

## **Social Policy Working Group**

Tuesday, 14th November, 2023

### MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND  
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Doherty (Chairperson); and  
Councillors S. Douglas and R. McLaughlin.

In attendance: Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of  
Corporate Services;  
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;  
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;  
Ms. N. Bohill, Head of Commercial and Procurement  
Services;  
Ms. C. Christy, HR Manager (Development);  
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager – Economy;  
Ms. S. O'Regan, Employability and Skills Manager;  
Ms. C. Hutchinson, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer;  
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Officer;  
Ms. C. Patterson, Policy and Programme Manager,  
Inclusive Growth;  
Ms. K. McDonald, Data Analyst, Strategy, Policy and  
Partnerships Team;  
Ms. M. Robinson, Belfast Business Promise Programme  
Co-Ordinator;  
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business, Research and Development  
Manager;  
Mr. J. Yohanis, Employability and Skills Officer; and  
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Smyth.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 5th September were approved by the Working Group.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Update on Actions**

The Working Group noted the contents of a report providing information on those actions which were now complete and those which were still ongoing.

### **Update on Belfast Business Promise**

The Belfast Business Promise Programme Co-ordinator reminded the Working Group that the Belfast Business Promise, which was a key commitment within the Belfast Agenda, the Belfast Agenda Refresh and the Inclusive Growth Strategy, focused on creating an inclusive City by working in collaboration with partners. The overall model had been co-designed with the help of an external business working group, with input from over 25 organisations and 130 individuals and a six-month pilot initiative had commenced on 24th April, with a target figure of 20 participants.

In relation to the progress which had been made to date, she confirmed that:

- a dedicated support team was now in place;
- 30 supporter organisations were working towards accreditation;
- 14 expressions of interest had been received;
- the Corporate Relationship Management system was now operational;
- the accreditation criteria/process had been agreed and mapped with external partners;
- the first cycle of Technical Panels had been completed and tested and would be held on a quarterly basis moving forward;
- Promise Learning Days, focusing on Pledges 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8, had been held in the City Hall, Queen's University and St. Comgall's;
- a light touch communications exercise had been undertaken to highlight the Promise Learning Days and supporter organisations; and
- an equality and rural needs screening had been completed, with opportunities to promote diversity and inclusion.

She went on to point out that, whilst the number of partner organisations had not changed since the last meeting of the Working Group, she was engaging with other anchor institutions/organisations across the City to ensure that specialist support was available to participants, when required.

She reviewed the main incentives for signing-up to the Belfast Business Promise and provided details of the feedback which had been received from supporters. In terms of highlights/successes, she confirmed that:

- the Pledges had touched on all of the key issues required to create an inclusive City;
- one organisation had signed up as a Real Living Wage employer;
- almost 50% of organisations had been supported to measure their carbon footprint for the first time;
- there had been a consistently high attendance at Promise Learning Days;
- Belfast Business Promise supporters were recommending other organisations to sign up to the Programme;
- there was an increasing awareness of relevant initiatives/programmes and there were opportunities to showcase the Programme and promote good employment practices.

The Belfast Business Promise Programme Co-ordinator went on to outline the following recommendations for improvement:

#### **Belfast Business Promise Model and Pledges**

- review and refine the wording of the Pledge criteria with partners and supporters to ensure clarity, direction and alignment with other relevant policies and accreditations;
- include a requirement to encourage employers to promote inclusivity/accessibility;
- reduce the number of Pledges required to achieve member status from six to five;
- develop a detailed welcome pack, including a detailed breakdown of requirements, expectations, time commitments and benefits; and
- produce guidance notes for supporters to clarify and explain the Pledge criteria expectations.

#### **Accreditation Process/Technical Panel**

- adopt a risk-based approach to accreditation assessments, to balance a robust assessment and team capacity;
- implement a partner screening/due diligence process and assessment plan/timetable for organisations; and
- establish a process to review and revise pledge criteria and new accreditations or standards emerged.

### **Belfast Business Promise Offer**

- develop a communications plan to increase the profile and prestige of the Belfast Business Promise and its supporters, members and ambassadors, attract new participants and foster a sense of community;
- develop the website to enhance access to resources, promote good practice and build connections;
- consider a tailored accreditation process and support package for small and start up organisations; and
- identify opportunities to integrate the Belfast Business Promise with existing programmes/policies such as Employability and Skills, the Enterprise Support Service, social value procurement etc.

### **Ongoing Development**

- targeted engagement to promote the Belfast Business Promise to organisations in more challenging sectors; and
- progress the evaluation framework and carry out an iterative, annual impact assessment to continuously improve.

In terms of next steps, covering the period from November, 2023 to March, 2024, the Belfast Business Promise Programme Co-ordinator reported that:

- a Promise Learning Day would be held on 5th December, with a focus on International Day for People with Disabilities;
- changes/recommendations would be considered and implemented;
- a Technical Panel meeting would be held on 11th January;
- officers would, in January, attend a planned future of work conference in Belfast;
- strategic engagement with anchor organisations and key city employers would be revisited;
- a soft launch would, on 1st February, take place in the City Hall to award accreditations (Member status), with the Lord Mayor to attend;
- engagement would take place with further organisations to sign up to the Belfast Business Promise (target of 50 organisations for year 1); and

- planning would continue for 2024/25 by scoping resource options to develop a work plan, based on optimum levels of onboarding and support.

She concluded by pointing out that management discussions were ongoing around securing Technical Panel/partner organisations expertise for Pledge 8 (Protect our Environment), developing a JAM Card bursary support for Belfast Business Promise supporters, delivering a proactive communication and marketing message, developing a website and securing staff and resources beyond 31st March, 2024.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information which had been provided and agreed that any proposed changes to the wording used within the Pledge criteria be circulated to the Members for review before adoption.

### **Update on Social Value Procurement Policy Delivery**

The Strategic Category Officer reminded the Working Group that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 28th March, 2022, had approved the revised draft Social Value Procurement Policy. The Policy had been implemented on 1st June, 2022 and applied to any new applicable open tender exercises with approval from that date.

He drew the Working Group's attention to a report, covering the period from 1st July to 30th September, 2023, on the delivery of social value outcomes via open tender competitions awarded in accordance with the Social Value Procurement Policy. The report also provided an update on those tenders which had been awarded by the Physical Programmes Unit where, due to project funding rules, social value had been considered and included, in accordance with the Construction and Procurement Delivery Buy Social Model.

He went on to explain that a Social Value Review Team had been established to assess how the Social Value Procurement Policy was being implemented, along with any lessons learned which needed to be applied following the conclusion of tender competitions. Areas which the Team was currently reviewing included, but was not limited to:

- i. trends in the use of Reserved Contracts and any further guidance required for officers on when these should be used;
- ii. trends in the selection of Social Value Organisational Behaviours by officers when using the Social Value Toolkit and any further guidance required for officers on when these should be applied; and
- iii. the quality of social value offers by suppliers (the scored submissions) and if further guidance was required, in terms of how these are evaluated by officers. In addition, any further guidance required for suppliers to improve their understanding of the Council's expectations, in line with the aims of the Belfast Agenda and associated strategies.

The Strategic Category Officer pointed out that the Social Value Review Team would meet every two months, in line with scheduled meetings of the Working Group and

that the current format for this report would be reviewed and expanded, as additional social value data become available.

He concluded by highlighting the fact that the Commercial and Procurement Services team had developed online guidance to lead officers through key considerations, in line with the Social Value Procurement Policy, as well as a new step-by-step guidance document for suppliers on how to offer social value as part of their tender and how their social value offers were evaluated. Social value evaluation training was also being rolled out until January, 2024.

After discussion, the Working Group:

- i. noted the contents of the report; and
- ii. agreed that a report be submitted to its next meeting examining the potential for including social value in future reserve contracts and single tender actions and outlining the background to the decision which had been taken to bypass the Social Value Procurement Framework in the case of the Belfast 2024 design competition and any lessons learned.

### **Social Value Procurement Policy/Ethical Framework**

(Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor, attended in connection with this item.)

The Working Group was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 1st November, it had been granted approval to review the Ethical Framework element of the Social Value Procurement Framework, in the context of procurement practices relating to any country found to have committed war crimes.

The Divisional Solicitor explained that Article 19 of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 set out a number of non-commercial considerations which a council was unable to take into account in contracts for the supply of goods or materials, one of which related to the country or territory of origin of supplies. In essence, whilst a council could develop a policy or adopt a resolution, in relation to country or territory of origin, it would find it difficult to put these into practice. This would be further compounded by the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, which was currently passing through Parliament and would make provision to prevent public bodies from being influenced by political or moral disapproval of foreign states when taking certain economic decisions.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided and agreed that a report be submitted to its next meeting providing clarity on whether the Council could, from a legal perspective, choose not to procure goods and services from any company involved in the importation, exportation or manufacture of ammunition, munitions, chemicals etc. and on the potential for developing an ethical framework for commercial and income generating projects.

### **Inclusive Growth Index and Toolkit**

The Working Group noted an update from the Strategic Planning and Policy Officer on the progress which had been made on the development of an Inclusive Growth Index and Toolkit, which would provide officers with a framework to monitor the extent to

which Belfast was an inclusive City and practical guidance to encourage inclusive growth through the development, design, monitoring and evaluation and delivery of programmes, projects and services.

### **Update on Enterprise Support Service**

The Senior Manager – Economy submitted for the Working Group’s consideration the following report:

#### **“1.0 Purpose of Report**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Working Group on the new Enterprise Support Service – the regional initiative to support business start-up and growth that will be led by Belfast City Council, on behalf of the eleven councils.**

#### **2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Working Group is asked to note the update on the new Enterprise Support Service, including the planned go-live date for the new intervention.**

#### **3.0 Main Report**

**3.1 The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 17th February, agreed that the Council should lead on the submission of an application to UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for the eleven-council Enterprise Support Service model. It agreed also that, subject to additional due diligence and risk management work being undertaken, the Council should lead on the future development and delivery of the service on behalf of the eleven councils.**

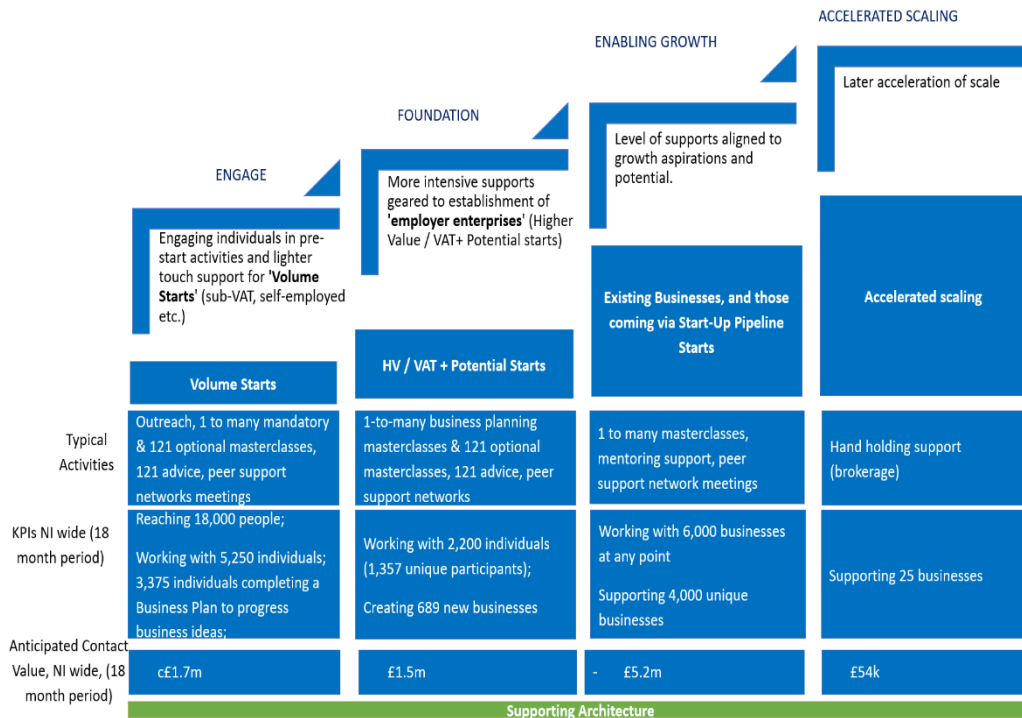
**3.2 Since that time, a significant amount of work has taken place to finalise the detail of the programme content, start the commissioning process of the new service and set in place the delivery structures so that it can become operational in November 2023.**

**3.3 The service represents the councils’ collective response to our statutory responsibility – set out as part of Local Government Reform in 2015 – for business start-up, social enterprise and entrepreneurship for specific target groups such as women and young people. Previously, the majority of the targets associated with the statutory responsibility were delivered through the Go for It programme. However, over time, the funding available for Go for It reduced significantly to the extent that it provided limited support for new start businesses and those target groups. Councils recognised the need for a more ambitious response so they commissioned research from the Enterprise Research Centre at Aston Business School which identified a new model and associated**

targets that could create a much more dynamic business base across the region.

3.4 The result was an enhanced support service that would provide a continuum of support from early-stage enterprise awareness through to starting, growing and scaling a business. The concept was that the service would help people get the right support at the right time – and would also help maximise other available funding streams by helping businesses to navigate the complex support ecosystem.

3.5 In order to fund the scaled-up intervention, officers identified the opportunity presented through the new Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). This is the UK Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities’ (DLUHC) fund that was established as a replacement for EU funding (ERDF and ESF). One strand of funding focused on ‘Supporting Local Business’. The Investment Plan for UKSPF in Northern Ireland was launched in December 2022. At that time, the Plan proposed that a central component of the Supporting Local Business strand would be the 11 council Enterprise Support Service. In September 2023 Belfast City Council received a MOU from DLUHC which set out a financial commitment of £17million - £12million programme delivery and £5million for small grants – to deliver the service. UKSPF funding is available to March 2025 so the initial programme period will run from Autumn 2023 to March 2025. The programme overview is detailed below:





### **Commissioning of Service Delivery**

- 3.6** Taking account of the marketplace, the procurement approach for delivery of the business support services (i.e. 121 mentoring support; masterclasses; peer support networks) was broken down into two main areas, namely:
- Engage and Foundation
  - Growth and Scaling.
- 3.7** For both areas, there was a significant focus on ensuring that the needs of the local business base could be considered – given the differences in business sectors; composition and development needs across the council areas.
- 3.8** In addition to the delivery elements, there are a number of support elements that have been put in place for the service, these include:
- **Marketing and communications:** this will cover a range of advertising, promotional and communication activities. This is critical in order to build and maintain awareness of the new service. The support service will also incorporate a new website/portal through which businesses will be directed to the support provided by the service – as well as a range of additional supports and relevant information. Derry City and Strabane District Council agreed that they will continue to lead on the communications activity – as they did under the Go for It programme. In doing so, they will work closely with the Belfast City Council team in order to ensure a seamless approach to all activities supported through the service;
  - **Call handling:** the Go for it programme benefitted from a freephone number through which business and entrepreneurs could be directed to the relevant delivery agent. That support will continue under the new service; and
  - **CRM:** in order to track all business engagement with the service and also support the development of relevant reports for funders and individual councils, a customer relationship management (CRM) system is being developed. Belfast City Council's Digital Services team have taken the lead on this and they will be supported by other council services such as the Information Governance Unit (IGU) and Legal Services in order to ensure compliance with all relevant obligations.

**3.9** Following a range of procurement exercises and having received the MOU in September 2023, officers were able to proceed with the appointment of the contractors for the delivery of services to businesses, as well as the provision of support services such as marketing and communications and call handling. Following completion of the procurement process, successful contractors include:

- Engage and Foundation – Enterprise NI and Partners
- Growth and Scaling – DCSDC and CCGBC – Deirdre Fitzpatrick and Associates
- Growth and Scaling – BCC – Full Circle Management Solutions
- Growth and Scaling – FODC, MUDC and ABCBC – Full Circle MS
- Growth and Scaling – ANDBC, LCCC and NMD – Full Circle MS
- Growth and Scaling – ANBC and MEABC – Mallusk Enterprise Park
- Telehandling – Like Us NE
- Communications and Marketing – Ardmore

**3.10** The service will provide an opportunity for councils to deliver a consistent approach to enterprise, start up and growth provision across the region, but will have the flexibility to adapt to meet the specific needs of entrepreneurs and businesses within local areas. To achieve this councils have developed a series of annual service plans which include community outreach activity which will target key groups to raise awareness of entrepreneurship and increase participation and address specific barriers for accessing the service, these groups include females, individuals with a disability, ethnic minorities etc. The service also has specific targets in relation to engagement levels with females and social enterprises, we will work to ensure there is 50% participation rate with females, in addition to this there is a target of 10% engagement with social enterprises and cooperatives across all elements the service.

**3.11** In order to achieve this, the range of providers we have commissioned have identified delivery partners who will provide tailored support to these groups, we are also working closely with organisations aligned to these underrepresented groups and other stakeholders to ensure that we fully understand the requirements of each group and provide the relevant support to help them proceed onto the service. To achieve the 10% target of social enterprise engagement we will work in conjunction with our existing providers and organisations within the sector to profile ESS.

**3.12** As part of the mobilisation period, work has been undertaken to develop new brand for the new service. The scoping

exercise consisted of detailed surveys, focus groups and stakeholder workshops which led to the creation of a new brand/logo, 4 sub brands and brand guidelines.

- 3.13 The selected brand Proposition is outlined as follows; 'Go Succeed NI Business Support is a service to help potential entrepreneurs, new starts and existing businesses to maximise their potential and contribute to Northern Ireland's economy. It provides would-be and existing businesses with flexible, tailored and easily accessible advice and support at any stage of their growth journey.'
- 3.14 The brand Value is that Go Succeed is the go-to source of easily accessible advice and support for anyone starting or growing their business in NI.
- 3.15 To accommodate marketing messages aimed at the widest possible range of businesses, and to allow for promotion of the specific support offerings applicable to each level, a set of Go Succeed sub-brands have been created.
- 3.16 The formal launch of the brand and the new service is scheduled to take place on 13th November in the City Hall to mark the start of Global Entrepreneurship week.
- 3.17 The launch event will be hosted by Sarah Travers and will include a welcome and overview of the new service from John Walsh, Chief Executive, representing Belfast City Council as the service lead. The launch will also include a panel discussion from entrepreneurs and business owners across the region who discuss business support provision and how they have accessed council led services and others to achieve their business growth ambitions. The event will be attended by representatives from DLUHC, the other 10 councils, key stakeholders, delivery partners and key media partners.
- 3.18 As part of the funding application to DLUHC, resources were secured for a number of staff roles in order to support programme delivery and provide appropriate management and oversight for funders and all council partners. Recruitment for these roles took place in October and have now concluded, however due to some of the exercises being unsuccessful and the creation of additional posts for finance and compliance positions, a further exercise will now take place in November 2023 and staff should be in position for December 2023 (subject to notice periods).
- 3.19 In the interim, the development and mobilisation work is being led by existing resources within the Enterprise and Business Growth Team. The team has been supported by colleagues from across the council including Digital Services, Procurement, Finance, Legal Services, Information

**Governance Unit, Human Resources and Continuous Improvement and Audit, Governance and Risk.**

- 3.20 For Belfast – and all councils – this new service represents an important step forward in the councils positioning their intent to drive their local economies – with an increasing focus on support for indigenous businesses. This is reflected in the draft Community Plan. This new approach also ensures that the councils, as a collective, can have a strong voice in the development of the new Entrepreneurship Strategy which will be a key pillar for the delivery of the 10x ambitions. It is also important to note that there is a limited window of opportunity in which to make progress so councils will be focused on ensuring that the new service works effectively to meet business needs. However, they will also need to consider how they can position the new service to attract additional funding for delivery after March 2025 – recognising the challenges in the public sector investment environment at present.**

**Financial and Resource Implications**

- 3.23 The Council will act as the lead council on behalf of the 11 councils for delivery of the service. To do so, we will establish a delivery and management team which will be fully resourced through the DLUHC funding.**
- 3.22 The overall indicative SPF budget is in the region of £5million revenue in year 1 and £7million revenue in year 2, with around £5million available across the funding period for grant support.**

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.23 An equality impact assessment for the service has been completed. Local targets for delivery in each council area have been established and will be part of the contractual commitments with delivery partners.”**

The Working Group noted the contents of the report.

**Economic Inactivity Research Brief**

The Senior Manager – Economy reminded the Working Group that the Northern Ireland Shared Prosperity Fund, which provided support to organisations working to reduce economic inactivity, was due to close in March, 2025.

She explained that, in order to initiate discussion around future provision, the Council had asked the Ulster University’s Economic Policy Centre to revisit, as a useful starting point, its Anatomy of Economic Activity paper which had been published in 2016. The Council was also facilitating, under the auspices of the eleven Labour Market Partnerships, an event on 22nd January in the new Ulster University campus, focusing primarily on inclusive labour markets, with a view to identifying needs, priorities,

challenges and opportunities from April, 2025 onwards. It had also commenced a separate piece of work specific to Belfast, as economic inactivity was an issue which impacted significantly upon residents. Details of that would be presented to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Social Policy Working Group in due course.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

### **Schedule of Meetings**

The Working Group noted that a schedule of meetings for 2024 would be circulated in due course.

Chairperson