

Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday 27th April, 2021

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP
(TO WHICH ALL MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL WERE INVITED)

HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor O'Hara (Chairperson); and
Councillors Bunting, Corr, Donnelly, Gormley, Hanvey,
Kyle, Lyons, McCabe, McLaughlin, Murphy, Nicholl, and
Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Ms. N. Bohill, Head of Commercial and Procurement
Services;
Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor;
Ms. C. Robinson, Strategy Policy and Partnership
Manager;
Ms. C. Keenan, Enterprise and Business Growth
Manager;
Ms. S. Williams, Governance and Compliance Manager;
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Manager;
Ms. C. Hutchinson, Policy and Performance Analyst;
Mr. M. Mulholland, Policy and Performance Analyst;
Ms. L. Goodwin, Economic Development Officer;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Community Planning Officer;
Ms. M. Robinson, Employability and Skills Officer;
Ms. P. Munro, Programme Support Assistant; and
Ms. K. McCrum, Democratic Services Officer.

CLES Representatives: Mr. Stuart MacDonald, Associate Director
Mr. David Burch, Senior Researcher

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of the High Sherriff
(Councillor Long) and Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian and Sandford.

Community Wealth Building Workshop

The Director of Economic Development welcomed the Members and
representatives from CLES to the meeting and provided an overview of the agenda for
the workshop.

Mr. Stuart MacDonald, Associate Director at CLES, provided a presentation on
Community Wealth Building (CWB), noting that this was not the same in any two places,

but was based on the assets and people of a place, as well as the specificity of the local economy.

The Members were advised that pre-Covid 19, there was evidence of a failing economic model, with indicators such as the number of people living in poverty, a record high in the use of zero-hours contracts, life expectancy stalling, and inequalities in wealth distribution, suggesting that the economy was not meeting the needs of all people.

Mr. MacDonald stated that their definition for CWB was '*a people-centred approach to local economic development, which looks to increase the flow of wealth back into local economies and places, by giving more control to local people and business*'.

He explained that traditionally, economic strategies focused on the redistribution of wealth after it was created, however, CWB involved thinking through pre-distribution during and before wealth was created. He suggested that the key to this was identifying anchor institutions with a duty to develop the area such as universities, local government, hospitals, and housing associations etc., and then utilise their financial, economic, intellectual, social and human-capital power and influence to support the growth of the local community. He noted that in Belfast, this anchor network was already in place via the Community Planning Partnership.

The Members were then provided with information of the 5 pillars of CWB:

1. Progressive commissioning and procurement
2. Socially productive use of land and property
3. Fair employment and just labour markets
4. Making financial power work for local places
5. Grow local and community ownership of the economy

Mr. MacDonald provided some examples of CWB across the UK, including the Preston Model, Birmingham Anchor Network and the Wolverhampton Pound, before inviting questions from the Members.

In response to a question about how Green New Deal proposals could be taken into consideration, Mr MacDonald explained that while this area was not as well developed as others, it did offer the opportunity to stimulate and grow the local economy. He provided an example of a review of the housing market in Lewes and East Sussex, its retrofit requirements, and how a review of the construction sector identified the need for skills development and business support programmes to allow them to meet the identified need. He noted the importance of market certainty to encourage sectors to engage with such development programmes. Mr. Burch added that environmental weighting could also be built in via social value frameworks within procurement and feedback obtained to determine the circulation of money through the local economy. The use of spend analysis frameworks was also discussed.

Mr. MacDonald explained how procurement could be tailored to the local economy in order to support local business to compete with larger regional companies, and provided examples of creative and collective procurement exercises undertaken elsewhere. Mr Burke added that social value clauses also tended to support local competitiveness. With regards to how social value could be used to address educational under attainment, he suggested that meaningful work experience and internships utilising anchor networks was key.

In response to a question about Inclusive Growth, Mr. MacDonald noted that this concept could be viewed as flawed in that it required growth which was not being experienced across many regions of the UK. He instead suggested that a model of Inclusive Economies was more appropriate. With regards to questions about the real living wage, he referred to the use of recruitment agencies and minimum wage in the hospitality and care sectors and provided examples of cooperative recruitment models which provided higher wages and skills development.

A Member suggested that an updated spend and workplace analysis for Belfast was needed, taking into consideration that the city was still emerging from conflict. He noted that some of the models discussed involved utilising powers which differed from those of Belfast and questioned whether a Community Bank was feasible for a city of its size. He also questioned the weighting of social value procurement strategies in order to be most effective.

Mr. Burch advised of the need for flexibility within weighting given that each market was different. He suggested that if the market was dense, social value could be tested and maximised as the price would be low and quality high. However, in less developed markets, where fewer local suppliers existed or, where the understanding of social value was low, more time to explain the concept was needed so as not to exclude local suppliers. He suggested that the scale needed for Community Banks required a regional approach.

Mr. MacDonald advised that CLES was planning to repeat the spend analysis with a range of anchor institutions represented on the Community Planning Partnerships as part of commissioned work to explore how procurement and commissioning could build local wealth. Details concerning how this would be undertaken were outlined.

Attendees were then split into two breakout rooms to discuss the following questions:

1. How should this work be framed and presented in Belfast?
 - Belfast Model? Belfast Anchor Network? Belfast Pound?
2. What would your priorities be (pillars?)
3. How do we embed this way of working in strategy?
 - Recovery plan/Corporate Plan refresh?
 - Do we need a Community Wealth Building Strategy?
 - How do we embed this approach in the Belfast Agenda?
4. How can/should communities be engaged?
5. How would you like to be involved in this work going forward?

Feedback from the breakout sessions was provided as follows:

- Use the refresh of the Belfast Agenda as an opportunity to build in Community Wealth Building and consider changing the metrics in terms of what we want to achieve;
- Use Area Working Groups to consider how CWB filters down to local communities, the development of cooperative economies, and the involvement of community and voluntary sector;
- A sectoral approach is needed, and initiatives need to work for young people and the local economy to create jobs for the future;

- Good work is already going on, therefore, there is a need to collate the existing and combine agendas under the same framing to strengthen the message;
- There is value in all of the priorities however the workforce is key as practical progress here would ensure buy in with the Council leading from the front i.e. use of the real living wage;
- It is important to engage communities, both local and those of interest, that is, the hospitality, retail, and care sectors, as well as migrant communities.
- Seeing tangible results quickly would help to embed the concept.

The Director of Economic Development thanked the representatives from CLES for their informative presentation and welcomed the detailed conversations that had taken place. He advised that the comments from the meeting would be brought back to the next meeting of the Social Policy Working Group.

Noted.

Chairperson