



# VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel and citywide network



## VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel Terms of Reference

Approved 27 October 2020

**Please note the Terms of Reference were drafted in 2019. The Terms of Reference will be updated then approved by the new Panel to better represent the aims of the Belfast Agenda and the diverse nature of the sector and the people of the city.**



# I. Role and Purpose of the Sectoral Advisory Panel

The proposed role and purpose of the Sectoral Advisory Panel will be to:

*i) Ensure the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector's voices are articulated by;*

- **influencing** the community planning process through participation in the governance structure through nomination of delegates from the Panel to sit on the Belfast Community Planning Partnership, and other Partnership structures (e.g. Delivery Boards and/or working groups)
- **advising** the Community Planning Partnership on sectoral perspectives in relation to community plan themes and the community planning process, **advocating** on the wider sector's behalf, and by articulating and **reflecting the views of others** within the wider sector and/or the Panel's relevant areas of expertise (e.g. geographical area, thematic interests, identity/s75 categories).

*ii) Support the development of Cross-sectoral Relationships and improved Partnership working by;*

- **increasing collaboration** between voluntary, statutory and business sectors through panel member participation in both the Community Planning Partnership and action planning/working groups etc., promoting alignment of sectoral priorities/delivery to community planning outcomes.
- advising the partnership in **identifying key sectoral organisations, groups and networks, stakeholders** etc. for the purposes of ensuring appropriate stakeholder participation and involvement in focused action planning working groups/thematic task groups etc.
- acting as a **2-way conduit for sharing information** with the sector on the work of the Partnership and **gathering wider sectoral views and inputs** by supporting engagement and consultation with existing partnerships, networks, forums and sectoral groups.
- assisting the Community Planning Partnership in assessing how work of the Partnership and implementation of Plans meet the needs of those most marginalised and disadvantaged over time.

*iii) Promote ongoing and effective community engagement by;*

- assisting the Community Planning Partnership in **ensuring the views, experiences and needs of all sections of the community**, including those who are seldom heard, are expressed, acknowledged and considered.
- **promoting and supporting broad community engagement** in the community planning process, including all section 75 groups and across the city.
- **connecting** the wider voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors and existing partnerships, networks, forums, and inter-agency groups into the community engagement processes.
- acting in an **advisory capacity** to the Partnership in development and review of its wider engagement and communications strategies (and their implementation to achieve better outcomes for citizens).

## 2. Values and code of conduct

The Sectoral Advisory Panel will apply the following set of **values** to its work and a code of conduct will apply to Panel Members to guide its application:

### 1. Partnership, collaboration and inclusive participation

- Panel members should actively encourage public participation from all sections of the voluntary community and social enterprise sectors, and promote a culture of partnership, collaborative working and shared responsibility.
- Panel members unable to maintain the required commitment to participating in the panel and fulfilling their roles as outlined in the panel's Terms of Reference should inform the Panel so that another member can

step in.

**2. Selflessness and advocating on behalf of others, rather than promoting self-interest.**

- Partnership members must act in the best interests of the Partnership and avoid situations where their personal interests or relationships interfere with acting in good faith and advocating on behalf of the VCSE sectors in Belfast.

**3. Leadership**

- Panel members should demonstrate leadership by showing respect for other members' views and opinions. Members should also demonstrate support for and foster trust in other members and by applying all these values in all they do.

**4. Objectivity**

- In carrying out all Panel business, members should make objective and non-judgemental choices based on evidenced need and/or merit.

**5. Honesty and integrity**

- Panel members should not place themselves in any situation where other people or organisations might seek to influence them unduly for their own personal benefit or the group they represent.
- Partnership members must declare any potential conflicts of interest at the beginning of the Meeting and refrain from discussion and voting when applicable.

**6. Openness and transparency**

- Panel members should be as open as possible about all the collective decisions made and actions they take and ensure open and regular communication with others. Information should only be restricted when the wider public interest or the need for confidentiality clearly demands.

**7. Innovation**

- Panel members should seek to identify, promote and encourage the application of innovative solutions and practices to drive positive change and improvements in wellbeing for citizens.

### **3. Roles and responsibilities of Panel Members, the Chairperson and Vice Chair**

#### **Panel Members**

*All Panel members would be required to demonstrate commitment and be willing to contribute to collaborative working. Panel members will support the progression of the community plan and community planning process by:*

- Participating in panel meetings, Community Planning partnership meetings and relevant working groups to help design and deliver on the community plan for the purposes of achieving improved wellbeing outcomes for citizens in Belfast.
- Envisaged time commitments are as follows (meetings usually 2-3 hours duration):
  - It is envisaged that the Sectoral Advisory Panel will meet a minimum of 4 times per year.
  - Panel members nominated as delegates to attend the Community Planning Partnership will be required to attend approximately 2 Partnership meetings per year.
  - Panel members may be invited to attend other relevant Delivery Boards and/or adhoc working groups/Action Planning/Task groups in support of the Community Planning Partnership activities throughout the year.
  - Panel members nominated to represent the Panel on Boards or other Community Planning Structures, when unable to attend such Board meetings etc, may send a delegate from the VCSE Panel to deputise and attend in their place.
  - Panel members nominated to represent the Panel on Boards or other Community Planning Structures may share relevant reports or other information circulated internally to CPP

members, within the VCSE Panel's membership for the purpose of seeking the Panel's feedback, to enable them to reflect the Panel's voice in Board meetings etc.

- The process for identification/nomination of Panel Members to act as delegates to Community Planning Partnership structures will be agreed and implemented by the Sectoral Advisory Panel.
- Working with other Panel members to identify actions, develop and agree action plans and ensure delivery against planned outcomes.
- Taking a lead in actions when required.
- Carrying out allocated tasks as agreed at meetings.
- Contributing to effective community engagement in the development and implementation of action plans.
- Engaging with other Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector groups and with communities within the city. Effective and meaningful public participation will help to ensure action plans and decisions taken to improve services are responsive and reflect local needs.
- Promoting inclusivity by identifying hard to reach groups and appropriate methods of engagement.
- Contributing to the collection of relevant data for performance management
- Developing relationships across the city to foster collaborative working

### **Chair and Vice Chair**

*The Sectoral Advisory Panel will be chaired by a Panel member chosen from within the Panel membership.*

*The Chair's responsibilities will include;*

- Chairing meetings
- Agreeing agendas
- Allocating/reviewing/co-ordinating actions between meetings
- Ensuring each action is attributed to an owner
- Ensuring feedback from members attending the Community Planning Partnership, Delivery Boards Action Plan teams/working groups. ensuring that the Panel reports on progress as required
- Reporting back to the Community Planning Partnership
- Agreeing and reviewing performance management

The Chair will work with a Vice-Chair who will deputise for them as necessary.

The Chair and Vice-Chair will be appointed to a minimum of a 2-year term with a possibility of a 1-year extension subject to agreement of the Panel.

## **4. Membership, process and criteria for selection**

**Sectoral balance:** Membership of the Sectoral Advisory Panel is drawn from organisations and groups within the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors operating within the Belfast local government district boundary. The Panel is initially comprised of 15 members, identified via an independently managed nomination and selection process that sought to ensure as far as possible, a balanced representation of the VCSE sectors across:

- geographical areas of the city,
- thematic priorities based on economic, social and environmental wellbeing themes within the current community plan (the balance of thematic priorities may be reviewed and adjusted following development of future community plans),
- reflecting s75 groups, and
- Larger and smaller organisations.

**Term of Membership:** Membership of the Sectoral Advisory Panel is initially for a 4-year term, at which point the membership will be refreshed via a further nomination and selection process.

Existing Panel members will be eligible to re-apply for a further 4-year term via the same nomination and selection procedures.

To ensure that membership is regularly refreshed, while at the same time facilitating continuity of the Panel's activity, up to 2/3 of the Panel's membership may be considered for re-appointment for a 2<sup>nd</sup> 4-year term.

No Panel member will serve more than 2x consecutive 4 year terms.

**Panel Selection process:** The nomination and selection process applied to recruit Panel members places emphasis on achieving a balanced membership across the areas highlighted above (see 'Sectoral balance' above) together with:

- a minimum level of relevant skills
- connections to VCSE networks and/or other VCSE organisations outside their own organisation/group
- commitment to advocating on behalf of the VCSE sectors' and participating as a Panel member.

The selection process would therefore not be a traditional competitive selection process of assessing experience, skills and expertise to identify the highest scoring candidates.

The process for selection will be reviewed during each membership cycle. The process may comprise the following steps:

- A. Application/Expression of Interest** – Candidates to self-nominate via a written Expression of Interest (using an application Form approved by the Community Planning Partnership) including endorsement/confirmation of support for the candidate's nomination by a Voluntary Community or Social Enterprise organisation, groups or networks/partnerships operating within Belfast.
- B. Assessment of applications** via an independent body or selection panel tasked by the Community Planning Partnership – this process may include establishing an assessment panel, a discussion/interview with candidates to confirm relevant information/evidence of meeting the selection criteria.
- C. Successful candidates nominated to Sectoral Advisory Panel** by the independent body, whose role will be to identify a balanced membership (referred to above) with a range of expertise and skills.

As indicated above the assessment process will primarily seek to achieve a **balanced sectoral representation on the Panel, over and above identification of the most skilled/experienced candidates**. The selection process will take into account the following criteria in considering which candidates to formally nominate as Panel Members:

1. Membership will be limited to one person per group or organisation. To be considered candidates must demonstrate **all of the following criteria (a-f)** in their Expression of Interest application:
  - a. Be either a Trustee/Director, Volunteer or staff member of a constituted community, voluntary or social enterprise organisation operating within the Belfast City Council area.
  - b. Be able to demonstrate evidence of strong connections with other sectoral organisations/groups via membership and/or participation in other sectoral networks, forums or partnerships of VCSE organisations and groups beyond their own organisation, and must commit to sharing information and seeking views of others in relation to community planning via these wider networks.
  - c. be willing and able to attend meetings of the Sectoral Advisory Panel and where appropriate/applicable attend Community Planning Partnership, Delivery Boards and other working group meetings (where nominated to attend) in order to ensure there is VCSE representation across the levels of decision making within the community planning process.
  - d. be committed to signing an agreed code of conduct/way of working as a group.
  - e. have experience and/or knowledge of one or more of the thematic areas from the community plan.

- f. have a good understanding of the needs of different communities experiencing inequality and disadvantage within and across the Council area, including S75 groups and communities of place.
  - g. If an existing VCSE Panel member, that they have served no more than one 4-year term of membership.
2. In application of the above criteria [and in particular criteria (a), (e) and (f) above], the selection of nominees to be chosen as Panel members will take into account the following to ensure **balanced membership of the Panel** across:
    - a. Gender: The Sectoral Advisory Panel membership should aim to have equal numbers of men and women. The representation of women should not fall below 40%.
    - b. Geographical representation: The Sectoral Advisory Panel membership should seek to ensure balanced coverage across the Belfast geographical area.
    - c. Sectoral interests: The Sectoral Advisory Panel membership will seek to reflect a range of interest groups working in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sectors to address economic, social and environmental wellbeing themes identified in the Belfast Agenda/community plan.
    - d. Section 75 groups: Selection of Panel members will also take into account the range of s75 groups that Panel members work with/represent, from a monitoring point of view. The selection of Members will seek to ensure as far as possible that all s75 categories are reflected.
    - e. Size of organisation based on income: Selection of membership will seek to ensure balance between across larger and smaller VCSE organisations/groups in the city, including a mix of persons in both paid staff and voluntary roles.

## 5. Operational details – number of meetings per year, agendas, minutes etc.

### Panel meetings

#### *Number of meetings*

- The Sectoral Advisory Panel will meet a minimum of 4 times per year, normally scheduled at least 2 weeks in advance of Community Planning Partnership meetings, and/or taking cognisance of scheduled Delivery Board meetings.
- Extraordinary meetings may be arranged by agreement to take forward matters of interest.

#### *Agenda*

- Once the meeting notification has been circulated, all proposed agenda items can be forwarded by Panel members to the secretariat for discussion.
- Agenda items submitted should as far as is possible be substantive issues that relate to the remit and purpose of the Sectoral Advisory Panel in the context of the community planning process, and in delivery, review and preparation of future community plans.
- Secretariat will brief the Chairperson on items that have been submitted and will finalise and agree the agenda with the Chair. Secretariat will deal with any items that have been submitted but do not make it on to the meeting agenda.
- An agenda will be agreed and issued (with relevant papers) to members before the Panel meeting.

#### *Conducting meetings*

- Secretariat will have briefed the Chairperson on issues including apologies and delegates attending.
- Meetings will follow the agenda. Any presentations will be delivered at an appropriate point as agreed with the Chairperson.
- Contributions from all Panel members are welcome. While constructive debate is encouraged, it is important that speakers go through the Chairperson to ensure their point is heard and order is maintained.

## Minutes

- Secretariat will prepare minutes of the meeting. Panel members or other persons attending who have made contributions may be asked for comments on the draft minutes or for copies of presentations.
- Minutes will normally be issued as a draft as soon as possible after the meeting. Panel members should distribute the minutes within their organisation(s)/group(s) as appropriate.
- Minutes of a meeting will be formally agreed at the next meeting.

## Attendance at meetings

Panel Members will be expected to attend all Sectoral Advisory Panel meetings. If members cannot attend, they are expected to provide adequate notice. If a member fails to attend three consecutive meetings they will be contacted by the Chairperson of the Sectoral Advisory Panel and offered the opportunity to resign or improve attendance.

In exceptional circumstances where non-attendance is unavoidable, the member should advise the secretariat and nominate a delegate to attend in his/her place.

## Conflict of Interest

This is an open and transparent process – documentation in relation to the Sectoral Advisory Panel will be publicly available. Conflicts of interest may arise. It is the responsibility of Panel members to identify any potential conflict, including perceived conflicts, and to declare it to the Chair. Any conflict of interest will be recorded in the minutes.

## Decision Making

All Panel members are required to demonstrate commitment and be willing to contribute to collaborative working. To enhance collaborative working decisions will be made by consensus as far as possible.

## Secretariat

Secretariat support for the Sectoral Advisory Panel will be provided by the Community Planning Partnership to

- assist the Panel in making practical arrangements for Panel meetings, including assistance in preparing agendas/reports and taking of minutes, and
- assist the Panel in its work with the Community Planning Partnership to identify key networks and organisations across the VCSE sectors for the purposes of inviting participation in focused action planning engagements.
- work with the Panel in its communications and networking activity, for the purposes of strengthening engagement with the wider VCSE sectors in the community planning process (e.g. action planning groups, wider community engagement).
- Assist the panel in monitoring and reporting of impact and outcomes delivered as a result of the Panel's activity.

## Review

The terms of reference for the Panel would be subject to regular review by the Sectoral Advisory Panel and the Community Planning Partnership.

Additionally, the Community Planning Partnership would plan to undertake a 1<sup>st</sup> stage developmental review of the arrangements for VCSE participation and engagement (including operation of the Sectoral Advisory Panel) in 2021 (within 2 years).

## **6. Reporting arrangements**

A consistent and concise reporting template will be developed to support the gathering of information and facilitate reporting. The Community Planning Partnership will report to the Department for Communities every two years and progress will also be reported to stakeholders and the wider community. The Statement of Progress prepared by the Community Planning Partnership may include information on actions taken by the Sectoral Advisory Panel.

## **7. Ways of Working: relationship with the Community Planning Partnership (CPP)**

The CPP has the roles of leader, enabler, facilitator, mediator and advocate of change and acts:

- To provide leadership and strategic support to the panel
- To work in partnership with the panel in accordance with CPP policies and decision-making processes
- To support the panel to provide advocacy at the Boards
- To provide technical assistance for change and innovation
- To promote international cooperation and forge relationship with other international organisations
- To develop and coordinate resources
- To ensure the issues raised by panel members are considered
- To provide evidence that panel members voices are heard/considered?
- To provide information to panel members in a timely manner that supports them to participate in the decision-making processes (i.e. draft action plans, agenda, position papers, strategies etc.)
- To put in place information sharing arrangements that reflects the specific role of the VCSE panel and their relationship with the broader sector

Panel Members will additionally benefit from the established mechanisms within the CPP for information exchange, sharing of experience, mutual support, the development of new strategies, and the dissemination of products and ideas following the stated objectives and outcomes of the CPP.

Panel Members to provide the Secretariat with information from board meetings to facilitate the sharing of information among the Panel.