



Subject:	Belfast Business Promise
Date:	9 th August 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Operational Director for Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Sinéad O'Regan, Employability & Skills Manager Maria Robinson, Belfast Business Promise Co-ordinator

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"/>
Some time 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 or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress to develop and deliver the Belfast Business Promise, as a key commitment in the Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy and undertaken in partnership with Economic Development and Strategy, Policy and Partnership.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: i. Note the progress in relation to the development of the Belfast Business Promise ii. Note the ongoing development work to support a successful implementation process including:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations who are operating as Partners to support implementation • Organisations who have signed up to become member • Approach to accreditation • Internal support to deliver • BCC approach to gaining membership as an organisation
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>A key commitment in the Council’s Inclusive Growth strategy to create a more inclusive city is the co-creation of the Belfast Business Promise which is our inclusive growth city charter. Members will be aware that a cross council team, led by the Strategy, Policy and Partnership in partnership with Economic Development, has been progressing the development of the Belfast Business Promise, alongside an external business working group and the council’s Social Policy Working Group (SPWG). In addition, strong relationships have been built with the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter and Scottish Business Pledge Charter teams, providing a wealth of best practice information and learning.</p>
3.2	<p>The extensive engagement with organisations, services and businesses carried out to date has shown that there is a strong appetite for such an initiative, and its role in encouraging organisations to maintain and/or adopt high standards in relation to more inclusive business practices which bring about added value to society by proactively driving forward inclusive growth in a meaningful way. The commitment to bringing forward the Belfast Business Promise is reinforced within the refreshed Belfast Agenda, the draft BCC Economic Strategy, the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the work being taken forward by the Renewed Ambition Taskforce and Bolder Vision Strategy.</p>
3.3	<p>Belfast Business Promise is aligned to and complements other strands of work underway within council including the Anchor Network on Commissioning and Procurement; BCC Social Value Policy and Framework; Social Enterprise Action Plan and BCC Employment Academies.</p>
3.4	<p>There is a real opportunity through the implementation of the Belfast Business Promise to achieve our aim of creating a stronger, more resilient, and fairer city economy and society for Belfast with inclusive economic participation. The Belfast Business Promise membership and network offers a real opportunity to promote the city’s aspirations and engage more widely with local businesses and organisations, working in collaboration towards becoming a more inclusive city.</p>
3.5	<u>Progress to date</u>

Pledges

The Belfast Business Promise is a business commitment to support the city's inclusive growth mission by signing up to a number of underpinning pledges around business practices. Organisations are able to use the process to benchmark against eight pledges and gain support from the Belfast Business Promise community and network to continually improve their inclusive practice and performance.

As agreed at SP&R Committee, the Belfast Business Promise has been designed as a free, voluntary membership and accreditation scheme which is open to all employers across Belfast – irrespective of size or sector – to consider and sign-up. It also provides businesses with recognition for demonstrating how they are having a positive social impact through their core business activities.

3.6 The Belfast Business Promise has eight pledges (as set out below in figure 1), which organisations will use to assess business practices and provide evidence of the approaches applied. It is proposed that larger businesses (i.e. currently classified as those with over 250 employees) to commit to doing more in each of the pledge areas.

Figure 1.



An underpinning accreditation process has been developed which provides further details on the scope and expectations around level of commitment across each of the pledges.

3.7 Membership structure

It is proposed that the membership to the Belfast Business Promise is tiered as outlined below:

1st Level - Supporter – organisations who commit to evaluating their current business practices and developing an action plan to work towards meeting the pledges. All organisations start their journey as a Supporter, working towards improved performance and making use of the Belfast Business Promise resources and network.

2nd Level - Member – organisations who have made the Supporter commitment and can then demonstrate **three core** pledges with an **additional three pledges** chosen from the remaining five, that best fit with their organisational priorities. The initial engagement identified that the following pledges as high priority and could be considered in agreeing the three core designated pledges.

Pledge 1	Provide fair wages and contracts
Pledge 3	Support the local and social economy
Pledge 8	Protect our environment

3rd Level - Ambassador - to achieve the Ambassador level of accreditation businesses must meet all 8 pledges.

3.8 Membership package

It is important that organisations and businesses in Belfast are aware of the potential benefits, support and added value created through the Business Promise. The key elements of the package, include:

- Promotion of their business via a Belfast Business Promise website and through the 'Mark', creating a unique selling point for the business and appeal to customers and employers in terms of showcasing the positive social impact of their core business practices.
- Access to an interactive members' network of like-minded and experienced individuals keen to solve common city issues and to improve business to business collaboration and support.
- Access to a members' support programme to help businesses to meet the pledges and improve their business practices (e.g. learning days around how to incorporate social value into procurement).
- Potential future opportunity to use the Belfast Business Promise accreditation to access BCC employment academies and procurement opportunities.

- Ability to capture and demonstrate the social value contributed through core business activities through an underpinning monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Signposting to best practice information, advice and support through the on-line website and members' programme of activity.
- Improved links through the Promise team and other members to communities and target groups of citizens.
- Access to a list of Belfast Business Promise members and their business profile to identify opportunities to enhance business-to-business working and trade as well as direct linkages to the labour relations agency network and other best practice organisations.

3.9 Pilot Phase: April - November 2023

A pilot phase was agreed to refine and further develop the Belfast Business Promise model in order to continue the collaborative approach to the design of the charter and to support sustainable and effective delivery. This phase has the following ambitions:

- Development of accreditation criteria and the supporting processes.
- Establish expert panel to provide assurance and accredit organisations against the criteria.
- Secure commitment from 20 organisations to sign up to the Belfast Business Promise to test the criteria and shape future delivery and the offer.
- Implement Promise Learning Days and provide practical supports to organisations to meet their selected pledges.

3.10 Progress achieved to date includes:

- Development of accreditation criteria for all pledges.
- Expert panels established to provide accreditation with the first members expected to be accredited by January 2024.
- Established a network of BBP Partners who can provide direct support to in achieving membership status and develop their business practices. These include...
- In the first eight weeks following the go-live date of 24th April 2023, 35 organisations have been engaged and of this, 21 organisations are now signed up to the Belfast Business Promise and going through the process of accreditation. These include:

3.11

Private Sector	Public Sector	Third Sector
Exploristics	Queen's University Belfast	East Belfast Enterprise
Change Over Technologies	Labour Relations Agency	Diversity Mark
BT	Belfast City Council	Lighthouse
People 1st	Ulster University	Orchardville
MSC Group	Translink	NOW Group

Honeycomb Jobs
Babcock

Social Enterprise NI
Footprints Women’s Centre
GEMS NI

Further engagement is ongoing to secure partner organisations and special support across pledge areas. Partner organisations include those opposite:

3.12 Officers have also hosted two Promise Learning Days where organisations have availed of specialist support across the following pledge areas:



- Pledge 1 Provide fair wages and contracts: facilitated by Labour Relations Agency
- Pledge 2 Provide opportunities into work: facilitated by Belfast City Council – Employability & Skills Team
- Pledge 3 Recruit Inclusively: facilitated by Labour Relations Agency and Diversity Mark
- Pledge 4 Support the local and social economy: facilitated by Juno Planning and Social Enterprise NI
- Pledge 7 Work in partnership with our communities: facilitated by Now Group
- Pledge 8 Protect our environment: facilitated by Climate Essentials

3.13 BCC Accreditation

As an organisation, the Council has also signed-up to the Belfast Business Promise demonstrating leadership and commitment to working with employers to deliver on the ambition of creating an inclusive city. Detailed internal discussions have been ongoing with key officers and professions to assess the Council’s position in relation to meeting the pledges and the subsequent action planning to ensure continuous improvement.

It is important to recognise the significant progress which has already been made in key areas including Social Value Procurement Policy, the work of the Employability and Skills team and community engagement teams, HR, Legal, Finance etc. and as an organisation we have made strides towards achieving the Belfast Business Promise accreditation ourselves, in particular, providing fair wages and contracts (pledge 1) with the Council achieving accreditation from the Real Living Wage Foundation for paying the Real Living Wage in February 2023 and the progress being made in terms of Protecting our Environment (pledge 8).

3.14	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p> <p>None at present. A temporary BBP core team has been established consisting of 3 officers until the end of the pilot phase in November 2023 and supported through the delivery of ongoing activity and programmes of work across Council, from Climate Commission through to HR, Economic Development etc.</p>
3.15	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>As agreed within the initial Inclusive Growth Commitments equality screening, a separate screening is being undertaken as part of the Belfast Business Promise pilot phase. The findings from the initial screening are already being utilised to inform the development and content.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>