

# Strengthening representation and participation of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sectors in Community Planning: Consultation on Terms of Reference for a 'VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel' for Belfast

## Introduction

Belfast Community Planning Partnership values the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors and is eager to deepen its partnership in recognition of the energy, ideas and contribution that these sectors make. In strengthening our approach, the Partnership is keen to facilitate both greater levels of involvement and a shift towards co-production and collaborative approaches to deliver the improved outcomes for our citizens that our city aspires to in the Belfast Agenda.

To begin to bring this commitment to reality, the Community Planning Partnership has been engaging with the organisations and groups across these sectors during Spring 2019 – in March 2019, the Community Planning Partnership held a series of workshop conversations with VCSE sector participants to shape early proposals for strengthening VCSE sectors participation in each of the areas above. A summary of the feedback received during this engagement is available to [download here \(insert link\)](#).

In building our approach we have reflected on what people told us to further develop proposals that enable:

- **Participation in Community Planning Partnership structures** – People told us this type of participation needs to ensure that any arrangements provide a balanced view across the VCSE sectors, taking into account the whole geographical area of Belfast and the range of thematic and other interests of the sectors. The statutory guidance for community planning also requires the Community Planning Partnership to be satisfied that there is an accountable structure and mandate for those representatives attending the Partnership to reflect the views and interests of others in the VCSE sectors

*To do this we are proposing to establish a 'Sectoral Advisory Panel' and have developed a draft Terms of Reference, along with some proposals for establishing initial membership of the Panel. We are keen to hear your views on the key elements of these proposals.*

- Ensuring effective and appropriate levels of VCSE sectors **participation in working groups and action planning activity** to maximise the value of these inputs – People told us that it is important not to create new structures or forums where these exist already, and that any arrangements should utilise these networks where possible.

*We are not proposing to create new forums or networks at this stage for this purpose. Instead we are proposing to build the Community Planning Partnership's stakeholder intelligence (to ensure focussed participation in these forms of engagement is targeted at those organisations and groups who are best placed to contribute) via*

- Knowledge, expertise and relationships of the Sectoral Advisory Panel members
- Community Planning Partners existing links to VCSE sectors organisations and networks

- *Building a Belfast VCSE sectors network to allow organisations to register interest and contact details (see below).*
- A vibrant, visible and managed approach to sector wide **awareness raising, communication, engagement and consultation** in relation to community planning, that maximises opportunities for the wider sector to input their views at key points in the community planning process.

*We are proposing to build our communications and engagement strategy via the creation of a Belfast VCSE sectors network, promoting 2 way information flow, through both online (website platform and email updates), social media and a programme of Sectoral engagement events throughout the year.*

## **Proposals for a Sectoral Advisory Panel – have your say**

We are currently seeking views on the emerging proposals for the Sectoral Advisory Panel outlined above. In the following sections of this document, we ask for your views on key elements that will form the basis for the initial Terms of Reference for the Panel. The elements we are asking you to comment on are:

1. The purpose of the Sectoral Advisory Panel
2. Proposed principles and draft code of conduct
3. Roles and responsibilities of Panel Members and the Chair person
4. Membership – criteria and process for selection
5. Operational details – number of meetings per year, agendas, minutes etc.
6. Reporting arrangements; and
7. Any additional comments

This consultation phase closes on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

A paper based version of the consultation is also available upon request.

Following the close of this consultation, we will hold an information event to update you on next steps and proposals for implementation. A date and venue for this event, along with information on how to register is being finalised and will be widely circulated in due course.

# 1. Role and Purpose of the Sectoral Advisory Panel

The proposed role and purpose of the Sectoral Advisory Panel will be to:

*i) Ensure the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector's voices are articulated by;*

- **influencing** the community planning process through participation in the governance structure through nomination of delegates from the Panel to sit on the Belfast Community Planning Partnership, and other Partnership structures (e.g. Delivery Boards and/or working groups)
- **advising** the Community Planning Partnership on sectoral perspectives in relation to community plan themes and the community planning process, **advocating** on the wider sector's behalf, and by articulating and **reflecting the views of others** within the wider sector and/or the Panel's relevant areas of expertise (e.g. geographical area, thematic interests, identity/s75 categories).

*ii) Support the development of Cross-sectoral Relationships and improved Partnership working by;*

- **increasing collaboration** between voluntary, statutory and business sectors through panel member participation in both the Community Planning Partnership and action planning/working groups etc., promoting alignment of sectoral priorities/delivery to community planning outcomes.
- advising the partnership in **identifying key sectoral organisations, groups and networks, stakeholders** etc. for the purposes of ensuring appropriate stakeholder participation and involvement in focused action planning working groups/thematic task groups etc.
- acting as a **2-way conduit for sharing information** with the sector on the work of the Partnership, and **gathering wider sectoral views and inputs** by supporting engagement and consultation with existing partnerships, networks, forums and sectoral groups.
- assisting the Community Planning Partnership in assessing how work of the Partnership and implementation of Plans meet the needs of those most marginalised and disadvantaged over time.

*iii) Promote ongoing and effective community engagement by;*

- assisting the Community Planning Partnership in **ensuring the views, experiences and needs of all sections of the community**, including those who are seldom heard, are expressed, acknowledged and considered.
- **promoting and supporting broad community engagement** in the community planning process, including all section 75 groups and across the city.
- **connecting** the wider voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors and existing partnerships, networks, forums and inter-agency groups into the community engagement processes.
- acting in an **advisory capacity** to the Partnership in development and review of its wider engagement and communications strategies (and their implementation to achieve better outcomes for citizens).

**Question 1:** What are your views on the draft Role and Purpose of the Sectoral Advisory Panel (is it clear, is there anything missing?)

## 2. Principles and code of conduct

The Sectoral Advisory Panel will apply the following set of **principles** to its work and a code of conduct will apply to Panel Members to guide its application:

### 1. Partnership, collaboration and inclusive participation

- Panel members should actively encourage public participation from all sections of the voluntary community and social enterprise sectors, and promote a culture of partnership, collaborative working and shared responsibility.
- Panel members unable to maintain the required commitment to participating in the panel and fulfilling their roles as outlined in the panel's Terms of Reference should inform the Panel so that another member can step in.

### 2. Selflessness and advocating on behalf of others, rather than promoting self interest.

- Partnership members must act in the best interests of the Partnership and avoid situations where their personal interests or relationships interfere with acting in good faith and advocating on behalf of the VCSE sectors in Belfast.

### 3. Leadership

- Panel members should demonstrate leadership by showing respect for other members' views and opinions. Members should also demonstrate support for and foster trust in other members and by applying all these principles in all they do.

### 4. Objectivity

- In carrying out all Panel business, members should make objective and non-judgemental choices based on evidenced need and/or merit.

### 5. Honesty and integrity

- Panel members should not place themselves in any situation where other people or organisations might seek to influence them unduly for their own personal benefit or the group they represent.
- Partnership members must declare any potential conflicts of interest at the beginning of the Meeting and refrain from discussion and voting when applicable.

### 6. Openness and transparency

- Panel members should be as open as possible about all the collective decisions made and actions they take and ensure open and regular communication with others. Information should only be restricted when the wider public interest or the need for confidentiality clearly demands.

### 7. Innovation

- Panel members should seek to identify, promote and encourage the application of innovative solutions and practices to drive positive change and improvements in wellbeing for citizens.

**Question 2:** What are your views on the draft Principles and code of conduct for Panel Members (e.g. are they clear, can you suggest improvements?)

### **3. Roles and responsibilities of Panel Members and the Chair person**

*All Panel members would be required to demonstrate commitment and be willing to contribute to collaborative working. Panel members will support the progression of the community plan and community planning process by:*

- Participating in panel meetings, Community Planning partnership meetings and relevant working groups to help design and deliver on the community plan for the purposes of achieving improved wellbeing outcomes for citizens in Belfast.
- Envisaged time commitments are as follows (meetings usually 2-3 hours duration):
  - It is envisaged that the Sectoral Advisory Panel will meet up to 4 times per year.
  - Panel members nominated as delegates to attend the Community Planning Partnership will be required to attend approximately 2 Partnership meetings per year.
  - Panel members may be invited to attend other relevant Delivery Boards and/or adhoc working groups/Action Planning/Task groups in support of the Community Planning Partnership activities throughout the year
- The process for identification/nomination of Panel Members to act as delegates to Community Planning Partnership structures will be agreed and implemented by the Sectoral Advisory Panel.
- Working with other Panel members to identify actions, develop and agree action plans and ensure delivery against planned outcomes.
- Taking a lead in actions when required.
- Carrying out allocated tasks as agreed at meetings.
- Contributing to effective community engagement in the development and implementation of action plans.
- Engaging with other Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector groups and with communities within the city. Effective and meaningful public participation will help to ensure action plans and decisions taken to improve services are responsive and reflect local needs.
- Promoting inclusivity by identifying hard to reach groups and appropriate methods of engagement.
- Contributing to the collection of relevant data for performance management
- Developing relationships across the city to foster collaborative working

*The Sectoral Advisory Panel will be chaired by a Panel member chosen from within the Panel membership. The Chair's responsibilities will include;*

- Chairing meetings
- Agreeing agendas
- Allocating/reviewing/co-ordinating actions between meetings
- Ensuring each action is attributed to an owner
- Ensuring feedback from members attending the Community Planning Partnership, Delivery Boards Action Plan teams/working groups.
- Ensuring that the Panel reports on progress as required
- Reporting back to the Community Planning Partnership
- Agreeing and reviewing performance management

**Question 3:** What are your views on the proposed roles and responsibilities of Panel Members and the Chair Person (e.g. are they clear, are there any missing, are there any you would remove?)

### **4. Membership, process and criteria for selection**

**Sectoral balance:** Membership of the Sectoral Advisory Panel would be drawn from organisations and groups within the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors operating within the Belfast local government district boundary. It is envisaged the Panel will be comprised of up to 15 members, identified via an independently managed nomination and selection process that seeks to ensure as far as possible, a balanced representation of the VCSE sectors across:

- geographical areas of the city,
- thematic priorities based on economic, social and environmental wellbeing themes within the current community plan (the balance of thematic priorities may be reviewed and adjusted following development of future community plans),
- reflecting s75 groups, and
- Larger and smaller organisations.

**Term of Membership:** Membership of the Sectoral Advisory Panel would be initially for a 4-year term, at which point the membership will be refreshed via a further nomination and selection process. Existing Panel members would be eligible to re-apply for a further 4-year term via the same nomination and selection procedures.

**Panel Selection process:** The nomination and selection process applied to recruit Panel members would place emphasis on achieving a balanced membership across the areas highlighted above (see 'Sectoral balance' above) together with:

- a minimum level of relevant skills
- connections to VCSE networks and/or other VCSE organisations outside their own organisation/group
- commitment to advocating on behalf of the VCSE sectors' and participating as a Panel member.

The selection process would therefore not be a traditional competitive selection process of assessing experience, skills and expertise to identify the highest scoring candidates.

The process will comprise the following steps:

- A) Application/Expression of Interest** – Candidates to self-nominate via a written Expression of Interest (using an application Form approved by the Community Planning Partnership) including endorsement/confirmation of support for the candidate's nomination by at least 2 other Voluntary Community or Social Enterprise organisations, groups or networks/partnerships operating within Belfast.
- B) Assessment of applications** via an independent body tasked by the Community Planning Partnership – this process may include establishing an assessment panel, a discussion/interview with candidates to confirm relevant information/evidence of meeting the selection criteria.
- C) Successful candidates nominated to Sectoral Advisory Panel** by the independent body, whose role will be to identify a balanced membership (referred to above) with a range of expertise and skills.

As indicated above the assessment process will primarily seek to achieve a **balanced sectoral representation on the Panel, over and above identification of the most skilled/experienced candidates**. The selection process will take into account the following criteria in considering which candidates to formally nominate as Panel Members:

- Membership will be limited to one person per group or organisation. To be considered candidates must demonstrate **all of the following criteria (a-f)** in their Expression of Interest application:
  - Be either a Trustee/Director, Volunteer or staff member of a constituted community, voluntary or social enterprise organisation operating within the Belfast City Council area.

- b) Be able to demonstrate evidence of strong connections with other sectoral organisations/groups via membership and/or participation in other sectoral networks, forums or partnerships of VCSE organisations and groups beyond their own organisation, and must commit to sharing information and seeking views of others in relation to community planning via these wider networks.
  - c) be willing and able to attend meetings of the Sectoral Advisory Panel and where appropriate/applicable attend Community Planning Partnership, Delivery Boards and other working group meetings (where nominated to attend) in order to ensure there is VCSE representation across the levels of decision making within the community planning process.
  - d) be committed to signing an agreed code of conduct/way of working as a group .
  - e) have experience and/or knowledge of one or more of the thematic areas from the community plan.
  - f) have a good understanding of the needs of different communities experiencing inequality and disadvantage within and across the Council area, including S75 groups and communities of place.
2. In application of the above criteria [and in particular criteria (a), (e) and (f) above], the selection of nominees to be chosen as Panel members will take into account the following to ensure **balanced membership of the Panel** across:
- g) Gender: the Sectoral Advisory Panel membership should aim to have equal numbers or men and women. The representation of women should not fall below 40%.
  - h) Geographical representation: the Sectoral Advisory Panel membership should seek ensure balanced coverage across the Belfast geographical area.
  - i) Sectoral interests: The Sectoral Advisory Panel membership will seek to reflect a range interest groups working in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sectors to address economic, social and environmental wellbeing themes identified in the Belfast Agenda/community plan.
  - j) Section 75 groups: Selection of Panel members will also take into account the range of s75 groups that Panel members work with/represent, from a monitoring point of view. The selection of Members will seek to ensure as far as possible that all s75 categories are reflected.
  - k) Size of organisation based on income: Selection of membership will seek to ensure balance between across larger and smaller VCSE organisations/groups in the city, including a mix of persons in both paid staff and voluntary roles.

**Question 4a:** Do you agree that the Panel should seek to achieve a balanced membership with a range of skills/backgrounds rather than simply the most experienced/skilled candidates)?

**Question 4b:** Do you have any addition comments on the proposed selection process and criteria for membership?

**Question 4c:** Do you agree that a 4 year term of membership for Panel Members is appropriate?

Yes / No / If no what would your suggested term of membership for Panel Members be?

## **5. Operational details – number of meetings per year, agendas, minutes etc.**

### **Panel meetings**

#### *Number of meetings*

- The Sectoral Advisory Panel will meet up to 4 times per year, normally scheduled at least 2 weeks in advance of Community Planning Partnership meetings, and/or taking cognisance of scheduled Delivery Board meetings.
- Extraordinary meetings may be arranged by agreement to take forward matters of interest.

#### *Agenda*

- Once the meeting notification has been circulated, all proposed agenda items can be forwarded by Panel members to the secretariat for discussion.
- Agenda items submitted should as far as is possible be substantive issues that relate to the remit and purpose of the Sectoral Advisory Panel in the context of the community planning process, and in delivery, review and preparation of future community plans.
- Secretariat will brief the Chairperson on items that have been submitted and will finalise and agree the agenda with the Chair. Secretariat will deal with any items that have been submitted but do not make it on to the meeting agenda.
- An agenda will be agreed and issued (with relevant papers) to members before the Panel meeting.

#### *Conducting meetings*

- Secretariat will have briefed the Chairperson on issues including apologies and delegates attending.
- Meetings will follow the agenda. Any presentations will be delivered at an appropriate point as agreed with the Chairperson.
- Contributions from all Panel members are welcome. While constructive debate is encouraged, it is important that speakers go through the Chairperson to ensure their point is heard and order is maintained.

#### *Minutes*

- Secretariat will prepare minutes of the meeting. Panel members or other persons attending who have made contributions may be asked for comments on the draft minutes or for copies of presentations.
- Minutes will normally be issued as a draft as soon as possible after the meeting. Panel members should distribute the minutes within their organisation(s)/group(s) as appropriate.
- Minutes of a meeting will be formally agreed at the next meeting.

### **Attendance at meetings**

Panel Members will be expected to attend all Sectoral Advisory Panel meetings. If members cannot attend, they are expected to provide adequate notice. If a member fails to attend three consecutive meetings they will be contacted by the Chairperson of the Sectoral Advisory Panel and offered the opportunity to resign or improve attendance.

In exceptional circumstances where non-attendance is unavoidable the member should advise the secretariat and nominate a delegate to attend in his/her place.



## **Conflict of Interest**

This is an open and transparent process and documentation in relation to the Sectoral Advisory Panel will be publicly available. Conflicts of interest may arise. It is the responsibility of Panel members to identify any potential conflict, including perceived conflicts, and to declare it to the Chair. Any conflict of interest will be recorded in the minutes.

## **Decision Making**

All Panel members are required to demonstrate commitment and be willing to contribute to collaborative working. To enhance collaborative working decisions will be made by consensus as far as possible.

## **Secretariat**

Secretariat support for the Sectoral Advisory Panel will be provided by the Community Planning Partnership to

- assist the Panel in making practical arrangements for Panel meetings, including assistance in preparing agendas/reports and taking of minutes, and
- assist the Panel in its work with the Community Planning Partnership to identify key networks and organisations across the VCSE sectors for the purposes of inviting participation in focused action planning engagements.
- work with the Panel in its communications and networking activity, for the purposes of strengthening engagement with the wider VCSE sectors in the community planning process (e.g. action planning groups, wider community engagement).
- Assist the panel in monitoring and reporting of impact and outcomes delivered as a result of the Panel's activity.

## **Review of Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference for the Panel would be subject to regular review by the Sectoral Advisory Panel and the Community Planning Partnership.

Additionally the Community Planning Partnership would plan to undertake a 1<sup>st</sup> stage developmental review of the arrangements for VCSE participation and engagement (including operation of the Sectoral Advisory Panel) in 2021 (within 2 years).

**Question 5a:** Do you think it is appropriate that the Panel meets 4 times per year? (Yes / No / Comments)

**Question 5b:** Do you have any other comments or suggested improvements on the operational matters outlined above?

## **6. Reporting arrangements**

A consistent and concise reporting template will be developed to support the gathering of information and facilitate reporting. The Community Planning Partnership will report to the Department for Communities every two years and progress will also be reported to stakeholders and the wider community. The Statement of Progress prepared by the Community Planning Partnership may include information on actions taken by the Sectoral Advisory Panel.

**Question 6:** What are your views on reporting arrangements for the Sectoral Advisory Panel (are they clear, how would you improve these arrangements)?

## **7 . Any additional comments**

**Question 7:** Please tell us if you have any additional comments, ideas or suggestions.