

Response ID ANON-MY8W-XQCB-3

Submitted to **The Belfast Agenda (draft for consultation)**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1A What is your name?

Name:

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1B What is your email address?

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1C Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation or group?

Community or voluntary sector organisation/group

Name of Organisation:

Women's Resource and Development Agency

1D If you are responding on behalf of an organisation or group, and have held a group workshop/discussion on the Belfast Agenda, how many people (estimate) have helped to inform your response to the consultation?

Not Answered

Number of participants/contributors:

80

1E If you are responding on behalf of an organisation that primarily represents the interests of a particular equality or minority group please tell us which category or categories you represent.

Women's group

If other please specify::

We facilitated storytelling workshops with 80 women from across Belfast in community based women's organisations. The participants came from diverse backgrounds with a large proportion having experience of social and economic inequality. Most had no prior experience of participating in policy consultation and so we used storytelling as the main method of gathering their experiences and opinions. The answers in this survey therefore reflect this approach and may not always give a definitive view on the specific questions asked. We hope however that the material provided will help highlight the real life stories behind the baselines and the participants' concerns and hopes about how the objectives of the Belfast Agenda might actually impact on women in their communities.

Chapter 2: Vision, Outcomes and Ambitions to 2035, and 4 year priorities

2A To what extent do you agree or disagree with the long term vision for Belfast?

Agree

If you think this vision can be improved, please tell us your suggested changes::

We did not ask participants in our workshops to specifically comment on the long-term vision for Belfast due to time constraints. Instead, we watched the short film 'The Belfast Agenda: Let Your Voice Be Heard' which was a more accessible way of outlining the vision to the groups and opening this up for discussion. Many people felt very inspired by the vision reflected in the film and some said it made them feel 'hopeful' and 'proud'. Many also felt 'uneasy' or 'frustrated' at the extent of the disconnect between the vision and their own communities.

The main concern raised by our participants was that the vision should be based on a need for equality. While it appears that the phrase in the vision statement which applies to this would be 'where everyone can reach their potential' the vagueness of this kind of language does not always reassure women that tackling the persistent multiple inequalities they face is of central concern.

The general impression of the women we spoke to was that a city vision needs to put more energy into the living conditions, needs and aspirations of its residents and less into creating a good impression to the outside world that does not reflect people's real lives or the state of their communities.

2B(i) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long-term outcome for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

We did not explore the detail of the long-term outcomes in our workshops due to time constraints.

2B(ii) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long term outcome for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

We did not explore the detail of the long-term outcomes in our workshops due to time constraints.

2B(iii) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long term outcome for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

We did not explore the detail of the long-term outcomes in our workshops due to time constraints.

2B(iv) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long term outcome for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

We did not explore the detail of the long-term outcomes in our workshops due to time constraints.

2B(v) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long term outcome for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

We did not explore the detail of the long-term outcomes in our workshops due to time constraints.

2C We have proposed four big ambitions for our city to work towards by 2035. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these proposed ambitions?

Ambitions agreement - Our city is home to an additional 70,000 residents by 2035:

Neither agree or disagree

Ambitions agreement - Our urban economy supports 50,000 more jobs by 2035:

Neither agree or disagree

Ambitions agreement - 50% reduction in the healthy life expectancy gap between neighbourhoods by 2035:

Neither agree or disagree

Ambitions agreement - By 2035 every young person leaving school has a destination that fulfils their potential:

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear in any comments which of the above 'Ambitions' you are referring to):

We did not look at the 4 big ambitions as our workshops were themed around each of the 4 priority areas outlined in The Belfast Agenda.

Generally speaking, it would be clear from the views we gathered from the women who participated that there is broad support for the kind of progress these 4 big ambitions represent. However, we did not hear much discussion of the figures that are contained within them and it is clear that these may appear arbitrary and hard for ordinary people to have an informed opinion on. Whilst we were discussing the priorities for the next 4 years, the women we talked to made comments that are relevant to the above 'ambitions'. These include:

Our city is home to an additional 70,000 residents by 2035:

- Housing need in this city is growing all the time and the only investment seems to be in the city centre + a 1 mile radius. They're not building the kind of houses local people need, big enough for families or bungalows suitable for keeping older people in their own homes longer.

Our urban economy supports 50,000 more jobs by 2035:

- The jobs they want to create are mostly in tourism and hospitality, or in retail. These are usually low paid jobs on insecure or zero hour contracts and with poor terms and conditions. Women bear the brunt of this kind of job market as we have caring responsibilities and can't get reliable work.

50% reduction in the healthy life expectancy gap between neighbourhoods by 2035:

- There is no money being put into community health services even though they are saying that's the way they want things to go. Older people are coming out of hospital and the support isn't in place for them. There isn't enough access to mental health support and waiting lists are longer than ever. More pressure is being put on women to make sure their family members have the care they need.

By 2035 every young person leaving school has a destination that fulfils their potential: - There still aren't enough services for vulnerable young people, and the youth service is facing cuts all the time. Education suffers because young people are dealing with so much trauma and mental health problems. We all know a young person who has taken their own life. More girls might leave school with qualifications but they face more hurdles if they get pregnant and many need to come back to learning through community education years later.

2D To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed city priorities for focus over the next four years?

Priorities agreement - Growing the economy: Creating jobs and investment in the city:

Agree

Priorities agreement - Living here: Creating a great city and neighbourhood living experience:

Agree

Priorities agreement - City development: Creating the right infrastructure and regenerating our city:

Agree

Priorities agreement - Working and learning: Supporting growth and connecting people to opportunities:

Agree

Comments (Please be clear in your comments which of the above priorities you are referring to):

The workshops we facilitated with community based women's organisations looked at each of these 4 priorities in detail, exploring in particular the commitments and workstreams. The women shared their stories of how the problems associated with these priorities have impacted on their lives and the lives of other women in their communities. They also talked about the initiatives and programmes of work that have been successful in the past in making progress on these issues and they gave their views on what needs to happen in the coming years.

While there was broad support for the 4 priorities there is a great deal of feedback on their implementation that we hope can influence the final version of The Belfast Agenda by connecting the priorities to women's lives. We will outline these discussion in the following 4 chapters.

Chapter 3: Growing the economy (optional questions)

3A To what extent do you agree or disagree that the commitments set out under this priority, as areas for city partners to focus on over the next 4 years, are right for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above commitments you are referring to):

The women we spoke to were supportive of the commitment to create employment and opportunity. They also support the commitment to reduce economic inequalities and see the lack of jobs and training opportunities as being one of the key problems.

The stories of these women in relation to the accessibility of employment opportunities and the ways in which they experience economic inequality should be taken into account in shaping these commitments. For example;

'I've been in a few call centre jobs and cleaning jobs. The wages are so low but I was just desperate to be working. It just isn't worth it though when you have to pay your transport and work out childcare...you have no money to spend at the end of it. And when you're in a low wage job you're stuck in the private rental sector because you don't qualify for social housing but you'll never raise a deposit to buy a house. And rent just keeps going up. They have to raise wages.'
'Zero hour contracts are a joke. They shouldn't let companies away with that. No one can get a mortgage on a contract like that, you can't even get a lease on a house. And it's impossible to get a childcare place when you never know what hours you'll be working. I'm not interested in them creating more jobs if it's going to be jobs like that.'

'Most employers aren't good at dealing with women who are single parents. You feel like you are less reliable. Like when your child is sick you're so nervous about asking for time off. I don't understand why there aren't more school hours and term time contracts. Do they have any idea how many more women could re-enter the workforce if we could work term-time?'

'At 18 I went to college but couldn't get a grant and left to work in a factory where I stayed for 7 years. When I got pregnant I had to take early maternity because the conditions of the job were so bad. I was eventually forced out and am still out of work now. I felt overwhelmed and at one point I had to get food bank help. My main problems with finding work are I can't get affordable childcare and I have no qualifications. I have a second child now and I am focusing on bringing them up. I am trying to get qualifications but I'll have had to wait until the children get older.'

The participants were very clear that those commitments focused on business stakeholders should come with requirements to conduct their operations in a way that genuinely benefits people, and does not leave women behind. One person remarked, 'You should be looking after people first, not big businesses.' It is also clear that the impact of unpaid caring work features heavily in women's lives and therefore unless the commitments around economic growth include a commitment to planning and resourcing the care infrastructure of the city then it will remain impossible for many women to engage with the 'inclusive growth' which the Belfast Agenda envisages. In fact the women we spoke to placed a much higher priority on this issue than on the commitments to attract investment, foster business growth or increase tourism spend. All of these things feel very remote to women whose daily reality looks like this example:

'I'm currently pregnant and have two older children. My son has moderate learning difficulties and my daughter has some problems so my children are very reliant on me. My husband works a low paid, insecure job and I look after the children but I also care for my brother with learning difficulties and my father who has dementia. The carers he has coming out to the house are very limited in what they can do. You really have to be there to help your own parents. I have a sister who is in paid employment in a good job and I find people have more respect for her work than all the caring I do. It's like it has no value. People just expect you to do it as if it's your duty. When people ask me now what I do I try to be more creative - it's too easy to say 'not in work' when actually I do so much.'

Women want to see an economy that values care and invests in it because until that happens their unpaid labour remains unaccounted for in our economic models and is taken for granted. Our models for growth ignore this work and therefore embed women's economic inequality in their foundations. The policies of the NI Executive do not deal well with this issue, such as the Draft Programme for Government or the Economic Inactivity Strategy which makes only the briefest mention of the need for childcare. It would be great if the Belfast Agenda could take the lead in adopting a genuinely gender-sensitive approach to its commitments around growing the economy and give the issue of care, in all its forms, the attention it deserves.

There is also a need to align job creation with the welfare and tax credit system in a way that reflects the needs of women returning to the workforce. For example;

'I started back with a 12 hour contract. The hourly rate was good but it affected my tax credits and I had to pay too much for childcare. It wasn't worth it.'
'I went back to work in a call centre but there was a mistake with my tax credits and I received a letter saying I had been overpaid by £2000 and it must be paid back. I had to leave work over this issue. Now I care for my child who has a learning disability and for my friend's mother. I could claim carers' allowance but if I did it would come out of my income support so it's not worth it. Not to long ago I was offered a job in a school that would have been perfect hours for my caring responsibilities and term-time. When I notified the benefits office they put so many barriers in my way I ended up turning the job down. Like they said I'd need a letter from my employer every week to confirm my earnings for my housing benefit. That would be so embarrassing...they don't think about the stigma attached to it.'

3B To what extent do you agree or disagree that the stretch goals set out for 'Growing the Economy' over the next four years are right for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above 'stretch goals' you are referring to)::

We did not discuss the stretch goals in our workshop due to time constraints.

3C To what extent do you agree or disagree that the workstreams identified for building momentum are the right ones for Belfast to deliver our 'Growing the Economy' priority?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the workstreams you are referring to)::

We asked the workshop participants to rank the proposed workstreams in order of preference. The resulting order of preference when the responses were collated is:

- Work locally to drive inclusive growth
- Provide sector specific support
- Harness innovation to drive city growth
- Develop and deliver an integrated, sustainable approach to inclusive economic growth and investment
- Make Belfast a great place to do business and supporting entrepreneurs and business starts
- Maximise the city's connections to drive growth
- Build the city's position as a magnet for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
- Create a resilient city

It is important to observe from this that the women we spoke to placed a higher priority on those workstreams with a local focus. They were extremely supportive of the plan to work with local community-based organisations in order to ensure that the voices of those most bearing the brunt of economic inequalities are included in shaping plans for economic growth. They were also supportive of putting in place mechanisms to improve the business infrastructure within the city. They had little enthusiasm for those workstreams focused on attracting FDI and many talked about their negative experiences of working for multinationals that do not invest properly in their workforce, pay badly and have poor terms and conditions. They gave the lowest preference on average to the idea of creating a Commissioner for Resilience. Some remarked that they had no idea what it meant or the value of that role would be.

The participants also suggested that a further workstream should be the development of a Women's Employment Strategy. This plan would illustrate all of the barriers women face to participating in the economic growth of the city and would require both statutory partners and employers to work together to address them. For example,

'There should be a plan for how to get more women into non-traditional roles so that it opens up broader options for women. There could be financial incentives for employers who do this. Employers should have to plan for how they include childcare like having a creche on-site or at least having more of a supportive approach to flexible working.'

Those two issues highlighted in this example are named by the Office of National Statistics as the main factors sustaining the gender pay gap. It would be an excellent initiative if the Belfast Agenda set out to eradicate the gender pay gap in the city by 2035 as part of its plan for inclusive economic growth.

Chapter 4: Living Here (optional questions)

4A To what extent do you agree or disagree that the commitments set out under this priority, as areas for city partners to focus on over the next four years, are right for Belfast?

Agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above commitments you are referring to)::

The consultation workshops that we facilitated were mainly with women connected to community based women's centres delivering services in some of the most deprived areas of Belfast. It is therefore understandable that they were most enthusiastic about the commitments contained under the 'living here' priority. As one participant remarked, 'It's not that we don't need things like tourist attractions but what about the communities that are struggling? People in our communities can't afford to go to the Titanic exhibition, the SSE arena to a concert or shop in Victoria Square. It is the middle classes who can afford to go to the Lyric or the Grand Opera House, but people who have lived in a community like this all their lives can't access these things and have other priorities. Belfast is promoted as the city centre and about a 1 mile radius. But all the councillors who spoke in the film represent working class communities who are living in cold damp houses relying on food banks. So you'd like to think they'd make that a priority.'

There was general agreement with all of the commitments although the women found that the accompanying information was lacking in detail, and they again had stories to share that should be useful in shaping the thinking of all community planning partners responsible for acting on these issues. For example,

'They are pushing for more care in the community for older people but the systems are not in place to make it work. I've just been through the process of bringing my mother with dementia out of hospital to find her home care had been cancelled and took 4 weeks to set up again due to nursing shortages. It has also taken a month to get her medication arranged as there was a breakdown in communication between the doctors and pharmacists.'

'They have targets to achieve on care in the community but aren't planning for it or investing in it and they're relying on family members, mainly women, to plug the gaps. Dementia care is very hard - 20 years ago you had extended family and neighbours to call on but it's not like that now.'

'It doesn't feel like healthcare funding for older people is prioritised. They are seen as a burden. Getting anything for them is a fight.'

(- support older people; enable active, healthy and empowered citizens)

'There are huge life inequalities in this city that are going to be very hard to shift. The biggest issues are housing and employment. I think some people would be shocked at the state of houses we are expected to live in.'

'Education is a major problem in our community. The previous generation relied on industrial jobs and didn't worry about education. But those jobs are all gone now. Manufacturing jobs are gone. Unless people are very highly educated the only jobs they can get are low paid, zero hour contract jobs. They keep people in the poverty trap.'

'Community education was starting to make a difference to women by helping us get support to get qualifications with childcare and mental health services...now that's all been pushed out. Women's education needs to come back into communities - we know it works and that it helps close that inequality gap. And it creates jobs for tutors and childcare workers in the local community.'

'Whatever this Making Life Better Strategy is all about it sounds like it might be just another list of nice ideas. It would need to have proper targets and be well funded because that's why nothing up until now has worked.'

(- reduce life inequalities; enable active, healthy and empowered citizens)

'In terms of prioritising of issues for community relations like delivering peace-building and interface programmes, it is the communities behind the interfaces where more work needs to be done. Women cross the interfaces without much difficulty and always have done this, even at the height of the conflict. Maintaining interfaces actually provides both an income and status to the gatekeepers, usually male led organisations. So you need to get past them so that the money gets to the groups doing the work who don't have a personal investment in sustaining division.'

'If you're not talking to the average people you won't get the truth. I always hear certain spokespeople saying that communities want gates kept closed in peace walls for safety. But normal people just want them open. Like most women I know get frustrated hearing men say that. Some have a vested interest in keeping things divided.'

(- improve community relations)

Housing was a particular concern for participants both in terms of unmet need for social housing and the conditions in both the public and private rental housing stock. There were two stories shared in the workshop that demonstrated positive and negative consequences around current policy to build 'homes for life'.

- Last year I moved into a new integrated community and it's fantastic. It's totally mixed in terms of age, families from here and families who've come from other countries, some supported housing. They are homes for life and have everything you'll need as you get older. It's right beside the shops and lovely and safe. I think they should build more like this and get people living in good affordable homes.'

- I live in a private rented terrace house in a street where a lot of houses are housing executive owned and have gotten into a bad state. The house next door to me has been empty for years and I've had so many problems because of it - damp and mould, water leaks, rats...I keep having to complain to the housing executive and have asked them to do something with it. But they said they can't do anything as it's too old to convert into a 'home for life' so they can't spend any money on it. They're leaving houses to go to ruin all because they don't fit their policy.'

'The housing stock is not appropriate for what people need and they refuse to build anymore bungalows. How can they aim to keep more older people in their homes for longer if they won't build bungalows?'

'There is too much wasteland around our community that the housing executive say there isn't enough money to develop. Or they make promise that then aren't followed through.'

'A lot of us women are very involved with lobbying the housing executive on the state of housing here but now with the shift to housing associations it's confusing and hard to keep up with who is responsible for what. And what level of accountability do these housing associations have? If they are partners in this community plan we need to know that they will be held to account for anything they fail to do.'

'Women know best what the housing needs are. And we are usually the last to be asked. That's why we have to kick up such a fuss when things go wrong. But if they just involved us in the planning they could save themselves a lot of mistakes.'

'People like us are often accused of not taking pride in our communities which isn't fair. I can have my house looking pristine on the inside but if I look out my window and see a wasteland it depresses me. It makes me think "I hate this place". There needs to be more investment.'

'There are a number of women living near me with severe mental health and addiction problems. They are given housing but with no support for how to manage their problems so they end up having blow outs when their benefits come in and upsetting neighbours, then getting evicted. Ensuring people have support to maintain their tenancy is just as important as getting them a house.'

(-improve the city living experience, improve neighbourhoods)

'There still isn't enough support for young people. As a mother I am terrified for my children. Everyone knows a young person who has taken their own life. They are supported to process grief and then start acting out in school and developing their own mental health problems.'

'The women in my community recently started a youth club because there was no statutory provision. We asked them what issues they'd like us to explore with them. The first thing they said was suicide. We're not talking about kids who want to go on a few trips here. They are seriously crying out for help.'

'There is so little support for young people experiencing drug use and mental health problems. The health service can't cope and the charities are losing their funding and closing down. They've been calling this a crisis for years but nothing changes in the way they approach it.'

(- support our young people, enable active, healthy and engaged citizens)

4B To what extent do you agree or disagree that the stretch goals set out for 'Living Here' over the next four years are right for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above 'stretch goals' you are referring to)::

We did not discuss the stretch goals in our workshop due to time constraints. However it was noted that the aim to deliver 1800 social housing units seems very conservative given that the Housing Executive's own statistics put the level of unmet need in Belfast at almost 4 times this figure. (http://www.nihe.gov.uk/unmet_social_housing_need_prospectus.pdf)

Additionally, on the stretch goal 6 referring to reducing interface barriers, the experiences women have of dealing with community gatekeepers, as recorded in the previous question, should be taken into account.

4C To what extent do you agree or disagree that the workstreams identified for building momentum are the right ones for Belfast to deliver our 'Living Here' priority?

Agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the workstreams you are referring to)::

We asked the workshop participants to rank the existing workstreams in order of preference. The results demonstrated a fairly even spread in terms of which workstreams were the most popular, indicating a decent level of support across all of them. However, the general order of preference when the responses were collated is:

- Ensure an age-friendly Belfast
- Deliver a city and neighbourhood Community Safety programme
- Design and deliver Belfast City Shared Space, Peace IV and Interfaces programmes
- Supporting children and young people to fulfil their potential
- Design and deliver an integrated city programme to address health inequalities, including enhancing mental wellbeing and reducing social isolation
- Design an integrated, inter-agency approach to neighbourhood regeneration and maximise the impact of local assets and investment (N.B. No one had a clue what this meant but when we translated it to 'all agencies work together with local community groups to get the best results' it gained more support. This language is very unhelpful for trying to get buy in from people in local communities.)
- Maximise the benefit of our natural and built environment
- Use social innovation to unlock service transformation (N.B. again this was a completely meaningless phrase and had to be changed to 'try new ways of working together to improve community services')
- Design and deliver a fully integrated, inter-agency approach to early intervention, including early years support and family programmes
- Deliver an integrated cultural and arts strategy

The women were keen to emphasise the importance of actively seeking out women's voices in the planning of these workstreams and they highlighted the excellent work done by women's centres, all of which are facing funding crises. How women experience their communities is generally different to men. They have a different perspective on housing because of their caring responsibilities with older people or disabled relatives. They have different community safety needs. They have had different roles in community relations work. They have experienced different barriers to education and employment. It is vital that all partners in the Belfast Agenda are held to account for how they have engaged with women, especially when working on a priority that has the potential to make such a difference to the lives of people most affected by inequality.

Finally it is disappointing that the language in these workstreams is so full of policy jargon when this is the priority that should be most accessible to ordinary working class people.

Chapter 5: City Development (optional questions)

5A To what extent do you agree or disagree that the commitments set out under this priority, as areas for city partners to focus on over the next four years, are right for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above commitments you are referring to):

For the purpose of discussing this priority with a group of women we arranged a consultation in a city centre location and invited women who work, live, study or regularly use services in the city centre. This workshop drew much smaller numbers than the others and the women who came primarily wanted to talk about their experiences of the city's infrastructure and connectivity. They presented a range of stories of how they feel the city presents issues for them as women. For example,

'I have been working in the hospitality sector in a low paid job and the hours I work are not serviced by public transport. As I can't afford taxis I regularly walk home from the city centre to where I live on a main arterial route just a couple of miles out. This has resulted in me experiencing sexual harassment.'

'A lot of the focus for investment and job creation seems to be in the hospitality, tourism and retail sectors, which many young women tend to work in. But these jobs aren't 9-5 whereas the public transport network here is based on a largely public sector workforce so it gets very patchy after these core hours. If they want to create more jobs in sectors that rely on shift workers then they need to make sure that public transport is changed to service these workers.'

'The physical landscape in Belfast is very complicated to negotiate. My mum cares for children with disabilities and the state of many pavements makes it hard to get around. The buses also have limited accessibility for people with prams.'

'The trees in Belfast are important but when there isn't enough maintenance done then the leaves make footpaths dangerous. In the winter I really struggle to get my older children to and from school on foot with a pram.'

'It says in the document that there hasn't been much growth in people using public transport. I think that's because it just doesn't make any sense. The network is based on a legacy of segregation and doesn't serve people's needs - going in and out of the city just to get a few miles across from your starting point is

ridiculous.'

(- develop the city's infrastructure and improve connectivity)

'I see a lot of focus on retail in their plans for growing the city's commercial potential. But first of all I have worked in retail for years as many young women do and the pay is very low, there are terrible terms and conditions and employment practice is often quite bad. Women who get pregnant for example are very badly protected in the retail sector and many jobs are zero hour contracts. Secondly, the whole retail industry is changing so much as it moves online and so it seems a bit short-sighted to prioritise this sector for the city centre.'

'When I see the word "compete" it makes me nervous as all I see these days is a race to the bottom. If competing internationally means driving down wages then I'm not interested. If we invest in the business community here there has to be accountability for what they do with that public money - create good, well paid jobs with good terms and conditions, skill up the workforce, tackle gender stereotypes and inequalities, pay their taxes, support subsidised childcare places...it can't just be creating a revolving door for workers.'

'We're still too focused in Belfast on attracting big money from outside. Meanwhile other cities have realised that it makes more sense in the long term to support local community-led initiatives. Like the example of the Markets tunnels project with shop spaces - it's a great project that worked with local people and focused on creating opportunities for co-operatives rather than just seeking out big companies to come in.'

'Is the regeneration going to be market driven or community driven?'

'There is almost no childcare provision in the city centre. I have spent the last few years having to drive away from the city to get to my childcare provider and then get into the city centre for work. I'm gradually moving away from working in the city centre because of this. If more employers had creche facilities or if the council incentivised childcare providers to set up in the city centre it would make a huge difference.'

'Housing close to the city centre is overwhelmingly old, damp houses owned by private landlords, often converted into flats that are too small. I live in this kind of accommodation because I need to work in the city but I feel trapped with increasing rent and I'll never be able to save for a deposit to buy a house.'

(- promote and position the city to compete, drive the physical and cultural regeneration of the city centre)

'I've no problem with tourism but does it ever actually benefit anyone outside the city centre? It can make you feel like you're in a goldfish bowl and gives people a negative impression of your community. I come from the Shankill Road and all the tourists on the buses hear about my community are the butchers and the bomb.'

'The tourist spend never reaches into the communities that need it most unless it's local community led initiatives like the women's history tours that uncover the positive contribution women have made to their communities and the city.'

'Tourism and hospitality jobs attract women a migrant women in particular. The pay and terms and conditions have to be improved. My neighbour cleans in a hotel and she has had her wages cut for things that guests have complained about.'

(- attract more tourists)

5B To what extent do you agree or disagree that the stretch goals set out for 'City Development' over the next four years are right for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above 'stretch goals' you are referring to):

We did not discuss the stretch goals in the workshop due to time constraints. However, in relation to number 2, it was noted that over the last decade the city has had an explosion of office accommodation and residents have watched as much of it has lain empty or even half finished. An example is the development around the Waterfront Hall. People can feel sceptical about the rationale behind building more and more office accommodation and it feels like there is a business plan behind it that benefits developers and is based on an economic priority to invest in the private sector but without the demand actually being there. They would like to see this revisited and some of that resource going toward more creative ways of supporting business growth that isn't based on building huge blocks of offices. Women in particular have developed more flexible patterns of working from different locations that do not revolve around city centre office spaces and people in the digital sectors are increasingly working remotely or from home.

5C To what extent do you agree or disagree that the workstreams identified for building momentum are the right ones for Belfast to deliver our 'City Development' priority?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above workstreams you are referring to):

This workshop did not explore the workstreams in detail. However in addition to the issues already raised for consideration under this priority, the participants made the following comments on how the commitments should be achieved:

'There has to be a change in mindset when it comes to sustainable transport. It needs real investment and planning.'

'Remove all the barriers to cycling. Make the lanes safe and with proper continuity. Integrate the cycling network with the public transport network.'

'Come up with solutions on how to use outdoor spaces. The weather is a barrier but with good planning this can be overcome. Other cities much bigger than Belfast and with worse weather conditions have been able to do this.'

'Build integrated housing. People want to live in integrated communities. Look at South Belfast - it is the most integrated part of the city and the most expensive to live in.'

'There must be a plan for childcare attached to the plans to grow Belfast as a commercial centre and create jobs. Otherwise women are not going to be able to benefit from this on an equal basis with men.'

'Use signage and advertising in the city to reach out to women and make them feel safe. For example, advertising a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment or sexual violence, sign posting towards support services for women in crisis.'

'Sort out the public transport networks. Make them relevant to people's needs and reflective of how people actually live and work. Think about people who are reliant on public transport and what they need rather than always thinking about enticing more people on to it. Some people in our city have no choice and they struggle with a network that creates barriers to them getting and keeping employment or training opportunities.'

'Make all city development community led. Involve people right from the start. Rebuild public trust that there will be accountability for private developers who have recently been destroying our built heritage.'

Chapter 6: Working and Learning (optional questions)

6A To what extent do you agree or disagree that the commitments set out under this priority, as areas for city partners to focus on over the next four years, are right for Belfast?

Agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above commitments you are referring to):

The workshop which explored this priority was the best attended of all our consultation sessions and included a number of migrant women from outside the EU, including refugees and asylum seekers. The participants had many stories to share of their experiences of educational inequalities and barriers to opportunities that have a particular impact on women. They also discussed their views on job creation and employment and covered some of the same themes as those raised in the workshop on 'growing the economy'. It would therefore be useful to cross-reference both of these chapters when reviewing the consultation response.

'At school I first got a sense that there were jobs women didn't do but my mum encouraged me to do woodwork. Me and another girl did woodwork and loved it. Although it was mostly boys and we weren't supported by our peers or teachers and at times my mum had to fight my corner. She was a good role model for getting an education and I later went to tech and university and have formal qualifications in youth work. At 30 I came out of work to raise children and now trying to get back into workforce with support from a women's organisation.'

'There is still too much stereotyping of girls from a young age pushing them into courses like beauty and childcare. These professions are fine but they don't carry the same opportunities for development and earning that more male dominated ones. We're always pushing young men to do apprenticeships and get a skill but we don't do the same with young women. They are ending up in low paid unskilled jobs.'

'I was a lecturer in my home country and when I came here I wanted to continue my education. I applied to QUB to do a PhD but childcare was my biggest issue. QUB have a crèche but it's very expensive. So in the end I came to a women's centre and attended courses in Maths and English.'

'Many of the newcomer women in the community come with high levels of skills but need to get into an ESL (English as a Second Language) course to get their English up to a level where they can pursue training and employment. But the FE colleges have withdrawn all funded ESL community facilitators. The only way a community based training provider like a women's centre can get the tutors to come out is to pay the whole cost of a course which is currently £6000. It's impossible. And they don't seem to understand the barriers to women going into the FE colleges to do a course like this. Where's the childcare? What about confidence building? What about having community support and mentoring?'

'I came to Belfast when I was 20 having studied nursing. I tried to get into university here because had also studied Arabic and French but they said I had to start again at high school level as my certificates would not be accepted here. This was a setback and then I had children and all hunger for learning died down. I have been doing GCSE courses at the women's centre but funding for this was removed and now I have no other options because of childcare.'

(- address educational inequalities and increase skills attainment; enhance and increase the skill levels of our residents and attract and retain even more skilled people)

Our participants were very focused on adult learning and how it is facilitated with a clear desire to see more commitment to delivering this in the community. Many policies and strategies on education focus almost entirely on school leavers, such as the draft Programme for Government. However, many women complete much of their education as adult learners if they have had children and find themselves unable to afford childcare or without family support to continue their education or employment. Women's centres support women in this situation attempting to return to education after having children and requiring holistic, wrap-around support. Their stories are evidence of the need for this kind of accessible learning environment to be prioritised:

'I had a good job in the bank but then took redundancy and later I suffered breast cancer. When I was recovering I found I needed to start over again. I came to the women's centre and did a basic computer class. Then I did literacy and numeracy courses and is now a tutor for literacy and numeracy myself.'

'I had a stroke a few years ago and after it I suffered with very bad agoraphobia. I managed to come to an event on mental health in the women's centre and from there have gone on to do confidence-building and courses in maths and english. The whole time I am learning in the women's centre I'm also getting access to counselling, reflexology, anxiety support, physio. Without these things I couldn't do it. You honestly wouldn't recognise me if you saw me a year ago - I'm like a different person.'

'You have to support women and work on confidence before you get to the skills and formal qualifications. This is why there are barriers to FE attendance for women because they might be feeling 'too old' or 'too stupid'. It's a daily battle with their own confidence just to stay there. This combined with lack of childcare and difficulties with transport are all the reasons women drop out of FE courses much more than they drop out of community based courses.'

(- address educational inequalities and increase skills attainment; address barriers to employment at structural and personal level; reduce poverty and economic inactivity)

Central to many of the women's concerns under this priority is childcare. Not only does this impact on their access to opportunities but it also creates a tension for those women who do want to get into paid work but feel the unpaid caring work they are currently doing is also important and should be valued. This requires a response that not only invests in providing accessible and affordable care options to those women who do want to increase their paid work or training, but also counts in the contribution that women make to the unpaid workforce.

'I can't do courses at the Belfast Met because I can't afford the childcare. Childcare has always been behind here compared to everywhere else. I can't imagine another modern city where you can't get free childcare to get back into education.'

'I run a creche in a women's centre and we have a serious problem with the capacity. We'd like to have a place for all women taking part in classes but we have to prioritise the referrals we get from the health trust which only leaves 6 extra places available per day. The demand always outstrips supply and more investment needed for this to be an effective resource for supporting women into education.'

'I feel women can be judged if we stay at home with children – we're called 'economically inactive' even though we are working our socks off.'

'Here's one way to reduce the economic inactivity levels - stop calling us economically inactive when we're actually keeping society together! Then the stats would drop a fair bit.'

(- address barriers to employment at structural and personal level; reduce poverty and economic inactivity)

6B To what extent do you agree or disagree that the stretch goals set out for 'Working and Learning' over the next four years are right for Belfast?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above 'stretch goals' you are referring to): :

We did not discuss the stretch goals in detail in this workshop due to time constraints. However, there some discussion that are of relevance to goals 1 and 3.

As already noted, measures of economic inactivity which include all of those, mainly women, who do unpaid caring work for children, older or disabled relatives or other people in the community, are not acceptable to the women who have taken part in these workshops. We want this essential contribution to the social and economic stability of our city to be counted in, valued and invested in. If our social and economic policy valued caring work more highly and reflected the importance of it through investing in support for those who carry out this work then the 'negative social consequences' that are often associated with economic inactivity would be reduced. Access to paid employment is one route to improving outcomes for those with caring responsibilities but it is not realistic to view all unpaid caring work as a problem to be eliminated. Until there is recognition that economic growth and stability is reliant on the complex network of care that is mainly provided by women then an economic inactivity indicator will be a problematic measure that is unlikely to see any significant progress. We hope that the Belfast Agenda will do a better job at reflecting this than previous policies of the NI Executive departments.

As goal 3 aims to increase the number of people with Level 2 qualifications it is important to note that women's centres used to be able to offer courses at this level but are no longer able to due to changes in the criteria attached to European Social Fund resources that were made by the then Department for Employment and Learning in 2013. These changes meant that community based education providers would only be funded to deliver courses at Level 1 and all Level 2 courses would have to be pursued in an FE college. It has not only decimated the women's sector by reducing their capacity as training providers but it also made Level 2 qualifications much less accessible to working class women in disadvantaged communities. As has been illustrated in this chapter already, there are many reasons why women prefer to access training in the community and although these issues were raised with the Minister at the time there has been no remedy to the situation. If the Belfast Agenda partners are serious about achieving stretch goal 3 then urgent attention should be given to reinstating funding for Level 2 qualifications in community based settings.

6C To what extent do you agree or disagree that the workstreams identified for building momentum are the right ones for Belfast to deliver our 'Working and Learning' priority?

Neither agree or disagree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above workstreams you are referring to): :

We asked the workshop participants to rank the proposed workstreams in order of preference. The resulting order of preference when the responses were collated is:

- Deliver an integrated city programme to address educational inequalities
- Deliver an integrated approach to employment and skills
- Deliver a 'Belfast Works' employability programme
- Establish a city pledge for our young people and a commitment to being a learning city
- Devolve funding to the city region for the delivery of a large scale skills and employability programme
- Maximise the benefits of our higher and further education offer
- Leverage the power of Belfast's anchor institutions and city partners

Whilst participants are supportive of workstreams that aim to join up the training and educational opportunities that are available in the community and those in more formal settings they emphasised the point that in their experience there is very poor continuity in practice. When women move from women's centres into FE colleges, the childcare places and the wrap-around support doesn't follow them and so they drop out in much higher numbers.

There was also some concern about the constant linking of education with employability with some participants noting that the value of learning is much more than just what employers are looking for:

'Education for me has been about much more than just formal qualifications. There are many other benefits like soft skills and improving your mental health. We need to offer a mix of courses and not just tie everything into getting qualifications for jobs. For older people getting qualifications may not be much of a driver. Many older women want to learn IT just so they can help in the family and connect with children and grandchildren.'

Chapter 7: Tracking our progress - Population level indicators (optional questions)

7A If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Everyone in Belfast benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.1 City productivity levels:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.2 Investment into Belfast:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.3 Performance of the Belfast Urban Area economy:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.4 The number of new business start-ups verses the number of business deaths (Business Churn Rate):

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.5 The proportion of the population living in relative poverty:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.6 The proportion of working-age population in Belfast who are unemployed:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.7 The employment rate of 16-64 year olds by deprivation quintile:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.8 Skills barometer measure – the gap between current and future skill needs:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.9 Economic inactivity rate (excluding students):
Change

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.10 Average earnings:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.11 Total spend by external visitors:

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.12 Supply of suitable housing:

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to):

Please see earlier comments about the problems associated with including those doing unpaid caring work in the data on economic inactivity. While we are aware that it is common practice to do this and it may therefore be difficult to change this for the purposes of generating indicators for the Belfast Agenda, we remain hopeful that at some point a statutory agency will take the lead in redefining this measure and giving caring work the respect it deserves. ONS data estimates the GVA of informal childcare in the UK to be £350 billion every year and this work largely done by women should not be excluded from models for economic growth. (1.9)

7B If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Belfast is a welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive city for all', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.1 Number of victims of any crime:
Change

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.2 Number of hate-motivated crimes:

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.3 Proportion of people who feel safe:

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.4 Number of anti-social behaviour incidents:

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.5 Number of interfaces:

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.6 The number of people who agree that people from different background get on well together:

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.7 Proportion of population who believe the cultural identity is respected by society:

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to):

It is important to note that in the crimes associated with domestic violence a decrease in the number recorded victims is not always a sign of a reduction in crime but can be a reduction in reporting. The added complications and under-reporting of these crimes mean that a more reflective approach to measuring success has to be taken. Women's Aid have undertaken informative work with the PSNI on this issue which should be incorporated into the population indicator. (2.1)

7C If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Everyone in Belfast fulfils their potential', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.1 Proportion of population who have attained Level 2 or above:

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.2 Gap between percentage of school leavers and percentage of free school meals school leavers achieving at Level 2 or above, including English or maths:

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.3 Proportion of school leavers entering employment, education or training:

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.4 Proportion of care leavers who aged 19 were in education training or employment:

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.5 Proportion of children who have reached attainment at Key Stage 2 (up to 11 years):

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.6 Proportion of pre-school children at the appropriate stage of development:

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.7 School attendance rates:

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to) :

7D If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Everyone in Belfast experiences good health and wellbeing', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.1 Healthy life expectancy at birth:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.2 Gap in healthy life expectancy:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.3 Preventable deaths:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.4 Proportion of the population of adults and/or children who are obese:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.5 Proportion of population who smoke:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.6 Proportion of adults drinking above sensible drinking guidelines:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.7 Proportion of people who rank themselves as having high levels of well-being:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.8 Proportion of adults participating in moderate exercise at least five days per week:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.9 Number of households in housing stress:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.10 Proportion of population living in decent homes:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.11 Proportion of the population volunteering:

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.12 Proportion of the population participating in culture, arts and sport:

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to) :

7E If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally friendly city', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.1 Air quality:

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.2 Percentage of household waste that is recycled or composted:

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.3 Percentage of all journeys which are made by walking, cycling or public transport:

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.4 Visitor numbers:

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.5 Renewable energy as a percentage of all energy consumed:

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.6 Number of miles of cycle lanes, footways and footpaths:

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.7 Proportion of homes that are energy efficient:

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.8 Visitor satisfaction:

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.9 Satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live:

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to) :

Chapter 8: Any other comments (optional question)

8A If you have any other comments about the Belfast Agenda or this consultation survey please use the space below.

Any other comments:

Having conducted 4 consultation workshops with women from across the city there was a common theme discussed that impacted on all of the priorities in the Belfast Agenda. Childcare affects all aspects of women's lives and the failure of the NI Executive to deliver a funded strategy for affordable and accessible childcare for all has left all women with barriers to participation in the workforce. It also increases economic inequality between communities by limiting the options of families who cannot afford private childcare places. If these workshops could promote one central message to the city partners working on the Belfast Agenda it would be to deliver a childcare strategy for the city. There is no reason why such strategy couldn't go ahead and it would support so many other goals and workstreams within the community plan. There is no need to wait for the NI Executive to bring forward their strategy - Belfast as a city can develop a strategy that is based on its own needs and priorities. There are many women's sector organisations who would be more than happy to work with city partners in moving this forward.

It has been recorded throughout the chapters that we did not discuss the stretch goals due to time constraints. We found that these sections of the document would have been the least useful to seek views on as they present figures and quantitative targets that would seem arbitrary to any member of the public without any background information to contextualise them. Additionally, we weren't sure what the phrase 'stretch goals' was trying to convey and so weren't confident that we could adequately facilitate a discussion on these with the groups.

In terms of the consultation survey, we found that the use of an online survey was off-putting to those women we were trying to encourage to participate. Without having facilitated discussions and a staff member to feed the information into the survey it would have been very difficult. It is also important to note that in facilitating these sessions with women who had no prior experience of consultation it was necessary to do a great deal of 'translating' of the material in the document. The language is often jargonistic and full of terms that would be understood by professionals working in either the public or community sector but not by ordinary people. There was a reliance on words like 'integrated', 'partnership', 'comprehensive', 'inter-agency', 'intervention', 'innovation' or 'transformation' to convey positive information about how plans would be taken forward. However, without any actual illustration as to what those terms mean and what the delivery of these commitments would look like, this terminology is relatively meaningless to a large proportion of the public. For women who have been disengaged from public policy making it can form a significant barrier. In one of our sessions a participant remarked that, 'When you try to have a say you can be talked down to or made to feel stupid because you don't understand what they mean. But how we women articulate things is important. We know what will work and what won't and

they should let us say it the way we say it.'

Related Consulations