



Subject:	Ban the Box Campaign
Date:	19th August, 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Christine Sheridan, Head of Human Resources

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To seek approval for Belfast City Council to sign up to Business in the Community's (BITC) 'Ban the Box' campaign, which lets applicants with criminal convictions know that they have a fair chance when competing for jobs in the Council.
1.2	To seek approval for the Council to demonstrate its commitment to the 'Ban the Box' campaign by publicly announcing it on relevant social media feeds.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to recommend: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That Belfast City Council signs up to BITC's 'Ban the Box' campaign and that the Chief Executive or the Head of HR provides a quote explaining why the Council has "banned the box".• That Belfast City Council demonstrates its commitment to 'Ban the Box' by publicly announcing it on BCC social media and other relevant feeds.

3.0	Main Report
	<p>Background information</p> <p>3.1 Belfast City Council has, for over 15 years, been committed to the fair recruitment of applicants with criminal convictions. The Human Resources Section has worked closely with the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) to develop detailed guidance for dealing with applicants with convictions to ensure our recruitment policies and procedures follow best practice in terms of fairness and equity for applicants with convictions.</p> <p>3.2 For the past 15 years, in line with best practice from NIACRO, the question regarding applicants' criminal convictions has been removed from the Council's jobs application form and only asked of applicants who are recommended for appointment as part of the pre-employment checking process when they are required to complete a Council Disclosure of Criminal Convictions Form. This means that any information provided by the applicant in respect of conviction(s) is not considered by the short-listing and interviewing panels and the applicant is recommended for appointment solely based on the merit principal and their ability to do the job as demonstrated at interview.</p> <p>3.3 If a conviction is disclosed at this stage, a structured 'risk assessment' process takes place which involves a meeting with the applicant to gain additional information on the precise nature, context, and date of the conviction so that an informed decision can be taken in terms of whether an appointment should be made. It also gives the individual the opportunity to state their case and offer any mitigating circumstances that they feel should be taken into consideration. The formal risk assessment process is then documented assessing the risk and relevance of the offence against best practice guidelines.</p> <p>3.4 If an applicant has an unspent conviction relating to a period of imprisonment of more than 6 months, the matter is escalated to a Recruitment Assurance Panel comprising a balanced panel of BCC Chief Officers. A fair and objective assessment takes place in terms of whether the conviction is materially relevant to the post that the applicant has been recommended for appointment to.</p> <p>3.5 As well as reducing barriers to employment for applicants with convictions, the Council has participated in various outreach programmes as part of its overall commitment to employability / inclusive growth by visiting prisons and young offenders' centres to try to encourage job applications from applicants with convictions.</p>

3.6	<p>Business in the Community's (BITC) Ban the Box campaign is a public campaign that calls on employers to create fair opportunities for ex-offenders to compete for jobs, by encouraging companies to ask the conviction question at a later point in the application process. Companies that sign up to Ban the Box commit to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• removing any tick box from job application forms that asks about criminal convictions.• considering applicants' skills, experience and ability to do the job before asking about criminal convictions.• reviewing their recruitment processes to ensure that when a candidate discloses a criminal conviction, they are given a full opportunity to explain the situation; and• ensuring that the circumstances of any conviction are fairly assessed against their relevance and potential risk within the role before a decision is made.
3.7	<p>Business in the Community (BITC) has confirmed that the Council's recruitment processes meet all the criteria and is requesting that the Council formally signs up to their campaign. This will enable the Council to gain recognition for the work it has done over the years to reduce barriers to employment for those with convictions by providing fair access to work.</p>
3.8	<p>So far, nine employers in Northern Ireland have signed up to Ban the Box, including other public sector bodies such as the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the NI Civil Service.</p>
3.9	<p>If the Council agrees to sign up to the Ban the Box campaign, it will be the first NI Council to do so. The Ban the Box logo will be included on the relevant section of BITC's websites for both Northern Ireland and UK. For the signing up process the Council has to provide a quote from a senior officer. The following quote from the Chief Executive will explain why the Council has "banned the box". "At Belfast City Council, we believe that everyone deserves a second chance. Our recruitment process focuses on a person's skills, experience and ability to do the job. Having a conviction does not debar an applicant from obtaining employment with us unless, via a fair and structured risk assessment process, we feel that the conviction is manifestly incompatible with the role."</p>
3.10	<p>This will not be used on the website but may be referred to in case studies or literature about the campaign; but only after BITC has sought permission from the Council for it to be used in the context and material that it is planning.</p>

3.11	<p>The Council also has the option of undertaking additional publicity. BITC would like the Council to promote that it has signed up to 'Ban the Box' on social media which may encourage other employers to sign up and adopt similar practices. This publicity would further encourage applicants with convictions to apply for posts within the Council and support our approach to employability/inclusive growth.</p>
3.12	<p>Financial and Resource Implications</p> <p>There are no financial implications to this report.</p>
3.13	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>There are no specific equality or good relations implications. All Council recruitment is and will continue to be based strictly on the merit principle.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None