

From: The Head of Equality and LGBT Policy Unit

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Your ref: EMcG 04.05.2021

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Ms Eilish McGoldrick
Democratic Services Officer
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Belfast City Council
City Hall
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Via email to: McGoldrickE@BelfastCity.gov.uk

Dear Ms McGoldrick

**BELFAST CITY COUNCIL MOTIONS IN SUPPORT OF AN EFFECTIVE BAN ON
CONVERSION THERAPY AND EQUALITY FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY**

Thank you for your letter of 17 May 2021 to Minister Hargey, giving details of the motion passed by Belfast City Council on 04 May 2021 in support of an effective ban on conversion therapy in Northern Ireland.

Your letter issued on the same date to First Minister Foster and deputy First Minister O'Neill regarding the motion passed by Belfast City Council on 04 May 2021 in support of equality for the LGBTQ+ community has also been referred to Minister Hargey, who is leading on the development of the Executive's LGBTQI+ Strategy.

Minister Hargey has asked me to reply on her behalf.

The Department for Communities is responsible for taking forward the development of the Executive's LGBTQI+ Strategy under *New Decade, New Approach*.

In October 2020 a Sexual Orientation Expert Advisory Panel was appointed to identify the themes and key actions the Strategy should include and the gaps in provision that it should seek to address. The Panel's [Report](#) was published on 5 March 2021. The Strategy is being developed further using a co-design approach, with meaningful involvement from those within the LGBTQI+ communities and officials across other departments.

In addition, a Ministerial Steering Group, comprising all Executive Ministers, will monitor the development of the four Social Inclusion Strategies and Ministers will consider the funding and resourcing implications for their respective departments.

Actions under the LGBTQI+ Strategy will aim to make a significant contribution to protecting the rights and equal treatment of LGBTQI+ communities and reducing discrimination throughout the duration of the Strategy and beyond.

The draft Strategy will be subject to public consultation later this year, which will provide comment and input from all stakeholders, including district councils. Subject to Executive agreement, the final Strategy will be published in December 2021. More details can be found on the Department's website www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/sexual-orientation-strategy .

Minister Hargey is on record stating her opposition to the practice of so called 'conversion therapy' and her determination that it should end as soon as possible. The Expert Panel's Report referred to above includes recommendations aimed at ending conversion therapy. Minister Hargey wishes to explore all legislative options to ensure that any legislation would be fit for purpose and sufficiently robust. Officials have commenced work to inform the drafting of the legislation in the context of the work the Department is doing on the wider LGBTQI + Strategy.

Ending conversion therapy will engage a range of Ministers' interests and is, therefore one of a number of cross-cutting matters for consideration by the Executive in the development of the LGBTQI+ Strategy. Officials are working with stakeholders and colleagues in other departments and jurisdictions to learn from experience and to consider where there are gaps in the law.

I would like to assure you that the points made by the Council will be considered when dealing with this matter and that there will be further opportunities to engage during policy development.

Minister Hargey will continue to work with her colleagues in the Executive to develop and deliver the first LGBTQI+ Strategy in the North.

The Minister acknowledges Belfast City Council's support for her work in improving the lives of LGBTQI+ communities, including action to end conversion therapy in the North and looks forward to the Council's contribution to the development and implementation of the LGBTQI+ Strategy.

Yours sincerely



Carl Savage
Head of Equality and LGBT Policy Unit