

Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday, 14th May, 2024

MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOТЕLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Doherty (Chairperson); and
Alderman Copeland and Councillors
F. McAteer and I. 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. C. Christy, HR Manager (Development);
Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti Poverty;
Ms. C. Hutchinson, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer;
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Manager;
Ms. M. McKay, Enterprise and Business Growth Manager;
Ms. S. O'Regan, Employability and Skills Manager;
Ms. C. Patterson, Policy and Programme Manager,
Inclusive Growth;
Mr. K. Quinn, Employability and Skills Officer;
Ms. M. Robinson, Belfast Business Promise Programme
Co-Ordinator;
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager Economy;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business, Research and Development
Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors R. McLaughlin and Smyth.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th February, 2024 were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Actions Update

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

Social Value Procurement Policy – Delivery Report

The Strategic Category Manager referred to the report on the delivery of the social value procurement policy which was a standing item on the Working Group's agenda. He drew Members' attention to Appendix 1, attached to the report, which outlined the application of the social value procurement policy to the 24 tenders that had been awarded during the period 1st January – 29th February 2024. He reminded the Members that a review team had been established to review how the policy was being implemented and to identify any lessons learned that needed to be applied in the future. Views on the report were sought and the Working Group noted the update provided.

Employee Diversity bi-annual report

The Director of Human Resources provided the Working Group with an update on the diversity of the workforce living in Belfast, this included a breakdown of staff by department and postcode.

The Director drew the Members' attention to appendices which providing detail of Belfast LGD post codes for Council staff by department, along with information on community background, gender, ethnic origin, age and disability. She advised that this information had been provided for the 53.8 % of employees living in the Belfast City Council area and provided for all other Belfast City Council staff (46.2%) who resided in other council areas.

The Members were asked to note that some of the diversity information was collected from staff on a voluntary basis, for example, ethnic origin and disability, and following a query, the Director reported that this might reflect the low statistics reported for those with a disability, as often people chose not to report their disability. The Members noted that the information was collected through the recruitment process or through a voluntary monitoring exercise. She reported that a further voluntary monitoring exercise was due to be completed in 2024.

The Members were advised that additionally there had been several departmental structural changes, and it was therefore difficult at this point to make departmental comparisons with August 2023 figures. However, overall there had been minimal change in the total number of Protestant and Roman Catholic employees between August 2023 and March 2024. In August 2023, the percentage of Protestant employees was 51.4% and the Roman Catholic percentage was 48.6%. In March 2024, the percentages minimally changed to 51.5% and 48.5% respectively.

In response to a query, the Director advised that management were actively trying to encourage more females to apply for traditional front line roles, such as drivers, but confirmed that there did continue to be some male dominated roles.

The Working Group noted the update provided and that a departmental comparison would be provided in the next report. In addition, at the request of a Member, the Director also undertook to provide a more comprehensive breakdown of the figures in terms of the categories of the roles throughout the Council, including senior positions.

Belfast Business Promise Update

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Belfast Business Promise Programme Co-Ordinator provided the Working Group with an update on Belfast Business Promise, which included the next steps for the Initiative, as follows:

- To follow up with strategic partners (BMET, DFC, Invest NI, NIHE and NI Libraries);
- Promise Learning Day - 18th June 2024 (to focus on improve training, engagement and wellbeing);
- Fourth Technical Panel (July 2024) - quarterly panels scheduled for 2024/25;
- Pledge 3: To protect our environment:
 - UU confirmed as a Partner - QUB committed in principle;
 - Pledge commitments under review; and
 - 66 organisations availing of Climate Essentials platform.
- Progress the recruitment of Enterprise and Business Growth Officer;
- Go Succeed offer / programme of work to be developed;
- Further development of website to enhance visibility / share resources across BBP Network;
- Corporate Comms to actively promote events/updates, including an article in City Matters; and
- Business engagement to be ongoing.

The Chairperson thanked the officers for the hard work being put into this business initiative and stated that it was a pleasure seeing it grow and he asked the other Members to encourage businesses to sign up.

The Working Group noted the update provided.

Go Succeed - Belfast Update

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Senior Manager Economy, provided the Working Group with an update on Go Succeed, the new go-to source for expert business advice led by Northern Ireland's eleven councils.

She advised that if individuals had an idea but were not sure how to turn it into a business or had already started out in business and required mentorship, Go Succeed Start experts were on hand to help them create a business plan, seek funding and to put the necessary foundations in place to get the business up and running.

She provided an overview of the progress so far, following the successful launch of the initiative in November 2023, including details of the website visits, sign-ups, enquires and details of the participants.

The officer concluded the presentation by providing details of the focus for 2024/25, as follows:

- Through local council outreach activity, further activity was planned to increase participation across all underrepresented groups;
- Identification of opportunities to enhance support for key groups to help overcome any additional barriers;
- Local stakeholder engagement planned to drive focus on inclusion;
- Targeted marketing activity to increase participation for social entrepreneurs and those with higher growth potential;
- Opportunities to drive participation from existing businesses in key sectors, including tourism, creative industries and social economy;
- Roll out of support across thematic areas including procurement, net zero, cyber security and digital transformation;
- Development and roll out of a series of peer support networks for key groups; and
- Enhanced engagement with entrepreneurs and businesses to support signposting and access to funding opportunities.

The Members were advised that more information, including details in respect of future events, was available via the Go Succeed – NI Business Support website [here](#)

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, congratulated the officers on the successful launch of the initiative and stated that he was pleased to now be able to signpost people to Go Succeed for assistance.

Following a query from a Member, the officer agreed to provide more information at a future meeting regarding the numbers of people with caring responsibilities that had either enquired or signed up to the programme. It was highlighted that people had often left long term employment and moved to self-employment as a way of trying to juggle caring responsibilities and this was therefore a cohort of people who might benefit from the scheme.

The Working Group noted the update provided.

Proposed areas of focus 2024-26

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty referred to the report which highlighted the proposed areas of focus that would inform the future discussions at the Working Group. He referenced the Inclusive Growth Strategy commitments, the successes and progress as well as the need to for continued momentum to deliver key priorities such as progressive procurement (social value and support for social enterprise and co-operatives), opening up employment opportunities as well as developing a 'one city approach' to inclusive growth through the Belfast Business Promise. He advised that embedding inclusive growth would also continue as a priority with the continued development of the inclusive growth index and toolkit, which included testing the approach to ensure it was fit for purpose, capacity building across the council and working with community planning partners. The development of the Corporate Plan was also noted as key opportunity to embed inclusive growth.

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty also highlighted the increasing emphasis on the need to prioritise poverty alleviation and tackle the persistent inequalities that held people back, with the proposal for an anti-poverty framework. He referred to emerging discussions on the potential for corporate social responsibility to contribute to Belfast's ambitions which would also be scoped out as a means of complementing the Council's efforts to drive inclusive growth, improve the local environment, and support local communities. There was discussion about the importance of connecting to other working groups that could contribute to these issues, in particular, the Cost-of-Living Working Group.

The Chairperson welcomed the proposed areas of focus and reiterated the need to keep prioritising discussion around poverty.

The Working Group noted the update report and agreed the key areas of focus and actions as outlined.

Chairperson