BELFAST CITY COUNCIL
GOOD RELATIONS AUDIT 2026 - 2029

Contents   **Page**

APPENDICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Belfast City Council's Good Relations audit was undertaken in 2025 and provides a foundation for the new 10-year good relations and cohesion strategy which has also been developed and adopted, for the period up to 2035. The good relations action plans will be developed from 2027 onwards as 3-year Action Plans, based on the findings from this audit.

While the city has been transformed in the time since the 1990s, some of the legacies of conflict, remain. That is not to say that good relations has not delivered during that time. It has. It has helped to transform relationships in the city and beyond, which has in turn created an environment for the whole of Belfast to meet a range of challenges. The united response at community level to the challenges of Covid, or the limitations placed on recent disorder linked to immigration, are examples of how good relations work spanning a generation, has cemented relationships, created new ambitions and facilitated new possibilities.

While recognising the successes of good relations within the Council since it was adopted as a key corporate objective in 2001, it is time to move on to a new, different iteration of good relations that reflects the current challenges of the 2020s. This is not a radical overhaul, but rather a shift beyond good relations (as known to date) towards sustainable, outcome-based transformation for the city and all its peoples and communities, delivering positive change for all on those lasting social issues that exist and still persist, in the city.

As a result of the new Good Relations and Cohesion Strategy, the Council expects to see many changes in the city. The city will develop a better understanding of interculturalism, its future as a city, and how to take decisions based on key issues and needs. Relationships will change for the better, and peoples' knowledge and behaviour will change. This will have a sustained impact on communities for many years.

All parts of the city will benefit, especially those areas and groups of people with greatest socio-economic need, isolation and exclusion. These are the areas that still suffer from the legacy and impact of the conflict, continued segregation and division.

Targets will be set for every project supported, linked to the vision and ambition of the Strategy. There is a commitment to assess all activities based on whether they make positive change (transformative versus performative) and fit the indicators that will be agreed by the Shared City Partnership.

The strategy includes new and innovative approaches in the city. It aims to make long-term and sustainable change to how the city supports, promotes and delivers cohesion.

Broadly, the strategy will include some or all of the following six key outcomes focused on relationships between people from different identities, faiths, cultures, opinions,

backgrounds, or between equality groups, through sustained cross community and intercultural contact. They are:

O   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.

O   **Develop capacity** to sustain and strengthen decision-making and project delivery across the community.

O   Ensure **greater openness and transparency** in decision-making and delivery.

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

O   Deliver better and meaningful **social justice outcomes**, with a focus on those interface and disadvantaged areas that still suffer most from our divided society.

O   Develop an **overarching dynamic or sense of belonging for the city** to which all people can buy in.

The strategic pillars will be delivered within a context of an outcomes-based transformative vision which is why the monitoring and evaluation frameworks are emphasised. They will be developed hand-in-hand with the strategy and action plan as it is delivered.

The strategy and action plan (developed from this audit), therefore, stress transformative versus performative delivery – for staff, for partner agencies, for projects, and for elected members.
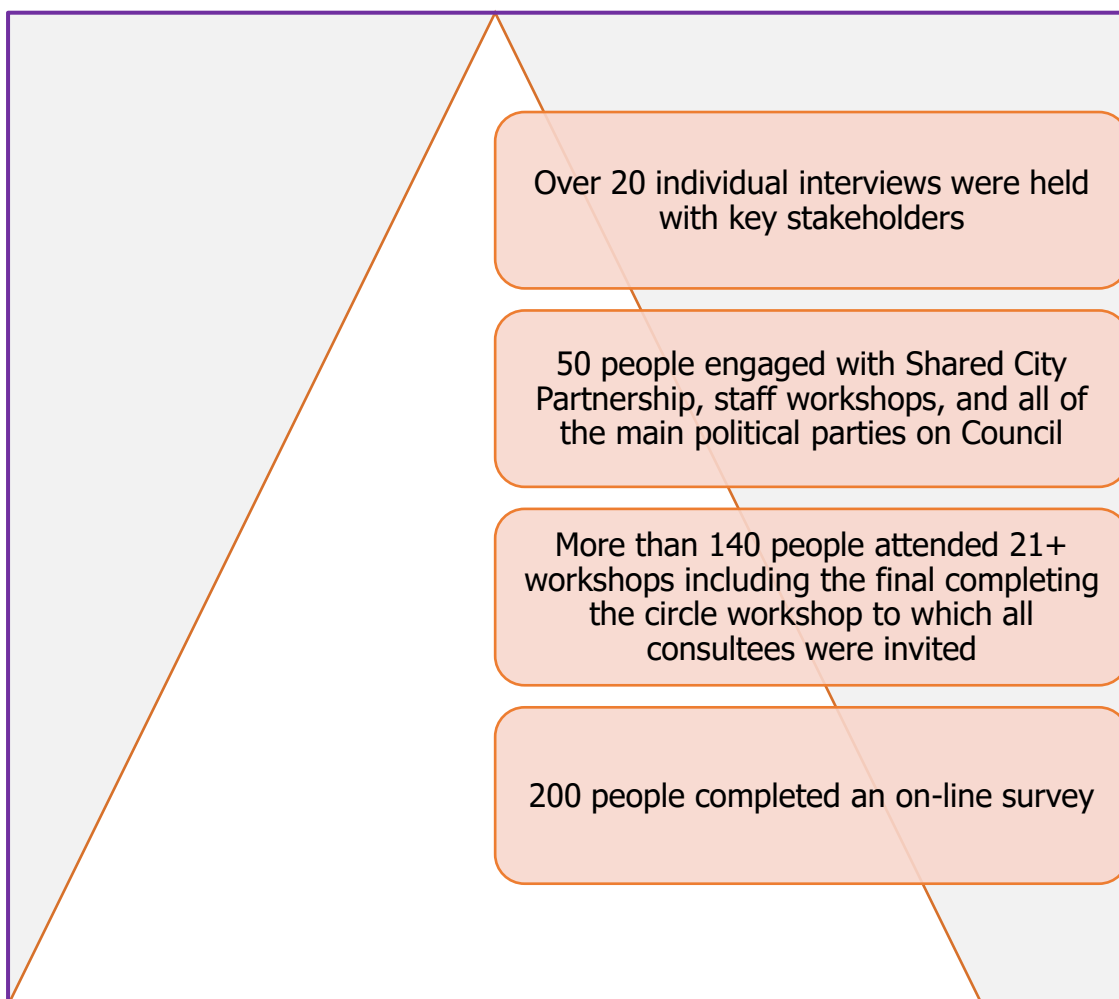
The strategy acknowledges the key challenges for the city going forward and represents a significant investment in long-term and systemic responses that will in the short-term develop relationships and greater cohesion; and change behaviours and attitudes; while supporting cohesion and a greater sense of belonging for people from all backgrounds inclusive of all section 75 groups.

BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

Overall, approximately 400 people participated in the consultation process, events and activities in the development of this new Good Relations Audit, such as attending any of 21+ workshops and/or completing a survey. All of 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.

Activities included:

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

Over 20 individual interviews were held with key stakeholders

50 people engaged with Shared City Partnership, staff workshops, and all of the main political parties on Council

More than 140 people attended 21+ workshops including the final completing the circle workshop to which all consultees were invited

200 people completed an on-line survey

During the consultation, more than 400 direct engagements took place. The summary below highlights the key factors and feedback in that consultation, that then relate to the Audit.

Some of the key factors identified through the consultation are summarised here, but many also relate to the city's determination to respect the past but build a positive peace rather than just settle for a lack of violence (negative peace). These include issued related to equality and inclusion, socio-economic issues, and trust in institutions.

Ongoing segregation and division is particularly failing those residents who live at interface and disadvantaged areas. The Belfast Agenda highlights its vision of a city in which "no-one is left behind". The new Strategy and this Audit contains this as its central element. In the areas of deprivation, education and health, a person is significantly more disproportionally worse off, the closer they live to an interface, or peace barrier. Peace barriers are mostly located in North and West Belfast.

> **Key issues, amongst others, include:**
>
> o Disengaged young people.
> o The impact of segregation linked to deprivation and issues of social justice.
> o Managing the changing demography including newcomer residents, refugees and asylum seekers.
> o Challenging racism and recognising degrees of sectarianism.
> o Recognising and supporting the heritage and cultural expression of all people and communities in the city.

However, socio-economic issues and related cohesion targets and projects are also relevant for many communities in the city not at interfaces or close to peace barriers.

CONTEXT

Until the detail of the new TEO (T:BUC) strategy is known the Council's strategy will will align with existing guidelines and strategic themes such as a focus on children and young people, shared communities, safer communities, and cultural expression. The Council is aware that the good relations budget is driven by the need to be consistent with the TEO strategic priorities as a partner funder in the delivery of the good relations programmes in Belfast. It is consistent with the racial equality strategy including the focus on reducing racism and prejudice and increasing participation.

The Council's new Strategy and Audit are also consistent with the Belfast Agenda community plan up to 2035 including its five themes of people and communities, economy, place, planet and compassion. It is also consistent with, and is informed by, other strategies including from outside Northern Ireland, such as the United Kingdon Integration Framework, the migrant integration strategy in Ireland, and other UK and Irish policies and strategies on integration and cohesion.

For example, one area of immediate and newsworthy concern is increasing visibility of racism and street disorder. Well publicised race hate incidents and crimes have been evident recently in the region and in Belfast. The potential impact of, and attitudes to, the very recently published Refugee Integration Strategy are explored.

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]

The statistics, as will be seen further, reflect wider challenges about attitudes to minority ethnic residents and a degree of Islamophobia, and speak to the need for managing racism and spin-off issues such as constructive use or unhelpful and at times unlawful misuse of on-line space and misinformation.

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.

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.

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[1] PSNI report to NIPB June 2025

The City

Belfast has a population of 345,000 people according to the 2021 census, a rise of 3.5% since the 2011 census. Of these, in 2021, 18% were 14 years of age or under and 15% 65 years of age or older.

The national identities provided by people were 35% Irish, 27% British, and 17% Northern Irish, 12% a variance of multiple Irish/Northern Irish/British, and 10% providing a nationality outside these islands. Of these, 84% had always lived in Northern Ireland – of those that haven't 4% came to Northern Ireland before 2011, 4% 2002-2010, and 9% after 2011.

The statistics reflect a recent uplift of people living in the city who were born outside the islands, and may impact on attitudes to 'others' especially, as reflected later in the report on issues related to the amount of availability of social housing, security of tenure, access to services, increasing concerns about health and wellbeing issues especially in working class and interface communities, educational under-achievement, and the legacy of identity issues.

In terms of religion brought up in, 49% were Catholic, 36% Protestant, 3% other and 12% cited no religion.

More than a third (34%) of people did not own a vehicle while 24% had no qualifications.

On language, 15% had some ability in Irish and 7% some ability in Ulster Scots.

There was high incidence of rental housing – of all households 26% were in social housing and 21% private rental.

The electoral areas all vary according to many of the Belfast-wide indicators above. The detail of these is not provided in the audit but the demographic differences have been considered in assessing strategic direction.

Policy and Strategies

There are many relevant policies and strategies. This section provides a brief resumé of some including those relevant to the audit and strategy content that may be from outside Northern Ireland. This is also reflected in recommendations around learning for staff outside Northern Ireland especially relating to cultural competence and other Council's good practice relevant to the strategy.

The **Together: Building a United Community** (T:BUC) strategy is being reviewed but remains central to good relations strategies of Councils through The Executive Office which also provides up to 75% of funding toward Council programme implementation.

The 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 audit and evidenced throughout.

The good relations indicators produced by The Executive Office are foundations for the indicators suggested for the Shared City Partnership. 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, there is a *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach central to this new, Strategy and Audit.

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 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 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.

Belfast City Council's community plan is called the **Belfast Agenda** and seeks to support communities and other public agencies to make Belfast better under four themes: Our People and Communities, Our Planet, Our Place, and Our Economy. While cohesion is not an explicit pillar of the community plan, it is important that that the new Cohesion and Good Relations Strategy and Audit are consistent with the Belfast Agenda. The strategy fits the timeframe of the Belfast Agenda, until 2035, and suggests cohesion may play a larger role in the community plan when that strategy comes to be renewed.

The **Equality Commission** recommends, on race equality, that the NI Executive, Departments and other key stakeholders take priority action in the following areas, including via the proposed Racial Equality Strategy (RES):

o   Reform of the law, to address key shortfalls in legal protections.
o   Tackling Prejudicial Attitudes, Racism and Hate Crime.
o   Ensuring equality of opportunity in education, employment, accommodation, healthcare and access to social welfare.
o   Ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation, supported by robust data collection.

For Belfast City Council the key recommendations are to tackle prejudice, robust monitoring and a similar attitude toward social justice issues.

The strategy for **black and minority ethnic inclusion** in Ireland focuses on full participation in all areas of society, recognition of cultural diversity and the elimination of racism. Themes and dimensions for the strategy include:

o   Respect, ensuring relationships of care between people and communities.
o   Representation, that people from minority ethnic communities have a say in decisions.
o   Recognition for cultural diversity that are flexible to needs.
o   Access to key resources, including employment, education and health as well as cultural spaces.[2]

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[2] Black and Minority Ethnic Inclusion 2021-2026, p7

The Irish Traveller and Roma Inclusion strategy emphasises the need to protect cultural identity, education and employment, anti-discrimination and equality, and children and youth. Traveller and Roma communities preferred to emphasise inclusion as well as integration in how they are involved in activities.

As with the strategy for inclusion of people from minority ethnic backgrounds key issues include engagement, involvement, access to resources, personal development and visibility and valuing of diversity.
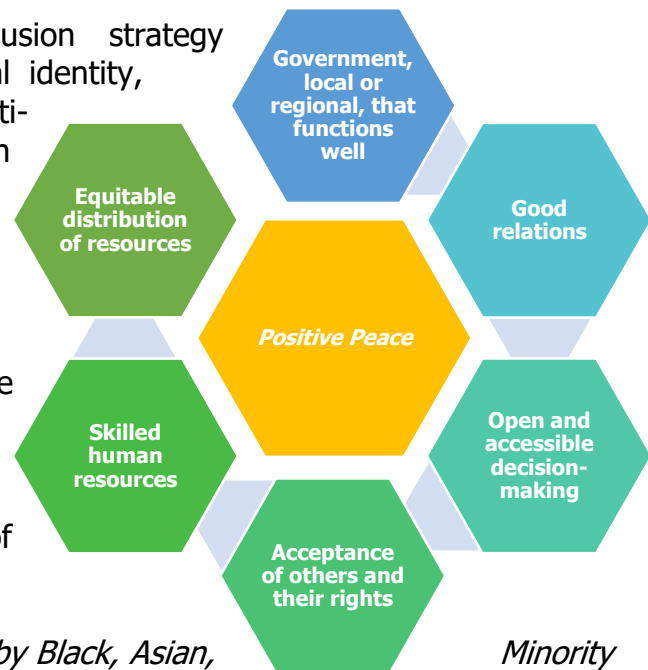
A recent report *Inequalities Experienced by Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Traveller people residing in Belfast*, produced by Belfast City Council, highlighted that:

o   There were significant housing issues especially accessing accommodation and overcrowding.
o   Mobility in the city is low.
o   While initial response by police was regarded as positive, criminal justice and other outcomes from the PSNI were regarded as poor.
o   People reporting hate crimes are disinclined to do so again due to unsatisfactory outcomes.
o   Trust in the political system was low.
o   Women are restricted in the labour market due to lack of access to child care.
o   Unemployment in the target group was partly due to discrimination.
o   Language was a barrier to communication between parents and schools.[3]

The United Kingdom **Indicators of Integration Framework**, 2018, identifies four headings each with a variety of domains, for measuring the degree of integration, monitoring effectiveness and delivery. The headings (markers and means, social connections, facilitators, and foundation) include domains such as education, leisure, work and housing, bonds, culture, safety and stability, as well as a foundation of citizen rights and responsibilities. The full list of indicators is included as an appendix.

These indicators assume an outcome-based approach to developing integration policy and within the framework many indicators are highlighted that may be relevant to the new Good Relations Strategy and Audit, based on building a positive peace with a focus on cohesion and belonging.[4]

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[3] Inequalities Experienced by BME and Traveller people in Belfast, 29025, pp44-46
[4] UK Indicators of Integration framework, p15

Positive Peace

One of the challenges of the last 25 years has been to move Ireland and Northern Ireland from a negative peace (the absence of violence) to a positive peace (creating positive attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peace).

According to the Global Peace Index, the eight pillars of creating a positive peace include six that are directly relevant to the wider context of peacebuilding. The six most impactful pillars for the Council's Good Relations work are outlined below via the footnotes.

The other two of the eight pillars are low levels of corruption and a sound business environment.[5]

Additionally, peacebuilding and reconciliation are recognised as highly cost-effective activities while requiring ongoing investment. It is estimated that the cost of not undertaking peacebuilding is x16 given subsequent likely social, economic and security costs.[6]

A positive peace, therefore, in also acknowledging the cost-effective nature of reconciliation work, leads to knock-on desirable socio-economic benefits including economic performance, social inclusion and more ambitious policy making.

A recent report from Queen's University suggests that The Executive Office should incorporate a Positive Peace process in to the review of the Together: Building a United Community strategy stressing its multi-dimensional systemic quality, cross-Departmental collaboration, a whole government approach and that can address complex factors impacting positive peace. This includes, as indicated above, issues such as socio-economic need, social justice, equality and openness.[7]

The nature of the positive peace outline suggests a focused role for the Shared City Partnership, something that Belfast City Council has been 'ahead of the game' on for many years.

PEACEPLUS Programme

The strategic context for the PEACE Programme is important and sometimes overlooked. It was the PEACE Programme that generated one of the best definitions yet of reconciliation that is at the heart of its delivery and has resonance for other related programmes including on good relations. These reconciliation criteria are:

1.   Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society
Challenging political and civic leaders to agree a vision of a shared future requiring the involvement of the whole society, and which is interdependent, just, equitable,

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[5] Global Peace Index, 2019
[6] Global Peace Index calculation, 2019
[7] Thompson et al, Queen's University Belfast p8, 2025

open and diverse.

2. Acknowledging and dealing with the past
Acknowledging the hurt, losses, truths and suffering of the past including individuals and institutions.

3. Building positive relationships
Relationship building or renewal following violent conflict addressing issues of trust, prejudice, intolerance in this process, resulting in accepting commonalities and differences, and embracing and engaging with those who are different.

4. Significant cultural and attitudinal change
Changes in how people relate to, and their attitudes towards, one another where each citizen becomes an active participant in society and feels a sense of belonging.

5. Substantial social, economic and political change
The social, economic and political structures which gave rise to the conflict and estrangement are identified, reconstructed or addressed, and transformed.

Good relations and cohesion is an important part of the reconciliation process in the city therefore, which is more than just about cross community relationships. The impact of economic and social deprivation, changing structures that estranged people, encouraging a sense of belonging of all including those people and communities feeling estranged (before, during or after the conflict), acknowledgement and a common vision, are all critical elements.

These are also important for Belfast in 2025 just as they were in 1995 when the PEACE programme started; and Belfast has unique challenges given its location and the impact of the Troubles. This iteration of the PEACE programme therefore should explore the benefits and challenges of a changing demography and bring a new lens on what peace and reconciliation may look like in the years ahead.

Perhaps just as significantly, the Hamber and Kelly definition also recognises the reconciliation paradox in the conflict between an acknowledgement of a painful and harmful past while searching for a longer term and interdependent future.[8]

As the cohesion strategy, exploring all section 75 categories focuses on challenging racism and sectarianism the definitions of each are important.

Racism
Racism is defined in many ways in different sources, but the fundamentals come back to:
o   Feelings of inherent superiority based on background.
o   Prejudice and disrespect.
o   The continued play out of issues at a local level through things like graffiti and vocalisation of prejudice.

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[8] A Working Definition of Reconciliation, Hamber and Kelly, 2004, p4

o   Systemic or institutional racism developed sometimes over a prolonged period.
o   Subsequent issues around decision-making processes, lack of involvement in decision-making and lack of recognition of contributions made.

As a result, the new Strategy and Audit includes reference to:
-   Systems and procedures by agencies and others that may include unconscious bias.
-   Capacity building to address every day, or systemic, racism and sectarianism and how they impact people.
-   Identification of role models.
-   Dialogues on the consequence of racism and how to challenge it.

Sectarianism
Sectarianism is defined in many ways in different sources, but the fundamentals come back to:
o   Narrow-minded or parochial attitudes toward people of different faith beliefs;
o   Being confined to the limits of a particular denomination or being biased toward people and beliefs of a particular denomination.
o   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.
o   There are often links from the denomination to other cultural, historical and political differences.

As a result, the Strategy and Audit includes reference to:
-   Inter faith collaboration because while there can be a diluted relationship between religion and political, historical and cultural differences, nevertheless it 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.

Learning from Elsewhere

In many ways communities struggle, not just with conflict or significant violence, but with exclusion, prejudice, and segregation. The issues that are relevant in one region are not necessarily the same as other regions, but the causes and ameliorations can be similar – and the good practice that helps deal with the problems arising from segregation, prejudice and exclusion can often be relevant in different regions.

Sectarianism and racism, and violence associated with sectarianism and racism, are not unique to Northern Ireland and Ireland. Nor are the consequences or solutions.

Indeed, sectarian violence and exclusions occurred on a much greater scale in other parts of the world. While Ireland and Northern Ireland was experiencing sectarian violence in the 1920s, 1940s and 1970s millions of people were killed and experienced systemic discrimination arising from conflicts and sectarian violence in Greece, Turkey,

India, East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and West Pakistan, Eastern Europe and many other countries and regions.

The consequence of conflict in these regions are still relevant and are manifest also in Britain today where immigration in the last century presented challenges of integrating those communities that came to Britain from some of the countries experiencing traumatic change; and where demographic change continues to confront policy makers and service deliverers.

As such, in Britain local authorities are often ahead of the game in promoting cohesion and diversity; in dealing with the reconciliation paradox of addressing the causes of conflict in the past to acknowledge hurt and facilitate better relations now; in identifying and improving systemic issues of inequality and discrimination; in developing skills; and in both accepting the rights of others and indeed of accepting the concept of otherness broadly.

Belfast can learn from such local authorities, but the learning is mutual as they in turn can explore how local authorities address deep-seated issues of prejudice and segregation here.

Good practice visits to other areas could explore:

1. Cohesive societies and the challenges in urban Britain.

2. How Council areas that are more diverse than Belfast, such as Birmingham address issues of segregation, race relations, systemic discrimination, and exclusion. Birmingham City Council is an advocate of the Class Ceiling approach referenced below.

3. Good practice projects and programmes that work.

A visit may include:

o Visit to and meeting with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Cohesion and Diversity, officials and Mayors of the Council.
o Exploration of how segregation and prejudice are manifested.
o Meetings with cohesion and diversity officers and practitioners from the Council and other agencies.
o Exploration of managing multi-agency approaches to improving cohesion and diversity.
o Meetings with faith leaders.
o Visits to community projects of good practice working on good relations and cohesion.

In addition, good practice visits may engage with projects such as the *Class Ceiling* research supported by Councils that demonstrate how a coordinated approach can help people from working class communities including within divided communities move in to higher echelons of work.[9]
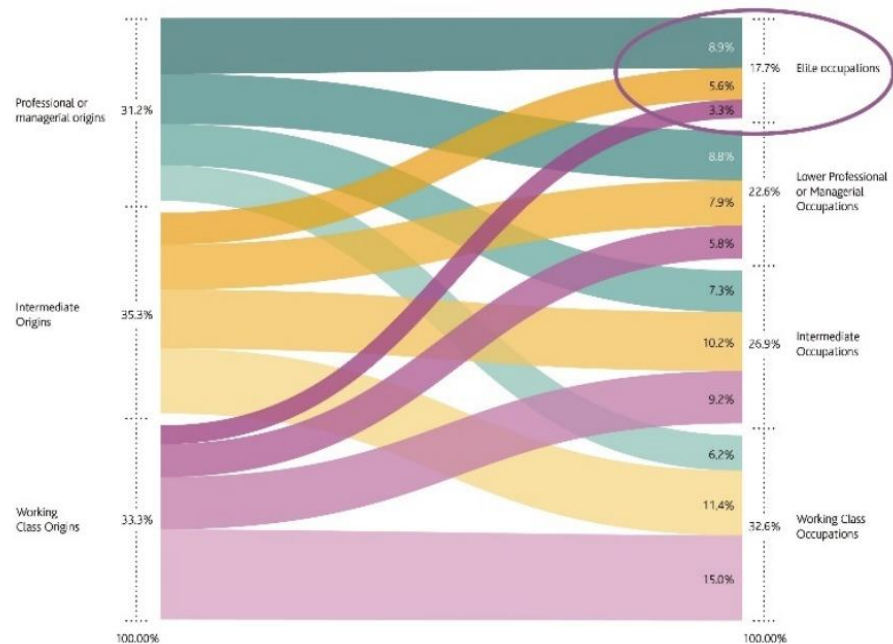
Other Policies and Commitments of Relevance to the City and Region

EU Green Deal
The European Green Deal sets out a range of policy initiatives to make Europe carbon neutral by 2050. The strategy contains commitment to support environment projects that may combat climate change and encourage community responses to environment challenges. This will include raising skills and knowledge on climate change.

Territorial Agenda 2030
The new Strategy and Audit includes potential North-South co-operation through exploration of good practice and applicability across the islands north-south and east-west in line with the Good Friday Agreement.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty that grants all children & young people (aged 17 & under) a comprehensive set of rights.

"That every child has the right to rest & leisure, to engage in play & recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child & to participate freely in cultural life & the arts." Children and young people are a core part of the strategy and many projects that will be supported within it.

UN Resolution 1325 on Women and Peacebuilding
The new Strategy and Audit acknowledges the importance of this resolution and will ensure that women and women's projects are supported, explicitly including greater visibility and leadership of women in peacebuilding initiatives.

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[9] Laurinson et al, The Class Ceiling: Social Mobility and why it pays to be privileged

NI Programme for Government

The Audit and new Strategy has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the following Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes on enjoying long, healthy, active lives; a more equal society; a confident, welcoming, outward looking society; and in creating a community where division does not restrict life opportunities of individuals & where all areas are open & accessible to everyone; a community where everyone feels safe in moving around & where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety; to promote a community, which promotes mutual respect & understanding, is strengthened by its diversity & where cultural expression is celebrated & embraced.

These feature of the Programme for Government are also features of the strategy.

Key Issues

Key issues in this section include:

o   Belfast is a vibrant city, increasing in size with a diverse population including minority populations of people from a Catholic and Protestant background, minority national identities, and some (10%) increase in people coming to live in the city from outside these islands in the last ten years.

o   There are significant numbers of people in rented accommodation, with no/low qualifications and with less access to a vehicle or make practical choices to use private transport due to availability of public options.

o   Various government policies and strategies prioritise belonging, cohesion and participation.

o   Hate crime has significantly increased with the number of race hate related incidents and crimes in Northern Ireland being more than all other hate related categories put together.

o   Celebrating cultural identity and broadening participation is a regular theme across government and policies.

o   Reconciliation definitions over the last generation have stressed the importance of structures and systems, vision, leadership, interdependence, positive relations, and the interconnectedness of social and economic issues.

o   Capacity building is an ongoing need. That may also include building capacity to identify structural change needs and cultural awareness or competence in making decisions within a demographically changing city.

o   Often people from working class communities are less enfranchised to fulfil their potential.

o   Agencies such as the Equality Commission stress the importance of equality of opportunity in education, employment, accommodation, healthcare and access to social welfare.

o   In Ireland the strategy for black and minority ethnic inclusion advocates for people from minority backgrounds to have a say in decisions.

o   The UK Indicators of Integration stress outcomes such as community bonds, safety and stability is important foundations of a citizen's rights and responsibilities.

o   Belfast City Council recognises already that trust in the political system is low.

o   Overcoming parochial outlooks contributes to constructive attitudes toward sectarianism and racism.

o   Bias may also include unconscious bias because of lack of familiarity or knowledge.

o   The economic benefit from a cohesive approach is reinforced by the positive peace global indices stress the need to prevent problems before they become major issues, which could save x16 more than allowing cohesion and good relations issues to fester.

o   Building a positive peace (as opposed to just the absence of violence) includes a range of factors including issues such as trust in government, building capacity, and openness and transparency, as well as good relations – all important for building cohesion.

o   Many indicators from government already exist including for good relations, cohesion and integration of relevance to cities, regions and more broadly across these islands.

o   Many of these indicators also stress the importance of finding commonalities while embracing diversity.

o   The positive peace indicators stress the cost-effective nature of reconciliation and prevention work.

Some of the key statistics for the city, especially where there is greatest socio-economic need is provided.

The maps below are provided in other research, but we consider them relevant and important for the new Audit and Strategy. They also remind that while there is considerable need at and around interfaces, there is also a need within communities that are not at interfaces and are in the suburbs sometimes in larger areas that do not have indications of significant socio-economic need.

The physical legacy of conflict: "peace" walls
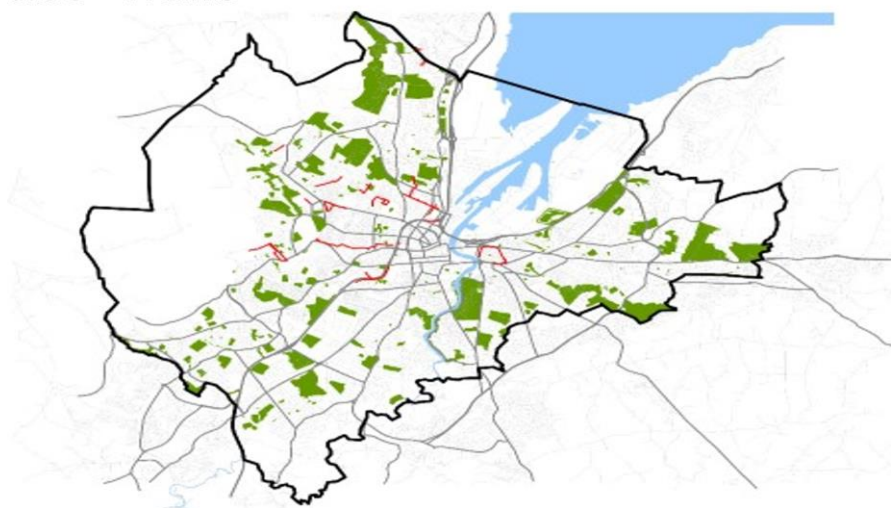
Patterns of segregation and division have not improved since the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998. Ongoing segregation and division continues to manifest itself in the physical fabric of our city, where upwards of 95 physical barriers continue to separate communities from each other. Residential segregation hasn't improved, with around 94% of social housing in Belfast either predominantly Catholic or Protestant.

In 2017, the Ulster University produced a number of Policy Briefs. In one, it explored the Socio-economic, education and employment factors pertaining to those who live at interface areas.
https://www.communityrelations.org.uk/files/communityrelations/media-files/Policy%20Brief%205%20Peacewalls.pdf

Some of the key elements of their general findings included that:

0   Of those who live adjacent to an interface or Peace Wall, 65% of these are from a Catholic background and 27% are from a Protestant background.

0   70% of all politically motivated murders in Belfast between 1996 and 2001 occurred within 500 metres of an interface barrier.

0   Those individuals living near a peace barrier are more likely to have had direct experience of violence than their counterparts living elsewhere in Northern Ireland.
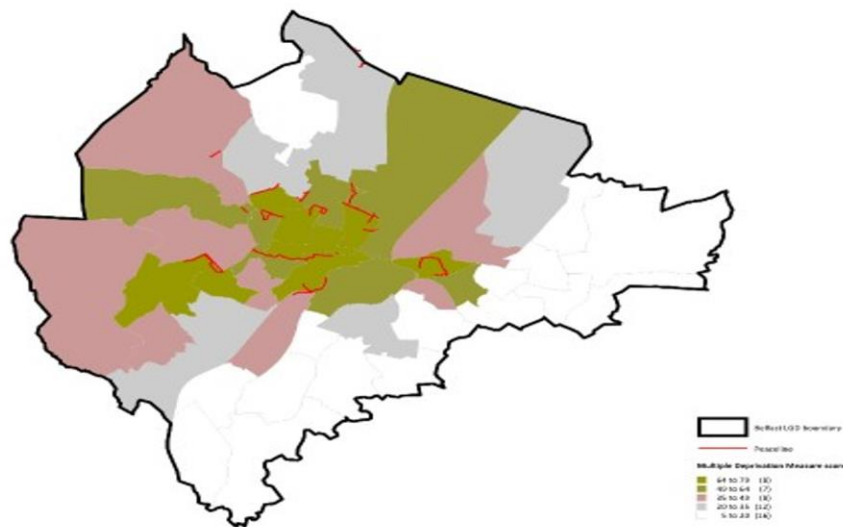
Deprivation

The study then looked at the direct link between interface areas and deprivation.

0   Communities living on an urban interface such as the Falls, Shankill, Ardoyne, Crumlin Road, New Lodge, Springfield Road and Duncairn (all of which are in North and West Belfast) comprise 14 of the 20 most deprived wards in Northern Ireland (70%). Essentially, these statistics capture the challenge in attempting to interpret a relationship in the form of 'causation' between peace walls and increased rates of deprivation.

0   While facing a similar myriad of interlinked social problems, Northern Ireland also faces the added dynamic of widespread residential physical segregation and the legacy of an ethno-national conflict. Hargie et al. (2006, 2011) have referred to this juxtaposition of 'ordinary' social and economic deprivation with segregation and sectarianism facing those who live in interface areas as a 'double penalty'. It is of little surprise therefore that: "The most socially deprived areas in Belfast are also areas where "peace walls" or interfaces between communities are prominent, are areas of lowest educational attainment with the fewest number of children and young people progressing into third level education and are places where youth unemployment runs highest" (Browne and Dwyer, 2014, p.800).

0   This social and economic deprivation appears to apply at both an individual/household and a communal level. In relation to the former, the 'Cost of the Troubles' study found that "The group with the highest intensity of violence (experience) was also characterised by households with extremely low incomes" (Morrissey et al., 1999, p.106).

0   Those with 'high' levels of personal experience of the 'Troubles' were 1.85 times more likely to have lived in poverty in the past, 1.16 times more likely to state they are poor 'sometimes' or 'all the time', and 1.76 times more likely to lack three or more essential items most people take for granted as they 'cannot afford them'

Deprivation levels across the city

The correlation between the location of interface areas, or Peace Walls, and the highest area of deprivation is clearly displayed here above.

Education

When it came to educational attainment, young people who live at interface areas or close to peace barriers are at a significant disadvantage. The policy brief noted:

0   School leavers from areas in the highest deprivation quintile had a 53.5% chance of obtaining good GCSE passes, and a 28.9% chance of getting good A-level passes, compared to 68.6% and 40.7%, respectively, for school leavers from areas in the lowest deprivation quintile.

0   In their study of the 'social ecological risks' to educational achievement in Northern Ireland, Goeke-Morey et al. (2012, p.249) drew upon data on 770 adolescents that found, "A family environment high in-conflict and low-in-cohesion was the sole environmental predictor of poorer academic achievement." They suggest that "A peaceful home environment may provide youth both the instrumental and emotional support necessary for academic success, including emotional and biopsychological regulation, adaptive sleep patterns, a sense of emotional security, self-confidence, and a culture of achievement".

0   Two studies of young people living in interface communities in Belfast (Hargie et al., 2006) and Derry/Londonderry (Roche, 2008), found that unemployment and sectarianism were the two most important (and at times inter-linked) issues facing young adults. Hargie et al. found that young people were reluctant to venture outside of their own community due to a fear of what lay 'beyond the

wall'. This led to a 'bubble syndrome' where unemployment passed from generation to generation in interface communities, and for many young people was viewed as the 'norm' (Hargie et al., 2006, 2011).

The image below is very visual representation of the clear relationship between poor educational progression and the reality of living in an interface area.

Higher Education attainment levels
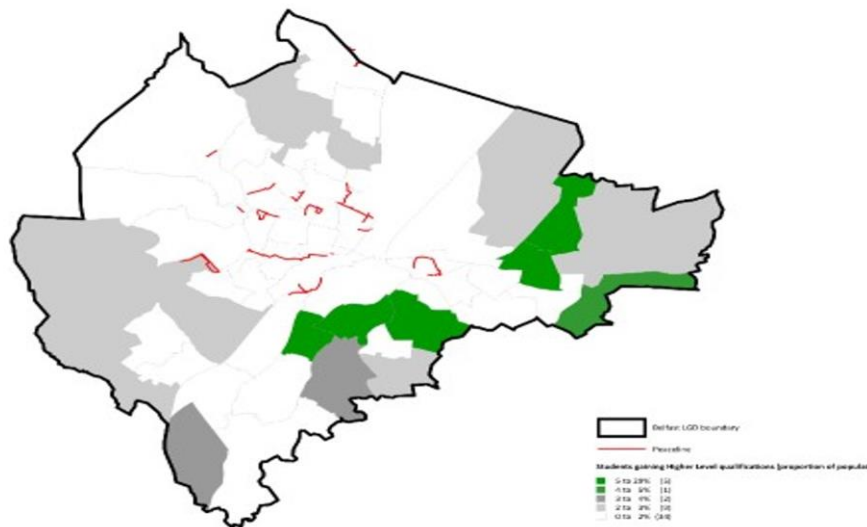
Health

In the policy brief referenced above, estimates suggest that 39% of people in Northern Ireland have experienced a conflict-related traumatic event and 16.9% witnessed a death or serious injury (O'Neill et al., 2014). Given the scale of the conflict (more than 3,600 deaths and 40,000 injured) it is perhaps unsurprising that the population at large tends to have poorer levels of mental health and higher levels of 'psychological discomfort' than both the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland (O'Reilly and Stevenson, 2003; Murphy and Lloyd, 2007; Murphy, 2008; Bunting et al., 2011, 2013; Wang et al., 2011). If, as stated above, 70% of conflict related incidents occurred within 500 metres of an interface barrier, then this means that this is significantly magnified for those living at an interface.

Worryingly, the levels of mental health in Northern Ireland appear to be even poorer than in other countries also emerging from protracted ethnic and political conflict (O'Neill et al., 2014; O'Connor and O'Neill, 2015). Furthermore, Mahedy et al. (2012, p.646) have contended that, "…it could be hypothesized that an underlying continuum dimension (sic) of anxiety and depression is present in the Northern Irish population."

The impact of the conflict and for those who live at interface areas is highlighted even further from the policy brief, with the following stark findings:

0   Tomlinson (2016) found that those individuals with high experience of the 'Troubles' were 2.65 times more likely to be at risk of mental illness than those with no such direct experience. The risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in particular is higher for those exposed to a conflict related traumatic event, as opposed to those individuals only exposed to a non-conflict related traumatic event (O'Neill et al., 2014). Indeed, Ferry et al. (2014) found that events that were characteristic of a violent conflict, including the unexpected death of a family member/loved one, witnessing a death or a dead body or someone being seriously injured, accounted for the highest proportion of the overall public health burden of PTSD (18.6, 9.4 and 7.8 %, respectively).

0   This built upon the findings of the 'Cost of the Troubles' study, which documented that approximately 30% of the 1,300 participants in the research suffered from the symptoms of PTSD (Morrissey et al., 1999). This included disturbed sleep, upsetting memories, overconsumption of alcohol and higher than average use of prescription drugs, all of which were more readily apparent amongst those residents who lived in areas where the violence was of a 'high-intensity', which inevitably is interface areas.

0   While anyone can suffer from PTSD regardless of where they live and depending upon their individual experience; given that much of the violence and most of the killings occurred within interface communities, it is plausible to surmise that those living in these communities are at greater risk of suffering from mental ill-health and/or PTSD. This would appear to be borne out in a recent large-scale study, which aimed to explicitly assess the potential for poor levels of mental health based upon residential proximity to interface barriers (see Maguire et al., 2016).

0   The study assessed health record data on 1.3 million individuals living in Northern Ireland and found that living in a neighbourhood segregated by a 'peace-line' increased the likelihood of using anti-depressants by 19%, and of anxiolytic medication by 39%. While a previous study (French, 2009) had suggested that it was segregation in and of itself which had an adverse effect on mental health, Maguire et al. in fact suggest that it is the proximity to an interface structure which is the much more significant factor in the use of prescription medicine and poorer levels of mental health.

0   They suggest that this is a crucial point to understand, as "Individuals living in areas with a segregation barrier are without doubt segregated, but it may be the built environment and the segregation infrastructure, not population composition per se, that is affecting mental health in these areas" (ibid., p.7).

o   Paradoxically therefore, while peace walls may provide local residents with a sense of security (Byrne et al., 2015), on another level they may also be impacting negatively upon their mental health.

o   There are two added issues to consider with regards to mental (ill)health, particularly relating to trauma. Firstly, poor mental health and trauma can often be transmitted inter-generationally (McAllister et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2013), with the children of parents who had conflict related trauma more likely to display 'emotionality' and 'hyper-activity' in terms of their behaviour (Fargas-Malet and Dillenburger, 2016). Secondly, poor mental health and conflict related trauma is related to higher levels of self-harm, suicide ideation and the act of suicide itself (O'Neill et al., 2014). Perhaps more significantly, once again socio-economic status plays a significant role in increasing the likelihood of self-harm or suicide. Data indicates that between 2010-14, there were 8.4 deaths by suicide per 100,000 population for 0-19 year olds in the most socially and economically deprived areas in Northern Ireland. In the least deprived areas, the figure was 2.2 (NIE, 2016, p.44). In addition, between 2010/11 and 2014/15, there were 50.6 hospital admissions due to self-harm per 100,000 population for 0-19 year olds from the most deprived areas. For the least deprived areas, once more, the corresponding statistic was 22.4 (id.). Building upon these statistics, Cummings et al. (2016, p.16) have argued that: "Children and young people growing up in the participating interface areas were aware of and perhaps were more vulnerable to severe mental health issues. This in turn may be related to the risk for self-harm, such as self-mutilation, cutting, burning or purging. Thus, an increasing risk that youth must attempt to deal with is risk for higher levels of self-harm and/or suicide than may be the case in other types of neighbourhoods.

Building Good Relations including exploring social and economic issues, is a critical and essential requirement for the progress and success of Belfast in all its ambitions and outcomes.

The city is still segregated along religious and political lines and those who suffered most during the conflict, particularly those who live near interface areas, continue to suffer the most and are in danger of being left behind.

Good Relations and cohesion considerations and outcomes therefore should be front and centre of all of policy and service delivery activities, if they are to not only succeed, but also if they are to deliver meaningful change for those still directly impacted by the legacy of conflict, division and segregation.

One example of the community response to issues, though not where there is a physical peace barrier but where the local community believes it is being squeezed by redevelopment and by newcoming communities, is on Donegall Pass. Supported by The Urban Villages initiative Donegal Pass Community Enterprises carried out an audit of the area and produced a report on the changing nature of communities in South Belfast.

Their report was based on secondary research (70% of people in the area were born in Northern Ireland compared to 87% of people in NI as a whole) and direct feedback from residents ("to be honest the biggest issue in this area is housing" one resident, "the housing executive really needs to step in" another resident).

Key recommendations stress issues around housing equity, local leadership and capacity building, a youth provision study, issues around accessing local services, building trust and cultural exchanges, and activities in a good relations hub.[10]

The Carnegie UK Institute recently published a report showing that economic hardship was more prevalent in Northern Ireland than the rest of the United Kingdom. Amongst other conclusions for Northern Ireland that it draws are included:

o   More people in Northern Ireland face hardship than elsewhere in the UK especially those in social housing and on low incomes.

o   Democratic wellbeing remains lower in Northern Ireland and most people feel they cannot influence decisions that affect their lives, locally or regionally.

o   Environmental access is lowest for those on low incomes and younger people.[11]

Key issues include:

0   More than three decades after ceasefires in 1994, there are as many peace barriers in the city though some have been reimagined or removed.

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 'performative' dialogue and decision-making.

0   There should 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 education, physical and mental health and wellbeing, the environment or employability could be the type of issues that could deliver excellent, issue-based good relations work.

0   There is evidence linking lower educational achievement, young people going to third level education, and youth unemployment. There are also links between a family environment high in conflict, low cohesion and poor educational achievement.

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[10] Report on the Changing Nature of Communities in South Belfast, Donegall Pass Community Enterprises, May 2024, pp44-47
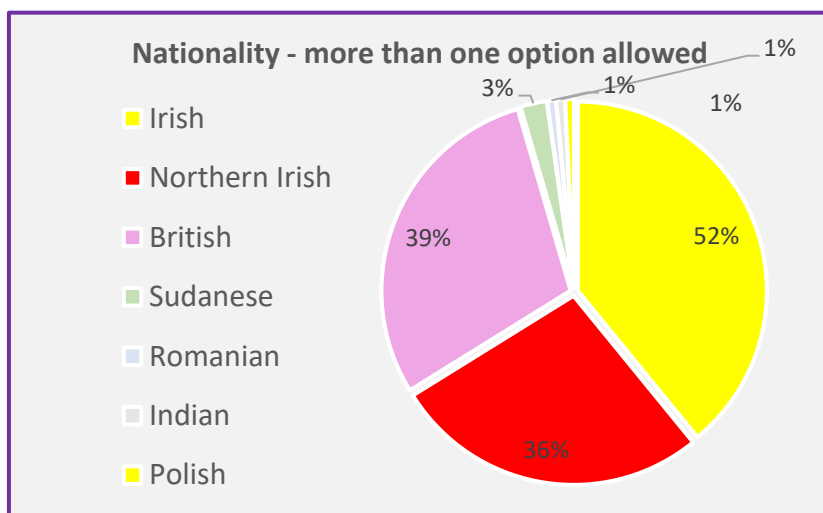
[11] Carnegie Institute UK, Economic Hardship in NI, 2025

- *0*   Links have been made between higher levels of mental illness with people and communities with high experience of the Troubles. Separately people and neighbourhoods segregated by a peace barrier are 19% more likely to use anti-depressants and 39% more likely to use anxiolytic medication suggesting while may feel safer the structure may directly contribute to poorer levels of mental health.

- *0*   Youth suicide rates in poorer areas appear higher than in other areas.

- *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 still left on the periphery rather than as a central component.

- *0*   While recognising the progress that has been made by those supporting good relations, Northern Ireland is still a highly segregated society epitomised by politics, cultural identity, 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 reinforcing a narrative that new communities are 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 newcomers locally. There appears to be significant tensions around, for example, housing in relation to newcomer communities.

- *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*   Tensions around housing stress and lack of adequate service provision in NI are believed to be the main factors in the recent rise in hostility towards migrants and 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 ignorance.

- *0*   Whether in local or central government, delivery should include a commitment toward transformative dialogue and decision-making rather than 'performative' dialogue and decision-making.

Some of these issues are applicable to Northern Ireland but are considered in the draft for relevance in Belfast.

SURVEY

During the audit more than 200 people returned a survey, a copy of which is included in the appendices. The survey provided a clear context and direction regarding issues raised, ideas to prioritise and issues that inhibit the development of good relations.

Nationality - more than one option allowed

- Irish
- Northern Irish
- British
- Sudanese
- Romanian
- Indian
- Polish

52%
36%
39%
3%
1%
1%
1%

The religious profile is broadly reflective of the city. The number of young people completing the survey was fewer than the average population, but their opinions were further captured during outreach with younger people. Most people managing community projects are also in the 45–59-year-old

age bracket which reflects the returns for that category.

Religion

- Christian Catholic
- Christian Protestant
- Muslim
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- None/Not say

31%
33%
30%
4%
1%
1%
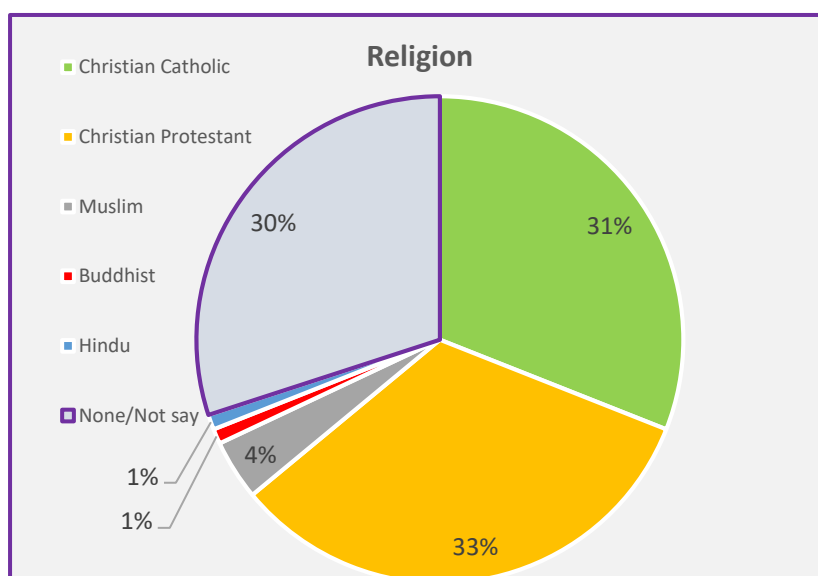
More women than men returned the survey, however, 41% male return rate is good and broadly reflective of the city.

While some replies came from people living outside the city the survey was completed generally proportionately by people from the North, South, East and West.

In addition, respondents' nationalities are self-defined, with more than one answer allowed (therefore the table below does not add up to 100%).

Parts of City

- Central
- East
- North
- South
- West
- Outside

1%
21%
21%
14%
25%
16%

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Non binary
- Prefer not say

3%
2%
42%
53%
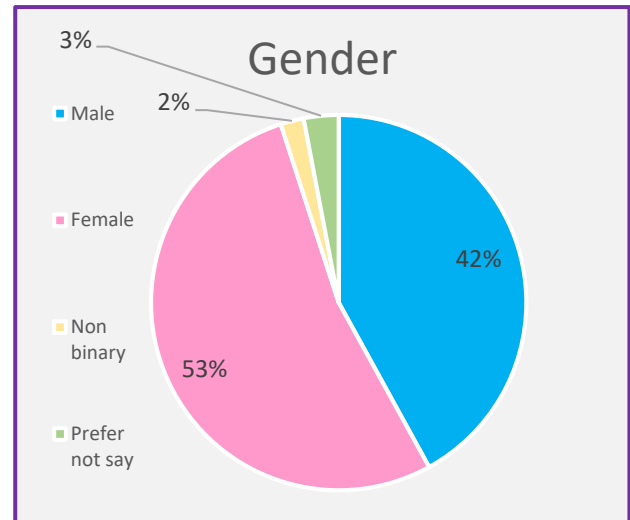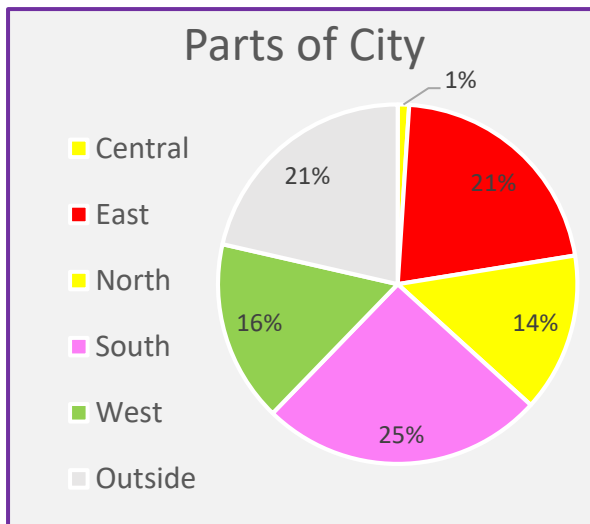
Given the demographic returns, we estimate in the survey responses overall a confidence rate of 94% and a margin of error of +/- 5%. High level results included:

0   91% believe good relations are very important for the city but while 11% feel it is a very shared city 8% believe it is not at all shared - the majority (81%) feel it is a bit shared.

0   A significant number (42%) always feel a sense of belonging in the city compared to just 7% who never feel a sense of belonging – the balance, (51%), sometimes have a sense of belonging.

0   While 20% feel their cultural background is always respected, just 8% believe it not at all respected. The balance, (72%), believe it is sometimes respected.

0   22% believe they can always express their cultural identity compared to 13% who say they never can express their cultural identity – 66% sometimes can express their cultural identity.

0   Most people (65%) would like to see multi-annual grants being provided, 4% no grants and 8% just for one year.

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

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

Lot Sectarianism and Racism - 2022 v 2025

79%

65%

65%

62%

2022   2025

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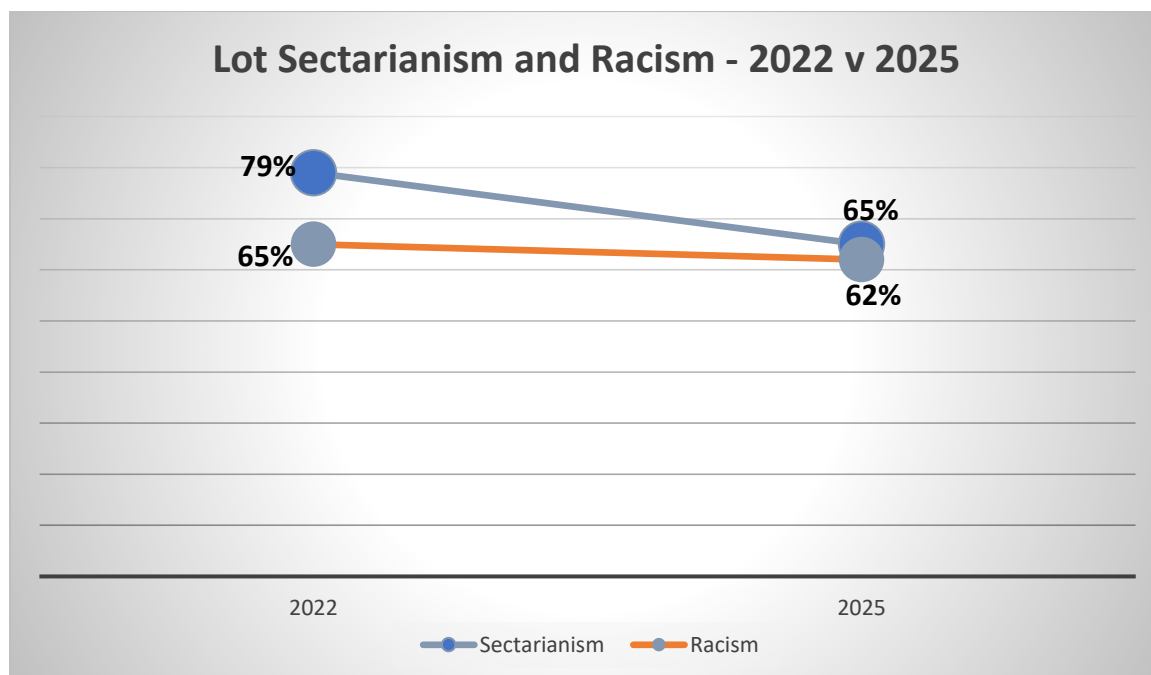
Almost all respondents believed good relations was a very important part of what Council does (91%) – just 8% saying it was fairly important and 1% that it was not at all important.

Priorities

100%

80%   80%   78%   77%   75%   72%

60%   64%   64%   60%

40%

20%

0%

■ Sectarianism   ■ Racism   ■ Worse off areas   ■ Young people
■ Paramilitarism   ■ Education   ■ Interfaces   □ Segregation
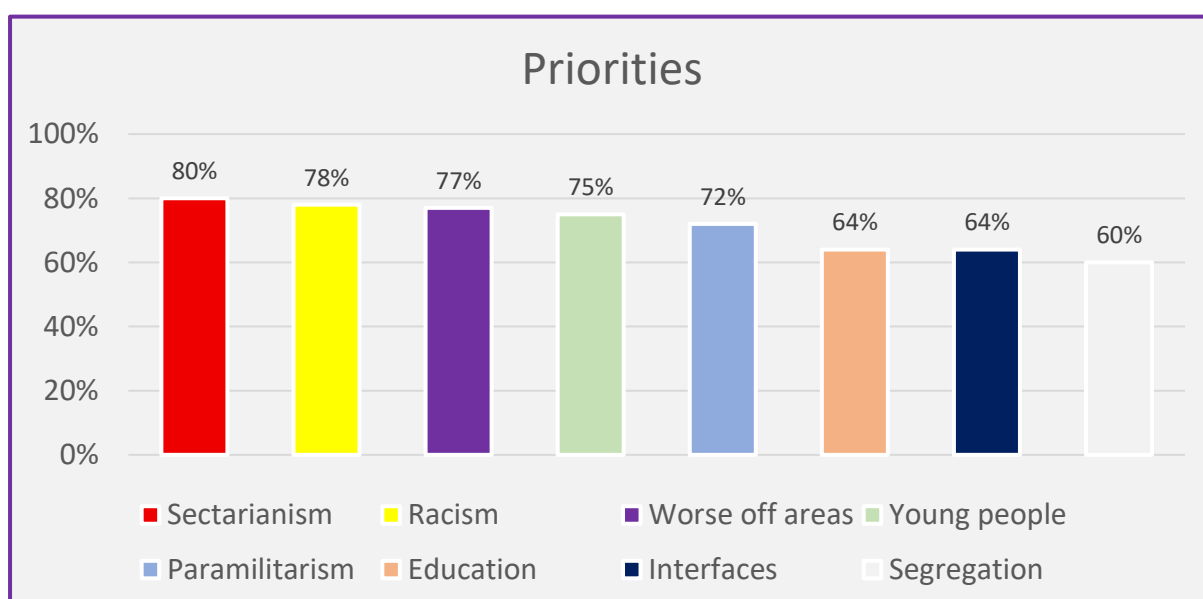
The key priorities for those replying were highlighted below – just the key priorities that scored most highly. A focus on educational under-achievement, socio-economic issues, interface communities and the important needs around challenging

sectarianism, racism and paramilitarism are all considered key priorities for the strategy.

While just 11% believe the city very shared, most (81%) believe it a little shared and 8% not at all shared.

However, many people (42%) always feel a sense of belonging while 51% sometimes feel a sense of belonging. There are no significant differences by data slicing.

Is Belfast a shared city?

- Very shared
- Little shared
- Not at all shared
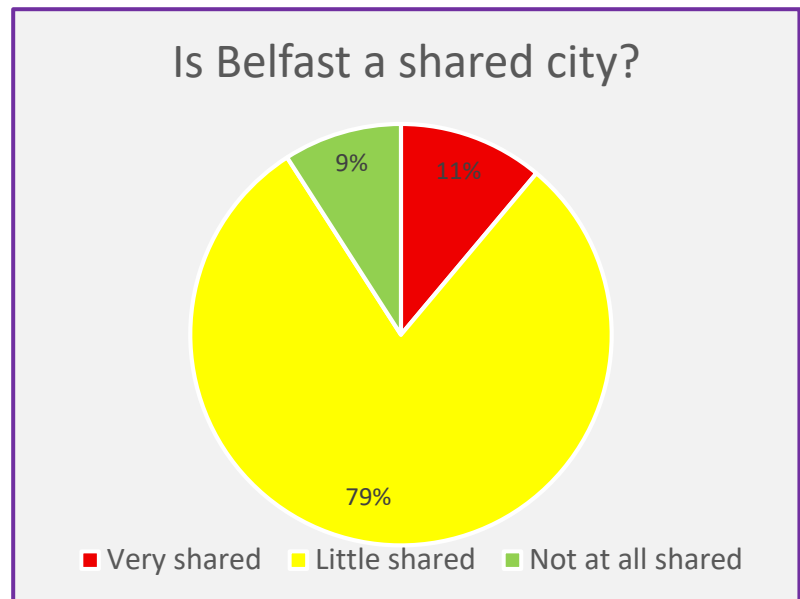
When asked whether their cultural identity or background is respected in the city most say sometimes (72%), with 20% always and 8% never. There is no significant differences by data slicing between people from different backgrounds.

Is your cultural identiy/background respected?

- Yes always
- Sometimes
- Never

Degree of Racism and Sectarianism

- Lot
- Little
- None
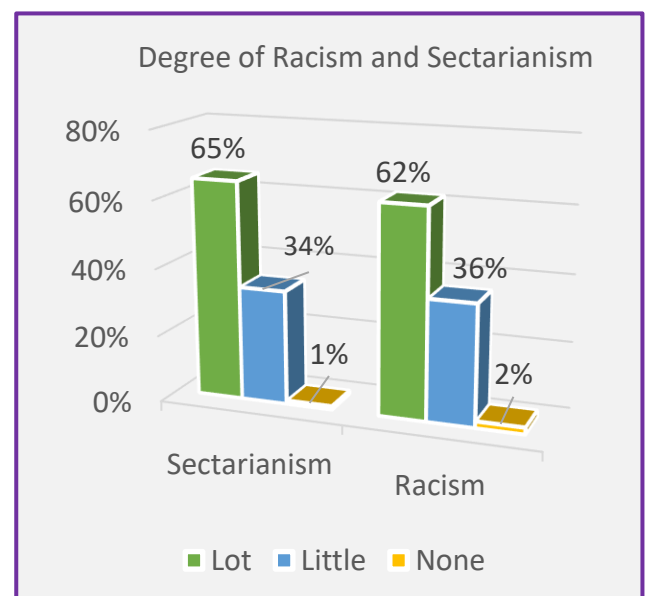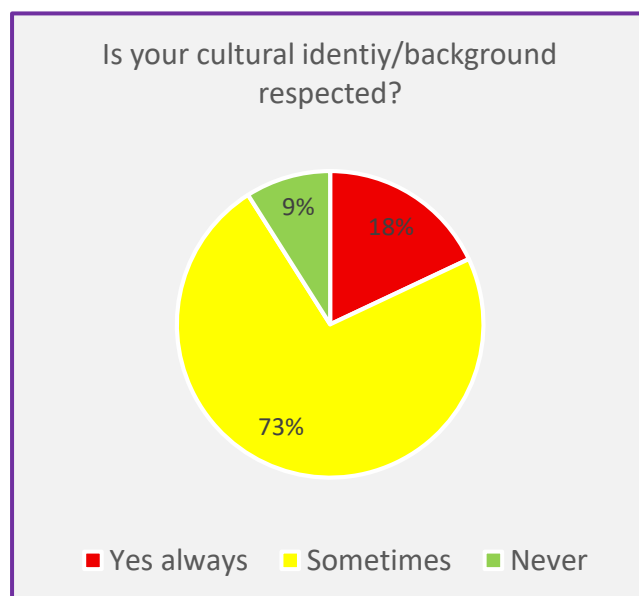
At a similar level 22% believe they are always able to express their own cultural identity or background while 66% believe they can sometimes and 13% never.

Generally the reference to 'sometimes' or 'little shared' may also reflect a city where some parts, such as the city centre, are well used by people from all communities but the city is still highly segregated therefore meaning many of these answers are caveated.

Delivery challenges

The survey asked people to identify some of the more important issues and barriers to promoting good community relations locally or/and in Belfast.

The most significant issues identified included racism, sectarianism, education, housing, and segregation.

Interface Segregation communities issues people Education Housing racism Tackling cross community integration Sectarianism young people services

Surveys: Qualitative Feedback

Survey participants were asked for qualitative feedback on the most important challenges for undertaking peacebuilding work, key issues in their areas. There was significant repetition in feedback such as those listed below, where the same or broadly similar comment was made at least five times.

good relations Poverty shared Politics education past politicians political Sectarianism Lack housing interface segregation communities Language leadership Lack understanding

The issues raised most often regarding barriers to undertaking peacebuilding work in the city included:

o   Sectarianism.
o   Housing.
o   Lack of understanding.
o   Political leadership.

The word cloud below summarises the most mentioned words for barriers to good relations in the city. It particularly highlights issues such as sectarianism, a lack of understanding, the past, politicians and politics, and leadership.

When asked for other comments the word cloud below highlights those most frequently mentioned. It includes issues such as community (more involvement), funding, need and delivering activities that people want.

Recent events including racial violence reflects 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 tackling more substantial disorder than anything Belfast has experienced.

The last good relations Audit and Strategy suggested Council staff visit areas of good practice to learn about those successful initiatives. The circumstances haven't changed in 2025, and perhaps the need has increased.

Key issues include:

o   Feedback suggests a strong support for the good relations work of the Council from those who have had engagement with it.

o   Many people regard Belfast as somewhat or a little shared, or that at times their cultural expression is respected. This may also reflect a city that is still highly segregated and perhaps reflects a separate living pattern.

o   The degree of respect felt for cultural expression and identity is the same across all communities when data sliced.

o   Many people do feel a sense of belonging in the city though it needs built on.

o   Sectarianism and racism are still considered the most important priorities along with working in less well-off areas and working with young people.

o   However, there is a sense of an improvement in the degree of racism and sectarianism that exists in the city compared to three years ago, even though the number of incidents have increased.

o   Challenges are considered to include segregation, education, provision of services, and working at interfaces.

o   People considered there to be a lack of leadership around good relations and a lack of understanding of its importance or what to do about it.

o   Housing is often reported as a pressure on contributing to better community relations, often access to housing or perceived fairness.

o   There is some improvement over the last four years in how people in the city perceive the city and in their belief in the amount of racism and sectarianism.

o   Statistics on belonging and cultural expressions suggests that across the community there is some way to go.

o   While many people feel they belong in the city all the time and are free to express their background and cultural identify, a majority believe those things to be conditional, and only sometimes feel they belong, and their cultural expression and background is respected. This was relevant to people from all community backgrounds, but especially those from a Protestant faith background.

o   There is significant support for a move to multi-annual funding given the challenges of one-year only to manage and deliver impactful projects on sensitive issues that require community engagement and buy-in.

o   Tackling racism is identified as a key and important priority for the new strategy. There remains a strong belief in the need to tackle sectarianism as well. The United Nations defines racism as including racist ideologies, attitudes and structural arrangements with institutional practices. These are referenced in feedback though sometimes not in these terms.

o   How politics played out including in the media, was thought to inhibit transformative relationship-building.

o   Ensuring that young people were engaged in activities and saw a route for their inclusion in activities was considered important, as well as relationship-building, skills and attitude-changing initiatives.

This new Audit and subsequent Action Plans reflect these priorities.

A summary of inherent and residual findings from the survey include:

Survey findings

- 93% believe good relations in the district is highly or very important - just 2% say it is not at all important
- Critical issues are considered to be dealing with sectarianism and racism, involving young people, and trust in institutions.
- Barriers raised including sectarianism, housing, leadership.
- Support for funding, both small grants for less experienced groups and longer grants to facilitate more planning.
- The recognition of existng socio-economic issues.
- Cultural expresssion is important to people and for all sides of the community people feel able to express themselves but it also could be better.
- On-line posting can be probematic and fan negative beliefs even if inaccurate.
- Good relations is considered a very important agenda for Council.
- There is still a considerable amount of racsm and sectarianism in the city.

Inherent impact - outgoing Audit and Strategy

- Well regarded and impactful good relations work by the Council
- Community organisations very aware of the GR small grants support.
- The smaller, short-term grants supports many newly established groups.
- The migrant forum is well regarded.
- The cultural expressions programmes are well regarded.
- The existing programmes deliver less combating online hate.
- While avery improtant function of Council good relations is less than a core function.
- Sectarianism is central to Coucil's good relations strategy as is racism.
- Housing and some of the related socio-economic issues raised are not core to the existing strategy but have been raised as playing into community feelings of threat from newcomer communities.
- Mental and physical health and wellbeing are factors for communities living at interfaces.

Residual impact - incoming Audit and Strategy

- The GR staff at Council are supported and will continue ongoing community engagement.
- Existing programmes are regarded well and many should be continued.
- Cultural expression programmes will continue with additional inclusion challenges.
- The migrants forum will continue with additional integration challenges.
- A multi-annual grants award, even on a pilot basis or for some programmes, may help increase outcomes achieved.
- There are common needs especially around socio-economic and social justice issues, that may provide a backdrop for linking them with good relations and contact outcomes.
- The online threat may require focus on cultural awareness and attitudes of young people.
- Sectarianism and racism should still be a core part of the new good relations strategy.

WORKSHOPS AND INTERVIEWS

Overall, approximately 400 people were engaged in workshops, consultation and interviews including through ten separate workshops with relevant groups and some workshops that were open to all from the community sector.

The consultation process was concluded with a completing the circle consultation where those who had engaged in the process were asked to return and hear the conclusions and key issues, and further input to what should be included in the good relations Strategy, Audit and associated Action Plans.

Feedback on the work of Council and the good relations team was generally positive. The team were regarded as engaged and committed, and the work of initiatives such as the Migrant Forum and the beacons project were acknowledged positively.

Funding by the Council was thought to be critical for sustaining good relations work and successes to date. However, no one at the workshops thought the funding was adequate and that it would be broadly beneficial for it to be for more than one year in a multi-annual format, perhaps for three years.

Disengaged young people and challenges of integration/inclusion/understanding minority ethnic groups including refugees and asylum seekers, were often referenced.

However, others also referred to the challenges of old fears being exacerbated by new challenges. They meant old fears of communities as they manage their relationship with other traditional communities, and at times sense of loss linked to legacy and related issues. Added to this were new fears generated by changing demographics in their area through migration. This included reference to media and social media.

The difficulty of managing change with an active story in the media and often negative, unfair or/and shrill social media content added to challenges in local communities.

Exploring integration is also a theme from interviews and workshops, including with minority ethnic communities and local communities about what integration means, protection of own faiths, and making sure, for example, youth provision, is open to all, safe, welcoming, and open to all faiths.

Key issues include:

o   Peacebuilding needs have changed in the last 30 years since both ceasefires in 1994 and the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

o   Cross community work was successful, is still relevant and important, although some feedback was supportive of single identity work within the traditional community difference setting but also for encouraging new communities to work through issues before becoming involved in intercultural work. Some newcomer communities felt they were encouraged to integrate but that existing community groups can sometimes be unwelcoming.

o   Issues such as lack of inclusion linked to social and economic needs, were referenced often. As with building a positive peace, ensuring greater inclusion of those previously excluded, and helping people to understand and benefit from peace, were considered important elements of this iteration of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

o   Similarly tackling racism was considered a priority. Some of the feedback, at times explicit and at other times implicit, referenced the systemic nature of racism and the need for a deep-rooted exploration of it and the response to it across all sectors. This reflected a more general need for change identified, of moving from a largely mono-cultural society to an inter-cultural society. How a changing demography interacted with ongoing fears and sense of loss, linked to local issues and perceptions about The Troubles and peace since 1998, was referenced in different ways.

o   Many within the community believed that skills and capacity within community organisations delivering importance services and support to local communities was an ongoing need that needed continually updated and provided.

o   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 more widely rolled out.

o   The needs for integration to be a two-way exchange with people from all communities and backgrounds involved safely and in a welcoming environment. People feeling vulnerable or believing their faith will be undermined, either for newcomer or established communities, does not facilitate integrated provision.

o   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.

o   Perceived criminality in newcomer communities particularly among young males has led to protests and attacks. There is significant suspicion of migrants particularly those who are Muslim or non-European and it is important to recognise that racism and Islamophobia go hand in hand, and some people are the target of both.

o   Within the minority ethnic communities there is very real fear and questions as to whether Belfast is a safe place to live and work. Many people appear to be leaving to go to GB which is considered a safer choice. This has economic as well as social consequences, not least for our health service which is heavily reliant on migrant workers. With the major universities being situated in Belfast, racist incidents which have included unprovoked attacks on minority ethnic students have a very real potential to deter overseas students.

o   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.

o   Young minority ethnic people and children are reporting significant 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 already having very serious consequences around both educational achievement and wellbeing.

o   The inevitable resentment, anger and lack of trust in institutions such as the PSNI, schools and service providers have the potential to facilitate radicalisation.

o   There also a sense that inadequate cultural awareness or induction programmes for newcomers can result in neighbour disputes and misunderstanding on all sides.

o   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 faux pas 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 and priorities are reflected in the new Strategy, this Audit and subsequent Action Plans.

Existing Delivery

There was a lot of success in delivery within the existing Good Relations Strategy evidenced in the feedback, interviews, workshops and survey. There is much good practice evidenced in Belfast City Council and significant opportunity to sustain the good programmes and introduce new in the context of a strategic, *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach that also involves other public agencies.

The Council's existing good relations plan includes support for 36 programmes broadly evenly 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 (£160k) 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 like the overall approach of the Council, 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.

Potential Strategic Focus of New Strategy, Audit and Action Plans

The new strategy will be consistent with the T:BUC strategy from the Executive Office, either the one due to be published or the existing strategy. However, it may be time for the Council to 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 the Council is very well regarded and effective, it may be time to re-set its strategic direction, review and enhance its role internally within Council, and ensure consistent and complementary delivery on social cohesion by the Council in all it provides. That may include re invigorating the role of The Shared City Partnership.

The strategic focus therefore seeks to identify a new iteration of reconciliation aims beyond good relations, recognising the critical role which good relations has in building a positive peace, but incorporating the critically important elements of what would be included in a new good relations and social cohesion strategy.

Concept of an Integrated Social Cohesion Approach and Strategy

Embedding the peace is an ongoing process that has been done relatively 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, principles and structures. Ensuring respectful 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 relatively 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 to focus on reconciliation.

This new Council **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-Council approach to building a more cohesive city, with the goal of meaningful reconciliation at its core.

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

The Strategy includes six pillars for building a more cohesive city and these are reflected in this new Good Relations Audit:

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 more focused multi-annual grants programme or further work on the beneath the radar but well regarded and successful bonfire beacon programme. The dynamics of different types of fear within local communities and newcomer communities may also be relevant and assist in supporting positive cultural expression in communities that feel a sense of cultural loss.

> 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, are cultural issues a focus for measuring status and standing? How does Council continue to support progress toward recognising peaceful and lawful cultural celebrations while being recognised as a supporter of cultural expression in all communities?

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 Council. Capacity is not just focused on training and knowledge but ensuring that decision-making processes within Council 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 relation process. It may also include successful initiatives such as the migrant forum.

> The Migrant Forum has demonstrated a capacity to identify key issues and bring significant community-based organisations to greater collaboration. Sustaining the Migrant Forum with an even greater focus on anticipating and challenging narratives is important.

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. The good relations implications of decisions needs to be explored through the Council committee process and in the report-writing of Council officers.

> Would a framework or charter for Good Relations 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 Council?

4. Develop **trust in key institutions** by all people across the community. Key institutions relevant to 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 Council's decision-making processes.

> Statistics show that trust in policing, and recruitment to PSNI, is more problematic in Belfast. Does the Council and PSNI with other agencies such as through the PCSP, engage in specific trust-building initiatives?

5. Deliver better and meaningful **social justice outcomes**, with a focus on those interface areas that still suffer most from our 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. Access to green space and ongoing impact of legacy and other issues relevant to those communities 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.

> 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. If these communities cannot be left behind and they have nowhere to go, should the good relations and social cohesion strategy pay particular attention to the inter-connectedness of disadvantage, interfaces and common concerns?

6. Develop an **overarching dynamic or sense of belonging for the city** to which all people can buy in. This includes all communities including newcomer communities as well as people from traditional community divides; and progressing work at interfaces with potentially different perceptions of priorities.

> The Shared City Partnership deliver a critical leadership role in agreeing what a sense of belonging is and what needs to change and be supported to achieve it? The Partnership will provide the right focus for inter-agency collaboration, and act independently of Council when required.

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 largely 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.

Therefore, the approach for the city by Council 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:

o   Have stronger communities where there is mutual support across political, ethnic or religious divides.

o   Have the goal of meaningful reconciliation as an intentional outcome of this work

o   Increase the resilience of the city.

o   Deliver better health and wellbeing outcomes, particularly in interface areas where they are most acute.

o   Provide a further basis for economic health and growth.

o   Reduce conflict, enhance healing, increase support for legitimate agencies, and enhance support between sectors including the community and faith sectors.

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 separate provision, where misinformation is challenged, and where long-term as well as short-term approaches are embraced. The approach seeks to simplify the measurements of success where complex and often inappropriate indicators are replaced with ones that are shorter, easier to understand; and more accurate measurements are used especially for short-term projects. It also suggests a strategy that realises that the impact of projects able to plan for a just a one-year project is restricted compared to what multi-annual funding can deliver.

It advocates for digital innovation. It seeks the active promotion of both promoting integration while tackling social exclusion, relevant to established as well as new communities, in countering extremism and radicalisation. Radicalisation, especially of young people, includes people from existing and newcomer communities whether people being used by organisations to act unlawfully or people frustrated at real or perceived threats to communities and people, or racism 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 social cohesion and good relations tackles social exclusion, poverty, fear and feelings of being left behind, as stimulants to this radicalisation.

That is why Belfast City Council, any Council, requires a whole-Council approach that takes seriously the ambition of a 10-25 year good relations and social cohesion strategy and three-year good relations plan that take the first steps in that 10-25 year 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 others within Council and within and between projects that receive Council funding.

Building on the impressive change it has helped facilitate to date Belfast City Council should 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.

Risk management

The risk assessment highlights potential challenges and robust mitigation strategies that ensure the strategy will achieve desired outcomes. The significance of proactive risk management and assessment during project consideration and deliberations will contribute to successful project completion.

Overall, a projects' ability to deliver successfully relies on effective community engagement and communication strategies which is why community involvement is an important part of this Audit.

The core aspects of the Audit and Strategy for Good Relations and Cohesion will assist in the measurement and impact of programmes, involve others in Council and other agencies, and strengthen the management and oversight of the strategy.

The role of the Shared City Partnership will focus on a greater challenge to all on it – Elected members, other public agencies, community and faith sector representatives, to play a role in setting the indicators and therefore the outcomes but also delivering on them.

The cohesion indicators agreed will cross other aspects of Council delivery as well as involve other public agencies.

The *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach challenges all with an interest and who will have an impact to get involved and help deliver outcomes. This includes other parts of Council and a broader engagement with the voluntary and community sector.

Those indicators, once agreed by the Partnership will be how the Partnership and other sectors, not just the Council, measures achievement in making Belfast more cohesive. All programmes and projects should relate to them.

With a focus on transformative not performative actions, Council should robustly challenge all activities in good relations delivery about efficacy and effectiveness. That means activities that are deemed to be expected and 'usual' but that have no impact, may be disregarded from delivery.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The TEO has a range of indicators and performance measurements which the Council's Good Relations Action Plans will be consistent with.

The appendices includes suggestions for the indicators and questions in the transformative not performative space that projects supported by Council may be asked. They will relate to the four themes of T:BUC, the five pillars of the Audit and Strategy, and the outcome-based indicators agreed by the Shared City Partnership.

These indicators will:

o   Shape programmes and projects that are supported especially when receiving Council grants.

o   Be the basis for ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities.

o   Allow for early recognition of under-performing aspects of the cohesion strategy. A radial chart in the appendices indicates how that might work as a reporting mechanism to the Shared City Partnership.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Communications should reflect the aims, outcomes and values of the TBUC strategy in the messaging, timeline, and deliverables. All branding and messaging will be consistent with TEO requirements. TEO will be always involved and engaged appropriately.

A key aim will also be to engage and involve any and all funded projects in communication activities, however.

Objectives

The communication objectives are :

1.   Increase awareness among local communities and stakeholders about the new Strategy, Audit, Action Plans and its projects.

2.   Encourage active participation in projects.

3.   Change attitudes by showcasing successes and long-term benefits, for the city and future generations.

4.   Promote awareness of TEO funding as a catalyst for change, emphasising how it improves community relations, intercultural engagement and social justice outcomes.

These communication objectives apply for every project and Theme.

Purpose

The purpose of the communications is to:

o   Increase awareness of the funded projects, and impact in the city.

o   Increase knowledge of, and participation in, activities and events.

o   Complement outreach activities by the Council and TEO.

o   Acquire feedback useful to the TBUC process and plans going forward.

Activities

Communication activities will include:

o   Every project will be required to undertake communication/PR activities.

o   Each project will also be asked at the start to identify further potential positive PR opportunities.

Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders are:

o   Projects funded through direct engagement.

o   The communities and community and faith organisations that are interested and able to contribute.

o   Elected representatives.

o   Other public agencies.

o   The Shared City Partnership.

All material produced, news releases and other public information will incorporate appropriate branding and will be approved by Council.

Exit Strategy

The focus for the Audit, Strategy and Action Plans will be to deliver successful good relations and cohesion projects within a re-focused strategic direction, including a ten-year plus cohesion lens and exploring an overall ambition for Belfast in 2050.

The key elements of this long-term change include:

o   A refocused and reinvigorated leadership and challenge role for the Shared City Partnership with specific measurement for cohesion, and a transformative versus performative approach.

o   Mainstreaming or systemic change in a *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach. For example, the Council and Shared City Partnership facilitation of a cultural competence project will change how public agencies engage with all communities and should lead to better decision-making.

o   Changing behaviours, attitudes and skills that will stay within the city so long as people stay, for example in supporting city-wide belonging and greater integration and crossing of boundaries.

o   The building of trust in public agencies especially on areas and issues of sensitivity such as trust in Council, youth services and policing.

The Audit, and Strategy acknowledges that despite 28 years of peacebuilding work since the Good Friday Agreement, challenges remain and sometimes these challenges have not been adequately addressed.

The significant change in demographics and consequent issues of racism and lack of welcome for new communities are addressed as an emerging feature especially when encountering fears by existing communities regarding a sense of, or dread of, loss.

Redevelopment and acknowledgment that some people in less well-off communities feel they are being left behind, means that the strategy seeks to provide a sense of inclusion, hope and aspiration for these communities to be involved in delivery whether at interfaces or in communities that have major challenges on those same social issues.

Changing attitudes and the inclusion of the traditionally excluded, therefore, are features of the outworking of the Strategy, reflected in the Audit and subsequent Action Plans. This will lead to sustainable and long-term change.

Belfast City Council and its partners in the *Whole Community, Whole Council* approach, will measure and update delivery of the Council's Good Relations work. Measurement of success will therefore be more real allowing the Shared City Partnership and Council to re-evaluate their how and what they are delivering. This reinterpretation may not just be about aspects of promoting good relations and cohesion but more substantially what cohesion means for the city in decades to come.

Conclusion

This new Good Relations Audit flows directly from the new Good Relations and Cohesion Strategy for Belfast, which have been developed in tandem. These are exciting additions to the previous audits, strategies and programmes, complementing existing delivery and adding value to existing good practice in the city.

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

The Audit and 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 Audit 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.

The issues within this Audit, along with the direction of the new Strategy goes 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

Appendix A

Interviews and Workshops

Workshops and Events

Alliance grouping
Belfast City Council group leaders meeting
Belfast City Council senior management team
Completing the Circle event
Diverse Youth NI workshop
Donegal Pass Community Association
DUP grouping
Good Relations Staff BCC, first session
Good Relations Staff BCC, second session
Green grouping
Migrant Forum workshop
Muslim learning workshop
NI Assist workshop
Open session for elected members
Public workshop in-person x 2
Public workshop on line
Red Cross workshop with refugees and migrant workers
SDLP grouping
Shared City Partnership workshop x 2
Sinn Fein grouping
Survey of community and staff
Ulster Unionist grouping

Arthurs	Briedge	Forward South Partnership
Bryan	Dominic	QUB
Conlon	Denise	NIHE
Deitrich	Lisa	Community relations in Schools
Douglas	Sammy	DUP
Duffy	Joe	Sinn Fein
Egiomo	Augustine	iAssistNI
Eguaogie	Israel	Diverse Youth NI
Euler	Laura	BHSCT
Fitzpatrick	Julia	Migrant Centre
Gardner	Chris	The Executive Office
Gunn	Liam	NIHE
Irwin	Jacqueline	Community Relations Council
King	Gavin	The Executive Office
McAvoy	Michael	DoJ
McCloy	Lisa	Donegall Pass Community Association
Plant	Jamie	Youthlink
Smyth	Brian	Green Party
Tanden	Nisha	Arts Ekta

Thompson	Andrew	QUB
Tubbritt	Gerry	BCDA

Appendix B

Examples of Key M+E Questions for Initial Discussion with Projects

Evaluation Samples

Components of the strategy monitoring and evaluation process for the Shared City Partnership and projects, will include responses to the following key questions with projects upon appointment. These will be robustly incorporated within a perspective of transformative versus performative – in other words the change that will be made needs to be clear and of benefit to cohesion.

Targets	
Baseline	Need established – where are we now?
Outcomes	Ambition realistic but achievable – what change do we wish to effect?
Impact	What happens within the community/target group - consequences of that change?
Processes	
Measurement	What are appropriate indicators and outcomes?
Data	What information is needed to measure change?
Use of Data	When is data needed and how it will best be used afterwards?
Resources	
People	Who is best placed to carry out monitoring and evaluation?
Skills	Do people understand their role, understand why M&E is important, and have the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake it?
Money	Is there sufficient time and money to carry out the monitoring and evaluate the impact/learning?
Stakeholders	
Partners	Have partners in the process been identified and are they willing to participate?
Funders	Are funders needs being met including any partners that have inputted money or staff?
Community	How will the community – as ultimate recipients and deliverers of better relationships – be involved as informed participants?
Reviews	
Mid-term	To provide scrutiny and provide comfort that delivery is likely to deliver by

	programme end, and demonstrate support to the programme
Project End	To demonstrate success against outcomes identified with project managers at the start
Going Forward	Learning what will change, refine and improve strategic priorities going forward

Appendix C

Outworkings of Survey

Some of the significant conclusions from the survey and their outworking to the new strategy are summarised below.

Survey findings

- 93% believe good relations in the district is highly or very important - just 2% say it is not at all important
- Critical issues are considered to be dealing with sectarianism and racism, involving young people, and trust in institutions.
- Barriers raised including sectarianism, housing, leadership.
- Support for funding, both small grants for less experienced groups and longer grants to facilitate more planning.
- The recognition of existng socio-economic issues.
- Cultural expresssion is important to people and for all sides of the community people feel able to express themselves but it also could be better.
- On-line posting can be probematic and fan negative beliefs even if inaccurate.
- Good relations is considered a very important agenda for Council.
- There is still a considerable amount of racsm and sectarianism in the city.

Inherent impact - outgoing Audit and Strategy

- Well regarded and impactful good relations work by the Council
- Community organisations very aware of the GR small grants support.
- The smaller, short-term grants supports many newly established groups.
- The migrant forum is well regarded.
- The cultural expressions programmes are well regarded.
- The existing programmes deliver less combating online hate.
- While avery improtant function of Council good relations is less than a core function.
- Sectarianism is central to Coucil's good relations strategy as is racism.
- Housing and some of the related socio-economic issues raised are not core to the existing strategy but have been raised as playing into community feelings of threat from newcomer communities.
- Mental and physical health and wellbeing are factors for communities living at interfaces.

Residual impact - incoming Audit and Strategy

- The GR staff at Council are supported and will continue community engagement.
- Existing programmes are regarded well and many should be continued.
- Cultural expression programmes will continue with additional inclusion challenges.
- The migrants forum will continue with additional integration challenges.
- A multi-annual grants award, even on a pilot basis or for some programmes, may help increase outcomes achieved.
- There are common needs especially around socio-economic and social justice issues, that may provide a backdrop for linking them with good relations and contact outcomes.
- The online threat may require focus on cultural awareness and attitudes of young people.
- Sectarianism and racism should still be a core part of the new good relations strategy.

Appendix D

Example of Indicators and measurement Management Tool

The framework for a sense of cohesion and belonging in Belfast is:

O   Capable of replication annually or more realistically in a three or five-year basis.
O   Adaptable including to other aspects of good practice.
O   Provides headline assessments behind which are more extensive data and statistics most of which are already available to public agencies and government, local or central.
O   The potential for cross-agency collaboration given the interplay of the key statistics.
O   Oversight that is capable from a cross-sectoral organisation such as 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.

The indicators for each theme could be numerous and over-powering. The plethora of data may underlie each theme with three basic indicators for each theme. The could be, for example:

Themes and Indicators

These are not real and have been limited to three indicators per theme. There could be any number of indicators. The larger number of indicators might increase confusion but may also increase accuracy.
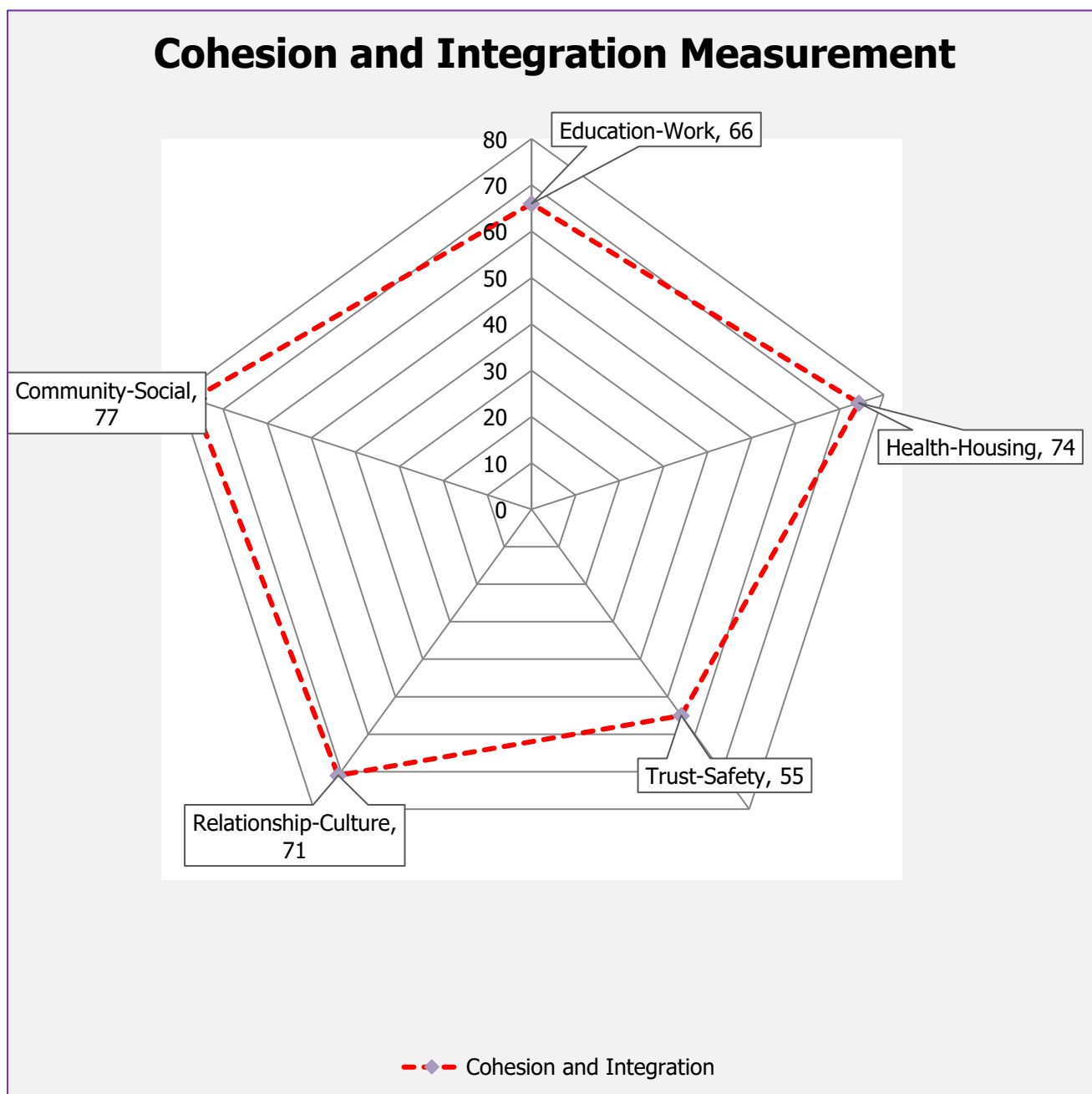
Theme	Indicator
Education and work	% of children in pre-education provision % achieving 5+ GCSEs % satisfied with current employment
Health and housing	% engaging in leisure activities % registered with a dentist % in secure owner-occupied resident or with stable tenancy
Trust and safety	% who trust key institutions % feeling fearful or insecure % victims of hate related incidents or crime
Relationships and culture	% of people with friends from different backgrounds % who are comfortable with diversity % who feel their culture is respected
Community and social links	% registered to vote % who report a sense of belonging % participating in community activities.

Radial Chart

A radial chart could be a clear visual summary of how well the city is doing.

The scores allocated to the cohesion and belonging framework therefore allows for the creation of a radial chart with an at-a-glance assessment of cohesion and belonging for the city.

Radial chart scores out of 100 but is only a visible example of how the model could operate – these statistics are not real.

Cohesion and Integration Measurement

Education-Work, 66
Health-Housing, 74
Trust-Safety, 55
Relationship-Culture, 71
Community-Social, 77

- - ◆ - - Cohesion and Integration

The radial scoring, at a glance, indicates that:

o   Cohesion and belonging requires more investment in relationships and culture, and in community and social links.

o   The city is doing well on education and employment.

Appendix E

Summary of Strategic Priorities

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The strategic priorities over the next three years of this new Audit (2026-2029), 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	**Actions**	**Actions**	**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 | 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. | Refocus and reinvigoration 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 | Supporting critical cultural expression activities including seeking alternatives to bonfires while encouraging lawful and respectful bonfires 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 |

		and delivery relevant o Council staff and members. Production of a 25-year strategy for cohesion in Belfast. Small grants programme that will offer pilot three-year funding across all TBUC priorities with a priority on social justice commonalities.	priorities with a priority on social justice commonalities.
priority on social justice commonalities.			
Results	**Results**	**Results**	**Results**
Results are outlined in greater detail in the action plan. They include: o Engagement of traditionally excluded, disadvantaged, minority & people from different faiths including newcomer communities. o Enhanced sense of belonging. o More young people involved in good relations activities developing skills, changing behaviours or attitudes. o Greater collaboration between schools from different sectors.	Results are outlined in greater detail in the action plan. They include: o Changed behaviour o Reduced anti-social behaviour o Reduced isolation o Enhanced health and wellbeing o More traditionally excluded people engaged o Increased trust in institutions o Recognised good practice and good news stories o Acknowledgement of positive diversity	Results are outlined in greater detail in the action plan. They include: o Increased sense of belonging and a positive acknowledgment of difference. o Greater understanding of the benefits of interculturalism. o Greater inclusion of people from minority faith or cultural backgrounds. o Enhanced skills and knowledge.	Results are outlined in greater detail in the action plan. They include: o More quality, lawful cultural expression o Acknowledgement of, and respect for, different, lawful cultural expression o Increased sense of belonging and a positive acknowledgment of difference. o Greater understanding of the benefits of interculturalism.

		- Increased trust in institutions. - Changed behaviours and attitudes to others. - 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.	- 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:

o Projects that will ensure decision-makers and public agencies align to a commitment to interculturalism.
o Social justice projects that response to needs within a city where the common social justice needs cross interfaces and communities.
o Investment that aligns with the overall strategic priorities of all public agencies and the TEO and the Belfast Agenda.
o Delivery of programmes that develop skills and fosters collaborations across interfaces.
o Delivery of programmes that draw on themes of cultural diversity, civic identity, health and wellbeing and many others.
o Deliver innovative programmes that support training learning and skills development through, leadership programme and tackling issues associated with new media.
o Programmes that collaborate with public agencies and community forms to ensure genuine cultural competence in decision-making given the changing demographic dynamics in the city.
o 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 AP will help to address long standing social and economic challenges which have, and continue to, impact communities, particularly those in Belfast's interface communities.