

## Appendix 1

### **Consultation Response to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's draft Corporate Plan 2019-22**

**From:** Belfast City Council

**Date:** 4.12.18

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Belfast City Council has considered the draft Corporate Plan 2019 – 2022 of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Please see our response below.

#### **2.0 Feedback**

2.1 Belfast City Council (BCC) welcomes the identification of the following strategic priorities:

- Employment,
- Education,
- Access and Participation
- Mainstreaming and Championing Equality

We have identified some alignment with the Belfast Agenda, Belfast's first community plan, and our four areas of focus until 2021:

- Growing the Economy
- Living Here
- City Development
- Working and Learning

The advice and guidance from ECNI should support collaborative working and measuring of progress amongst statutory partners.

2.2 BCC also welcome the ECNI move towards an outcomes based accountability process and associated measures, which BCC has adopted within the Belfast Agenda and is currently mainstreaming throughout associated programmes of work.

2.3 In particular the council welcomes the focus on the development of Programme for Government equality indicators and the addressing of data gaps and need for disaggregation by section 75 groups, as outlined on page 31 under the strategic outcome area of 'Mainstreaming and Championing Equality'. The development of these indicators and associated activity may aid the Council in its commitment to deliver inclusive growth, a key principle underpinning the Belfast Agenda, through effective targeting of resources and

activity. As part of the above indicators we would invite attention be paid to multiple identities.

2.4 We also welcome the inclusion of a focus, as identified on page 31, on the Commissions role in raising the profile and level of engagement with issues in the media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers and acknowledge the recent leadership report, supported by David Sterling, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. We would encourage the Commission to be pro-active in raising the issues of inequalities across society.

2.5 In relation to the strategic outcome areas of Employment and Education the draft corporate plan focuses on section 75 groups that experience inequalities in these areas of life. We would welcome that, in addition to this, consideration is given to understanding the relationship between the complex nature of the barriers that individuals from areas of high deprivation may face around income and unemployment, educational attainment and health, and how these relate to the groups protected by Section 75 legislation.

We have adopted the following definition:

For us, addressing inequalities is about what we can do to create a fairer society and recognises that equality and good relations are issues for us all. We don't all start from the same place and to create a fairer, peaceful society we need to recognise the diversity in our communities. We need to continue to consider how the characteristics protected by Section 75 may have on the life chances of members of all of our communities and better understand the relationship between these characteristics and the role that socio-economic status has in creating, or contributing to, inequalities. (Equality and Diversity Framework 2017-21)

This correlation between vertical and horizontal inequalities is a burgeoning field of study and Northern Ireland specific guidance would be of significant value in developing interventions that address broad, complex inequalities and their impact on the synergies between equality and good relations.

2.6 ECNI corporate plan (p.14) refers to the importance of securing progress around 'Education'. However, there are no specific potential indicators in relation to the defined groups and this could be considered going forward. In addition, the indicators referenced in the 'Employment' section, on page 17, focus on women and those with a disability and we would ask how progress in relation to the other Section 75 groups, as outlined on pg. 13 would also be monitored/measured?

2.7 In relation to the strategic outcomes of 'Access to information and digital services' we would ask that the indicators, listed on pg. 29 encompass all forms of communication and the needs of others whose first language is not English. The goal being to create a society where people with different access requirements can locate and access the detail they need to make informed choices about their lives.

2.8 Within the strategic outcome area of 'Employment', much of the section focuses mainly on working with employers to improve in work practices. We would recommend that consideration be given to earlier interventions, including pre-employment support, to help support access to job opportunities for those groups experiencing inequalities. Consideration could be given to including indicators around the provision of opportunities for pre-employment support for relevant section 75 groups. These could be additional forms of learning that should have recognition in developing the skills and confidence of people. There are good examples of this activity in Belfast and our experience would support the notion that it encourages better employee retention.

2.9 Within the strategic outcome of 'Education', as discussed on pg.13, we recommend that reference to early years interventions i.e. identifying and providing effective early support to children and young people who are at risk of poor outcomes and inequalities should be reflected in the narrative. In addition, under this strategic outcome, consideration should be given to including performance indicators around attainment levels at GCSE for those children entitled to free school meals.

2.10 Further thought could be given to considering including additional indicators in relation to the procurement and social clauses within contracts, particularly in relation to the strategic priority areas of employment and mainstreaming and championing equality.

2.11 We look forward to the publication of the final document and delivery plan. In addition, we would recommend that a detailed glossary is attached alongside the strategy to ensure consistency of approach and understanding going forward.