



## Belfast City Council

**Report to:** Development Committee

**Subject:** Poverty/Social Deprivation: Proposed Way Forward

**Date:** 17 September 2013

**Reporting Officer:** John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470

**Contact Officers:** Claire Patterson, Business Research & Development Manager  
ext 3379

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Following the Council Notice of Motion on 'social deprivation' in February and party briefings to test the idea of establishing a city-wide poverty forum/taskforce and the development of a citywide strategy, Committee agreed that poverty should form a key theme within the Council's community planning process and the need to align to the regional Delivering Social Change agenda.
1.2	The Committee will be aware that 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Welfare Reform Bill</li><li>- Delivering Social Change and Together Building a United Community</li><li>- Social Investment Fund</li><li>- Local Government Reform, particularly the transfer of functions (regeneration) and the introduction of Community Planning</li><li>- Belfast Strategic Partnership's Framework for Action to Address Life Inequalities</li><li>- Investment Programme priorities to invest in the city, create jobs and improve skills</li></ul>
1.3	The outcomes from the party briefings were considered by Committee in June 2013. All parties agreed on the importance of tackling poverty and that Council has a key role in influencing central government, providing a critical connection to issues at a local level. It was noted that to address poverty required a focus on increasing educational levels and aspirations, skills and employability along

	with increasing employment opportunities to create wealth to contribute to improve quality of life and to secure sustained improvement in the local economy. The community planning process offers an established governance mechanism and the opportunity to engage with a range of stakeholders.
--	--

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	A recent report by the Child Poverty Action Group (2013) reported that the cost to the economy of dealing with child poverty in Northern Ireland has reached £1bn, with around 97,979 children in Northern Ireland defined as living in poverty. In Belfast around 21,186 children are considered to be living in poverty with an estimated annual cost of 230 million. As is the case across the UK, there is also a growing trend of in-work poverty in NI, particularly with the increase in part time employment and various contractual arrangements.
2.2	A review of how other cities have tackled poverty has been carried out, including Liverpool City Region Child Poverty and Life Chances Commission, Greater Manchester Poverty Commission, Glasgow's Poverty Leadership Panel. These bodies vary in structure and focus but share a common aim, to establish a partnered approach to reducing poverty locally. The recommendations and priorities focus on early family interventions to improve education and life chances, increasing parental employment opportunities, maximising incomes and affordable warmth. It also indicated the importance of engaging with those experiencing poverty to understand the issues and identify potential interventions through co-design.
2.3	<p>Council is already taking forward a range of actions to tackle poverty as outlined in the Framework document. There are a number of partnerships/groups in Belfast that Council is involved with that aim to tackle poverty-related issues such as Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, Belfast Outcomes Group, Bryson House, Belfast Strategic Partnership etc. Council is already developing two key strands of work which includes actions / considerations that should help tackle poverty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tackling health/social inequalities – focusing on food, energy, maximising incomes, family and living conditions. High level milestones have been developed and agreed by Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee, including the establishment of an interagency forum on poverty.</li> <li>- Development of the Integrated Economic Strategy - this recognises the need to support economic growth and create employment opportunities, including enhancing the skills / employability, creating links with the education sector and connecting those from disadvantaged areas to economic opportunities.</li> </ul> <p>As raised during the party briefings, a strategic and inclusive approach is essential to maximise the level of impact and resources required to deliver, therefore this twin track approach will help to ensure that economic growth can benefit those experiencing poverty and that those experiencing poverty are in a better position to avail of the opportunities created.</p>
2.4	Members will be aware that Council has agreed to a joint meeting at political and officer levels between council and OFMDFM to discuss how we can work together on programmes aimed at improving good relations and addressing social/economic problems following the release of Delivering Social Change combined with the Together, Building a United Community Strategy. This is a key strategic opportunity for Belfast in terms of delivering the strategies at a local level and highlighting the significance of the city in delivering this agenda.

2.5	DSDs Urban Regeneration & Community Development Framework includes policy objectives to tackle area based deprivation; improve linkages between areas of need and areas of opportunity and; to develop more cohesive and engaged communities – all of which will play an important part in tackling poverty related issues. The Council’s preparations for Local Government Reform and the transfer of regeneration functions has an important role in shaping a future Belfast approach to the poverty agenda and Delivering Social Change.
2.6	<p>Council officers from Development and Health &amp; Environmental Services have been working to identify the next steps to take forward the poverty agenda within the context of community planning and developments already underway. The proposed next steps are therefore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joint discussion at officer and political levels between BCC and OFMDFM to discuss opportunities for joint working and Belfast’s importance in delivering on the regional ambitions, as agreed by Council.</li> <li>- Assess the scope, resource and feasibility of the practical interventions that have been announced, or are being developed, to address poverty related issues (examples are included in Appendix 1).</li> <li>- It is planned that BCC form an interagency forum on poverty. It is proposed that this be initiated by hosting a broader facilitated workshop session which would include those working directly in the poverty field. This will provide a current assessment of the realities of life, including working life for those experiencing poverty as well as the current constraints in supply and demand in the labour market. The aim of the workshop would be to create greater co-ordination and integration as well as the identification of practical interventions that would make a real difference to existing efforts to tackle poverty at a city level.</li> </ul>
2.7	The Committee is asked to note that a series of engagement events are taking place during the autumn to follow-on from the Future City Conference; continuing the conversation to develop city-wide priorities and a community plan. These include engagement with the anchor institutions and participation in the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge. The proposed facilitated engagement on poverty would also align to this process of engagement with key stakeholders to agree how best city issues can be tackled and progressed in a practical, integrated and realistic way.
2.8	The advent of community planning and transfer of regeneration, including neighbourhood renewal, as a result of Local Government Reform provide the opportunity to take a more co-ordinated approach to planning for the future of the city. Tackling poverty will be an integral component of a community plan and will influence the Council’s future approach to regeneration, employability, social and quality of life issues. The Integrated Economic Strategy and Tackling Health/Social Inequalities programme of work, along with the efforts to integrate with Delivering Social Change provide an opportunity to connect strategy and programme delivery in Belfast.

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	Resources for the engagement event will be met within the current departmental budgets. A cross departmental approach will be adopted to take forward the proposed next steps.

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations considerations attached to this report; however, it would be expected that efforts to tackle poverty would have a positive impact on Section 75 groups.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	Members are asked to agree to the proposed next steps to consider the proposed interventions and to broaden the participation in a facilitated workshop which would support the planned interagency forum on poverty

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
6.1	Timeline: December 2013                      Reporting Officer: John McGrillen