



SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Consultation on Poverty &
Social Inequalities in Belfast
Jelena Buick
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Belfast City Council
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20 April 2012

Dear Jelena

Response to (Draft) Poverty and Social Inequalities in Belfast: Framework for Action

I write to you on behalf of the South Belfast Partnership Board (SBPB) in response to the Council's draft Poverty and Social Inequalities in Belfast: Framework for Action consultation. Primarily, SBPB welcome the publication of the document as a statement of commitment from the Council to bring together key services and activities in order to help reduce poverty in the city. Nevertheless, we have also outlined a number of comments below in relation to the specific consultation questions posed and trust that you will find this helpful in finalising the Framework.

Background

We are very supportive of the aims of the Framework and the definitions of poverty outlined on page six. However, we would suggest that 'Young People' should also be added as one of the main groups who are in poverty or at risk of poverty on the same page, particularly alongside 'Children in workless households.'

As the framework is looking at both poverty and inequalities, we also feel it would be beneficial by way of background to look specifically at 'inequalities' in terms of social, opportunities, access to employment and standards of living, etc. In particular, there are clearly important geographies associated with the distribution of inequalities that, once understood clearly will help strengthen the policy response to poverty and tackling inequalities.

The Role of Government

The public sector has an important role to play in tackling poverty and social inequalities. Section 3 of the draft Framework begins to unpack the role of Government generally, then

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specifically the role of the Council. However, we feel this element of the document should be strengthened.

Whilst the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) take a lead in tackling poverty on behalf of the Executive, we believe greater detail should be given around this role and the interactions with other Departments and Agencies. For example, the section notes that the Department for Social Development (DSD) are also partially responsible for talking the causes of poverty, but no mention is made as part of this context to the Department's Neighbourhood Renewal programme, which is an on-going cross-Government programme managed by DSD and aimed at addressing communities living in areas of multiple deprivation.

Similarly, OFMDFM has also announced a major four-year Social Investment Fund (SIF) that will seek to complement the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in tackling social inequalities and poverty. Whilst many of the details of how this will be implemented remain unclear at the time of writing, there remains a commitment in terms of Executive investment to rolling out the Fund over the coming two-three years. The likely result of this additional investment will impact heavily on social inequalities in Belfast and must be looked at closely as part of the context.

We welcome the recognition that the Council, although having a limited remit in relation to talking poverty, have an important role as local service provider and local partner of Government in addressing the root causes of poverty and social inequality. As part of this, we would suggest that the Council, as Civic Leaders in Belfast, have an important advocacy role to play on behalf of its citizens in relation to Government-led initiatives, such as those outlined above. This could perhaps be emphasised further through inclusion on the list of contributions that the Council can make on page seven.

As well as this, we welcome the identification of community based partners as having an important role to play in local service delivery in partnership with the Council. In South Belfast, there are already strong examples of sharing of resources and joint-service delivery through the likes of the Shaftesbury Community and Recreation Centre in the Lower Ormeau area, or the joint use of the Council's Community Centre by Sandy Row Community Forum.

We believe that the community and voluntary sector will continue to play a vital role alongside the statutory sector in meeting the needs of local residents and talking poverty and suggest that this point too could be strengthened. For example, the Council are already heavily involved in the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme at ground level and, certainly in South Belfast, are beginning to adapt and develop services to assist in the delivery of the Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans that exist in both the Inner South and the South West Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

However, other than the passing reference to Neighbourhood Renewal in the final paragraph of page seven and related Action 10, there is little detail given to the contribution Council can make, and in fact is making, to Neighbourhood Renewal in Belfast. To expand this point further, it would seem likely that over the next three to five years, the Council's role and remit in relation to community development in Neighbourhood Renewal may even expand further, whilst the transfer of Community Planning powers to the local Councils under the Review of Public Administration, or in fact in advance of much of the Review being implemented, will also serve to strengthen the Council's role in relation to community development work. We believe this wider context needs to be better understood to set the context within which the Council's Poverty and Social Inequalities Framework is developed.

Action Plan 2012-2017

Clearly, understanding the broader context and the evolving role that the Council may play over the next five years may perhaps require a flexible Framework and Action Plan that are able to adapt to the changing circumstances. Whilst we are supportive of the majority of the Actions detailed, we have a number of specific comments in relation to a number of the proposals as follows:

- **Action 7: Reducing fuel poverty** – As a general point, it may be useful to provide definitions of some of the key terms used within the document, such as Fuel Poverty;
- **Action 11: Increasing access to cultural development and outreach initiatives across the city** – Part of this action should be to tackle sectarian tensions that still exist in some areas and racism, especially given the a strong correlation between poverty and conflict/interface areas.
- **Action 21: Ensuring a maximum social impact of our regeneration projects** – We welcome the recognition that monitoring and evaluation of the social impact of projects is vital to ensure effectiveness and value for money. As part of this, we would suggest that key partners, especially those in the community and voluntary sector, are well placed to support the Council in this work through existing partnerships, structures and monitoring processes.

For example, in South Belfast, we are currently running 1 pilot scheme to bring together a number of groups funded by Public Health Agency investment to deliver local health services to effectively monitor the social impact of the work via an online database system. Likewise, the South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership is planning to initiate a similar system for all groups funded by DSD in their area to monitor the social impact across a range of themes. As part of these pilot schemes, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Council, and other statutory partners, how to better align and share monitoring information to improve efficiency in evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and value for money in delivering social change.

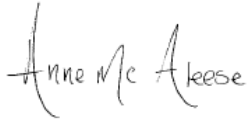
- **Action 28: Develop partnerships and deliver political legacy** – We welcome the commitment of the Council to genuine Partnership working in lobbying Government and delivering local interventions. We would encourage the Council to utilise existing structures and partnerships wherever possible in delivering services and projects to help minimise duplication and inefficiency. One has only to look at the number of partnerships and structures in existence related to the delivery of both statutory and non-statutory health services and interventions in Belfast to understand the risks of creating too many ‘structures’.

As part of this, we believe the Council should to recognise the importance of existing partnerships that the Council are already engaged in, such as the five Belfast Area Partnerships and 14 Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships across Belfast, which are broadly speaking all aiming to address inequalities and reduce poverty.

Conclusion

I trust that you have found our comments useful and we look forward to the adoption of the final Framework for tackling poverty and social inequalities in Belfast. If you would like any further information or would like to discuss any of the points raised through this consultation response, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne McAleese". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Anne McAleese
CEO, South Belfast Partnership Board