacity of all communities to engage effectively in the responsibilities associated with building cohesion or undertaking good relations work was highlighted, although particular needs were also identified in some communities.
- 0 While coercive control including by paramilitaries was mentioned it was also mentioned in the context of: gatekeepers in newcomer communities and with some leaders regarding violence against women and girls (VAWG), anti-migrant rhetoric, and in recruiting young people.
- 0 There was a need for real change in attitudes, behaviours and confidence to adequately challenge having indicators that are more ambitious.

- 0 Good relations efforts often contributed to helping improve social issues – health, housing, educational achievement, employability and the environment.
- 0 Racism was being further fuelled by housing stress, pressure on established communities or tenancy uncertainties.
- 0 There are many different units in the council that benefit from closeness of alignment and coordination with good relations support.
- 0 There is an economic impact of racism on, for example, tourism or not attracting sufficient workers for key roles, or people feeling they have to leave due to fear about their welfare and that of their families.

All of the feedback received, the key points highlighted, and main findings from the survey, are reflected in the strategic priorities, pillars, and many of the actions that flow from within this strategy.

OTHER ISSUES AFFECTING GOOD RELATIONS

Many issues of public importance in recent years have been debated in Council or been reflected in news stories. Often these issues relate to ongoing legacy discussions, young people, education, policing, and health amongst others. We may refer to some of them also as social justice type issues. Many are summarised here arising from research, surveys or further consultation.

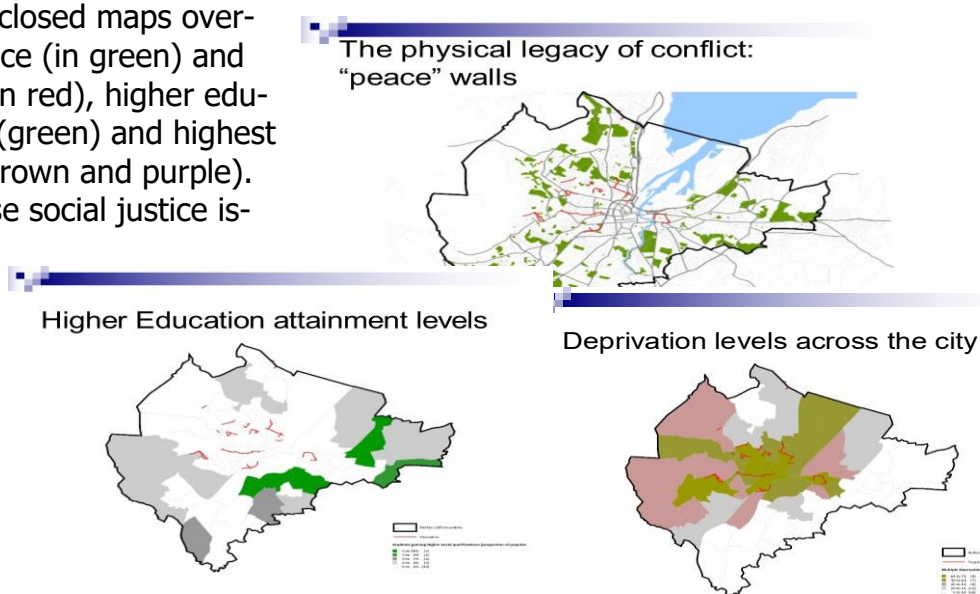
Recent events, including public disorder, reflect a need to reinforce anti-racism work but also to acknowledge the causes of either misunderstanding or fear of demographic change. Other areas of these islands have developed programmes to manage that change, sometimes in areas where there has been more substantial violence than anything Belfast has experienced. The last good relations strategy suggested Council staff visit areas of good practice to learn about those successful initiatives and the circumstances have not changed in 2025. The need has, in fact, increased.

Given the highly segregated nature of Belfast and the continued existence of many peace barriers, or interfaces, and the perceived divisiveness of politics still, it is only to be expected that there are still caveats in many peoples' sense of belonging, from all sides of the community; a sense that their cultural identity is respected, but sometimes not always.

The issues that are referenced in the strategy as social justice issues include those associated with educational underachievement, disadvantage, access to green space, and access to stable housing tenancy or employment, amongst others.

The feedback from the consultation indicates that these issues were priorities for communities as well as at times a sense of loss, challenges associated with redevelopment in some areas, and ongoing uncertainty on what some might call unresolved legacy issues.

For example, the enclosed maps overlay where green space (in green) and peace barriers are (in red), higher educational attainment (green) and highest deprivation levels (brown and purple). They show that these social justice issues are most prevalent in areas close to interfaces and peace barriers, and in working class communities across all community backgrounds, in all parts of the city.



Key Issues

More generally in Northern Ireland, and sometimes in Belfast, there is a sense that in promoting and delivering work on good relations:

- 0 There has been significant success, easily overlooked, in the last decades in building relationships along with the positive progress made in ensuring political stability and the development of reconciliation.
- 0 Whether in local or central government, delivery should include a commitment toward 'transformative' dialogue and decision-making rather than a 'performative' approach.
- 0 There could be greater utilisation of an inter-section of good relations with social and economic issues of relevance to those areas where good relations efforts are most acute. For example, the environment or employability could be the type of issues that could deliver excellent, issue-based good relations work.
- 0 While still intending to encompass all aspects of work within a local government setting, the notion of good relations being integrated into the core work of a Council is often left on the periphery rather than as a central component.
- 0 While recognising the progress that has been made by those supporting good relations, Belfast and Northern Ireland is still a highly segregated society epitomised by politics, cultural identity, physical barriers, faith and ethnicity.
- 0 New challenges, including for example demographic change, need to be better integrated into the good relations and social cohesion responses of government, local and central. However, these discussions should be about the organisation of services and resource scarcity rather than suggesting a narrative that new communities are necessarily a drain on resources.
- 0 Recognising the increasing number and relative proportion of race hate incidents and crimes is important; while understanding the fear evident in all communities from change, or being left behind, cultural loss, what people have come from or what reaction there will be to people locally. There appears to be significant tensions around, for example, housing in relation to newcomer communities.
- 0 Tensions around housing stress and lack of adequate service provision contributed to a recent rise in hostility towards newcomers and subsequent or associated racist behaviour and crime.
- 0 The impact of social media and the level of misinformation which is widely circulated appears to be fuelling negative perceptions. While a proportion of this is believed to be a deliberate attempt to escalate tensions, much appears to be the result of fear or lack of accurate information.

- 0 There are currently programmes which work with young people to address developing issues related to social media and its misuse. Should they prove to be successful they could potentially be rolled out more widely.
- 0 Programmes which seek to address misinformation and support engagement between people who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are from the established communities in Belfast could potentially support greater understanding and respect across different cultures and faiths.
- 0 Perceived criminality or/and media coverage relative to newcomer communities particularly among young males has contributed to negative perceptions.
- 0 Within the minority ethnic communities there is very real fear and questions as to whether Belfast is a safe place to live and work. This may have economic as well as social consequence, not least for the health service which is heavily reliant on migrant workers. With the major universities being situated in Belfast, racist incidents have a potential to deter overseas students.
- 0 Concern about the impact on tourism should also be taken into consideration particularly in relation to the high visibility of passengers off cruise ships visiting the city centre.
- 0 Young minority ethnic people and children are reporting racist incidents within schools and feel that they are not being addressed. Associated mental health issues and anxiety around school attendance should racism and Islamophobia not be effectively dealt with, are having consequence around both educational achievement and wellbeing.
- 0 There also a sense that inadequate cultural awareness or induction programmes for newcomers can result in neighbour disputes and misunderstanding on all sides.
- 0 Cultural competency/awareness for service providers and those working in communities across Belfast is needed. The view was expressed that often staff are anxious about making mistakes or being labelled as racist which can lead to avoiding people from minority ethnic backgrounds or not dealing with tensions. Such awareness would support those in decision-making positions to have wider perspective and be better informed.

These issues, applicable to Northern Ireland, are considered for relevance in Belfast through this new Strategy.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND TOGETHER; BUILDING A UNITED COMMUNITY (T:BUC)

Strategic Focus of New Strategy

This new strategy is consistent with the T:BUC strategy from the Executive Office, either the T:BUC review due to be published or the existing strategy. However, the Council wants to also independently update its strategic ambition for good relations and for the city as it enters the next iteration of the peace and reconciliation process.

While the existing delivery of good relations by the Council is very well regarded and effective, it is time to re-set the city's good relations strategic direction, review and enhance its role internally within the Council, and ensure consistent and complementary delivery on social cohesion in all that the Council provides. That will include re-focusing the role of The Shared City Partnership.

The strategic focus therefore seeks to identify a new iteration of reconciliation beyond good relations, recognising the critical role which good relations will continue to have in building a positive peace, but incorporating the critically important elements of what will stimulate an even more cohesive city.

Concept of an Integrated Social Cohesion Approach and Strategy

Embedding the peace is an ongoing process that has been done well to date with much capacity developed and sustained in communities and local government. There is importance in continuing to positively provide purpose, content and actions that serve the needs of all people in a post-conflict setting, where issues and contrary beliefs remain; and where new challenges and dynamics emerge, competing with an older set of views, concerns and structures.

Ensuring genuine attention to the needs and interests of all, including new and existing communities, in terms of relations, policies, actions and structures, is paramount. This is more important in a context of misinformation in the digital era and ongoing radicalisation of people of all ages whether for political, religious or ethnicity agendas. The role that social media plays in peddling harmful misinformation which raises tensions around sectarianism and racism is a new and significant challenge to the promotion and maintenance of good relations.

The next iteration of the reconciliation and peace building processes, therefore, needs to be more complex and complete than the building of relationships, which has been successful to date and continues to be important. That next iteration needs to focus on the building of a more cohesive, inclusive and socially just community that embeds peace and enhances a sense of belonging for and by all.

It should focus not just on building good relations and relationships which are the foundation of any peace building process. It should go beyond good relations to create fairer and more open ways to access services and rights, have social justice running through its core like a golden thread, and develop trust in key institutions that are

equitably regarded by all. It must also start to incorporate a meaningful strategy and focus on reconciliation and further building a positive peace.

This new Belfast **Good Relations and Social Cohesion strategy**, therefore, focuses on inclusion, belonging and trust, on identifying the rights and responsibilities equally applicable to all, and a long-term *Whole Community and Whole Council* approach to building a more cohesive city, with the goal of meaningful reconciliation at its core.

Every aspect of City Council policy and design should include reference to and focus on its impact on developing greater cohesion and better relations.

This strategy includes five pillars for building a more cohesive city:

1. Continue to **repair and refine relations within a reconciliation lens and re-embolden** how those relations

can improve the lives of people across the community. This may include, for example, a hybrid small annual small grants with a more focused multi-annual grants programme or further advance work beneath the radar, but well regarded and successful cultural expression programmes. The dynamics of different types of fear within local established communities and newcomer communities may also be

If a fear or sense of loss on key issues across communities is part of the dynamic, especially within communities close to interfaces and in areas of greatest socio-economic need, a key question for the strategy is how does Council continue to support peaceful and lawful cultural celebrations while being recognised as a supporter of cultural expression in all communities?

relevant and assist in supporting positive cultural expression in communities that feel a sense of cultural loss.

2. **Develop capacity** to sustain and strengthen decision-making and project delivery across the community. This includes capacity to undertake social cohesion and good relations work across all sectors in the community and all departments in the Council. Capacity is not just focused on training and knowledge

We were told the Migrant Forum has demonstrated a capacity to identify key issues and bring significant public agencies and community-based organisations into greater collaboration. So, the strategy suggests how to sustain the Migrant Forum with an even greater focus on anticipating and challenging negative narratives.

but ensuring that decision-making processes within Council and other public agencies are robust, fair, aware of implications; and the good relations/social cohesion function is appropriately positioned within Council. Some communities are more advanced than others in their capacity and community infrastructure. Some may need additional resources to get to a position of parity in their ability to engage with others in the good relations process. It will also include successful initiatives such as the migrant forum.

3. Ensure **greater openness and transparency** in decision-making and delivery. This includes decisions made within Council and encouraging more openness outside Council with community, public sector and other stakeholders. Funding decisions should also bear in mind the importance of being seen to be fair and equitable as an outcome, and monitoring & evaluation processes that are simpler and more relevant to the projects funded.

We were told that a framework or charter for Good Relations could be useful as a commitment by elected members in how they engage with each other, and with all communities, but even more so perhaps for community-based projects to adhere to if they wish to benefit from support and funding from the Council. How cultural competence is manifested is part of future planning.

4. Develop **trust in key institutions** by all people across the community. Key institutions relevant to

Statistics show that trust in public agencies is important in developing a more positive, progressive peace. So, the strategy suggests that key public agencies engage in specific trust-building initiatives.

social cohesion include, for example, local government services, policing and youth services amongst others. Making good relations therefore more relevant to the work of Council in, for example, policing and community safety is relevant as is being aware of any trust issues any community may have in the Council's decision-making processes.

5. Deliver better and meaningful **social justice outcomes**, with a focus on those interface areas that still suffer most within our still divided society. This may also touch on issues of relevance such as gender equity, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and with minority ethnic and more disadvantaged communities.

Ongoing segregation fails residents especially if they live at interface areas close to peace barriers. The conflict and its legacy more deeply and negatively affects them, and they are more likely to live in areas of greatest deprivation. Often newcomers and refugees are living in housing in these areas of greatest deprivation. If these communities cannot be left behind and they have nowhere to go, the good relations agenda needs to pay particular attention to the inter-connectedness of disadvantage, interfaces and common concerns.

Access to green space and ongoing impact of legacy and other issues relevant to those communities such as physical and mental health and wellbeing, those most impacted by the conflict are also the type of issues that have social justice implications.

Common needs across communities can provide a greater focus for good relations and cohesion activities.

Together, these five pillars will help develop an **overarching dynamic or sense of belonging for the city** to which all people can buy in to. This includes all communities including newcomer communities as well as people from traditional, established communities; and progressing work at interfaces with potentially different perceptions of priorities.

These pillars do not fail to recognise that Belfast City Council and other agencies, have helped to change the city remarkably and for the better in the last 25+ years. The change, regeneration, and improvements have been positive and of benefit to all communities.

However, more than 30 years since ceasefires, and 27 years since the Agreement, the city needs to finish the job of a reconciliation process that is for the benefit of all, leaves no one behind in real or perceived terms, and builds a genuinely cohesive city by the middle of the 21st century. In this period, our poorest communities are those who often live at interfaces and closest to peace barriers and are still our poorest communities after many decades of investment. Leaving no one behind should mean Council working hardest at areas separated by peace barriers.

However, feedback also suggested the importance of acknowledging new and invisible peace barriers that includes for established and newcomer communities, issues such as language and cultural barriers.

Therefore, the strategy for the city should have good relations and social justice at its core, all of which should be critical aims for any agency developing and delivering services for people from all backgrounds. These social justice priorities are as applicable to keeping people safe including women and girls as they are to providing accessible services for those who need them most.

The benefits of such an approach will be to:

- 0 Save money through prevention and earlier intervention.
- 0 Have stronger, resilient and more aspirational communities where there is mutual support across political, ethnic or religious divides.
- 0 Have the goal of meaningful reconciliation as an intentional outcome of this work.
- 0 Increase the resilience of the city.
- 0 Deliver better health and wellbeing outcomes, particularly in interface areas where they are most acute.

We were asked whether the Shared City Partnership can drive and deliver a critical leadership function in agreeing what a sense of belonging is and what needs to change and be supported to achieve it. Providing a respected vehicle for a *Whole Community, Whole Council*, approach with a considered focus on inter-agency collaboration in a Shared City Partnership, is a feature of the strategy driving cohesion and overseeing delivery.

- 0 Provide a further basis for economic health and growth.
- 0 Reduce conflict, enhance healing, and increase support for public agencies.

This approach speaks to the benefit of intercultural rather than multicultural approaches to developing cohesion, where integration and relationship building is the aim rather than a separate provision, where misinformation is challenged, and where long-term as well as short-term approaches are embraced. This will simplify the measurements of success where complex and often inappropriate integration indicators are replaced with ones that are shorter, easier to understand; and more accurate measurements are used especially for short-term projects. It also is a strategy that realises that the impact of projects able to plan for just a one-year project is restricted compared to what multi-annual funding can deliver although some newer groups appreciate smaller, one-year support; which is why an initial hybrid system is included.

The strategy commits the Council to develop 10-year targets for Social Cohesion for the city, as well as a series of three-year good relations action plans. It advocates for digital innovation. It seeks the active promotion of integration while tackling social exclusion, relevant to established as well as new communities, in countering extremism and radicalisation. Radicalisation includes people from existing and newcomer communities where young people are being used by organisations to act unlawfully; or where people are frustrated at real or perceived threats to communities, or racism or sectarianism is directed at them.

Regardless of a community's politics, cultural identity, ethnicity or faith, there are common issues and needs that are reinforced in an integrated social cohesion strategy; there are common responses relevant to these issues and needs; there are common approaches that work whether longer or shorter-term; there is a need to ensure that cohesion and good relations tackle social exclusion, poverty, fear and feelings of being left behind, as stimulants to counter this radicalisation.

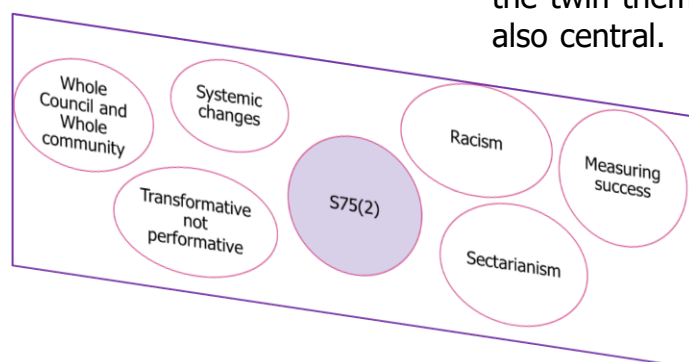
That is why Belfast City Council, any Council, requires a *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach that takes seriously the ambition of long-term social cohesion targets and three-year good relations action plans that take the first steps in that generational social cohesion process. All functions of a Council affect cohesion, trust, and equitable provision; and processes for decision-making affect it just as much which includes how people engage with each other within the Council and within and between projects that receive Council funding.

Building on the impressive change it has helped facilitate to date, Belfast City Council seeks to lead the recognition of a *genuine* reconciliation process where people understand and believe that progress for all is predicated on an honest desire to understand and meet the concerns and needs of others.

DRIVERS FOR THE STRATEGY

Acknowledging how far the city has come and how far it has still to go, is central to the strategy, accepting there are still substantial issues of segregation and ongoing legacy issues that need addressed, as well as new challenges linked to changing demographics in communities.

The obligations under Section 75(2) are critical and being keen to challenge head on the twin themes of racism and sectarianism are also central. However, throughout the strategy



the Council is prioritising measuring impact which also means adopting a transformative rather than performative challenge to all activities, participants, projects and staff and Councillors.

Broadly, the strategy includes five key pillars and an overarching theme, focused on relationships between people from different identities, faiths, beliefs, cultures, opinions, backgrounds, or between equality groups, through sustained cross community and intercultural contact.

The key pillars are:

- 0 Continuing to **repair and refine relations within a reconciliation lens and re-embolden** how those relations can improve the lives of people across the community.
- 0 **Developing capacity further** to sustain and strengthen decision-making and project delivery across the community.
- 0 Ensuring **greater openness and transparency** in decision-making and delivery.
- 0 Developing **trust in key institutions** by all people across the community. Key institutions relevant to social cohesion include those members of the Shared City Partnership.
- 0 Delivering better and meaningful **social justice outcomes**, with a focus on those interface areas that still suffer most from our divided society yet have many needs and issues in common.

These pillars are the foundation of an **overarching dynamic strategy for a sense of belonging in the city** to which all people can buy in to, participate in developing, and deliver together.

The strategic pillars will be delivered within a context of an outcome-based transformative vision which is why the monitoring and evaluation frameworks are stressed that will be developed hand-in-hand with the strategy and action plans as they are delivered.

The strategy and action plan, therefore, stresses transformative versus performative delivery – for staff, for partner agencies, for projects, and for elected members.

The strategy acknowledges the key challenges for the city going forward and represents a significant investment in long-term and systemic responses that will in the short-term develop relationships and change behaviours and attitudes, while supporting a greater sense of belonging for people from all backgrounds inclusive of all section 75 groups.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Belfast City Council, developing its good relations and cohesion strategy will:

Be ambitious and innovative in its approach and delivery of services

Continue to review, innovate and improve our services with community at the core and an approach that involves and engages all relevant partners within and outside the Council, as part of our *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach.

Empower people, empower staff, empower communities and empower this city

Recognise that building capacity and empowering communities and leaders is an important part of the process that is delivered by an empowered staff team and driven on-the-ground by empowered people and communities. This includes enhancing the cultural awareness/competence of all involved in decisions including elected members and key staff in other public agencies.

Share good practice, knowledge, learning and resources

Utilise the existing good practice, knowledge and skills of all within communities, sharing common aims to develop better services for local communities and promote community-based leaders and influencers especially on a cross community basis addressing common issues and needs. It also advocates for learning from good practice outside Northern Ireland.

Be open and inclusive, understanding and transparent

Be open, transparent and accountable in its working with all people, communities and organisations; with funders and public agencies; with elected representatives; and in its dealings with representatives of community based organisations working for the common good of all communities.

ROLE OF THE SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP

The Shared City Partnership was established over two decades ago (formerly called the Good Relations Steering Panel) to provide a focus for good relations work in the city; create a strategic challenge to the Council; and offer advice and guidance on challenging issues. It was deliberately created with representation from the main sectors (public agencies, community, Trade Union and faith representatives) and led by representatives from the main political parties on Council. It is currently chaired by a Councillor from the largest party (Sinn Féin) with a vice chair from the next largest party (DUP).

Since it was established, the Partnership was also tasked with the role of being the city's partnership for overseeing the PEACE Programme, most latterly making decisions on the PEACEPLUS funding allotted to projects throughout the city. It has performed effectively in that role.

The Shared City Partnership is reinvigorating its operation to refocus its functions providing challenge and strategic direction on good relations to the Council and the City, and to explore being a stronger advocate.

Feedback from the consultation process suggests that the established Shared City Partnership has the potential to be robust in its provision of advice and strategic direction to Council.

The Shared City Partnership will be the focus and driver of the *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach to creating a more cohesive city, the ambition to support a transformative rather than a performative agenda; and set and measure the outcomes and impact of the strategy.

In the first months of the strategy the Shared City Partnership will:

- Agree measurement for the new strategy to support a cohesive city, based on a bespoke Belfast cohesion framework and consistent with the T:BUC Good Relations indicators and that link with the Global Peace Index Framework.
- Agree a reporting process and mechanism for cohesion in the city through the Shared City Partnership.
- Agree cohesion targets for 2035, a timeline consistent with the Belfast Agenda.
- Cement its relationship with Belfast City Council, ensuring it has a voice and challenge function appropriate for both its members and the role of Council as an elected organisation.
- Agree an annual reporting mechanism to Belfast City Council as a whole, reflecting the strategy's *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach that provides an annual or bi-annual report on the city's state of cohesion, with support from the Global Peace Index Framework.

PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

The strategy is consistent with the T:BUC themes and identifies both a long-term vision for the city with short-term targets, shifts and refinement of structures and processes. The strategy tackles head-on the significant issues identified in the consultation process, such as community dislocation, rise in racist incidents, Islamophobic incidents and violence, and ongoing need to support positive cultural expression.

The strategy sets good relations in the city within a wider lense of cohesion and integration. This wider lense affords not just a vision and set of activities that meet needs, it also allows for a response that energises all sectors and other public agencies, as well as all sections of Council, to be more involved in the good relations agenda. This is what the strategy calls a *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach.

The Council is committing to develop pro-active and practical cohesion targets over the next 10 years, consistent with the Belfast Agenda timeline.

However, we also will develop strands that are generational with aspirations for 2050. By 2050 we have set a vision for Belfast to be significantly less segregated, significantly more culturally diverse, engaging all sections of the community in cultural expression and celebrating all ethnicities, religions and identities.

We are committed to delivering the strategy within a transformative rather than performative framework. That means The Shared City Partnership and Senior Managers within the Council robustly challenge all of those contributing to the delivery of the strategy including staff and elected members of Council, and other public agencies, in deciding on funding and in organising events, to ask whether or not activities, words and deeds that are being planned and delivered, fit criteria to be developed on what making a meaningful and transformative difference looks like.

We will not be going through the motions with activities and funding projects for the sake of funding them – they will have to prove that they are making a contribution to a more cohesive city consistent with the criteria and indicators set.

The strategy recognises, from feedback during the consultation process, the successes that have been achieved in many projects and programmes supported. These are further built on in the strategy such as supporting cultural expression, the migrant forum, and small grants funding.

However, this is a strategy that changes what and how we deliver good relations. It is a new iteration for Belfast that goes beyond good relations toward a significantly more cohesive Belfast by 2035 and beyond.

As such, this Good Relations strategy includes:

- New long-term targets for cohesion in Belfast looking to 2035 and beyond.

- A refocused and reinvigorated Shared City Partnership whose main purpose will be to develop new cohesion indicators for the city and measure their achievement on a bi-annual basis.
- A pilot three-year small grants funding programme.
- A new focus on building trust between communities and with key public agencies.
- Capacity building that, taking account of changing demographics and the challenges for decision-makers, focuses on cultural competence enhancement for all decision-makers in public agencies including Council.
- An audit of all Council activities that support good relations to assess their contribution to good relations and cohesion outcomes.

The strategy will promote programmes consistent with the themes of T:BUC and the identified five strategic pillars for cohesion in the city, building a positive peacebuilding, transformative society.

| T:BUC Theme | Five Strategic Pillars | Activity/programme | New Activities |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| All Four | All Five | Good Relations Small grants programme for cohesion and belonging | Introduce a three-year grant allocation on a pilot basis for some grants, complementing existing one-year small grant awards. Those pilot grants will be especially helpful for projects that require a lead-in or additional planning. That may include a new theme for social justice issues tackled across interfaces or/and related to planning and developing new approaches to cultural expression including other communities. |
| Cultural Expression | Good relations Trust Capacity | St. Patrick's Day civic events programme | A renewed effort to include more people from traditionally unionist backgrounds and newcomer communities to create even greater inclusion in this flagship event in the city. |
| Cultural Expression | Good relations Trust | Positive cultural expression Beacons Programme | Continue to engage with communities to build on the progress of supporting positive cultural expression including |

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| | Capacity | | the deployment of bonfire beacons. It will proactively seek to establish better relationships between communities and key agencies. It will also explore good practice visits. |
| Shared Community | Trust | Building trust and celebrating an intercultural future | Will embrace significant activities within the existing Civic Engagement programme but target activities and events that will build greater trust between communities and with public agencies. Statutory partners on the Shared City Partnership should be heavily engaged along with internal Council work streams such as the Policing and Community Safety Partnership and community planning. This should be additional to existing activities. |
| Safe Community | Social justice Good relations Trust | TIME – The Inclusive Minority Ethnic programme | To include continued facilitation of the Migrant Forum, delivery of activities to support integration of refugees and asylum seekers, and support local communities to develop integration activities. The programme will also target inclusion of people from those communities that feel particularly pressurised by change or a sense of loss; and include a response to misinformed and disinforming social media content, and attacks on newcomer communities. It will explore good practice visits. |
| Shared Community | Social justice Trust | Interface Community Engagement (ICE) | While focusing on interface communities as with an existing programme, the focus will change to seeking to build |

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| | Openness Capacity | | a consensus on key social justice issues affecting interface areas on a bespoke basis and at times developing a 'FAIR Share' modelled intervention where a 'Common Needs' approach will be developed and there is a requirement for funding activities to include communities on either side of an interface. It is likely the agreed social justice issues will include access to green space, educational under-achievement employability, physical activity or mental health. |
| Children and young people | Good relations Trust | Shared Education and Relationships with Agencies | <p>The programme will work in schools with students and with uniformed and non-uniformed youth organisations, as well as team leaders and staff, to enhance young people's understanding of other communities and the support available to them from other agencies and Council.</p> <p>Programmes should be transformative and include activity on challenging issues as well as common needs, and not merely based on developing contact.</p> <p>There will be a particular exploration of the impact of on-line and social media impact on young people, and efforts to develop their understanding of that impact.</p> |
| All Four | Capacity | Capacity and Cultural Competence Programme (3 C's) | The programme will make connections between all sectors. It will deliver cultural competence initiatives and capacity building. This will include a programme of work |

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| | | | <p>for elected members and staff of the Council, the Shared City Partnership, and other agencies.</p> <p>Develop a Good Relations charter for all communities working with Council including those that receive funding, and for all elected members to agree and adhere to.</p> <p>It will also enhance the capacity of the Shared City Partnership and develop outcome based criteria for measuring cohesion in the city in collaboration with the Global Peace Index Framework.</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The strategy is written for use over the next ten years but with long term ambition in mind for the city. The city will adopt a ten and 25-year approach to achieving a city where people feel a sense of belonging always, everywhere.

Relating to potential short and long-term outcomes the strategy includes an indication of what is derived from the five strategic pillars. We will develop ten-year cohesion targets for the city consistent with the Belfast Agenda, and set even longer-term goals for 2050 to make Belfast as cohesive as it can be with a real sense of belonging enhanced across all communities, backgrounds and ethnicities. We will engage with the Global Peace Index Framework to develop realistic ambitious cohesion outcomes for the City.

| Strategic Pillars | Short Term Results - in three years | Long Term Results – in ten years |
|--|--|--|
| Good relations activities, reimagined and reinvigorated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of the critical issues that communities across interfaces, and disadvantaged communities, have in common. Delivery of impactful projects that benefit all communities equally. Identification of good practice from elsewhere on these islands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good relations between and within communities openly discussing even the most sensitive issues. Greater and welcome pro-active cross-community challenge to the Council to go further. Belfast seen as a city of good practice across these islands on relationship building between communities including newcomer and established communities. |
| Social justice issues where there are common issues and needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater coordination of action across public agencies and Council. Impactful projects that increase trust and sense of purpose between communities. Increase in public commentary recognising the quality and importance of cross community work. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive collaboration sustained without Council input. Reimagining of many interface and peace barriers. Improvements in the quality of life for people across interfaces and communities within disadvantaged areas. |

| Strategic Pillars | Short Term Results - in three years | Long Term Results – in ten years |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Trust in key institutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater acceptance of the importance of trust-building across public agencies and their supporting roles. Increased levels of trust. Increased engagement in all communities with key public agencies, across all ages. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All communities, including young people, show strong levels of trust of agencies including the Council and the PSNI. Greater key agency engagement in all communities. Comparator with levels of trust at least as good as any other region on the islands. |
| Openness and transparency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of decision-making process and good relations recognition in the Council. Communities increase trust in decision-making by Council. All communities engaging better with the Council. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of trust across all decision-making of agencies. Increased funding applications to the Council across all communities. Increase in cross community collaboration. |
| Developing capacity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of cultural competence skills and awareness enhancement work to decision-makers in public agencies and communities. An engaged Shared City Partnership that takes a leadership role for cohesion in the city. Greater understanding of good practice form elsewhere on these islands, and applicability of aspects to Belfast. Agreement of a Good Relations engagement charter for funded projects, staff and elected members. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belfast recognised on these islands as a city of good practice for supporting greater cohesion. Increased understanding of the importance of dialogue and relationships in supporting solutions to sensitive issues. Optimum levels of cohesion applying agreed cohesion indicators. |

Activities for this period will consistent with current and any new T:BUC themes.

MEASUREMENT FOR COHESION

Over the course of this Strategy, there will be a review of the Shared City Partnership. The Shared City Partnership will have the key good relations and cohesion leadership role for the city.

As part of this review, the Shared City Partnership will, through its members drawn from Council, key public agencies, faith and community organisations, provide challenge to the Council and advocate for a more cohesive city.

It will also develop a cohesion framework for the city.

This framework for cohesion and belonging in Belfast is yet to be developed. As part of our focus on transformative rather than performative activities, and an outcome-based focus, the framework is anticipated to include agreed measurement indicators and an agreed working template that will be:

- 0 Capable of replication annually or more realistically in a three or five-year basis.
- 0 Adaptable, including being open to other aspects of good practice.
- 0 Provide headline assessments behind which are more extensive data and statistics, most of which are already available to public agencies and government, local or central.
- 0 Supportive of cross-agency collaboration given the interplay of the key statistics.
- 0 Open to oversight that a cross-sectoral organisation such as The Shared City Partnership can lead.

While yet to be agreed by those public agencies, the Council, community and faith representatives of the Shared City Partnership, the key cohesion and belonging themes may include:

1. Education and work.
2. Health and housing.
3. Trust and safety.
4. Relations and culture.
5. Community and social links.

Avoiding numerous and overly complex data is important by prioritising the headline data that is key for cohesion in the city. The indicators also will be consistent with The Executive Office good relations indicators.

Themes and Indicators for Belfast as a Cohesive City

Good Relations or, better defined in the context of this strategy as indicators for cohesion or/and integration, need to be discussed and agreed with the Shared City Partnership. The Partnership, on a cross-sectoral and inter agency basis will agree to monitor and report on the indicators each year.

As a result, the indicators will contribute to The Executive Office being able to measure the progress of T:BUC while also setting a parameter and baseline for Belfast as an increasingly cohesive city.

These indicators are suggestions only relating to the key agencies on the Partnership, and as indicators on cohesion beyond good relations.

There could be any number of indicators. The larger the number of indicators might increase confusion but may also increase accuracy.

| Theme | Indicator |
|---------------------------|---|
| Education and work | <p>% of students and young people in substantial relationships with students and young people from other community backgrounds</p> <p>% achieving agreed education outcomes for established and newcomer communities</p> <p>% satisfied with current employment or/and who are working across communities</p> |
| Health and housing | <p>% engaging in leisure activities or/and across communities</p> <p>% registered with a vital health professional</p> <p>% in secure owner-occupied residency or/and with stable tenancy</p> |
| Trust and safety | <p>% who trust key agencies</p> <p>% feeling fearful or insecure</p> <p>% confident of reporting hate-related incidents/crimes</p> <p>% victims of hate related incidents or crime</p> <p>Numbers of race hate incidents and crimes</p> |
| Relationships and culture | <p>% of people with friends from different cultural identity backgrounds</p> <p>% who are comfortable with diversity</p> |

| | |
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| | % who feel their culture is respected |
| Community and social links | % who feel secure visiting traditionally 'other' facilities or types of cultural expression |
| | % who report a sense of belonging |
| | % participating in community activities. |

There are many other indicators that could be included and that will be considered by the Partnership. These include:

- % young people socialising or playing sport with people from other community backgrounds.
- % people who are monitored for use of facilities beyond leisure centres such as libraries and parks.
- % who feel they have an influence on decisions affecting them
- Numbers of peace barriers.
- % who want to remove peace barriers now or in the future.

The Council is engaging with Queens University and the Global Peace Index Network on developing a framework for the assessment of a positive peace index for Belfast, which will greatly assist and underpin these indicators.

MONITORING EVALUATION AND REVIEWING

The Shared City Partnership will produce an agreed monitoring and evaluation framework for cohesion and belonging, including critical targets, timeframes and monitoring information required.

Key monitoring and evaluation themes will include:

- Awareness of others and improved attitude and behaviour of communities toward others and towards public agencies and government.
- Improved sense of belonging of participants in their own communities.
- Further enhanced trust of public agencies across the community.
- Enhanced health and well-being.
- Education and work.

Monitoring will be built into the planning stages of all activities to facilitate baseline measurement, the agreement of indicators, and agreement on how the information is collected by staff or strategic partners.

As such, each year the Partnership will oversee a baseline audit of key statistics for each programme to provide a snapshot of attitudes relevant to the target group for each programme.

The Shared City Partnership will provide an annual assessment of cohesion in the city to full Council including progress and barriers to progress.

The Shared City Partnership will provide regular challenge to Council and other public agencies.

The Council will work alongside Queens University and the Global Peace Index Network on developing a framework for the assessment of a positive peace index for Belfast.

CONCLUSION

This new Good Relations strategy flows directly from the new Good Relations and Cohesion Audit for Belfast which was undertaken throughout 2025. These are exciting additions to the previous audits, strategies and programmes, complementing existing successful delivery and adding value to existing good practice in the city.

More than adding value however, this new Strategy embodies a desire to move the work on Good Relations into a new direction, with a focus on those key issues that are relevant for today: tackling issues around social justice and reducing sectarianism and racism – all within a renewed focus on building reconciliation.

Belfast City Council can be proud of what it has achieved in its good relations work. Community workers on-the-ground on all sides of the community deserve great credit for courageous and often groundbreaking work they undertake often in association with Council.

This Strategy aims to build on that work, going beyond a currently defined good relations approach, toward a focus on cohesion, belonging and promoting a positive peace.

The five pillars include a real focus on ensuring communities with most social and economic needs are front and central to delivery:

- 0 Redefining and refreshing good relations work toward robust transformative not performative actions.
- 0 Increasing and enhancing capacity of all involved from different sectors.
- 0 Building trust in key institutions.
- 0 Concentrating on social justice needs that exist across communities using commonalities as an enabler of good relations and cohesion.
- 0 Actively demonstrating increased openness and transparency.

These pillars will all work within the key themes of any new T:BUC strategy.

By focusing on outcomes such as the five pillars in the strategy, the indicators and monitoring processes will flow naturally.

The Strategy identifies that sustainable change is important. Seeking change in skills and behaviour will have impact for many years. Furthermore, improving relationships or changing the way decisions are taken now to support an intercultural future for the city will leave a legacy for years to come.

The Strategy identifies and directly embraces the issues that still exist. It will involve people, led by communities, in acknowledging those issues from the past that are still to be addressed, in the context of new challenges in the present, for the benefit of the city in the future.

These issues, along with the direction of the new Strategy, go beyond good relations to embrace long-term cohesion with sustainable, systemic outcomes that will help

transform the city, and how Council delivers good relations and cohesion, for the future.

APPENDICES

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The strategic priorities for this new strategy are:

| Our Children and Young People | Our Safe Community | Our Shared Community | Our Cultural Expression |
|---|---|---|---|
| All consistent with existing relevant regional and city policy agendas | | | |
| Actions Contact programme developing initiatives between pupils, staff and governors of schools that prioritise understanding of the development of the city. Young leaders programme for existing youth leaders in communities targeting uniformed and non-uniformed youth organisations focusing on potential next generation of leaders and their response to changing demographics and new media. Small grants programme that will offer pilot three-year funding across all TBUC priorities with a priority on social justice commonalities. | Actions Minority ethnic equality, inclusion and integration programme including support for the continuation of the Ethnic Minority Forum. Interface Common Issues and Leadership programme developing joint initiatives. Small grants programme that will offer pilot three-year funding across all TBUC priorities with a priority on social justice commonalities. | Actions Review and reimagining of the role of the Shared City Partnership Delivery of a cultural awareness/competency training programme for decision-makers in key agencies including Council, SCP members and key community organisations. Trust-building initiative between communities and key public agencies. Exploration of good practice from across the islands to further develop thinking, policy and delivery relevant to Council staff and members. | Actions Supporting critical cultural expression activities including seeking alternatives to bonfires while encouraging lawful and respectful bonfire celebrations. Supporting critical cultural expression activities including around St. Patrick's Day celebrations attracting people from all communities including established and newcomer communities. Small grants programme that will offer pilot three-year funding across all TBUC priorities with a priority on social justice commonalities. |

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| | | <p>Production of a 25-year strategy for cohesion in Belfast.</p> <p>Small grants programme that will offer pilot three-year funding across all TBUC priorities with a priority on social justice commonalities.</p> | |
| Results | Results | Results | Results |
| <p>Results are outlined in greater detail in the action plan. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement of traditionally excluded, disadvantaged, minority & people from different faiths including newcomer communities. Enhanced sense of belonging. More young people involved in good relations activities developing skills, changing behaviours or attitudes. Greater collaboration between schools from different sectors. | <p>Results are outlined in greater detail in the action plan. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changed behaviour Reduced anti-social behaviour Reduced isolation Enhanced health and wellbeing More traditionally excluded people engaged Increased trust in institutions Recognised good practice and good news stories Acknowledgement of positive diversity | <p>Results are outlined in greater detail in the action plan. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased sense of belonging and a positive acknowledgment of difference. Greater understanding of the benefits of interculturalism. Greater inclusion of people from minority faith or cultural backgrounds. Enhanced skills and knowledge. Increased trust in institutions. Changed behaviours and attitudes to others. | <p>Results are outlined in greater detail in the action plan. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More quality, lawful cultural expression Acknowledgement of, and respect for, different, lawful cultural expression Increased sense of belonging and a positive acknowledgment of difference. Greater understanding of the benefits of interculturalism. |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased environmental awareness and actions. More interface and cross community active cooperation. Greater Council engagement in good relations across all departments. Better collaboration across public agencies promoting a more cohesive city. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better cross community and intercultural understanding, cooperation and trust. Greater inclusion of people from minority faith or cultural backgrounds. Enhanced skills and knowledge. Changed behaviours and attitudes to others. |
|--|--|---|---|

Communication Objectives

Communication objectives include:

Increase awareness.

Greater knowledge of the diverse range of skills and knowledge gained through programme participation, promoting participation and the wider impact that builds community cohesion.

Highlighting change perceptions and long-term benefits caused by the actions in the strategy.

Promote awareness of strategy outcomes and changed focus through the strategy.

Recognition of the positive funding as a key catalyst for better relations, promoting cohesion and belonging.

Continuous promotion and awareness among local communities and stakeholders regarding the strategy and action plan activities, ensuring all stakeholders are aware of the long-term outcomes and impacts.

Outputs from initiatives that promote better relations.

Increased knowledge and understanding of, and support for, regional and city policies and strategies.

Innovation

The co-designed plan includes new and innovative approaches in the city including amongst other things:

- Projects that will ensure decision-makers and public agencies align to a commitment to interculturalism.
- Social justice projects that response to needs within a city where the common social justice needs cross interfaces and **disadvantaged communities**.
- Investment that aligns with the overall strategic priorities of all public agencies and the TEO and the Belfast Agenda.
- Delivery of programmes that develop skills and fosters collaborations across **interfaces and with disadvantaged communities**.
- Delivery of programmes that draw on themes of cultural diversity, civic identity, health and wellbeing and many others.
- Deliver innovative programmes that support training learning and skills development through, leadership programme and tackling issues associated with new media.
- Programmes that collaborate with public agencies and community forums to ensure genuine cultural competence in decision-making given the changing demographic dynamics in the city.
- Social cohesion: Provide relevant platform for participants to share stories, gain insight, and perspectives relating to conflict, recognition of minority communities, and addressing ongoing inclusion issues.

The Action Plan will help to address long standing social and economic challenges which have, and continue to, impact communities, particularly those in Belfast's interface communities.

Cultural Awareness/Competence

The advocacy for decision-makers including elected representatives to take cultural awareness/competence sessions is recommended as part of an induction process but also relevant for all people in a public agency engaging with people from different backgrounds or taking decisions that affect them. Such training could range from a half day session to university level. Below is a suggested programme for a half-day session given the time restraints placed on participants by other commitments.

Introduction to Cultural Awareness/Competence - for community stakeholders/statutory providers

A 2-3-hour interactive workshop should equip participants with some of the knowledge and skills required to work effectively with a diverse range of service users and to develop their cultural competency. It should give participants an understanding of:

- 0 Relevant terminology (e.g. culture, diversity, cultural awareness)
- 0 The role of culture in shaping personal identities and worldview
- 0 Personal perceptions and where they come from (e.g. media, political discourse)
- 0 Why cultural awareness is important
- 0 Things to consider when working with individuals from other cultures
- 0 Potential areas for misunderstanding
- 0 How to critically reflect on their views, knowledge and attitudes

Introduction to Cultural Awareness – for people seeking asylum

Interpreting costs for volunteer interpreters may be required.

A 2-3-hour interactive workshop should equip participants with some of the knowledge and skills required to engage and build relationships in their new community. It should give participants an insight into:

- 0 What culture/cultural diversity is
- 0 Why cultural awareness is important
- 0 Things which they may not know about cultural norms in NI

- 0 A brief explanation of the NI conflict and its ongoing impact
- 0 Potential areas for misunderstanding
- 0 The importance of learning English
- 0 What integration is and why it is key to building a good future

Draft 1