Appendix 2

SHARED FUTURE

Legislative and policy context to Equality, Good Relations and Shared Space:

At Executive level, there is no direction on what constitutes ‘shared space’. Interpretations vary from neutrality to interculturalism. However, it is worth highlighting that there are legislative and policy frameworks already in place and adopted by the Council in relation to the broad areas of Equality, Good Relations and Shared Space. Members will know that the Council’s approach to Equality and Good Relations is underpinned by our obligations under legislation, and also by a desire amongst Members to demonstrate an active commitment to these ideals.

Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act of 1998 came into force on the 01 January 2000 and placed a statutory obligation on all public authorities, in carrying out their various functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

In addition, without prejudice to this obligation, under section 75 (2) of the NI Act, the Council, as a Public Authority, is also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, and racial group.

These statutory obligations are implemented through Equality Schemes, approved by the Equality Commission, and by screening and carrying out Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) on policies. In the Council’s Equality Scheme, the Council had pledged to produce a Good Relations Strategy which would integrate equality, community relations and cultural diversity within the Council.

In January 2001, The Council demonstrated its commitment to these ideals by adopting “Promoting Good Relations” as a Key Corporate Objective. Immediately after this, in 2002, the Council developed a Good Relations Strategy. In 2003, the Council set up its Good Relations Unit, which incorporated the Good Relations and Equality functions.
Following on from the initial strategy and the out-workings of the Unit, the Council adopted a Good Relations Plan for the City on two occasions, in 2007 and 2011. These Plans involved all Council Departments and a number of other service providers in the development of a collective set of Good Relations actions that would all contribute to the promotion of Good Relations throughout Belfast. These Plans were widely regarded as benchmarks for delivering Good Relations outcomes across the City and the region.

The Council has also adopted the following principles for shared space. It is important to understand that shared space is a place where one's identity can be expressed in an open and non-hostile environment. Shared space should therefore be:

- **Welcoming** - where people feel secure to take part in unfamiliar interactions, and increase an overall sense of shared experience and community;
- **Accessible** – well-connected in terms of transport and pedestrian links within a network of similar spaces across the city and managed to promote maximum participation by all communities;
- **Good quality** – attractive, high quality unique services and well-designed buildings and spaces;
- **Safe** – for all persons and groups, and trusted by both locals and visitors.

The principles within the Good Relations Strategy, the two Good Relations Plans, and its approach to Shared Space also informed the development of the Council’s PEACE III programme. The themes within the PEACE III Plan were as follows:
- Securing Shared City Space
- Transforming Contested Space
- Developing Shared Cultural Space
- Building Shared Organisational Space

In practical delivery terms, the Council develops an annual Good Relations Action Plan, which is based on the Council’s Good Relations and Corporate themes and principles as well as an audit of the Good Relations issues and needs within the City. This Action Plan, which is funded to the tune of 75% by OFM/DFM is now required to be based on the strategic aims within the new Government Strategy *Together; Building a United Community*. These aims comprise of four key pillars: Our Children and Young People; Our Shared Community; Our Safe Community and Our Cultural Expression.

The Council’s annual Action Plan seeks to deliver programmes that can address the issues within the audit and to also challenge others to embed Good Relations and shared space principles into...
all of our activity. The Action Plan is delivered through a grants programme by third party community and voluntary organisations or through direct delivery by Council officers. The Action Plan is targeted at areas such as work around interfaces, bonfires, decade of centenaries, participation & inclusion of migrant and minority ethnic communities, mural replacement programmes, summer interventions and training.

All of these strategies, principles and practical intervention programmes are central to the internal and external work of the Council in its delivery of Good Relations within Belfast.

**Current opportunities:**
Belfast is still a divided City. We know that the legacies of separation, division and conflict still play a huge factor in all aspects of civic and social life, with the following outcomes:

- The costs associated with the historical duplication of services
- The costs of policing division and associated criminal justice costs,
- A loss of investment and tourism
- Costs associated with a segregated housing and education system
- Damage to the reputation of the City and the country
- The human cost of conflict
- Costs associated with conflict related illness, trauma and other health costs
- The cost of young people leaving to seek an education and a career elsewhere

These costs impact on most people within Belfast, but particularly in areas of deprivation, where the quality of life and health & well-being for residents is significantly poorer than for people in other areas. Most of these areas of deprivation are in and around interface barriers, the physical legacy and manifestation of division and separation.

The Council has invested millions of pounds through its Investment Programme, Local Investment Fund and its City Investment Fund, along with other schemes. These schemes have delivered significant improvements within communities across the whole of the City.

By reasserting the central outcome of Good Relations into Council activity as we continue to develop the City, there exists a real opportunity to build Good Relations within and between communities for the common good. This was reinforced throughout the recent Belfast Conversations events in which the importance of promoting good community relations was a central theme. Therefore the promotion of good community relations will continue to be a core theme within the Belfast Agenda and Corporate Strategies.
In order to promote sharing and interdependence, the Belfast Agenda, Community Planning, PEACE IV and City Regeneration strategies that are being developed at a corporate level, need to have Good Relations outcomes at their core. Having Good Relations and shared space outcomes at the heart of these developments can contribute to the creation of a City that is confidently emerging from the legacies of separation, division and conflict. For example, the City Centre Regeneration Strategy has “creating shared space and social impact” as one of its 8 core principles.

Opportunities for transforming contested space, promoting shared space and embedding Good Relations outcomes must be developed at the beginning of any programme or project.

**Potential Options**

Therefore, by reasserting the commitment of the Council to Good Relations and Shared Space outcomes, through its key corporate initiatives and strategies such as Community Planning, City Regeneration, PEACE IV and the Belfast Agenda, the Council can continue to demonstrate its commitment to improving the quality of life and health & well being for all of our citizens. A new Good Relations Plan for the City will add value to these other Council initiatives.

In addition, the Council may wish to consider the attached Shared Future Policy Proofing Assessment template in appendix 1 used by the Department of Justice as a mechanism through which Council policies can be assessed for their potential to create shared space. This would enable officers to look at decision making on potential projects and policies through a shared future lens and if required, to introduce any additional or mitigating measures in order to achieve balance in Council initiatives.

Or alternatively, the Council may wish to incorporate the intention within the Shared Future Policy Proofing Assessment template into the EQIA and Equality Screening process to support greater consideration of the impact of projects and policies on their potential to promote better community relations and/or shared space.