



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Poverty/Social Deprivation Notice of Motion – Outcomes from Party Briefings
Date:	20 June 2013
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	At the Council meeting on 4th February a Notice of Motion on 'social deprivation', was passed and referred to the Development Committee for consideration. Councillor McVeigh provided an overview of the aims and objectives of the notice of motion. He stated that the issue of poverty was one which the Council should aim to consider by formulating a strategy to address need across the city and that it would be prudent for the Council to establish a multi-agency, city-wide task force and forum, to ensure that any initiatives which might be undertaken would be inclusive and developed in partnership.
1.2	The issue has also been discussed at the Party Leaders meeting in February 2013 where it was recognised that the Council carries out a range of functions that contribute to tackling poverty and deprivation as well as various partnership initiatives; such as employability initiatives, early interventions, neighbourhood renewal, fuel poverty etc. Party Leaders requested that further consideration be given to the structures required in the emerging public landscape.
1.3	At the Development Committee on 29 th April, there was discussion about the Council's limited remit to directly tackle poverty and that these powers will grow under the Local Government Reform with the introduction of Community Planning and transfer of functions. The importance of council as a civic leader was also recognised as Council could have greater influence over such matters through partnership and lobbying. The potential for developing a scrutiny-type role in delivering anti-poverty initiatives with partner organisations was raised.

1.4	A series of Party Briefings were undertaken in May 2013, with the final briefing taking place on 10 th June to test the idea of a city-wide poverty taskforce/forum and strategy.
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2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The Council's framework to tackle poverty and social inequalities was completed prior to the implementation of related regional and citywide developments. The multi-faceted and complex nature of poverty and deprivation means that any future Council approach needs to align with policy and programme developments such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welfare Reform Bill - Delivering Social Change agenda - Social Investment Fund - Local Government Reform, particularly the transfer of functions (regeneration) and the introduction of Community Planning - Belfast Strategic Partnership's Framework for Action to Address Life Inequalities - Investment Programme priorities to create jobs and improve skills - Local Area Working and the Area Working Groups
2.2	<p>All parties highlighted that addressing poverty requires a focus on increasing educational levels, aspirations, skills and employability along with enhancing employment opportunities which will create wealth and contribute to improved quality of life and secure sustained improvement in the local economy.</p>
2.3	<p>While all parties agreed on the importance of tackling poverty, there were different opinions about the extent of the Council's role. There was general agreement that the Council has a key role in influencing central government, providing a critical connection to issues at a local level. A number of parties emphasised that the statutory authority to deliver on poverty lies with central government; however, the Council did have a role in creating the conditions to support and enable others to tackle poverty. Other parties emphasised the leadership role of council in creating a city-wide focus on the issue.</p>
2.4	<p>There was agreement that given the complex and multi-faceted nature of poverty, a range of organisations have a role to play in tackling poverty-related issues and a co-ordinated approach is required to support long term change. The role of central government was viewed as critical, particularly in terms of engaging with OFMDFM, DSD, DEL, DE and DETI. In particular, this is a timely opportunity to connect with the Delivering Social Change framework and the 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy as well as the Local Government Reform agenda.</p>
2.5	<p>It was also acknowledged that engagement with the sector and those experiencing poverty would also be important. One of the benefits of a taskforce option was viewed as the opportunity to enable intensive dialogue with those experiencing poverty. The importance of sustained engagement with all sectors and with those experiencing poverty was also highlighted at the Delivering Social Change Conference organised by OFM-DFM earlier this month.</p>
2.6	<p>The need for a long term commitment to create change was noted and that there was no quick-fix or single solution available. The need to sustain momentum in tackling poverty was noted; however, a number of parties raised concern about</p>

	<p>the need to avoid duplicating existing structures, for example, the cross party working group on community planning. The need for co-ordinated, realistic action was noted although no additional resource is available therefore it would have to be delivered within existing budget and resource. There were views that a high profile event could be used to highlight the issue although this was not supported across the board.</p>
2.7	<p>There was a general view that the structures through local area working and community planning provided a useful framework to take forward the poverty agenda.</p>
2.8	<p>The emerging community planning process provides a real opportunity for the Council to take a lead role for the city, maximising the impact of the work of a range of organisations and stakeholders which would include poverty as a key theme to improve social and economic conditions across the city. Community planning and local area planning provides a useful framework to have productive city-wide discussions about what works and how best to deliver change in a holistic way in Belfast.</p>
2.9	<p>In addition, the Belfast: Future City Conference held on 22 May provides a prime opportunity to use the clear support for Belfast City Council to lead, in partnership with others, on the development of shared priorities and outcomes for the city. At this conference the Council committed to lead the process of developing a draft community plan for the city over the course of the year. It is intended that the draft community plan would be available at the next city conference in 2014 for consultation and agreement with key city stakeholders. The multi-faceted nature of poverty means that it relates to a number of other streams of work such as employability, skills, good relations, health, education, regeneration etc. which makes it an integral theme for community planning.</p>
2.10	<p>In order to avoid duplicating structures and to secure a long term commitment to address poverty-related issues in a co-ordinated way it is proposed that a further report is brought back to committee in September detailing the emerging community planning process and how poverty can be taken forward through this process.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	None at this stage. Resource implications will be considered as part of the community planning process

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no relevant equality and good relations implications. Equality and good relations are likely to be supported through a co-ordinated city-wide approach to tackling poverty through the community plan. The emerging actions or programmes to tackle poverty will be subject to the Council's equality and good relations processes.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to note the content of the report and agree to take forward the approach to anti-poverty through the community planning process.

5.2	A more detailed report will be brought back to Committee in September to outline how this will be taken forward in the context of the development of the community plan and resources considered within this context
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6	Decision Tracking	
6.1	Timeline: September 2013	Reporting Officer: John McGrillen

7	Key to Abbreviations	
DSD – Department for Social Development DE – Department for Education DETI – Department for Enterprise, Trade & Investment DEL – Department for Employment & Learning OFMDFM – Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister		