

## Belfast City Council

### Response to the Department of the Environment Consultation Paper: Local Government (Community Planning Partners) Order (NI) 2015

**DRAFT**

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Summary of Key points</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Council recommends that the underlying principle for the identification of community planning partners be that they are selected based on their contribution to the achievement of community planning outcomes.</li><li>• The governance and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland is different to that in other places. Our local councils do not have the same range of functions and responsibilities as their counterparts in other regions. As a result there are clear gaps between the proposed list of statutory community planning partners listed in the draft regulations and the range of function / issues that will need to be included in a community plan. For example, there is no representation in respect of roads and transport or skills and employment.</li><li>• Government Departments have not been included in the statutory partners list; yet in Northern Ireland they are responsible for local service delivery in areas such as health, roads, education and employment and will therefore play a key role in supporting delivery at a local level and helping to align priorities and strategic policy setting at the regional level. Specific consideration should be given to naming key Government Departments and/or operating units to ensure community will work effectively given the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland.</li><li>• Belfast City Council strongly recommends the inclusion of OFMDFM, the Department for Employment and Learning; Transport NI and the NI Transport Holding Company to ensure that these core functions will have a statutory requirement to participate in community planning. Also, given the delay in the transfer of regeneration functions, it is recommended that the Department for Social Development is also included as a partner.</li><li>• The Council emphasises the importance of ensuring effective dialogue and collaboration between central government and local government, through the Minister / Member led Partnership Panel and at officer level, and also in time, supported by a regional performance management framework.</li><li>• The Council recommends that it should be for each council area and partnership to agree how the partners should meet and convene, including the levels of involvement and partnership structures. This should be included in the draft guidance which is currently under development.</li></ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>General Comments</b>
	<p>The consultation issued by the Department of the Environment (the Department) regarding the proposed specification of community planning partners is a welcome step in the ongoing development of community planning within Northern Ireland. Belfast City Council looks forward to working with the Department to help ensure the goals of community planning are met and that a fit for purpose and effective process is implemented.</p> <p><b><i>The Importance of Community Planning Partners</i></b></p> <p>Belfast City Council believes that over time community planning will demonstrate that collaboration and joined-up working is the best way to make a positive difference to the lives of local people. However, we also</p>

feel that in the first instance, community planning will require legislative support to help establish the conditions for effective community planning and partnership working. It is important that both the enabling legislation and statutory guidance provide a strong foundation upon which to build the relationships and practice of community planning. By specifying partners at this early stage it sends out a clear message and requirement for full and active involvement. It also helps establish the shared ownership and responsibility which will be necessary for effective community planning.

Whilst the rationale used by the Department for naming partners is helpful, we believe that the starting criteria and underlying principle for identifying and involving community planning partners should be based on their contribution to achieving the agreed community planning outcomes. This shifts the focus to desired end results (outcomes) and then on who needs to work together to achieve them.

*Belfast City Council therefore recommends that the underlying principle for identifying and involving community planning partners should be based on their contribution to achieving the agreed community planning outcomes.*

### **The Northern Ireland context**

Partnership and participation within the current Northern Ireland context is not the same as other jurisdictions – the legislative framework therefore needs to reflect this. Any enabling legislation intended to drive and support community planning will need to address Northern Ireland’s unique circumstances. This is extremely important given that even after local government reform, local councils in Northern Ireland will not have the same range of powers as their counterparts in other places. As a result, there are clear gaps between the range of functions covered by councils and the proposed statutory community planning partners outlined in the draft legislation; for example, roads and transport, skills and employment.

It is imperative that the statutory partner legislation and the statutory community planning guidance address this issue. Developing a fit for purpose legislative framework for Northern Ireland will require a more creative approach and a willingness to develop new solutions.

Already, based on our emerging approach to community planning to date, we have identified clear gaps between the functions and partners that would need to be actively involved and accountable under a community planning process for Belfast and the list of proposed statutory partners. This is due to the different governance and service delivery arrangements that exist here in Northern Ireland. This is explored in more detail below in response to the consultation questions (see response to Question 2.)

### **Role of the Government Departments**

Government Departments are required to promote and encourage community planning, and have regard to the implications of community plans. The consultation states that the role of the Government Departments is distinct but complementary to that of statutory partners, and therefore, they have not been included in the draft statutory partners list. However, it is clear that they will need to play a key role in supporting delivery at local level and helping to align priorities and strategic policy setting at the regional level. This is particularly important for community planning in Northern Ireland where the government departments actually deliver a range of local services that in other jurisdictions would be delivered by local councils or other statutory partners. This therefore requires a different approach to be taken to the involvement of departments, or parts of departments; and must be focused and driven by the need to involve the services and functions required to achieve better outcomes.

Consequently, the Council believes that appropriate elements of Departments should be designated as community planning partners to ensure those departments participate and engage beyond mere consultation. We have therefore highlighted in our response to the posed consultation questions, those functions and Departments which we believe should be designated community planning partners. We therefore request that further consideration is given to how the role of departments can be reflected in both legislation and guidance and would welcome further engagement on this issue. The Council also recommends that Community Planning should be a key consideration in any future changes to departmental structures.

**Other Sectors**

In this consultation the Department acknowledges that other sectors will have a role to play in community planning. We appreciate that the statutory designation of community planning partners must be limited to public sector bodies but welcome the Department’s recognition of the important role that the business, voluntary and community sectors can play. We await the publication of the draft statutory community planning guidance, which we hope will provide further clarification on how wider partnership working will be supported at a policy level.

**Statutory Guidance**

In considering the draft legislation it becomes apparent that the specification of statutory partners, whilst important, will not guarantee the successful delivery of community planning. Therefore, the statutory guidance will need to play a critical role in helping to clarify and strengthen partnership working and processes. It is important that both the enabling legislation and statutory guidance provide a strong foundation upon which to build the relationships and practice of community planning.

The community planning partners together must be able to ensure that:

- a) each district community plan is accountable and influential and carries with it sufficient authority to enable successful implementation; and
- b) that decisions and actions are managed on an ongoing basis so that each district community plan can be effectively delivered and implemented.

However, there is a risk that naming a large number of statutory organisations in the Order will make community planning unwieldy and unproductive. Therefore, in keeping with our recommended principle of focusing on what is needed to make community planning work locally, we recommend that a clear rationale for designating statutory partners be agreed coupled with flexibility thereafter for each council area to identify optimum partnership structures and levels of involvement.

For community planning to be effective, partnerships will need to fulfil two distinct roles – setting the policy direction and managing local delivery. This may mean that different organisations will be involved at different stages or in different ways. However, it is essential that the right people who can make key decisions, in line with the local community planning priorities, are at the table. Ideally the guidance should help clarify what is expected from organisations and the level of seniority required, whilst also enabling partnerships the flexibility to establish partnership arrangements that are fit for purpose in each local area rather than a single partnership and one-size fits all approach.

**Consultation Questions**

**1. Do you agree with the list of bodies to be named as community planning partners?**

The organisations that are proposed as statutory partners are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Education and Library Boards*</li> <li>• The Health and Social Care Trusts</li> <li>• Public Health Agency</li> <li>• Health and Social Care Board</li> <li>• Police Service of Northern Ireland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Ireland Housing Executive</li> <li>• Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service</li> <li>• Invest Northern Ireland</li> <li>• Northern Ireland Tourist Board</li> </ul>
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\*Subject to amendment should the legislation to establish a new education authority obtain Royal Assent by January 2015

Belfast City Council agrees that those included in this list should be designated statutory partners. However, it should be for each council area and partnership to agree how the partners should meet and convene, including levels of involvement and partnership structures. The guidance which is currently being

developed should provide clarification on this.

**2. Do you think that other organisations should be named as community planning partners, and if so, why?**

As mentioned above, we feel that the current list contains clear service and function gaps when assessed against the likely quality of life issues that community planning will need to address. Achieving the community planning goals of improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area will be challenging, particularly as environmental and economic issues are so underrepresented in terms of the current council functions and proposed list of statutory community planning partner organisations.

The ability to deliver meaningful outcomes will be predicated on the involvement of government departments. Whilst this is an issue that the Partnership Panel will undoubtedly seek to address in the coming months; Belfast requests that the Department secures a commitment from the Executive and the Departments to look at this in an inclusive, creative and pragmatic manner. The end focus should be on how governance and public services within Northern Ireland can be enabled to work in partnership, through the mechanism of community planning to deliver a real difference to local people.

As a minimum, council would expect this to be addressed through **the statutory guidance – which must be extended to government departments.**

We particularly wish to highlight the examples of employment / skills and transport to demonstrate why a more creative and fit for purpose approach to the involvement of government departments in any future community planning structures is required within Northern Ireland. These are two issues that are important to competitiveness and quality of life in Belfast and have also emerged as important matters for local people following our recent Belfast resident survey. It is difficult to see how community planning will help address these key issues of concern without the active participation of the government departments who have the responsibility for those functions. Whilst we are confident of developing meaningful relationships and active partnership, there is a risk that without a mechanism to support their involvement progress may be hampered.

There is also a clear link and synergy between the outcomes-based approach of community planning and some of the key programmes being implemented by OFMDFM, including Delivering Social Change and Together Building United Communities. There is also a clear opportunity to maximise the benefit of community planning by connecting it to the development of the next Programme for Government.

In the light of the delay in the transfer of regeneration functions and of the on-going need for a close relationship in terms of regeneration and community development policy and for the alignment of outcomes in these critical areas of work, it is also recommended that DSD is included as a partner.

Belfast City Council therefore recommends that the following Government Departments be designated in the Order as statutory community planning partners:

- Department for Employment and Learning
- Transport NI
- NI Transport Holding Company
- OFMDFM
- DSD

The Council also recommends that consideration also be given as to how a mechanism to enable senior officer level dialogue and collaboration between central and local government officials in addition to the Minister / Member led Partnership Panel might work.

Additionally, the Council also recommends that consideration be given the development of a statutory-based regional performance management framework which connects community planning outcomes across different tiers of government and which supports partners in working towards shared targets. In other areas this has been a cornerstone of progress and would be particularly important in Northern Ireland where responsibility for key services is still relatively distributed and where accountability is potentially diffused.