Belfast Agenda (Community Plan)  
2017-2021

Stage 7 Monitoring Report

September 2018
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Access to information

As part of our commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, we want to ensure that everyone is able to access the documents we produce. We would therefore be happy to provide any of the information in this document, and its availability in alternative formats (including Braille, disk and audio cassette, and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English). If required please contact:

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1. Background Information

1.1 Section 75

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Belfast City Council is required 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
  - sexual orientation

- between men and women generally

- between persons with a disability and persons without and

- between persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to the obligations set out above, the Council is also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

Schedule 9 of the Act sets out the detailed procedure for the implementation of this duty including the publication of an Equality Scheme and the conduct of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) of selected policies. In response to the Act, Belfast City Council prepared an Equality Scheme which was approved by the Equality Commission in March 2015. The Equality Scheme can be accessed on the Councils website at http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/council/equality/equality‐scheme.aspx
1.2 Belfast City Council and Community Planning

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 introduced the new statutory duty of community planning which placed a requirement on local councils as the lead partner, to initiate, maintain, facilitate and participate in community planning for its district.

The council must work with its community planning partners to identify long term objectives and actions for improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of its district. This is to be published as the district’s community plan.

In addition to the council, Belfast has 13 statutory community planning partners. These include:

- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Education Authority
- Health and Social Care Board
- Invest NI
- Libraries NI
- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Public Health Agency
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
- Sport NI
- Tourism NI

The council, along with its community planning partners, must make arrangements for monitoring the community plan and publish a public statement at least once every 2 years on its progress. The community plan must be reviewed every 4 years and amended as necessary.
1.3 Screening of policies

The Belfast Agenda is the name of Belfast’s first community plan. It is a high level framework outlining how the council and its community planning partners will work collaboratively to deliver an ambitious and inclusive vision that will create a better quality of life for all citizens in Belfast.

The draft Belfast Agenda was issued for consultation on 15 December 2016 and closed in 15th April 2017. Running alongside this public consultation were two linked consultations - an equality impact assessment and a strategic environmental assessment (the EQIA and SEA).

The draft Belfast Agenda document set out a long-term vision for Belfast. To achieve this vision the draft document also outlines five long-term outcomes or ‘conditions of wellbeing’. These aspirations were identified following the Belfast Conversation, a city-wide engagement process held in 2015.

- Everyone in Belfast benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy
- Belfast is a welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive city for all
- Everyone in Belfast fulfils their potential
- Everyone in Belfast experiences good health and wellbeing
- Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally friendly city

The document also identified four over-arching ambitions for the city (to be achieved by 2035) and four medium-term priority areas with stretch goals (to 2021) that the council and its community planning partners believe should be the focus of collaborative efforts over the next four years (2017-2021). The four priorities were:

i. Growing the economy
ii. Living here
iii. City development
iv. Working and learning.
The draft document also articulated the need to drive forward ‘inclusive growth’. This is not just about securing economic growth but is about ensuring the benefits of growth enables all people in Belfast to have the best life chances no matter where they were born or where they live, and is seen as of overarching importance if we are to achieve our vision for the city.

The document highlighted a wide range of workstreams designed to help achieve our desired outcomes. The list of initiatives was not exhaustive and will be subject to continual review and prioritisation over the next four years. Given the strategic focus of the draft Belfast Agenda 2017-2021, the equality impacts of individual workstreams were not specifically considered as part of the EQIA. Instead, each programme or project within these workstreams will be subject to equality screening in line with the council’s or our community planning partners’ equality schemes, and where, appropriate, further EQIAs will be carried out in relation to these individual programmes or projects.

The main purpose of the EQIA was to –

- provide an analysis of data and research on current major inequalities experienced by people in the Section 75 groups in relation to the key outcomes and priorities within the Belfast Agenda

- consider the potential equality and good relations impacts of the Belfast Agenda at a strategic level and seek feedback on whether we have adequately understood those impacts;

- establish the positive equality impacts at a strategic level focusing on the key inequalities that the Belfast Agenda might help to address;

- encourage comments and ideas on how we might address any equality and good relations issues raised in the draft EQIA.

The EQIA was prepared and issued for consultation in December 2016 and can be accessed on the Councils website at: http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/council/equality/eqia.aspx.
2. Stage 7 Monitoring Process

In line with Stage 7 of the Equality Commission Guidance, the final EQIA report included a process for monitoring each policy to determine the future equality impacts, in the light of the changes made and the mitigating actions taken. The purpose of monitoring policies which have been subjected to EQIA is to determine whether the impacts predicted, particularly those which may have an adverse impact on anyone in the Section 75 equality categories, have occurred in practice and whether the impacts are greater or lesser than anticipated.

If the monitoring and analysis of results over a two year period show that the policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the Council is committed to ensuring that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.

3. Findings of the EQIA

Eight responses were received specifically on the EQIA; six responses to the on-line EQIA survey, an EQIA specific response that was submitted as part of the on-line Belfast Agenda consultation and one written response. Generally, respondents welcomed the Belfast Agenda and felt that it was likely to have a positive impact on all Section 75 groups, both directly and indirectly. There was also general agreement with the EQIA’s findings and conclusions. However, the feedback did highlight the scope of the task ahead and the need to more properly assess and mainstream our understanding of equality and the impacts, both positive and negative that may result from the detailed implementation of the plan. One respondent indicated that without this, the Belfast Agenda may remain ‘premature and aspirational’.

Respondents therefore called on us to ensure:

- improved level of detail on the potential impacts, both intended and unintended, when assessing the planned individual programmes and policies articulated within the Belfast Agenda; and
- improved assessment and understanding of the equality implications in relation to the outcomes (population indicators)
In relation to the latter point, we also met with the Equality Commission to explore how we might mainstream equality considerations within the community planning process moving forward. As a result, we committed to undertake further work to improve understanding of equality implications, focusing specifically on the population indicators. Consideration of this may form part of data development agenda and equality mainstreaming.

4. Results of Monitoring

The Belfast Agenda is an over-arching strategic document that sets out a long term vision for the city and a range and actions to help us get there. It is therefore an ongoing planning and delivery document with equality implications assessed on an ongoing basis as required. This ongoing monitoring will help continue to determine whether there is any effect over a longer period of time. Currently, we are not aware of any specific instances or impacts raised in relation to particular aspects of the agenda. We continue to believe that the proposed actions will contribute positively to the promotion of equality of opportunity, but will continue to monitor the policies and evaluate the results of monitoring at regular intervals.

A mentioned above; however, we have committed to look more thoroughly at equality monitoring of the population indicators. Data permitting, this will enable us to more fully understand where potential differentials exist and as result, take action to address this.

5. Publication of the Results of Monitoring

In line with the commitment in our Equality Scheme, we will make this report available on the Councils website at www.belfastcitycouncil.gov.uk and. It will also be available in printed form and we will make arrangements so that it can be made available on request and in a timely fashion in formats such as Braille, large print, disk and audiocassette and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English.