



Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	First draft of a corporate action plan to tackle poverty and reduce inequalities
<b>Date:</b>	10 November 2010
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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**Relevant Background Information**

Members will be aware that on 11 November 2009 the proposal for a Poverty & Inequalities Strategy was taken to the Development Committee. The Committee was reminded that in 2008 the Development Department had commissioned Dr Mike Morrissey to undertake a study to assess the level of poverty in Belfast and to recommend anti-poverty initiatives which the Council could undertake in the short and medium term.

Subsequently, a number of workshops had been held with Members and officers to consider Dr Morrissey's findings, which had concluded that the Council should develop a framework to tackle poverty and inequalities.

Three main methods by which the Council could implement the plan were highlighted at the Committee meeting:

1. improve access to, and delivery of Council services,
2. better targeting of the Council's existing budgets, and
3. using the Council's statistical and performance management systems to monitor the levels of poverty at a neighbourhood level and the council's achievements following the implementation of the Strategy.

The Development Department and its Policy and Business and Development Unit were tasked to lead on the development of a Council framework to tackle poverty and reduce inequalities, within the context of the corporate theme of "Improving Health and Tackling Health Inequalities", as recommended by the Chief Officers. It was agreed that the process to develop the framework would involve working closely with Members, consulting key stakeholders and public consultation.

Since November 2009, the Development Department and its Policy and Business Development Unit (PBDU) have been working on this project and as a result of this process the first draft of a document has been developed for consideration by Committee. (see Appendix 1)

### **Key Issues**

The purpose of the Framework is:

- To raise awareness of poverty and inequalities in Belfast;
- To improve access to, and delivery of, councils services;
- To better target existing Council resources to contribute to tackling poverty and inequalities in Belfast; and
- To use the Council's statistical and performance management systems to monitor the levels of poverty across the city and in neighbourhoods and the Council's achievements following implementation of the Framework.

The Framework defines clear and concrete actions the Council is already taking and will take over the next 5 years.

The Framework clearly notes that the Council can't solve poverty or end inequalities. Rather, the Council can:

- be more inclusive in our service delivery;
- ensure that the resources we have are used in the best way and with highest social impact ,
- provide support to citizens in the time when it is most needed;
- collect poverty and inequality indicators and information to raise awareness, monitor and challenge; and
- build partnerships for more integrated service delivery.

In terms of managing public expectations, it is important to note that the Framework does not aim to end poverty and inequalities in Belfast, which would be beyond the scope of the Framework and beyond the remit of the Council. The purpose described above very clearly notes that this is an action plan for how the Council can raise awareness of these issues and *contribute* to tackling poverty and inequalities.

As such, the draft Framework is realistic and resourced. The emphasis is on describing and highlighting the work already being carried out across the Council (which is already resourced) and to identify a relatively small number of new initiatives that have the potential to contribute to tackling poverty and reducing inequalities by improving the ways in which current service are delivered.

The Council will closely monitor the performance of the Framework, in order to ensure that it does make a difference on the ground. There will be a review of the Framework every two years which will identify its successes and areas for improvements.

The draft Framework will be equality screened before going out for public consultation.

### Developing the draft Framework

The draft Framework has taken considerable time to develop. This is because it was crucial that it consisted of real joined-up work across the whole Council and not only the Development department. As can be seen in the action plan, every Council department

is contributing to the Framework. Confirming agreement with all the relevant departments took time.

There was also some additional pre-consultation research carried out with some key stakeholders. Northern Ireland Anti-poverty Network (NIAPN), Barnardos, Womens Support Network (WSN) and Council for Homeless were commissioned to provide preliminary research findings on the needs of people in poverty and ways the Council could improve its service delivery. This qualitative research took the form of focus groups and was completed at the end of June 2010. The main objectives of this research were to answer three main areas: a brief overview of what Council services people in poverty (young people, older people, lone parents, homeless, etc) currently use; what problems or difficulties they face; and what they believe should be changed or improved. These research findings have been very useful in framing this draft plan making it more grounded.

In addition, the changing economic and financial climate has meant that Chief Officers and other key staff wished to ensure that any draft Framework was realistic about current and future resources. As a result, any draft action which could not confirm resources either in existing budgets or planned budgets for 11/12 and 12/13 was removed. Chief Officers have met twice to consider and confirm this and to ensure the draft Framework presented to Committee was realistic.

Though Members' workshops were held previously, party briefings will also be held as part of the consultation process.

#### Next steps for the draft plan

- equality screening of the Framework
- a draft plan to be ratified by Council on 1 November
- internal consultation to take place and party briefings to take place in winter, from November 2010 to January 2011
- a full and inclusive consultation to take place in parallel
- final strategy to go to Committee in February, and
- final strategy to be ratified in March

#### Monitoring and reporting

Development Department will monitor the day-to-day progress of the strategy and a formal report on the progress of the action plan will be brought to the Development Committee once a year.

#### **Resource Implications**

The budget for this work was agreed by Committee in November 2009 – a total of £32,000. So far, £12,000 has been spent on pre-consultation research and developing the strategy. This leaves £20,000 for public consultation events, consultation materials, production of the final plan and a launch event. It should be noted that it is not intended to produce a high spec designed document, rather a simple publishable Framework, designed internally. The aim is for a fully engaged consultation process.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

1. Approve the draft Framework to go to the full Council for ratification; and
2. Approve the draft Framework to be used for public consultation

**Decision Tracking**

John McGrillen will present the final plan after the public consultation in February.

Time line: February 2011

Reporting Officer: John McGrillen

**Key Abbreviations**

NIAPN – Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network

WSN – Womens Support Network

**Documents Attached**

Appendix 1 – First draft of a corporate plan to tackle poverty and reduce inequalities