



Subject:	Inclusive Growth – Belfast Business Promise
Date:	24 th May 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
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
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1.1	To provide Members with an update on the continued progress with the Belfast Business Promise, following the celebration and launch event in City Hall on 11 th April 2024.
1.2	The Committee will be aware that the Belfast Business Promise is a key commitment in the Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy and embedded within the refreshed Belfast Agenda (2024-2028). The development of the Business Promise has been shaped by Elected Members through the work of the Social Policy Working Group and supported by a strong cross-council partnership approach.
1.3	As the inclusive growth charter for the city, the Belfast Business Promise is a key tool to encourage and support employers across the city to adopt and/or improve their practices and demonstrate a positive social impact through their core business activities. The level of engagement and positive response from businesses of all sizes and sectors during its first year of operation has been significant. There is now a strong and growing community of practice aligned to the ambitions of the business promise. This presents a real opportunity to build upon and share good practice and adopt a holistic approach to create a stronger, more resilient, and fairer economy and society for Belfast.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Note the progress made during the first year of implementing the Belfast Business Promise (ii) Note the work underway to support the further development and continued scaling up of the Business Promise and to ensure the continued successful implementation, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the continued growth in the number of organisations engaging in the initiative, committing to be partners and supporting implementation and accreditation. ▪ the Council's continued commitment and work underway to progress through the Belfast Business Promise journey to become an accredited Member and Ambassador. ▪ Next steps for the programme as outlined at paragraph 3.12.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	As agreed by SP&R Committee, the Belfast Business Promise is a proactive commitment by businesses to support the city's inclusive growth mission by signing up to a number of underpinning pledges that support inclusive business practices. Organisations use the process to assess and benchmark their business practices against eight pledges and gain support from the Belfast Business Promise community/network to continually improve their inclusive practice and performance.
3.2	A cross-council team has been progressing the development and delivery of the Belfast Business Promise with an external business working group, with oversight and input from the Council's Social Policy Working Group. The Belfast Business Promise is aligned to and complements other

strands of work across the Council, including the Social Value Procurement Policy & Toolkit, Social Enterprise action plan and BCC Employment Academies. Strong relationships have also been built with the Inclusive Growth Network, the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter and the Scottish Business Pledge Charter teams which has enabled the sharing of good practice and shared learning opportunities.

3.3 Following a significant period of co-development and engagement, the Belfast Business Promise went live on 24th April 2023 for a six-month pilot phase. Working with 20 early adopters, the pilot phase enabled testing and refining of the model with the business community and clearly identified a strong support for the scheme across the public, private and third sectors. The pilot phase also allowed for crucial practical testing of the operational delivery processes with improvement work on both the systems and the support provided to businesses continuing.

3.4 The pilot phase endorsed the holistic approach adopted by the Belfast Business Promise and the ethos of building a network of like-minded organisations to work together to create a better Belfast and a more inclusive city. It also confirmed the three core pledges that all organisations should commit to (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Belfast Business Promise pledges



3.5 An underpinning accreditation process has been developed in conjunction with key Council Departments, partner organisations such as the Labour Relations Agency and external advisers, including those with expertise and experience in auditing quality standards (IIP, EFQM and ISO standards). This has been tested and enhanced during the pilot phase to ensure that it aligns to other good practice standards, provides assurance around the robustness of the process and recognises the challenges organisations are facing in the current economic climate.

3.6	<p>A review and evaluation of the pilot phase was undertaken and considered by the Social Policy Working Group in November 2023, with identified improvements progressing in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ clarifying the requirements set out in each of the pledges that organisations are expected to demonstrate. ▪ strengthening the requirement to encourage employers to consider inclusivity/accessibility, streamlining the processes to support the assessment and accreditation process. ▪ developing a communication plan and website. ▪ continuing to build on the work so far to develop the Promise Learning Days and create a sense of community and network for Supporters to learn from each other and share practice.
3.7	<p>Since the pilot completed, the network of supporters has continued to grow with 46 organisations now signed-up to the scheme. A well-attended and very positive celebration/launch event had been held on 11th April 2024 in the City Hall. This event recognised the significant level of commitment to the Business Promise in the city, the growth in the network of Belfast Business Promise Supporters and the improvement journey underway across many organisations.</p>
3.8	<p>Some of the highlights and successes during the first year of implementation of the Belfast Business Promise include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 46 organisations have signed up as Supporters (see Appendix 1), ▪ 3 organisations secured 'Member' status (meeting 5 of the 8 pledges and committing to continue to work towards all 8 pledges) – Department for Economy, Linen Quarter BID and Belfast Harbour. ▪ Established a BBP Partner Network of technical advisers which provide specialist expertise to support the accreditation process and delivery of the Belfast Business Promise (See Figure 2 below) ▪ Delivered 7 Promise Learning Days, focusing on sharing good practice relating to each of the pledges. ▪ Almost half the 'early adopters' in the pilot phase reported measuring their carbon footprint for the first time. ▪ BBP Supporters are recommending other organisations to sign-up to the BBP. ▪ Showcased the Belfast Business Promise, promoting more inclusive practices and insight at key events such as the Labour Relations Agency conference, Equality Commission's event to mark International Day for people with Disabilities and the Inclusive Growth Network's Good Employment Conference in Manchester. ▪ Shared learning and experience from the Belfast Business Promise with the Inclusive Growth Network's Good Employment Charter group

Figure 2: Belfast Business Promise Partners



BCC Accreditation

- 3.9 As an organisation, the Council has also signed-up to the Belfast Business Promise demonstrating leadership and commitment to working with employers and encouraging others to join us in working to create an inclusive city. Detailed internal discussions are 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.
- 3.10 Members will be aware of the significant progress made in key areas such as Social Value Procurement Policy, the work of the Employability and Skills team, community engagement teams, HR, Legal, Finance etc. In addition, 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) have been vital steps in meeting the standards.
- 3.11 The internal assessment of the Council's stage of readiness across the eight pledges, identified a number of areas of development which had already been recognised with work underway in these areas. These included the development and delivery of the Council's People Strategy, which was approved by the Committee in August 2023, and the Health & Wellbeing Strategy approved in February 2023. Additionally, the Council has also signed up as a JAM (Just a Minute) Card Partner with the NOW Group to enhance its commitment to inclusivity and plans are being taken forward for the development of a staff volunteering policy to strengthen its contribution to the core pledge 'working in partnership with our communities'. The Council is committed to continuing its efforts to meet the standards set in the Belfast Business Promise and is therefore on course to achieve its aim to attain Member and Ambassador status in autumn 2024.

<p>3.12</p> <p>3.13</p> <p>3.14</p> <p>3.15</p>	<p><u>Next steps for the BBP</u></p> <p>In addition to continuing to make progress on the Council’s journey through the Belfast Business Promise, the following next steps will be taken forward with regular progress reports being brought to the Social Policy Working Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building the Belfast Business Promise offer and menu of provision. ▪ Onboarding strategic partners/technical panel specialisms. ▪ Developing effective MIS (Management Information Systems) / MS Forms to streamline delivery. ▪ Conducting an interim evaluation to support plans to sustain and scale-up. ▪ Encouraging progression through the accreditation tiers, increasing the awards of Member / Ambassador status to organisations. ▪ Developing the website to highlight the reputational benefits associated with a city charter, which is key to sustaining interest and commitment. ▪ Showcasing the story so far and celebrating success. <p>A further report on the steps being taken to embed inclusive growth will be brought to Committee in June, alongside an update on the Corporate Plan.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Resources are included within Departmental budgets. In addition to the core team of 3 officers, support is also provided across a range of Council Departments and professions to support the delivery as well as the Council’s aim to lead by example and progress through the accreditation tiers.</p> <p>Delivery of the programme also draws on the Supporter network to share resources and expertise to assist in delivery, where possible.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>An Equality screening and Rural Needs Assessment has been carried out, with the Belfast Business promise screened out with mitigating actions. Whilst the Belfast Business promise is a key tool to deliver on the Inclusive Growth Strategy and is not expected to have any adverse impacts on the Section 75 categories, the programme will continue to be informed by practice and review, with an interim evaluation planned for 2024/25. This will ensure that modifications and mitigations can be put in place to meet the needs of programme participants as delivery matures.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Belfast Business Promise Supporters and Members</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Accreditation Tiers of membership</p>