

Appendix 1: Response to the Public Consultation

Drawing on the results of this work a workshop and an all-Party briefing (August 2011) were held for Members to finalise a consultation draft. The council then undertook a three month public consultation process that included; sending copies of the draft document directly to approximately 300 organisations and networks to seek their views; publishing the strategy on the council website and promoting its availability; organising facilitated workshops for key statutory, community and voluntary organisations; and public workshops in north, south, east and west Belfast.

The public consultation also included presentations to the Belfast Area Partnership Boards and Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships; briefings for staff and senior council officers; and presentations to the council's Equality Consultative Forum and the Youth Forum.

The key finding from the consultation was that there was considerable support for the council in taking a lead in this area and that given our civic leadership role we were in a unique position to encourage greater understanding of the nature and importance of community development and to foster a shared approach to both delivering community development work and measuring its impact.

There was consistent recognition of the importance of community development work to the city and its value to the citizen and in enhancing the work of organisations in both the statutory and third sector.

Key challenges identified during the public consultation included:

- The need to consider the relationship between the role of the elected representatives and community development work;
- The nature of community organisations and 'active' citizens;
- The need to draw together the wealth evidence and experience to build a renewed vision for continued improvement of CD practice in Belfast.
- Encouraging a shared emphasis on an asset-based approach; recognising the importance of existing community infrastructure as a basis for shaping intervention.
- Emphasising the critical role that community development work has to play in supporting Good Relations particularly given Belfast's post-conflict environment. We are operating in a fairly unique environment and our approach to community development must be informed by this drive towards a shared city.
- Taking a CD approach that recognises that the nature of community is not restricted to one defined by geography but which might also include communities of interest, communities of identity or communities of action.
- In earlier drafts of our strategy we used the metaphor of building blocks to describe aspects of community development work. This was challenged by many as too mechanistic and not reflective of the nature of the work where groups or communities move between strands at different times and in different circumstances.

