Contents

Securing shared city space 5
Transforming contested space 6
Developing shared cultural space 7
Building shared organisational space 8
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) 9
Context of the development of the Good Relations Plan
  1 Background 11
  2 Working in partnership 12
  3 A Good Relations Plan for Belfast 13
  4 Gathering the evidence and building the partnerships for delivery 13
  5 Our city and its continuing challenges 14
  6 Moving from conflict management to city transformation 15
  7 Developing a new collaborative agenda for city transformation 17
  8 An agenda for action 17
  9 Today's action, tomorrow's legacy – areas for action 18
    9.1 Better leadership 18
    9.2 Better opportunities for success 19
    9.3 Better care for Belfast's environment 20
    9.4 Better support for people and communities 21
    9.5 Better services and better value for money 21
  10 Next steps and developing actions 21
  11 Monitoring and evaluation 22
  12 Equality impact 22
    12.1 Consultation carried out to date and further consultation 22
  13 Conclusion 22
Promoting Equality and Good Relations is key to improving the quality of life for everyone in the city. This Good Relations Plan sets out a vision for Belfast for the next 3 years as we strive to make Belfast a better place in which to live, work, socialise and do business.

We will ensure that fairness, equality and respect are at the heart of everything that we do – values that are central to our policy and underpin all of our activities.

We are committed to improving the quality of life now and for future generations for the people of Belfast. We want to shape Belfast so that its spaces and services meet the needs and ambitions of all people of the city. We will provide leadership and strategic direction to develop and manage the city and we will continue to work with other organisations to improve good relations, promote equality, generate wealth, protect the environment and encourage local people to participate more in the civic life of their city.

We will facilitate a partnership approach from a number of agencies including statutory, voluntary, community and faith based groups to effect change in our city and address issues such as sectarianism and racism.

Despite the economic challenges currently faced by the city, we believe that Equality and Good Relations are central to economic regeneration, attracting talent, sustaining inward investment, generating significant tourism and tackling poverty.

There are four themes that this plan will be based on that will help us achieve this. They are:

- Securing shared city space
- Transforming contested space
- Developing shared cultural space
- Building shared organisational space

These themes reflect the current challenges that the city faces as it continues with the process of transformation.

The principal funders of this plan are the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, the European Regional Development Fund as well as Belfast City Council.
Securing shared city space

In Belfast segregation remains high, with significant costs to those who live in the vicinity of areas such as interfaces. The impact on relationships, labour markets, the inefficient use of services and facilities, significant urban blight and poverty are all characteristics of divided areas. Physical and psychological barriers between communities make travel around parts of the city difficult and has resulted in people avoiding certain areas perceived to be unsafe.

One of the most damaging effects of residential segregation is that many of Belfast’s citizens feel they have access only to limited parts of the city. A key element of a successful good relations plan would be to create greater mobility across the city. We need to increase people’s confidence and perceptions of safety in accessing services beyond their traditional geographical sphere. Reconnecting the city of Belfast is a critical element in improving good relations and moving towards a cohesive, forward looking and competitive city.

Apart from the obvious social benefits, there is a strong business case for sharing over separation. Shared space means a place where different forms of cultural heritage can be expressed in an environment that is safe, welcoming, good quality and accessible for all members of society.

These principles will be central to how the city progresses over the next number of years, with mobility a key element in securing shared space.

To move towards securing shared city space our priorities are:

- To mainstream Good Relations within the Council’s service delivery
- To develop Equality and Good Relations as a central component to all public service delivery within Belfast
- To work with other partners across the city to support initiatives that will consolidate existing shared spaces and create new shared spaces within the city

What we are going to do in 2011-2014

- Work with other Council Departments to embed Good Relations activity into their Departmental Plans and service provision
- Continued on-going engagement with all Section 75 Groups within Belfast to ensure equal access to services
- Deliver actions within the District Council Good Relations Programme that support the shared space agenda
- Deliver the Securing Shared City Space actions within Phase II of the Belfast Peace plan funded under PEACE III
- Facilitate the inter-agency group within the Growing a Shared City Programme
The reality of contested space has led to a duplication of services in order to provide for communities that live side by side but do not integrate or share easily. Transforming contested space requires communities to create new lines of contact and develop meaningful engagement and interaction with one and other, moving from conflict management to city transformation.

To become an outward and forward-looking city-region, Belfast must re-orientate its priorities from short term safety to a confident engagement with the world. A vital part of that agenda is improving the attractiveness of the city for all our citizens, for visitors, investors and new communities.

A key element of a successful good relations plan would be to transform contested space within the city, to tackle the visible manifestations of sectarianism, racism, intolerance and other forms of prejudice. There are many physical barriers which were once seen as short term protection for communities but have now become part of the permanent structural landscape. We must support communities and find alternatives to physical barriers with the objective of creating secure and safe communities which will make physical barriers irrelevant. We must invest in people, organisations and programmes to alleviate violence, transform contested space and build positive relationships at the local level.

To support the transformation of contested space our priorities are:

- Setting a positive civic leadership political agenda with regard to transforming contested space
- Supporting better community and race relations within the city through initiatives to tackle sectarian and racist attitudes and behaviour
- Participating in and supporting multi-agency approaches to interventions in and around interfaces
- Working with communities who are seeking the removal of barriers to provide a package of initiatives to support progress in this arena
- Working with local people to support the transformation of local neighbourhoods into spaces that are safe and welcoming

What we are going to do in 2011 - 2014

- Delivery of the Leadership Development Programme as part of the Growing A Shared City project
- Administration of intervention funding streams
- Support local initiatives that seek to build Good Relations at the local level through the allocation of good relations and PEACE III small grants
- Reduce tensions at interface areas by the delivery of the PEACE III funded tension monitoring project
- Promote the positive expression of cultural identity through the delivery of the bonfire project
- Develop a Council-wide programme to support communities seeking barrier removal
- Support capacity building of local communities through the delivery of training on tackling issues around hate crime and promoting diversity
- Contribute to initiatives aimed at interface communities through participation in the city-wide interface working group.
Developing an environment of peaceful interaction and social stability is crucial to transforming Belfast and sustaining peace and prosperity in the city. We need to create spaces for communities to interact and make connections with each other, moving from parallel living to meaningful relationships and casual interactions. As the city’s population becomes more diverse, the validity of all cultures and faiths must be affirmed.

Prejudice and intolerance because of one’s cultural background is still a blight on the city – manifested in barriers, flags, murals and territoriality. One of the most important elements of promoting shared cultural space is supporting communities in the positive expression of their cultural heritage. Diversity is an important aspect of our city’s future success and international experience demonstrates that the cities that are most successful are those that have embraced diversity. The academic Richard Florida\(^1\) states that:

“Places that offer a high quality of life can best accommodate diversity; enjoy the greatest success in talent attraction and retention and in the growth of their technology-intensive economic activities”.

The time-frame of this plan will also see the start of the historic decade of commemorations in which the city has an unprecedented opportunity to look to our past in order to create a better future.

A successful Good Relations Plan would see all cultures, faiths and traditions expressing their identity and heritage positively within the city.

To move towards developing shared cultural space our priorities are:

- Support communities in the positive expression of their cultural heritage
- Ensure that there is a city-wide response to the needs of migrant and minority ethnic communities
- Work with and support communities at a neighbourhood level in the delivery of local cultural events and programmes
- Provide civic leadership on a decade of events to remember the past
- Continue to articulate the links between diversity and a successful city

What we are going to do in 2011 - 2014

Deliver the PEACE III Council led bonfire programme, supporting communities in the positive expression of cultural heritage

- Facilitate the PEACE III funded Migrant Forum and projects to support the integration and inclusion of migrant and minority ethnic communities
- Support communities in the delivery of local events and programmes through Good Relations and PEACE III funding
- Deliver the Council’s Decade of Historic Centenaries programme
- Oversee the delivery of PEACE III funded initiatives aimed at promoting shared cultural space
- Deliver the Leadership programme for elected members under the Growing A Shared City Project
There is also a continued need to invest in the capacity of the political and statutory leadership to provide space for adapting to a diverse, outward looking city. The Growing a Shared City project will include as a key element, a development programme for elected Members on the social and economic value of good relations, community cohesion and shared space in the city.

To support the building of shared organisational space our priorities are:
- Mainstreaming good relations within the service delivery of Belfast City Council
- Equip staff within the Council with the skills necessary for service delivery in a shared city
- Target service provision across the Council at areas most in need, such as interface areas
- Support the delivery of a city-wide approach to the promotion of Equality and Good Relations
- Ensure that everyone within Belfast has equal access to Council services

What are we are going to do in 2011 - 2014
- Work with other Council Departments to embed Good Relations activity into their Departmental Plans and service provision
- Deliver Good Relations awareness training to staff on a monthly basis
- Develop a cross departmental council-wide group to develop a Council policy on interface areas and better coordinate service provision in such areas
- Facilitate inter-agency dialogue on creating shared organisational space as part of the PEACE III funded Growing a Shared City project
- Support community based initiatives to create institutional capacity through funding opportunities under Phase II of PEACE III
- Equality proofing of all Council initiatives and policies.

Building shared organisational space

All service providers need to be fit for purpose in the delivery of services to the diverse community that they serve. The Council will lead the process of building and sustaining institutions which are fair and accessible to all, reflecting the diversity of the city. We will encourage projects that build the capacity of organisations to be able to challenge prejudice, intolerance, sectarianism and racism in society. Through our programmes, we will promote new learning stimulate debate and challenge thinking.
Monitoring and Evaluation is a key part of the Good Relations Plan, to ensure proper implementation and continuous improvement in the light of emerging evidence. Progress on the action plan will be reported to the Good Relations Partnership on a quarterly basis. The Good Relations Partnership, which is made up of representatives of all parties represented on Council as well as representatives of the community, business, trades union, statutory, government, faith and minority ethnic sectors within the city, will be accountable for the delivery of this Good Relations Plan.

### Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The actions laid out in the plan contain activity that is both internal to the Council as well as external in partnership with other agencies and communities. Therefore, the delivery of the plan will be measured on the following indicators:

**Internal:**
- 300 staff trained in Good Relations awareness training per year of the plan
- 3 other Council Departments delivering Good Relations Projects under Phase II of the PEACE III programme
- 15 elected members participating on the Leadership Development Programme
- Annual reductions in the number of Equality complaints received
- 5 cultural diversity civic events delivered per year of the plan

**External:**
- 10% year on year reduction in the number of bonfire related incidents recorded against groups participating in the Council’s Bonfire Programme
- 10 new community groups availing of the Council’s Good Relations Fund per year of the plan
- 5 paramilitary-type murals removed per year of the plan
- Annual reductions in the number of sectarian and racist hate crimes recorded by the PSNI
- 100 community organisations financially supported by the Good Relations fund per year of the plan
- 150 community practitioners trained in Ending Hate and Migrant Awareness training per year of the plan
Context of the development of the Good Relations Plan
1 Background

We want to help shape Belfast so that its infrastructure, spaces and services meet the needs and ambitions of all people who live in, work in, invest in, study in and visit the city.

In an ever-changing, global environment, cities need to be vibrant, attractive places to live, work and invest in. They need to be socially and economically stable, connected and able to provide the optimal life opportunities for its citizens as well as being attractive to investors and visitors. The health of any society is influenced not only by the measurement of statistics such as life expectancy, disease and physical well-being, but by the quality of relationships that allow free transactions in daily and civic life.

We acknowledge that developing a culture of peaceful tolerance, interaction and social stability is the crucial key to sustaining prosperity in Belfast. Emerging from over three decades of political conflict, Belfast has its own unique features and obstacles in transforming itself to become a tolerant, clean, green and safe city. However, since the Council published its first Good Relations Strategy in 2003, there has been significant progress.

Due to enormous efforts in many communities and sectors, inter-community relations have continued to grow and strengthen. Over the last five years, Belfast has seen major retail and residential developments and an increase in the financial services sector. However, it is still a city of contrasts and there are many areas within the city where the change has been much slower and deprivation remains. The continuing challenge facing Belfast is to ensure that all of its citizens are able to share the new opportunities and ‘feel-good’ factor.

Good relations and community cohesion therefore remain vital ingredients for the city’s future development. A successful good relations agenda in Belfast means not only resolving the problems of the past, but also dealing with new sets of issues thrown up by a volatile, rapidly changing world.

As the elected body for Belfast, we provide leadership and strategic direction to shape, develop and manage the city. Belfast faces distinctive problems and challenges. We will continue to work with other organisations to address these and improve good relations, promote equality, generate wealth, protect the environment and encourage local people to participate more in the civic life of their city.

We published the first Good Relations Plan for the city in 2007 and this update provides a refreshed framework for continuing and galvanising this important work in this great city.

Belfast and its people have achieved much in the past decade. In the next decade, there is more within our grasp.
Context of the development of the Good Relations Plan

2 Working in partnership

The Good Relations Partnership of Belfast City Council is responsible for delivering the Good Relations Plan. From the outset, we acknowledged that social divisions in Belfast were deep-rooted and that it would require a partnership approach from a number of agencies including statutory, voluntary and community to effect change in our city and address issues such as sectarianism and racism. Since 2002, the Council has co-operated and partnered with a range of other agencies in the city in examining and tackling the issues that cause division.

The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is the principal funder of this Good Relations Plan. Within the Programme for Government 2008-11, OFMDFM made a commitment to the cross-cutting theme of: ‘A shared and better future for all’. OFMDFM has consulted on a draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI), which will have a significant impact on good relations work in Belfast. This Good Relations Plan will operate in tandem with the future CSI programme and its emphasis on tackling the continuing problems of sectarianism, racism and intolerance in our society.

In 2007 the Council formed a successful partnership with the other major local statutory bodies, developing the first Good Relations Plan for Belfast. We involved a number of Chief Executives in discussions about broader good relations issues at a policy level. Together, our work in this area was cited as “an excellent model” of practice in the Government’s ‘A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland’ (2005).

We have built on and maintained this good practice with PEACE III funding secured for the Growing a Shared City project. This project will add value to how we build the capacity of our Elected Members, staff and key partners to develop a shared society.
3 A Good Relations Plan for Belfast
The first Good Relations Plan for Belfast in 2007 stressed the importance of developing a citizenship for the diverse citizens of Belfast, with a common civic identity, as well as sustaining and expanding public spaces, welcoming, safe and accessible to all. The plan outlined a vision for the city as:

Belfast City is One City. It is:

- A Shared City - Belfast is a city where every citizen knows that they belong and can participate together in the life of the city. The test for the city is whether it treats all its citizens, in particular the more vulnerable communities, groups and individuals, equally and with fairness.

- A Peaceful City - There are real differences of aspiration and experience. Belfast is committed to change through exclusively non-violent means, with dialogue, partnership and tolerance of others, in which all views are considered and accepted as valid. Everyone is treated fairly and equitably by the law and the law is respected by everyone.

- A Welcoming City - We come from different backgrounds and traditions, each of which has a place and which has helped to contribute to the creation of a diverse and vibrant city. There is thus a collective responsibility on all of us to ensure there is a place across the city for identities and cultures other than our own.

- An Open City - The public places of the city and its institutions belong to, should be accessible to, trusted by and welcoming to all of those who live in, work in, and visit the city.

Within that first plan, the Council agreed that in the absence of a shared moral or political consensus, a ‘public values’ approach would underpin this vision. The values considered particularly relevant to Belfast were consent, the rule of law, inclusion, diversity and pluralism. Fundamentally, the principle of equality of opportunity underpins the Council’s approach to all good relations issues; there can be no good relations without equality.

It is our belief that this vision and these values continue to be pertinent for Belfast and will remain in place for this updated edition of the city’s Good Relations Plan.

4 Gathering the evidence and building the partnerships for delivery
The new Good Relations Plan has been driven by the Council’s Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and the Good Relations Partnership and is the culmination of months of strategic analysis, discussion and refinement with the political parties, across the organisation and with our external partners. Ultimate responsibility for the delivery of the plan will rest with the Good Relations Partnership and will be monitored through regular reports to the Council’s Chief Officers’ Management Team.

We have engaged in sustained discussion with our partners on the challenges facing the city, as well as the solutions needed. Partners involved in the development process of the previous and this refreshed Good Relations Plan include:

- Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
- Belfast Metropolitan College
- Department for Social Development and Belfast Regeneration Office
- NI Housing Executive
- Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister
- Police Service of N Ireland
- Community Relations Council
- Belfast Education & Library Board
- Strategic Investment Board

We commissioned a series of research reports which have examined various aspects of the good relations agenda and given us a good evidence base upon which to move forward.
The full reports\(^2\) are available on the website at: www.belfastcity.gov.uk/conflict and many of their findings and recommendations are reflected in this framework. We were also influenced by two external reports.\(^3\)

This new plan reflects the public’s response, consistently highlighted in our public consultation surveys, that improving relations in our city must remain as a top priority for the Council’s work.

**5 Our city and its continuing challenges**

On average, 40% of violent conflicts across the world which have ended re-start within 10 years\(^4\). A large part of this is due to a lack of understanding by a new generation who did not directly experience the full effects of conflict but feel disillusioned by the slow pace of change. Nowhere in Northern Ireland is this more evident than in Belfast, where so-called recreational rioting occurs, restricted mobility is the norm and inter-communal tensions continue.

During the conflict of the past 30 years, Belfast was the seat of the most intensive violence in NI and suffered disproportionately as a result. There is extensive evidence of residential segregation, mutual hostility at its many interfaces and ongoing low-level violence. Problems of security, crime, community relations and racist incidents, are particularly acute in Belfast and have had a consequent impact on mutual suspicion and fear.

\(^2\) Delivering Services in a Divided City (Deloitte MCS Ltd.); Qualitative Record of Good Practice in Conflict Transformation (MacBride International); Good Relations in Local Area Planning (Community Technical Aid); Sharing and Interaction in Public Spaces in Belfast (Queen’s University Belfast); Opportunities and Challenges to Shared Residential Spaces in Belfast (Institute of Conflict Research & Trademark Consulting); and Improving Connectivity and Mobility in Belfast (Colin Buchanan Partners).


Belfast contains the highest number of sectarian interface areas in NI where segregation remains high and inter-community tensions are reducing, but continuing. There are 88 interface barriers in Belfast. Since 1994, ten barriers have been erected and another 12 heightened, lengthened or extended in Belfast. The barriers in Belfast exist in all sections of the city, but especially in north and west Belfast\(^5\).

Fundamentally, segregation has significant costs in the city. This includes the distortion of labour markets, the inefficient use of services and facilities, significant urban blight and poverty. The ‘diseconomies of segregation’ are borne disproportionately by the most disadvantaged communities.

There is evidence to suggest that individuals forego employment opportunities and access to services, including social services, in areas which they perceive to be dominated by the ‘other’.\(^6\) This serves to further isolate and marginalise communities in areas already seriously disadvantaged by under-investment, poor levels of health, educational under-achievement and environmental dereliction.

The highly segregated nature of Belfast is obvious as expressions of community identity are often expressed in highly visible ways – e.g. murals, kerb painting, or the flying of flags. Under the ‘Re-imaging Communities’ initiative, managed by the Arts Council for NI, we have been working with local communities to remove the more aggressive wall murals and replace them with more inclusive forms of community expression.

Flag flying has been a feature of Belfast for many years. It is still common to see flags flying on lampposts for many months until they have become

\(^5\) Community Relations Council (2009) Towards Sustainable Security: Interface Barriers and the Legacy of Segregation in Belfast

\(^6\) A Policy Agenda for the Interface, C. O’Halloran, P. Shirlow and B. Murtagh, Belfast Interface Project, 2004
tattered and torn. There are obvious chill factors associated with such marking of territory and evidence from a recent survey indicates that flags and murals potentially have a detrimental effect on the economy of local areas. Responses indicate that although a good proportion of people from the ‘other’ community are deterred from shopping in areas with flags and emblems, a substantial proportion of the ‘same’ community are also less willing to shop there – indicating that political symbols act as a more general commercial disincentive.

Physical and psychological barriers at the interfaces between segregated communities, makes travel around parts of the city difficult and has resulted in people avoiding certain areas perceived to be unsafe, freezing current land use patterns and making the creation of shared spaces more difficult.

The recent fluctuations in the housing market in Belfast have resulted in a shortage of affordable housing and community fragmentation in some areas. It has also led to difficulties for those few areas regarded as ‘mixed’ in retaining their character. Economic investment in the city has been uneven and private developers and private investments have played a role in changing the face of the city.

Levels of tolerance are low and community attitudes continue to be insular. Successive survey results indicate how political developments (good and bad) have a substantial impact on how one community views the other. Large numbers of people continue to live parallel lives, with minimal inter-community contact and little knowledge about the other community.

Over recent years, Belfast has experienced a marked increase in levels of inward migration. Unfortunately this has also been accompanied by a sharp rise in racially-motivated incidents and attacks. Although the issue of migration is one affecting all parts of the EU, there are additional challenges for Belfast given our legacies of bitter inter-communal antagonism and acute territorialism.

All of this projects a negative backdrop as Belfast presents itself as an outward looking and modern location for living, investment and tourism. There is a clear desire to build a vision of a shared and better future between local communities in the city as we enter the next phase, moving from conflict management to city transformation.

### Moving from conflict management to city transformation

If we are to transform our city, the building of relationships requires communities to create new lines of contact and develop meaningful engagement and interaction with one another. We must move from a model of safety and security guaranteed by ‘containment’ and by locating all services within communities, to a model of ‘mobility’ where people can freely travel to and safely access services beyond their immediate locality. Importantly, we need to increase people’s confidence and perceptions of safety in accessing services beyond their traditional comfort zone. Historically in the city, we have dual-provided services at considerable cost. While this was necessary in order to deliver services safely for a time, this is not sustainable in a situation where public funding is ever tighter and where citizens are rightly demanding the best value for money.

While the removal of interface barriers is vital to the success of Belfast, it also presents an enormous threat to those who feel most protected by their existence. By promoting connections to safe and affordable access to shared spaces and high-quality services, community interaction will increase and suspicion and mistrust will diminish. Ultimately, it is hoped that safety and security in Belfast will only truly be guaranteed through interaction rather than hard physical measures such as barriers.

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7 Dr. Dominic Bryan, research for the NI Life & Times Survey, 2007

8 NI Life & Times Surveys, www.ark.ac.uk
In Belfast we must continue to increase the number of spaces for making multi-layered connections – shifting from the parallel lives we often currently live, to a new era of meaningful relationships and casual interactions.

Health and well-being are inextricably linked to community cohesion. Health tends to decline (with premature mortality and increased morbidity, particularly in stress related conditions) in communities where levels of interaction are low and where people feel insecure. Where conditions are favourable, community cohesion increases social capital and reduces health inequalities and this in turn improves community cohesion to complete a virtuous circle.9 Service providers in Belfast must seek to maximise the opportunities for new bridging capital to be developed, especially in those neighbourhoods most deeply affected by the conflict and segregation, and to fundamentally improve the quality of life in those areas.

Unsurprisingly, evidence suggests that service usage is highly dependent upon the perceptions of the community ‘ownership’ of the location in which the facility is situated. Statutory agencies must enable interaction and provide services which are located in attractive, safe and shared spaces. There is obvious advantage in developing service centres along the borders of segregated areas, particularly on arterial routes with good transport connections. Bold, well-planned and well-designed location choices, such as the re-developed Carlisle Circus Health Centre, have proved to increase accessibility and in time, may facilitate increased interaction among users.

Generally, there is a growing openness to the concept of shared space and an increased recognition amongst providers and users that duplication of services is an inefficient and unsustainable method of delivery. This is particularly pressing in the current climate of significant public funding cuts and an increased drive for efficiencies. Unsurprisingly, safety remains a key concern.

The significance of transport and connectivity is paramount in terms of promoting access to shared spaces in the city – whether this is services, jobs or leisure opportunities. Re-connecting the city of Belfast is a critical element in its success as a cohesive and competitive city – Belfast as ‘One City’. While there has been much progress in the centre and economic heart of the city, there are still areas of deprivation which have not been able to benefit from the opportunities afforded by peace. A safe ‘path network’ (of public transport along major arterial routes, cycle ways and pedestrian routes) between sites of employment, leisure and services in the city, would greatly assist in this.

Economic competitiveness is also promoted through social and environmental competitiveness. Threat and fear are major deterrents to attracting highly skilled and mobile investment as well as labour. In a world where everyone is competing for global business, cities can no longer afford to present a bad image to the world and businesses want a stable environment and access to the right kinds of people. Labour mobility can play a key role in reinforcing peace in Belfast, promoting it as an attractive global city where its resident talent pool is able to move freely and safely, as well as attracting the best international employers.

The ongoing changes in government in Northern Ireland, both regional and local, are fundamentally changing the way in which public services are delivered. At the heart of these changes is the understanding that effective, efficient service delivery at the local level is dependent upon strong local government. We are determined to put in place a community planning model which transcends both the mental and physical barriers in our city.

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9 Lawrence, A. (2009) Better Together: A guide for people in the health service on how to help build more cohesive communities Institute of Community Cohesion
7 Developing a new collaborative agenda for city transformation

Through discussions with elected representatives, communities and partner organisations, we propose a core set of ideas, locating equality and good relations at the heart of a new agenda for city development:

1. The primacy of political leadership – we need a coherent development vision generated by the city’s political leadership, which balances local constituency interests with the broader interests of the city;
2. The principles of equity, diversity and interdependence should be mainstreamed into all of our activities, policies, structures and procedures, recognising that diverse groups are interdependent and basing relationships amongst them on agreed principles of fairness and equality;
3. Partnership is a core organising principle - not all the elements required to successfully compete in global markets can be found within the boundaries of a single organisation, sector or city, no matter how big;
4. Wealth creation creates the resources that support other kinds of agenda and should be used to creatively invest in an improved quality of life for all of its residents, investors and visitors and target inequalities;
5. Talent, a key driver of development, wants a tolerant, safe, clean and green place to live in – competitiveness depends on the quality of the environment and the quality of life within that environment;
6. Education produces development assets and there is an imperative to minimise educational failure and ‘grow your own’ talent base;
7. There is a need for an accessible, connected city for all its residents – labour and leisure markets only fully function in conditions of maximum labour mobility, unrestricted by territoriality;
8. There is a need to pivot development around the city’s key assets and use strategic publicly-funded ‘anchor’ investments in iconic projects and infrastructure, as catalysts for broader regeneration and investment by the private sector;
9. Public places, parks and open spaces need to be transformed into safe shared spaces to be and do, not merely to own and know about; and
10. Diversity can be an important tool for economic development – community festivals and parades could bring colour and visitors to spend money in local neighbourhoods.

These ideas will continue to frame the ongoing discussions needed to deliver real change in our city.

8 An agenda for action

There are multiple avenues which exist in city management to deliver good relations and community cohesion outcomes and there is a real need to think practically and creatively about steps and projects that could begin to address some of the more serious problems in Belfast. In the first Good Relations Plan, 4 broad goals were outlined:

- securing shared city space
- transforming contested space
- developing shared cultural space
- building shared organisational space

Actions from the Council itself and from the major public agencies in Belfast were set out under these four headings, galvanising the good relations momentum in the city and demonstrating the shared commitment across the public sector. These four goals were adopted as the core of our EU PEACE III Programme Building Relations at a Local Level - Peace and Reconciliation Plan.

We have always recognised that the capability to deliver such a broad range of actions lies beyond the Good Relations Partnership, and lies with other Committees within Council, and with partner agencies. In outlining our city’s continuing challenges, we acknowledge that there is still some distance to travel in these goals and they remain current. We will continue to hold them as broad goals for this Good Relations Plan.

Since the publication of the Good Relations Strategy in 2003, we have advocated a ‘commitment rather than minimal compliance’ approach. As the public sector is increasingly
challenged to meet the needs of our society within a significantly reduced public purse, good relations work must continue to be seen as a central part of the city agenda rather than an additional burden or an optional extra.

The specific action plans of the Good Relations work of the Council, are also aligned to the Council’s 6 Corporate strategic themes.

- Better leadership - strong, fair, together;
- Better opportunities for success across the city;
- Better care for Belfast’s environment - a clean, green city now and for the future;
- Better support for people and communities;
- Better services - listening and delivering;
- Better value for money - a can-do, accountable, efficient council.

9 Today’s action, tomorrow’s legacy – areas for action

Our corporate plan outlines our vision for the city, as a modern and welcoming city with a quality of life to rival the best in the world - in short, "we believe in a better Belfast." We want to help create a city:

- that is vibrant and prosperous
- that is attractive and clean
- that is safe and secure
- where there is equality of treatment and opportunity for everyone with good relations between all citizens
- where quality of life improves continuously
- where the decisions that are made reflect what is best for this and future generations
- where customer focused Council and public services are provided fairly
- where all organisations work in partnership for the common goal of a better society
- with a strong cultural life

Across all of these areas of city development, there are multiple opportunities to promote good relations and community cohesion outcomes.

The publication of this framework is not the end of the process; it is part of an ongoing cycle of action planning, pushing good relations further and deeper into the corporate DNA of city management and the efforts in transforming Belfast.

9.1 Better leadership

The place-shaping agenda in Belfast must acknowledge that the sense of place has been and continues to be contested – interventions cannot be designed and delivered ‘blind’ to the limitations and nuances of a deeply divided city. Studies have demonstrated the deep entrenchment of segregation, in terms of street design, infrastructure and planning decisions.

To begin to reverse such division will require that a long-term commitment and priority be given to promoting safe, welcoming and accessible spaces in planning and asset management for the city. Any future-orientated system for Belfast would need to consider the eventual reduction and removal of interface and security barriers. All investment and dis-investment systems as well as portfolio reviews would need to factor in the potential for increasing shared space and connectivity in the city.

The need to design, promote and manage increased shared spaces in the city of Belfast has emerged as an overarching priority for the city. Specific interventions are needed to increase and sustain shared spaces in the city, as we begin to reduce and eliminate the expense of duplication. This is of particular importance in relation to the future development of public service centres as strategic anchor investments. Apart from the obvious social benefits, there is a strong business case for sharing – even if in the shorter term, this may require more investment, it will undoubtedly drive longer term efficiencies.

It is important to understand that ‘shared space’ is not neutral space; it is a place where identity can be expressed in an open and non-hostile environment. More often, however, the existing model of shared space employed and understood by public services has been neutral and harmonious. It is proposed that the Council, under its leadership theme, champions the concept of
‘shared by design’ as to encompass the planning, management and animation aspects of spaces in the city. The Council has adopted the following principles for shared space:

- **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, which are trusted by both locals and visitors.

For example, potential sites which arise for purchase or re-development should be considered for their potential to generate new sites of sharing and interaction in the city. They could be imaginatively used to provide public service centres which are designed, managed and utilised as shared spaces. These principles could be integrated into relevant strategies, including assets management, transportation and regeneration policies and various master-planning mechanisms.

Finally, it is essential that there is a politically-led space to facilitate the continuation of discussions of controversial issues into a safe forum. There is also a continued need to invest in the capacity of the political and agency leadership to provide space for new thinking. The Growing a Shared City project will include as a key element a development programme for elected Members on the social and economic value of good relations, community cohesion and shared space in the city.

In turn, the political leadership of the city endorsed the development of a ‘coalition of interest’ on good relations in its first Belfast Good Relations Plan. This framework requires a similarly common vision between partners on the value of developing and sustaining shared spaces in the city.

9.2 Better opportunities for success

To become an outward- and forward-looking city-region, Belfast must re-orientate its priorities from concerns with short term safety, and the inward focus that brings, to a concern to attract others and a confident engagement with the world. A vital part of that agenda is improving the attractiveness of the city to visitors and investors. There is a need to further communicate the role of the city as an economic driver for the region and begin to dismantle the negative competition between Belfast and everywhere else.

The importance of the value of tolerance playing a key role in a successful economy is increasingly recognised at an international level. The social characteristics of city-regions have a big influence over their economic success and competitiveness.

In other words, a city and citizens ill at ease with difference will neither attract nor retain talent in a globalised, mobile labour and investment market. A city in which people want to live (tolerant, safer, cleaner, greener) with an ease of interaction and an education system sensitive to the needs of the urban economy, is a city investing in its economic future, not diverting from it. Business will want the city to be the best possible attractor of the most skilled and knowledge intensive workers. There may be unexplored opportunities for engaging with the private and commercial sectors in delivering a tolerant, attractive, welcoming city, which would benefit them as well as the city.

The use of culture and identity as significant ingredients of a tourism product have much potential in relation to further product development in the city. Belfast must address the perceived and physical impermeability of some of its neighbourhoods. There needs to be a menu of programmes which ensures that neighbourhoods of identity within the city are seen as open and welcoming to all citizens.

There is an opportunity to work with local areas on a series of linked cultural tourism and night-time...
economy projects which promote a unique, non-hostile identity and ensures that the social and economic value of the multiple cultural identities of the city is maximised. These projects must exist within an inclusive overarching framework of Belfast as a city of many neighbourhoods. Ultimately, Belfast’s abundant ‘cultural wealth’ could prove double the asset, in terms of attractions for visitors and residents alike.

In order to attract and retain highly skilled talent and investment, the demands of a safer, cleaner and greener city and a city of fun and diversity are complementary to economic development, not secondary. Belfast needs to build a sense of belonging amongst its citizens which is perceptible and unambiguous.

There is therefore further need to enhance ‘shared’ experiences through acting as an attractor for higher visitor numbers and in turn revenue to the city. Such events could take place in the city centre but need to build in venues in local neighbourhoods too. We must locate Council-led events at venues and open spaces across the city, encouraging residents and visitors to move beyond the local.

9.3 Better care for Belfast’s environment

Belfast is fortunate in its green and open spaces, its connections to its parks, hills and waterways. There is more opportunity to place significant emphasis on maximising these spaces as shared. Linking attractive safe spaces and high quality programmes across parks throughout the city will encourage citizens to travel to new parts and have new experiences while remaining ‘comfortable’ and feeling safe. Finding ways to connect places is extremely important in this regard.

The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) highlights that Northern Ireland has a larger ecological footprint than England, Scotland or Wales, and that if the rest of the world lived as Northern Ireland’s population does, it would take three planets to support us. RICS believe that a move away from dual or stereo provision is the best way to use our scarce resources, as well as address divisions within our society.10

Segregation also has a carbon cost, with distances travelled to access services in the city greater as a result of the distorted travel patterns we use. Added to this, is a greater reliance on private car use as a mode of transport. Safe and shared connections for walking and cycling will impact upon the environment of the city as well as promote accessibility and connectivity.

Getting people connected – both physically and psychologically – to new spaces in the city will have an enormous impact on securing the long term viability of the city and its environment. Events which promote a sense of belonging will also develop a sense of pride in their open spaces – places to ‘belong to and share’ rather than ‘to own’. The provision and programming of green spaces where people feel welcome and safe will impact upon their quality of life as well as the overall attractiveness of the neighbourhood. Animation programmes, physical refurbishment and sustained community engagement will promote and maintain our parks and open spaces as shared spaces for all.

10 Shaping Northern Ireland’s Future: RICS Northern Ireland Manifesto
9.4 Better support for people and communities

As previously stated, health and well-being are inextricably linked to community cohesion – trust, a sense of security and freedom of movement are all key determinants of health and well-being. All service providers in Belfast must seek to maximise the opportunities for new bridging capital to be developed and to fundamentally improve the quality of life in those areas, especially in those neighbourhoods most deeply affected by the conflict and segregation.

We have been working through the Interface Working Group\(^{11}\), to develop a co-ordinated strategy for the regeneration of those neighbourhoods located at the interface. The Group delivers a coordinated intervention approach to areas in and around interfaces and is also developing a strategy to facilitate those communities where barrier removal is desired.

We have been continuing to work on the shared routes programme to offer a number of opportunities for communities to devise solutions to these barriers and to create joint planning about their short and long term potential.

In a globally mobile market, the ethnic mix of Belfast has changed over the years, most rapidly in the last 5. We have been involved in a range of inter-agency projects to ensure that racism and hate crime – whether evident through direct attacks or more subtle prejudice – is tackled head on through programmes of welcome and integration.

9.5 Better services and better value for money

While there are understandable sensitivities on this, duplication and restricted access are key efficiency and value for money questions for asset management and service delivery in Belfast. The physical and psychological barriers in the city result in people avoiding certain locations perceived to be unsafe. This freezes current land use patterns and makes the creation of shared spaces more difficult. An unstable city, prone to sporadic violence and tension, with deep levels of segregation, is an unattractive investment location. This can have a direct depreciating impact on land values, including our publicly-owned assets. As the public sector seeks to find ways to maximise value for money and effectiveness, it is essential that the impact of segregation begins to diminish.

For example, if assets are a key source of revenue generation it is critical that they are accessible to the widest possible customer base – within the neighbourhood, from across the city and attracting visitors from beyond.

Good relations objectives and outcomes must be explicitly embraced as part of the regeneration model for Belfast. Local people must be confident that all the city’s partner organisations have a common vision for addressing segregation and the legacies of conflict in Belfast.

10 Next steps and developing actions

This Good Relations Plan is a dynamic framework under which a series of individual organisational and collaborative actions can be slotted, presenting the collective efforts of the lead public agencies in the city. The Good Relations Partnership has overall responsibility for implementing this plan.
Context of the development of the Good Relations Plan

11 Monitoring and evaluation
Monitoring and Evaluation is a key part of the Good Relations Plan, to ensure proper implementation and continuous improvement in the light of emerging evidence.

Progress on the action plan will be reported to the Good Relations Partnership on a quarterly basis. The Good Relations Partnership, which is made up of representatives of all parties represented on Council as well as representatives of the community, business, trades union, statutory, government, faith and minority ethnic sectors within the city, will be accountable for the delivery of this Good Relations Plan.

It is proposed that monitoring the implementation of the actions underneath this framework will be managed under the corporate performance management system and benchmarked against the regional reporting undertaken by OFMDFM in measuring good relations.

12 Equality impact
Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Council, in carrying out all its functions, powers and duties, 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.

The Act also requires the Council, in carrying out its functions, to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Council’s Equality Scheme, which details how the Council will fulfil its duties, was approved in April 2001. The scheme will be revised in 2011 in accordance with new guidelines issued by the Equality Commission. A part of that Equality Scheme was the production of a Good Relations Strategy. The Council’s Good Relations Strategy was prepared and adopted in February 2003; it was commended as a model of good practice in the Shared Future document by the Office of the First Minister/Deputy First Minister.

As these recommendations are based on Section 75(2), the Plan is focused on the three dimensions associated with this Section and, since it aims to promote good relations positively between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group, is likely to have a differential but positive impact in terms of all three dimensions.

12.1 Consultation carried out to date and further consultation
This Good Relations Plan is based on the information returned in a series of research reports, public consultation surveys and discussion reports. We place enormous importance on listening to, and responding to, the views of all our various stakeholders. We engage regularly in a wide array of consultation and engagement activity which varies from large scale public consultation exercises to smaller internal satisfaction surveys.

The Council ensured that its major public consultation surveys included specific questions to gauge public perceptions of the state of community relations in Belfast. Our public surveys have consistently indicated sound support for the Council taking a more pro-active role in the promotion of community relations in the City.

Recent consultation with the statutory agencies in the city indicates growing interest by all major public bodies in the area of good relations.

13 Conclusion
The learning and actions have the potential to significantly enhance the sophistication and mainstream nature of the Council’s and the city’s good relations agenda, accelerating the achievement of our common vision for the city – a city which is shared, peaceful, welcoming and open.

We recognise that this is an ambitious vision. This is a clear statement of our commitment to the city. We look forward to working together to achieve that vision – Belfast as one city.