



Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Development of an Interface Strategy for Belfast
Date:	Friday 24 January 2014
Reporting Officer:	Suzanne Wylie, Director of Health and Environmental Services
Contact Officer:	Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Council will be aware of the Notice of Motion from Alderman Ekin which was unanimously agreed by the Council in September 2011:
1.2	"This Council can demonstrate true civic leadership by agreeing to tackle one of the biggest problems which affects all of the citizens of the City, that is, the continued existence of the so called 'Peace Walls'. These walls performed a necessary security purpose in the past in the several interface areas of the City but now serve to increase alienation and to inhibit regeneration and development of those very same areas and the time has now come to seek to move towards their removal.
1.3	The Council agrees to take the lead in devising a strategy which seeks to move towards the removal of a number of these walls within the current Council term. This strategy should be inclusive and include the direct involvement of all appropriate organisations from the business, public and voluntary and community sectors, with the wishes and needs of those people who live in the interface areas being paramount."
1.4	The Motion was referred to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee which agreed that the development of a strategy and framework for action, which seeks to move towards the removal of a number of walls/barriers, should be taken forward by the Good Relations Partnership in conjunction with the Safer City Group.
1.5	The Council's Corporate Plan makes specific reference to interfaces, stating that we commit to lead on an Interfaces Strategy to ensure that we support a shared city.
1.6	Our Investment Programme notes that: "... segregation and division produce significant additional costs in the city. The 'diseconomies of segregation' are borne disproportionately by the most disadvantaged communities. All of this projects a negative backdrop as Belfast presents itself as an outward looking and modern location for living, investment and tourism. We will continue to work with local communities who are seeking to reduce and remove barriers, in the context of local area working. We will support and advocate for a

1.7	<p>number of neighbourhoods in the city, close to interface barriers, to regenerate those neighbourhoods while safely and sensitively working towards removing and reducing barriers.”</p> <p>Members are aware that improving the quality of life and connectivity in the city are clear priorities for the Council and the preparation of a more integrated strategy for interfaces within broader regeneration proposals is timely, given the imminent introduction of community planning and the transfer of regeneration powers which provides the framework for such place shaping actions.</p>
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2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>Interfaces feature prominently in the NI Executive’s recent <i>Together: Building a United Community</i> strategy, which states that:</p> <p>“ In building a safer community, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a 10-year Programme to reduce, and remove by 2023, all interface barriers; and • Create an Interface Barrier Support Package.”
2.2	<p>Funding of approximately £420,000 was previously awarded under Phase 2 of the EU Peace III Programme for work in a number of cluster areas of Belfast identified in previous surveys as being the most likely to be receptive to transformation of barriers. Work over the past 18 months has included changing the appearance of barriers, providing landscaping and other softening features and providing support for local community consultation and visioning exercises. This Peace III funding is due to end in March 2014.</p>
2.3	<p>To date efforts have focused on those areas considered as “early wins” based on Peace III and IFI target areas, using the tried and tested IFI model of community-led delivery, which is generally agreed as being the best model.</p>
2.4	<p>Work on the development of a longer-term integrated multi-agency Interface Strategy is now proceeding under the auspices of <i>TBUC</i> in conjunction with the Department of Justice, the International Fund for Ireland and the NI Housing Executive. The aim is to ensure a holistic approach that eliminates duplication, targets resources more effectively and builds on existing good practice.</p>
2.5	<p>The Department of Justice has assumed the role of lead partner in the development of this Interface Strategy and envisages a co-ordinated delivery programme by a number of interested agencies, including the City Council and NI Housing Executive.</p>
2.6	<p>The DOJ team will apply for additional resources to the OFM/DFM under the <i>United Community</i> framework to cover the cost of this programme. This application will include a bid for sufficient funding to support resources within the Council which are specifically dedicated to working on the interface strategy, in terms of planning, design and delivery. Work to date has been undertaken by one of the Good Relations Officers funded by Peace III but the programme planned will require staff with a mix of skills from a number of different Departments– planning, legal, project management etc.</p>
2.7	<p>OFM/DFM have expressed support for this proposed programme since the interfaces form such a central plank within <i>TBUC</i> and will request and encourage other Government Departments to support it through the release of staff, funding and experience. It is envisaged, for example, that existing expertise available within BRO/DSD will be utilised,</p>

	along with lessons learned from existing and previous programmes, including evidence based decision making and interventions, use of quality visioning tools and effective consultation.
2.8	The Council's current work on tackling sectarianism and promoting positive relationships in the city will continue in parallel with this programme.
2.9	Any programme would be co-designed by both the DOJ and Council. This approach could be regarded as a holistic model of good practice , and if successful could be rolled out NI wide – the OFM/DFM are keen to see how such a model might be used for example in Lurgan/ Portadown.
	Longer term
2.10	In the longer term, when planning and regeneration functions have been fully devolved to local authorities, the Council is likely to continue this central role round interfaces, mainstreaming it within the broader context of community planning/ local area working/local regeneration plans. However, funding physical works will still be required.
2.11	It appears likely that a Peace IV Programme would include a specific programme to tackle interfaces and experience gained at this stage would be crucial.

3	Resource Implications
	None at this stage – the Council's bid will be for funding at 100%.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	This proposal seeks to improve the physical environment and the quality of life of residents from the most deprived communities within the city; any implications will be positive.

5	Recommendations
	That the Committee notes the information in this report and grants authority to proceed on the basis as outlined above; further reports will be submitted in due course.

6	Officers to contact for more information
	Suzanne Wylie, Director of Health & Environmental Services, ext 3260 Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager, ext 6020

7	Key to Abbreviations
BRO:	Belfast Regeneration Office
DOJ:	Department of Justice
DSD:	Department of Social Development
IFI:	International Fund for Ireland
OFM/DFM:	Office of the First Minister/Deputy First Minister
<i>TBUC:</i>	<i>Together: Building a United Community</i> strategy