



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Update on Research into the Response of the Council, Community and Statutory Partners during the first Covid-19 Lockdown</b>
<b>Date:</b>	18th June, 2021
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Ryan Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services.
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Nicola Lane, Good Relations Manager David Robinson, Good Relations Officer

### Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

☐

After Council Decision

☐

Sometime in the future

☐

Never

☐

### Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To provide Members with an update on the research that was undertaken over the last 6 months to capture the work by the Council and others to the initial lockdown and subsequent response to COVID-19.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May 2021, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- consider the contents of this report and make any comments on the findings;</li><li>- note that the report will be referred to the Living Here Board after approval from Council</li><li>- suggest to the Shared City Partnership what areas Members may wish to prioritise within the next steps section of the report, taking into account that £10,000 has been set aside within the Good Relations Action Plan 2021/22</li></ul>

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>3.1 Members will be aware that the Revised Good Relations Action Plan was agreed by Council at its August 2020 meeting and subsequently by The Executive Office. Within this revised plan, approval was granted for the Good Relations Unit to lead on the development of a piece of consultation and research on the successes of the response to COVID-19. Specifically, the research sought to capture how the response contributed to peacebuilding and to identify how this could be built upon.</p> <p>3.2 Following a competitive quotation process, Blu Zebra LTD was appointed to carry out this project, working closely with Council officers and others within the community and statutory sectors. Extensive consultation and engagement was undertaken with a range of stakeholders, the list of which is contained within the report on pages 49-50. The full report is attached.</p> <p><b>Report findings</b></p> <p>3.3 The research was undertaken within the context of the Council's Good Relations Strategy, Resilience Strategy and the Community Plan, the Belfast Agenda. In summary, the report locates the response to COVID-19 within these strategies and explores how the intention of these strategies was borne out during the emergency response to the pandemic.</p> <p>3.4 For example, the vision of our Good Relations Strategy is: "A Shared City - a city re-imagined, connected and resurgent delivering inclusive growth that leaves no-one behind". In the response to COVID-19, the evidence shows that this was borne out in the response by the Community infrastructure across the City, an infrastructure that has been carefully built up over the past 25 years in a City emerging from Conflict. The relationships and inter-community networking meant that despite our continued physical division, people worked across boundaries to ensure that no-one was left without, or behind in the initial response.</p> <p>3.5 The research looks at the response to COVID-19 through the lens of the themes within the Good Relations Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Theme 1:</b> Strong, Positive and Transformative Civic Leadership - Inclusive Governance with local community change makers</li> <li>• <b>Theme 2:</b> Shared &amp; Connected Spaces - a smart, connected city driven by inclusive and transformative place making</li> <li>• <b>Theme 3:</b> Shared Services - focusing on prevention, co-design, co-creation, &amp; social innovation</li> <li>• <b>Theme 4:</b> Structured collaboration, partnerships &amp; resourcing</li> <li>• <b>Theme 5:</b> Respectful cultural expression within the rule of law</li> </ul>

3.6	<p>This approach has enabled us to locate the response within a Good Relations lens, while also highlighting the next steps that should be developed to maintain peacebuilding as a core component of what the Council does in general service delivery.</p>
3.7	<p>The next steps identified within the report include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>The importance of continued investment in community infrastructure</b> to supporting the recovery. There is never time for complacency. We are often affected by outside influences like Brexit and the fallout from political differences in which the most vulnerable in our city lose out</li> <li>- There is a need to <b>continue to cultivate integrated services at a local area-based level</b> building on the new area based working model, while not forgetting the importance of thematic approaches. This type of model has the potential to really help all of the city's stakeholders to take <b>a strategic view of the needs of the city</b> at an area basis, to help the city <b>break down barriers</b> that stifle progression and to identify projects and programmes that can help areas recover. The gains made during the COVID response cannot be allowed to disappear and move back into a business-as-usual scenario.</li> <li>- <b>Investing in neighbourhoods</b> and creating that sense of belonging, trust, confidence and hope among residents to move across the city freely is important from a good relations perspective.</li> <li>- Taking a <b>whole systems approach</b> means including all sectors in investing in conversations about how the city can start to retain and create good well-paid jobs right across the city, that everyone feels comfortable and safe in accessing and that help people out of poverty and onto a more sustainable household footing.</li> <li>- Building the capacity of the community and working with the sector and other partners to create a <b>new community support framework</b> based on the new agile working methods that have emerged as a result to the pandemic response process should be pursued. This <b>should have at its heart a good relations golden thread</b>, recognising that a city at peace with itself can become a thriving and prosperous one.</li> <li>- It can <b>build on the tacit knowledge, skills and capacity of all players</b> but particularly those in the community and voluntary sector whose capacity has been built up over many years both during and after the years of conflict and community rebuilding. We should remain cognisant of the aging nature of those individuals who have travelled the journey towards a more peaceful society and the need to <b>cultivate</b></li> </ul>

**and embed new relationships** within and between our communities. Many of these human assets within our communities will retire eventually. It is important to **ensure that their knowledge is shared before they move on and that succession planning becomes a top priority with our young leaders.**

- Knowledge of key workers in CVS organisations and their contacts also play an important role in the **future of networking** for the city. This needs to be built on and shared constantly to ensure continuity in service.
- Developing **our young volunteers and leaders** is vital for the future relationships across the City.
- There is a strong drive for the city to examine the concept of **community wealth building**. In order to achieve this there is a need to keep building on the relationships between organisations and the new ways of working. There is a need to continue to keep collaborating and being **imaginative, agile and resourceful** and remembering what has been accomplished in such a short period of time in terms of how things are done from a service delivery perspective, during the pandemic response. Above all citizens need to be placed first in terms of the recovery.
- **Good, plain English communication** is very important so that people understand what is being planned and how they can engage in decision making moving forward. Investing in good communication methods and channels is vital. Sharing but yet protecting data in particular about those who are most vulnerable is essential. Developing the right processes for all organisations in the community and voluntary sector around data management and handling is essential.
- A **transformational journey** has started – there is now a new connectedness within local areas and between local areas and between local areas and the statutory and the private sector. It is now time to continue to grow capacity and bring partners and collaborators together.
- **Integration** across sectors is crucial as is mainstreaming of policy thinking into the everyday lives of people. The community and voluntary sector is connected on a day-by-day basis with local communities. They are and need to be recognised as the lynchpin that makes integration work. The community and voluntary sector faces both the community and government agencies and other public bodies and needs to be seen as a solid trustworthy delivery partner by all stakeholders. More traditional habits of doing things needs to change among all stakeholders and new pathways with positive views taken. If **the whole system** is seen as one coherent unit working for local citizens, then **co-design and co-production of services will work**

3.8	<p><b>effectively.</b> Investing in staff support and training among all stakeholders will build trust.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- While facing new challenges, the Belfast Community Planning Partnership, should <b>continue to deliver on The Belfast Agenda’s ambitions</b>, while the council should continue to build on the Corporate Plan, the Inclusive Growth Strategy, the Resilience Strategy, the Good Relations Strategy and other city plans and strategies that can drive forward transformative change across the city.</li> <li>- Building <b>business resilience, community capacity and digital innovation</b> with a focus on public safety and developing people skills is key to recovery. Working in collaboration with partners to regenerate and reshape the city centre and increase community connectivity between the city and arterial routes will play a role in reducing poverty and increasing good relations through cohesion and cultural connectedness.</li> <li>- Increased focus on <b>sustainable economic development</b> must take account of impacts on the environment and deliver on quality of life and wellbeing within our communities. It is the shared responsibility of communities, the NI Executive, its departments and Council city partners to sustain a positive, solution focussed approach, proactively, co-designed and engaged to deliver and improve on the outcomes for Belfast and its citizens who live, work and harmoniously engage together.</li> <li>- <b>Recovery plans</b> should seek to maximise and harness benefits from new strategic investments, emerging developments and funding opportunities. Immediate, medium and long-term opportunities exist to create and shape economic opportunities. A recovery framework which is mindful of minimising the human cost, providing relief to communities and delivering essential day-to-day services should be the focus.</li> <li>- The pandemic will <b>further intensify existing inequalities and create significant economic and social challenges for our communities</b> in the coming years. The impact of COVID-19 on health inequalities, mental health and wellbeing, social isolation and vulnerability and financial worries including income, food and fuel poverty are all too obvious. Council will need to work with government to scale up projects to help address these issues. Leadership at all levels is vital and decision makers will need to engage with communities, evolve and deliver, ensuring a thread of good relations runs through everyone’s business. The good relations commitments within Together, Building a United Community are outlined against four key strategic priorities.</li> </ul> <p>The report concludes that the journey ahead will not be easy, but the infrastructure in communities, the relationships across the city, the focus on the common good which exists</p>
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	<p>across the community and the spirit of hope which focuses on a prosperous future for all, demonstrates that as a city emerging from conflict, we have more in common than divides us. With one of the youngest populations in Europe, Belfast has youth, innovation and the creativity to drive it forward positively, leaving no one behind.</p>
3.9	<p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p> <p>Members are asked to comment on the findings of the report. Following any subsequent approval of the report from Council, it would be proposed that the report be considered by the Living Here Board and also launched and made public on the Council's Website, for download and publicised through the Council's usual social media channels.</p>
3.10	<p>In addition, it is also proposed that engagement begins with other stakeholders on the proposals contained within the 'next steps' section of the report, as a key part of the Council's Recovery agenda.</p>
3.11	<p>Members should also note that within the Council's current Good Relations Action Plan, agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19 February and at Council in March, provision has been set aside for £10,000 to develop actions arising from this report. Members may wish to suggest to the Shared City Partnership what areas within the above 'next steps', they may wish to prioritise.</p>
3.12	<p><b><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>The report is part of the revised Good Relations Action Plan, which was screened for Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs and was screened out.</p>
3.13	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>The costs of this report were £11,649. £12,000 was included in the revised Good Relations Action Plan, 75% of which will be recouped by the Council from The Executive Office under the District Council's Good Relations Programme.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Document Attached</b>
4.1	Report on response to Covid-19