

# Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2021

## MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP

HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor O'Hara (Chairperson);  
Alderman Copeland; and  
Councillors Harvey, Heading and McLaughlin.

In attendance: Ms. N. Bohill, Head of Commercial and Procurement  
Services;  
Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor;  
Ms. C. Robinson, Strategy Policy and Partnership  
Manager;  
Ms. C. Hutchinson, Policy and Performance Analyst;  
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Manager;  
Mr. M. Denny, Commercial Manager;  
Ms. L. Goodwin, Economic Development Officer;  
Mr. M. Mulholland, Policy Officer;  
Mr. J. Uprichard, Community Planning Officer;  
Ms. N. Donaghy, Employability & Skills Officer;  
Ms. C. Miskelly,  
Ms. M. Robinson, Employability & Skills Officer;  
Ms. K. McCrum, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Alderman Dorrian and Councillor Kyle.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 30<sup>th</sup> March were taken as read and signed as correct.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

## **Actions Update**

### **Living Wage Foundation**

The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager advised that staff had met with the Real Living Foundation and work was ongoing to develop an Action Plan which, once developed, would be brought back to the Working Group.

### **CLES Members Workshop – Community Wealth Building**

The Members were reminded that the CLES Members Workshop was held on 27<sup>th</sup> April and that the findings from that session would begin to be embedded into the work of this group, as well as within the review of the Belfast Agenda.

The Members noted the minutes from this workshop.

### **Procurement and Commissioning Group**

The Working Group was advised that, following the CLES Members Workshop, a meeting of the Anchor Institution Procurement and Commissioning Working Group was held, the minutes of which had been provided.

The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager commented that representation at the meeting had been positive, including representatives from Queens University, the Belfast and South Eastern Trusts, Libraries NI and All State, as well attendees from the Community and Voluntary Sector through Forward South Partnership and the Ashton Centre.

She added that work was now ongoing between CLES and these institutions to look at their procurement and how their money was spent across Belfast, and that updates would be brought back to the Social Policy Working Group as this work developed.

### **Procurement 1992 Order**

The Working Group was advised that a letter had been issued to the Minister of the Department for Communities and the Assembly's Community Committee requesting a change to the Procurement 1992 Order in respect to the Council's Social Value Procurement goals going forward.

The Working Group noted the updates provided.

### **Inclusive Growth Cohorts**

Chris Lloyd, Professor of Geographical Information Science, School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University Belfast, attended in relation to this item.

The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager reminded the Members that, at the outset of the Council's Inclusive Growth Work, four target groups had been chosen which the Members felt, and the evidence showed, the Council's attention should be focused towards when making investment and strategy decisions in order to have an impact on those most in need. She added that a review of this analysis had been requested and, as a result, a number of recommendations were presented in terms of broadening the Council's focus over the next 6-12 months.

Professor Lloyd presented an assessment of the city using spatial data to look at need, inequalities and deprivation, including the impact of Covid 19 across the city, both geographically and demographically. He advised that he and Niamh Moggan, a QUB PhD student, had reviewed inclusive growth schemes applied elsewhere, available data in Northern Ireland and the Belfast Agenda to arrive at the recommendations.

He outlined the four target groups, or cohorts: Unemployed Residents; Residents with low skill levels; In work, low earning individuals; and Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and the limitations of these, including the lack of consideration of age, duration of unemployment, and other measures of deprivation, including mental health.

The following target groups were then recommended, with the aim of being able to measure effectively what impact interventions were having on those most in need:

1. Unemployed residents (a) Long-term (b) Post Covid-19 lockdowns
2. Residents with low skill levels
3. In work, low earning individuals
4. Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)
5. Young people without benchmark qualifications (i.e. less than 5 GCSEs at grades A\*-C)
6. People living in multiply deprived neighbourhoods (could include health, housing etc.)

Professor Lloyd suggested that a number of these groups could be refined, however, it was important that target groups could be clearly defined and were large enough to analyse when targeting policy.

He also recommended that Inclusive Growth was embedded in all of the Council's programmes and that people in the six target groups should be explicitly targeted as those who would benefit most from support across the city.

Further information on monitoring the changes as a result of targeted interventions was provided, alongside potential extensions with regards to further dividing cohorts by age, widening the educational attainment measurements, and consideration of gender, mental health, family structure and employment sectors.

The Members posed a number of questions, including how targeted interventions could be with regards to the 6<sup>th</sup> cohort, and what definitions were used to determine those with low skill levels or low earnings.

Professor Lloyd confirmed that at present an area focus was recommended, but that neighbourhoods could be drilled down to Super Output Areas to become more focused. He advised that the recommendations included 'courser' groups so as to be more measurable, however, if individual characteristics that were most important could be agreed upon, progress could be measured at a neighbourhood level.

With regards to the definitions he confirmed that income level was taken as the median level benchmark, as this was changeable over time, and that a government definition was used to categorise low skilled.

A Member recommended that 'Economically Inactive' be added to the list of cohorts, while another requested overlay mapping of housing demand, available land and economic investment over the last 10-15 years. Progress with regards to reducing child poverty was also queried.

Professor Lloyd agreed that further subcategories could be added, however, it was more difficult to capture and measure progress. He added that, while housing and investment data would be useful to give a more wholistic picture, he did not have access to such information, and so he suggested that, as part of the work of the Area Working Groups, there needed to be a focus on obtaining and standardising such localised information.

The Working Group discussed the rationale of adding demographic characteristics, including gender, ethnic minorities, those with disabilities. It was suggested that the high-level groups should remain broad, but particular groups within these highlighted as sub-groups for secondary consideration.

The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager suggested that while programmes should explicitly consider the 6 outlined target groups, it did not preclude them from targeting other specific groups. She added that, if agreed, specific guidance would be developed for departments across the Council, to include the sub-groups previously discussed. She also confirmed that all comments, including the request for the additional overlay of economic development, would be reviewed before being submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June. Professor Lloyd suggested that those specific groups could also be referenced explicitly within the monitoring process.

The Working Group recommended that the expanded list of 6 target groups was presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, with the addition of 'Economically Inactive' as well as the inclusion of a number of further demographic sub-categories.

### **City Charter**

The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager provided a recap on the development of the Inclusive Growth City Charter for Belfast, moving from the themes of procurement, employment and community to the 8 pledges that were previously presented.

The Policy and Performance Analyst provided an overview of the changes that had been made to the Charter in response to feedback from Elected Members, the Social Policy Working Group and the External Working Group. She added that the feedback from businesses had been positive and that they were keen to know what would be required of them. The key requirements from their point of view were outlined as improved collaboration, alignment of common goals, engaging employees in the company vision whilst improving health and well-being, and attracting talent and investment.

The Members were advised that further targeted engagement and promotion was planned with businesses, particularly with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), in order to obtain additional feedback and to promote the Charter as inclusive. She noted that as part of the branding and communications work, the term 'Charter' was likely to be replaced with something more appropriate.

The Policy and Performance Analyst suggested that the issues of the Real Living Wage and Zero Hours Contracts were consulted on further with businesses as, if they were to be included as core pledges, current feedback suggested that this would deter businesses from signing up. She added that it was important to find a balance between getting business involved in order to encourage their further development and wanting to set minimum requirements.

The Working Group was asked to agree that the detailed draft would be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June, with an indicative launch date in Autumn. The Policy and Performance Analyst then outlined the key strands of work that would follow, including further engagement; branding, communications and PR; content development; website development; monitoring and evaluation and the pilot and launch.

A Member welcomed the news that the term 'Charter' would be replaced, and suggested that a social contract between the Council and businesses seemed more appropriate. He also cautioned against diluting the purpose of the work in order to attract more members, whilst recognising the need to engage businesses on the journey to better, more socially conscious, business practices.

In response to a question about which businesses would be targeted as early adopters, the Policy and Performance Analyst suggested that anchor institutions and key multi-national companies would be approached, as well as a range of SMEs and social enterprises in order to show that there were many aspects that could be achieved without requiring large budgets.

The Working Group endorsed approach and the proposal that details would be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June.

### **Social Value Procurement Policy**

The Head of Commercial and Procurement Services presented the Members with an update on the Social Value Procurement Policy, and in particular the changes that had been made as a result of feedback from the previous 3 Working Group meetings.

#### **Weighting**

The Working Group was reminded that the previous proposal with regards to weighting was between 5-10%, however, this had now been revised to 10-15% with the caveat that this was risk and quality assessed to ensure that it was achievable. In addition, within this weighting, it was now suggested that a minimum scoring threshold of 40% was included (4% of 10% or 6% of 15%) to ensure that suppliers were offering a viable social value proposal in order to move forward in the procurement process.

The Working Group discussed this with some Members feeling that the 10% weighting was not ambitious enough, and that both contracts and services should carry a 15% weighting and a minimum requirement of 10%, whilst others felt that it was important to strike a balance initially, so as not to put barriers in the way of competition.

The Head of Commercial and Procurement Services confirmed that the deferential had been recommended as there were limited opportunities to deliver on social value within a goods contract, in comparison to a service contract, on top of the market readiness considerations for certain sectors.

It was agreed that, given the differences of opinion, the recommendations would be brought to Party Group Leaders for further discussion ahead of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June so as not to delay the planned consultation and implementation timeline.

### **Award Criteria**

The Head of Commercial and Procurement Services presented the updated Social Value Points menu and explained that the points related to the associated cost of implementing each measure. She pointed out that measures relating to paying the Real Living Wage and not using Zero Hours Contracts had been added following feedback from the Members, however, the Zero Hours Contracts would need to be applicable only to the industry sector associated with their use so as not to award points to those who do not use these as standard. She also advised that the points had been aligned to the Belfast Agenda but could be amended as priorities changed.

The amended points were broadly welcomed, alongside a recommendation that the points associated with paying the Real Living Wage and the use of social enterprises or cooperatives were increased slightly.

The Head of Commercial and Procurement Services confirmed that this could be done, but suggested that, in terms of social enterprises or cooperatives and the industries that they participate in, the opportunity for suppliers to get points for using these would be limited therefore the uptake would be very much determined by the market, rather than the appetite to use a social enterprise.

Noted.

### **Phased Approach**

The Working Group was advised of the envisioned growth of the work over the next 5 years, with an initial focus on enhancing organisational behaviours for all contracts over £30,000, and additional requirements for social value deliverables applied to tenders over £250,000 which would be scored as part of the awards process.

Following this first year, she advised that the 'ask' of suppliers would increase, both in terms of the weighting and what suppliers should offer, and that by year 5 it was envisioned that suppliers would be paying the Real Living Wage, not using Zero Hours Contracts, and that there would be increased competition across the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors.

In response to a query, the Head of Commercial and Procurement Services confirmed that it was recommended that a Review Board would be put together to review this and that an annual report would be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager added that, once the Charter and Procurement Policy were approved, measurement of the impact would be an issue for the Working Group to discuss.

Noted.

### **Fairtrade**

The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager advised the Working Group that the Director of City and Organisational Strategy had brought a paper to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> May regarding maintaining Fairtrade City status for the Council area. She added that, in order to be awarded Fairtrade status, a Steering Group was required to be set up across the City to promote and further the Fairtrade ambitions. She added that Democratic Services would process this, including the nomination of a Chair and Vice Chair, and that regular updates would be brought to the Social Policy Working Group.

Noted.

### **Forward Work Plan**

The Members were advised that, as agreed, the Social Value Framework would be taken to Party Group Leaders for further review and then recirculated to the Working Group. The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager also asked that any further comments or queries were provided to the Head of Commercial and Procurement Services to assist with the ambition of having the final draft approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June.

In terms of future agenda items, it was agreed that a paper on the Real Living Wage would be brought in June, alongside an update on the social impact of the Council's Capital Programme and a presentation from the Strategic Investment Board, if available, which had been deferred from a previous meeting.

The Strategy Policy and Partnership Manager confirmed that further information on monitoring and reporting, as well as feedback from the consultation and engagement work, would be scheduled at a later date.

A Member referred to the Notice of Motion regarding the Real Living Wage, which had included an additional point regarding the eradication of the use of recruitment agencies, and requested that a paper on this be brought to a future meeting.

Noted.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The Working Group agreed that the next meeting would be held on a date, as yet to be agreed, in late June.

Chairperson