



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Draft Belfast City Council Framework to Tackle Poverty and Reduce Inequalities
Date:	8 November 2011
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that the original proposal for a Poverty and Inequalities Strategy was taken to the Development Committee on 11 November 2009. At that time, the Committee was reminded that in 2008 the Development Department had commissioned 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. A number of workshops were held with Members which concluded that the Council should develop a framework to tackle poverty and inequalities.
1.2	Three main methods by which the Council could implement the Framework were highlighted at the November 2009 Committee meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) improve access to, and delivery of, council services;(ii) better targeting of the council's existing budgets; and(iii) using the council's statistical and performance management systems to monitor both the levels of poverty at a neighbourhood level and the Council's achievements following the implementation of the strategy.
1.3	The Development Department and its Policy and Business and Development Unit (PBDU) were tasked to lead on the development of a Council framework to tackle poverty and reduce inequalities.
1.4	The Draft Council Framework to Tackle Poverty and Reduce Inequalities was taken to Committee in November 2010. At Committee, following a recent Good Relations seminar under the 'One City' project, where Dr Mike Morrissey had

	presented on the relationship between economic development, good relations and tackling inequalities, Committee requested that Dr Morrissey be asked to give a presentation to Members and address how the issues he raised might be addressed by the new Framework.
1.5	Members also requested party briefings on the Framework. Party briefings were held with the SDLP, Alliance, the UUP and the PUP before Committee in March 2011. The report was agreed at Committee. A party briefing was held with the DUP between Committee and Council. Members requested that the report be sent back from Council for further consideration and so that it might be discussed at an All Members' briefing. A further party briefing with the DUP was held in June 2011. A party briefing with Sinn Fein was held in September 2011.
1.6	An All Member briefing was held on the 11 October 2011. Members raised a wider variety of issues and this report and new draft of the Framework seeks to respond to these issues to ensure that the Framework reflects Members' priorities for the city.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>At this briefing Members discussed some key issues including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the importance of ensuring that the Framework addresses the needs of all citizens in Belfast, specifically that it recognise and plan for the needs of citizens in 'hidden' pockets of poverty across the city; - the need to use a quantitative definition of poverty, possible to measure and aligned to the ongoing work of the NI Executive; - that the Framework should focus on what the Council can actually do - improving services for citizens, opening access to services more widely, concrete actions and projects on the ground; - That the Framework should not duplicate the role of other agencies, particularly the key role of Government departments and should focus on using effective collaboration and joined up working to address these issues in Belfast; and - That the issue of poverty and inequality in Belfast is closely linked to the need to increase urban competitiveness and drive economic growth forward.
2.2	<p>The Framework notes the following:</p> <p><u>1. Improving Services for the People of Belfast</u> Belfast City Council cannot eradicate poverty but we can make our services more accessible and use our resources more effectively so that we support people where they are now, facing the long-term effects of the recession.</p>
2.3	<p>Under this Framework the Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Ensure that our services are more accessible; (ii) Target our resources more effectively; (iii) Work in partnership with other lead government departments to deliver on-the-ground projects that will support citizens; and (iv) Advocate for the people of Belfast who are experiencing poverty and inequalities.

2.4	<p><u>2. Responding to the needs of all the citizens of Belfast</u> Nearly half of Belfast's population live in some of most deprived Super Output Areas in Northern Ireland. Many parts of Belfast have 'hidden' pockets of poverty within more affluent areas. This Framework seeks to ensure that the Council's services are targeted to meet the needs of all citizens.</p>
2.5	<p>A household in poverty is 'one with an (equivalised) income that is 60% or less than that of the median household income in the year'. Under this definition around 20% of Belfast's population live in relative poverty (which is higher than the EU average of 16%). In absolute terms this works out at around £115 per week for a single adult with no dependent children or £195 per week for an adult with two dependent children under 14.</p>
2.6	<p>The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) central Anti-Poverty unit states that 'people are considered to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to prevent them from enjoying a standard of living, which would be regarded as acceptable by society generally.'</p>
2.7	<p><u>Causes of poverty</u> Poverty is most strongly associated with worklessness. Children's poverty in particular is directly linked to living in households where no adult is employed. Households at the fringes of the labour market are also at substantial risk – the 'working poor'. Households headed by a lone parent with dependent children are also at risk; as are pensioners when they are entirely dependent on state pensions and associated benefits.</p>
2.8	<p>While concentrations of such 'at-risk' households can be mapped to particular parts of Belfast, it is important to note that such households can exist in any part of the city – and can often become 'hidden' in statistical analyses.</p>
2.9	<p>The other significant cause of poverty is ill health and there is available data covering this category of people. Although the council has limited powers to tackle health problems, it is already proactive in partnership working with major health agencies to tackle health problems and inequalities.</p>
2.10	<p><u>3. Actions on the ground</u> The Council can address some of the causes of poverty, for example working on job creation, skills development, supporting people back into the labour market all address worklessness. Council can better target its resources to support people in 'hidden' pockets of poverty. Council can also work to support people in terms of the impact of poverty by making services such as parks, leisure centres, community centres and events and venues as accessible as possible.</p>
2.11	<p>This Framework describes some work we are already doing, but people in Belfast may not realise we're doing; and some new work which we think will tackle the causes and impacts of poverty.</p>
2.12	<p>Some examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for social economy projects – advice and guidance on public sector contracting. - Investigate (expanded) use of social clauses. - Community tourism and outreach – training and advice for local communities on how to develop tourism products. - Raise skills and reduce worklessness - HARTE programme supports long-

	<p>term unemployed people to get jobs in hospitality sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support and fund advice provision infrastructure in Belfast. - Reduce fuel poverty – mainstream fuel stamp initiative. - In partnership with the Public Health Agency provide free access to leisure facilities in the most deprived wards in Belfast. - Tackle health inequalities via the new Belfast Health Development unit and the Belfast Strategy Partnership.
2.13	<p>4. Building Urban Competitiveness</p> <p>The Council's recent research on Belfast's economic competitiveness showed that the inequalities in the city, and the high rates of economic inactivity which did not improve during the boom and have worsened in the recession, continue to be a major drag on economic growth and competitiveness. Directly addressing poverty and inequalities will support people directly and build urban competitiveness. The bottom line is, Belfast cannot be competitive if a large percentage of its population live in poverty.</p>
2.14	<p>The Council's commitment to a Stimulus Investment Package aims to support economic growth and urban competitiveness and address the specific impacts of the recession. This includes the need to address the causes of poverty including job creation, improving employability and skills, supporting social economies and tackling wider health inequalities.</p>
2.15	<p>5. Review and Improve</p> <p>Progress in terms of implementing the Framework will be reported via the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The whole Framework will be reviewed every year to be sure that it remains aligned to ensure that it remains aligned to emerging issues, in line with key initiatives such as the Stimulus Investment Package.</p>
2.16	<p>Members are asked to approve the draft Council Framework to Tackle Poverty and Reduce Inequalities.</p>
2.17	<p>If the draft Framework is approved a public consultation process will be held and the revised Framework, based on feedback from the consultation, will be presented to Committee for approval in March 2012.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	As agreed at Committee in March 2011, the budget for the public consultation on the Framework was reduced from £20,000 to £10,000. The budget of £10,000 is included within the PBDU budget for 2011/12.
3.2	The budgets for each of the actions in the action plan are accounted for within existing service budgets.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	This framework aims to contribute to reduction in equality and thus it has positive equality considerations. The initial screening showed the positive impact the

	framework would make to many of the Section 75 groupings. However, the document will be fully screened again during the consultation period.
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5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to approve the draft Council Framework to Tackle Poverty and Reduce Inequalities.

6	Decision Tracking
Timeline: March 2012	Reporting Officer: John McGrillen

7	Key to Abbreviations
PBDU – Policy and Business Development Unit OFMDFM – Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister HARTE – Hospitality and Retail Training for Employment Programme	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 - Draft Belfast City Council Framework to Tackle Poverty and Reduce Inequalities.	