

Social Policy Working Group

Tuesday, 11th February, 2025

MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP

**HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOVED VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Members present: Councillor Doherty (Chairperson); and
Councillors F. McAteer, I. McLaughlin 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;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;
Mr. D. Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager;
Ms. C. Patterson, Policy and Programme Manager,
Inclusive Growth;
Ms. M. Robinson, Belfast Business Coordinator;
Ms. K. Murtagh, Enterprise and Business Growth Officer;
and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Smyth.

Minutes

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

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Actions Update

The Working Group noted the Decision and Action Tracker.

Social Value Procurement Policy (SVPP)

SVPP – Delivery Report

The Working Group was provided with an update on the delivery of social value outcomes via open tender competitions awarded in accordance with the Council's Social Value Procurement Policy (SVPP), for the reporting period 1st September – 30th November, 2024.

The Head of Commercial and Procurement Services advised the Working Group that, during the reporting period, 40 tenders had been awarded by the Commercial and Procurement Services (CPS) team and the Property and Projects Department. She highlighted that the SVPP had been applied to 25 of the tenders awarded and that the following social value organisational behaviours had been selected to be included:

- Ethical Procurement Policies – included in 5 out of the 25 tenders awarded;
- Environmental Management Systems – included in 7 out of the 25 tenders awarded; and
- HR Policies – included in 10 out of the 25 tenders awarded.

She provided a summary of the reasons why SVPP had not been applied to 15 of the tenders awarded, that included:

- 1 direct award;
- 10 awards where an external framework had been used;
- 2 awards where the value of the contract within the tender was less than £30,000; and
- 2 awards where social value was considered not viable due to short project timescales.

The Working Group was advised that the Social Value Review Team would continue to review the implementation of SVPP, including on the use of reserved contracts, social value organisational behaviours and the quality of social value offered by suppliers.

Noted.

SVPP – Applying a Minimum Contract Period

The Working Group considered a report that recommended an amendment to the SVPP that would enable flexibility in respect of applying social value scoring and weighting to tenders with a short duration contract of less than 6 months.

The Working Group was advised that, to date, the SVPP had been applied to 101 tenders. It was highlighted that the contracts with a duration period of less than 6 months had presented officers with a number of challenges in respect of the SVPP toolkit being applied, including impracticality, a negative impact on the number and quality of submissions, and difficulties in respect of suppliers delivering meaningful social value initiatives in a short period of time.

During discussion, a number of Members highlighted the success of SVPP, and the importance of social value being applied to all tenders. The Members further highlighted that, to date, there had only been a small number of projects procured by the Council that were of short duration of less than 6 months, and that further information, including feedback from suppliers in respect of the challenges, would be beneficial to help inform the Working Groups consideration of potential amendments to the SVPP.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed that a report would be brought back to a future meeting that provided further information on the challenges faced by officers and suppliers in relation to SVPP being applied to short duration contracts and that it would outline a range of options in respect of potential amendments to the SVPP and associated social value toolkit.

Belfast Business Promise

The Belfast Business Promise Programme Coordinator presented the Working Group with a progress update on the Belfast Business Promise that included:

- **Partner Update** – The Council was now working closely with Advice NI in respect of increasing Real Living Wage (RLW) employers in line with pledge one of the Belfast Promise;
- **Supporter Accreditation** – 52 organisations had achieved Supporter accreditation to date;
- **Member Accreditation** – 15 organisations had achieved Member accreditation to date with a further 5 organisations set to achieve Member accreditation in February 2025;
- **Ambassador Accreditation** – 3 organisations were set to achieve Ambassador accreditation in February 2025;
- **Pledges** – 123 pledges had been accredited to date;
- **Technical Panels** – 14 panels convened during the period of September 2024 – January 2025, with a further 3 panels scheduled for February 2025; and
- **Belfast City Council** - achieved Member accreditation in October, 2024, achieved pledge 8 accreditation in February, 2025, and on course to achieve Ambassador accreditation in June, 2025.

She provided the Working Group with a further update on the Belfast Business Promise including the recruitment of an Enterprise and Business Growth Officer, the interim evaluation and next steps. She informed the Working Group of Promise Learning Days scheduled to be held on 27th February and 1st May and invited the Members to attend.

In response to several Members questions in respect of support for organisations, the Belfast Business Promise Coordinator advised the Working Group that the Belfast

Business Promise team had worked closely with the Enterprise and Business Growth team to provide support to organisations to work towards accreditation. She highlighted that the Promise Learning Days had provided an opportunity for organisations to network and that the roll out of the Peer Support Network would further help support organisations across the business community.

Noted.

Corporate Social Responsibility - Tackling City Challenges and Maximising Social Impact: Discussion on Proposed Approach to Shape an Inclusive City

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised the Working Group that the purpose of a proposed approach was to align the social activity of organisations with the objectives set out in the Belfast Agenda, through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), in order to address city wide challenges, maximise social impact and shape an inclusive city.

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty highlighted the Belfast Business Promise and the current social value activity of organisations across the city. He explained that a CSR approach would build on and enhance this social value activity. He advised that the vision would be centred around three core themes - Our People, Our Communities and Our Planet.

He outlined to the Working Group the current landscape in respect of social value activity, city-wide challenges, and the potential options for the development of an approach.

During discussion, Members highlighted the potential benefits of the proposed CSR approach in enhancing the current social value activity across Belfast. The Members further highlighted the importance of not displacing current social value activity and the need for Belfast's anchor institutions, both in the public and private sector, to play a key role in forming a collaborative and informed approach to CSR.

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty outlined the next steps that included the establishment of initial engagement with organisations and anchor institutions in respect of a CSR approach, and that further updates would be brought back to the Working Group for consideration.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that its next scheduled meeting was Tuesday, 13th May, 2025.

Chairperson