



Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Strategic engagement - <i>Together: Building a United Community</i> and other strategic government programmes
Date:	Friday 23 August 2013
Reporting Officer:	Suzanne Wylie, Director of Health & Environmental Services Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager

Relevant Background Information
<p>The Committee will be aware that the First and Deputy First Ministers jointly launched the <i>Together: Building a United Community</i> strategy at the end of May. The Executive Summary of that document was circulated at the meeting of the Good Relations Partnership on 10 June and a more detailed report was considered at the Partnership's meeting on 12 August (see minutes of that meeting for full report).</p> <p>The strategy represents a key building block in the implementation of the <i>Programme for Government 2011-2015</i> and provides the framework for action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation.</p> <p>It reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and places responsibilities on all government departments, requiring them to work together to ensure that the required outcomes are delivered on the ground.</p> <p>The new strategy will have major implications for all public bodies in NI and, in particular, for local government since councils will have a key role in its delivery.</p> <p>Priority Areas The strategy identifies four key priority areas: children and young people; our shared community; our safe community; and our cultural expression.</p> <p>Implementation The strategy envisages a Panel made up of NI Ministers, plus senior representatives from a range of statutory agencies and community partners, supported by broadly based thematic sub-groups who will develop action plans with associated aims, targets, milestones and resources etc.</p>

Key Issues - Implications for future work and opportunities for strategic alignment
<p>Implementation of Together Building a United Community</p> <p>The Good Relations Partnership welcomed this overarching strategy as a significant step forward by the NI Executive in tackling our community divisions and acknowledged the importance of a central coherent strategic approach, led at the most senior political level, to be delivered through effective and established structures at local level.</p> <p>The strategy underlines the cross-cutting nature of the work required, stressing the need for joint</p>

working and inter-agency collaboration and has implications for the Council as a whole. The programmes to be delivered, of particular interest to the Council, include:

- developing summer schools/camps for young people with a focus on sport
- ensuring that our approach to youth intervention becomes a year round programme
- developing cross-community programmes focusing on reconciliation through sport
- encouraging the use of the arts as a means of improving good relations
- continuing our work round interfaces, aiming to remove barriers and support local communities, through training and employment where possible
- building closer links between community safety and good relations.

The Council will not only be responsible for direct delivery of programmes on the ground but also for supporting local community and voluntary groups, through various Council Departments and a range of funding streams.

The Council is already actively supporting many of the types of initiatives outlined in the document and has ensured that equality and good relations are key principles underpinning our Investment Programme.

Preparing for community planning and links to other strategies

A number of proposals in the *Together: Building a United Community* strategy and its focus on local delivery and improving local outcomes mean that it has great synergy with opportunities presented by local government reform and in particular by the introduction of community planning powers. As Members will be aware, community planning will be a new power given to Councils which will provide a statutory basis for joint working between agencies towards common goals. The strategy also has significant commonality with the Investment Programme and its core principles of good relations and equality, balanced investment and partnership and integration.

In this respect *Together: Building a United Community* is one of a number of regional strategies/programmes, including the *Delivering Social Change Framework* and the *Social Investment Fund*, which provide ideal opportunities for closer working between the Council, government departments and communities in order to deliver improved quality of life across Belfast. There is a real opportunity to reinforce and consolidate strategic programmes currently being driven by Members at a local level such as the implementation of the Investment Programme and leisure transformation.

The six signature projects identified by OFM/DFM under the *Delivering Social Change Framework* are intended to tackle matters such as improving skills, support for families and pathways to employment for young people and echo many of the objectives set by Members as part of the Investment Programme. Members have already highlighted the need to link projects within the *Social Investment Fund* and those within the Investment Programme in order to reinforce and maximise the benefit of both programmes for communities across the city.

As the NI Executive moves towards the development of a new *Programme for Government*, it will become even more important to align strategies and plans at both central and local government levels. It will also be important to demonstrate both the importance of Belfast to delivering regional goals and the practical determination of Belfast City Council to play a key role in delivering these strategies at a local level.

Engagement with OFM/DFM

Given the number of potential linkages between Council's plans and developments at a regional level, appropriate engagement at a political and officer level is crucial to ensure that key priorities are delivered and benefits for local communities maximised. At this formative stage, it is particularly

important that the Council should be closely involved in the planning and preparation of any detailed programmes and action plans arising from the *Together: Building a United Community* strategy.

It is therefore recommended that the Committee writes to OFM/DFM to request a meeting between the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister, the Chairman of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and the Party Group Leaders within Council in order to discuss how the Council and OFM/DFM can work together on programmes aimed at improving good relations and addressing social/economic problems. In particular the discussion should focus on:

- how the Council can assist the NI Executive and the government departments deliver, in a more integrated way, the priorities set out within *Together: Building a United Community*;
- how we can contribute to the *Delivering Social Change Framework*;
- how we can take a more joined up approach to delivering *Social Investment Fund* projects;
- the key strategic investment priorities for the city, in the context of community planning and the development of an economic strategy for Belfast.

It is also recommended that Council officers engage with OFM/DFM officials in order to support this political engagement and that the Chief Executive seeks a meeting to take forward work on options for the delivery of these strategic programmes at a local level.

Resource Implications

None at this stage.

Equality and Good Relations Implications

Expected to be positive. The *Together: Building a United Community* Strategy has been equality screened by OFM/DFM and since its intent is clearly intended to be positive it has been screened out.

Recommendations/Decision required

It is recommended that the Chairman of the Committee writes to OFM/DFM to request a meeting between the Ministers, the Chairman of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and the Party Group Leaders to explore opportunities for more joined up working.

It is also recommended that meetings are held at officer level between OFM/DFM and Council in order to prepare options and recommendations for consideration by Members.

Officers to contact for more information

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