



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Update on Belfast Poverty Commission</b>
<b>Date:</b>	25th March, 2022
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Claire Patterson, Inclusive Growth Policy & Programme Officer

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	To update the Committee on the initial engagement sessions carried out by with the Poverty Truth Network to explore the potential to establish a Belfast Poverty Commission to support the Council's work on Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty and to consider next steps.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. agree that officers continue to engage with partners and those engaged in poverty-related initiatives in Belfast to identify how a Poverty Commission could be adapted to work in Belfast and secure buy-in to that approach; and</li><li>ii. recommend the inclusion of establishing a Belfast Poverty Commission as an identified workstream in the Belfast Agenda to aim to address poverty and tackle</li></ul>

	<p>inequalities. This approach would require CPP agreement to collectively meet the resourcing requirements for a poverty commission.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Poverty Truth Network helps cities to determine whether a Poverty Truth Commission would be right for their local area. Poverty Truth Network accompany cities at every stage of their journey from asking ‘<i>whether a Poverty Truth Commission could happen here</i>’ through to the establishment of a commission. The Poverty Truth Network is a registered charity that supports Poverty Truth Commissions and encourages them to work together. Further information is available at: <a href="https://povertytruthnetwork.org/commissions/what-is-a-poverty-truth-commission/">https://povertytruthnetwork.org/commissions/what-is-a-poverty-truth-commission/</a></p>
3.2	<p>Following the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting in December 2021, four initial engagement sessions were organised for the Poverty Truth Network to engage with key stakeholders in January and March 2022. Stakeholders included Members, community planning partners and the VCSE Panel as well as government departments (Department for Communities and the Executive Office). The purpose of these sessions was to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hear the experience from the Poverty Truth Network about what a Poverty Truth Commission is.</li> <li>- Consider if this is an approach that could be adapted for Belfast</li> <li>- Consider whether the timing is right for it and who would need to own/drive it</li> </ul> <p>A separate session was also hosted by NICVA.</p>
3.3	<p>The Committee will recall that a phased approach is supported by the Poverty Truth Network:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishment of a start-up group - to host, develop and facilitate the establishment of the Commission.</li> <li>- Recruitment of commissioners – those with lived experience of poverty (15 people), and civic/business commissioners, including the VCSE sector (15 people). These 30 individuals should reflect the demographic make-up of Belfast.</li> <li>- Commission implementation – full commission conversations and issue groups formed.</li> <li>- Closing event for the Commission – to communicate the findings and commit to plans to embed changes.</li> </ul>

	<p>The City may decide to run another Commission in subsequent years, for example, Leeds is now running its third Commission.</p>
3.4	<p>The Belfast Poverty Commission, if established, would be responsible for setting their agenda and their own work. The approach is a 2–3-year commitment, focusing on creating a cultural shift at the level of the individuals and organisations participating as well as at a policy and societal/city level, in terms of changing language and attitudes. It’s a deliberate process to build relationships, trust and capacity of those involved in order to understand the issues deeply before moving to solutions and therefore requires the personal commitment of all those who sit on the commission.</p>
3.5	<p>A key commitment in the Belfast Agenda and Council’s Inclusive Growth Strategy is to strengthen civic voice and to enable us and our partners to tackle poverty and inequality in the city. A Belfast Poverty Commission would seek to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthen and diversify civic voice.</li> <li>- Build capacity of participants and shared understanding of the issues faced by those living in poverty to inform policy, programmes, service delivery.</li> <li>- Create cultural change at an individual, organisation and city level.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p>Establishing a Belfast Poverty Commission would provide a mechanism for the Council and Community Planning Partnership to design and test a model of engagement to enable individuals who are seldom heard to share their experiences and views on policy/service design issues that are important to them in order to help inform and improve them.</p>
3.7	<p>The following provides a summary of the key points raised in the initial engagement sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Poverty Commission must sit alongside existing structures aligning and enhancing existing work rather than displacing, replacing or adding layers of governance.</li> <li>- It must recognise and connect to the strong, established community networks across the city to ensure the Commission and its work is knitted in.</li> <li>- There is a range of work across the city on poverty-related issues which a Poverty Commission could enhance.</li> <li>- The Commission and its Commissioners must reflect Belfast – the Commission must look and feel like the people of the city</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organisational commitment is essential to support the commissioners, particularly local 'community commissioners', to develop and fulfil their role on the Commission.</li> <li>- Assurance that there is buy-in, resource and commitment to the process, including the co-design nature of the process.</li> <li>- Build on the experience and learning from Belfast based initiatives as well as the impact that Poverty Commissions have had elsewhere.</li> <li>- It was welcomed that the Commission is a timebound programme, over a 3-year period, as a means of keeping it focused and 'fresh'.</li> </ul>
3.8	<p>The Committee will be aware that the Department for Communities is considering a regional approach to establishing a poverty commission, based on the recommendations in the Report from the Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Panel. Initial conversations with DfC have indicated that should Belfast go ahead with a Poverty Commission, they would be keen that this informs the regional strategy and approach. Any Belfast Poverty Commission must be positioned to align with these plans as well as the Belfast Community Planning structures, particularly the VCSE Panel.</p>
3.9	<p>Feedback from all the engagement sessions indicated that a significant focus on poverty in the city is now imperative at a strategic and practical level. There was support for the Poverty Commission approach; however further engagement with stakeholders is required to ensure that the approach is owned by partners and that the process is co-designed with partners / stakeholders. The inclusion of a workstream in the refresh of the Belfast Agenda to explore and establish a Belfast Poverty Commission would provide the means to continue the conversations to develop an approach that works for Belfast.</p>
3.10	<p>It is important to note that this process should not detract from the ongoing efforts to tackle poverty and provide practical support to those who are experiencing poverty across the city, for example fuel poverty. However, the Commission will provide a mechanism to support, inform and shape these efforts in the medium and longer term, while also increasing and improving our civic engagement and involvement.</p>
3.11	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>Officer time will be required to support the ongoing engagement and development of the approach. The Poverty Truth Network estimate that financial resource of approx. £110,000 is required for three part-time staff members (approx.) to recruit the commissioners and to facilitate and support the Poverty Commission. If included within the Belfast Agenda action</p>

3.12	<p>plan, CPP agreement would be sought to collectively meet the resourcing requirements for the poverty commission.</p> <p>An organisation will also be required to 'host' the commission, acting a base for the staff team and to provide equipment/materials. In-kind support from partners will also be required, for example, provision of meeting space.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>The programme to develop a Belfast Poverty Commission will be subject to equality, good relations and rural needs considerations.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	None