

2014 Election Briefing



Belfast Healthy Cities: Election Briefing



Putting 'health & place' into planning policy

One of our priorities in the last 5 years has been the theme of 'Health and Health Equity in all Local Policies'. It is recognised that the health of a population is determined not only by health sector policies and initiatives but by policies across all public sectors departments, central and local. Our overall goal is to generate health and health equity as a core value in all local policies and actions by working with organisations to seek solutions that meet their objectives in a healthy way; address the inequalities within their areas of work.

The devolution of planning responsibility to local councils is a significant move and presents the new Councils with both an opportunity and a challenge. Planning sets the context for all activities within the city, and for citizen well-being. It shapes peoples living environments by providing access to jobs and services; it creates opportunities to socialise through the use of green space and increases opportunities to be active and affects the economy: business thrives in places that people find easy to access; where children and older people are welcome, and where they can choose to access on foot, by bike or public transport.

Major planning applications will impact on the health of the citizens of the city and we are seeking a situation whereby the health and equity implications of all policies and planning applications are taken into consideration. We have trialled this approach in the Shankill area, on the proposed extension of the Belfast City Airport; on various local (community allotments) and regional (community pharmacy) government policies through health impact assessment and health in all policies approach.

Community planning will set out a framework within which the Councils, in partnership with Government Departments, statutory bodies and other relevant public and voluntary agencies can work together to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area based on effective engagement with the community. We believe this is a milestone opportunity for building health into policy development.

We are seeking commitments from elected members to acknowledge that health equity in all policies should be integral to all policy development.

Addressing Health Inequality

Belfast and Northern Ireland is divided by health inequality. The 3 electoral constituencies with the lowest life expectancy in Northern Ireland are all within the city of Belfast, and are East, West and North Belfast. The highest life expectancy in the region is in Lagan Valley where a male can expect to live 6.6 years longer than if he lived in west Belfast. Within the city life expectancy varies significantly too between 72.5 years for a male in west and 76.9 in the south. The gap for women in the two parts of the city is more than 3 years.

Similarly the rates of suicide and self-harm are greater in parts of Belfast than elsewhere in Northern Ireland with east Belfast recording the highest rate of death by suicide.

It is now accepted that socio- economic inequalities have a clear effect on the health outcomes of a population. While the standard of living in a region can be measured in terms of socio-economic factors the most important issue facing the citizens of Northern Ireland, like anywhere else, is their health. Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Chair of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health has identified the unequal distribution of power, income, goods and services as factors which lead to health inequality. These impacts on access to health care, schools, and education, and ultimately their chances of leading a flourishing life.

Health inequality among our citizens is unjust, damaging and if left unchecked will have a detrimental impact on the sustainable development of Belfast.

There is a responsibility on policy makers in Belfast and Northern Ireland to create conditions which address and reduce inequalities in the health of our local population through action on the social determinants of health.

We are asking new and returning Councillors to acknowledge the detrimental impacts of continuing health inequality; to undertake to address all of the policies and influences which can help redress the inequalities.

Making Belfast a City for All

Belfast has already begun the process of making the city open to all citizens. In each of the last 3 years, Belfast Healthy Cities has staged the 'KidsSpace' project in conjunction with the Public Health Agency. The initiative involves identifying a suitable site and opening it up to children and families in a safe, accessible way. This has attracted more than 1,000 kids into the city centre to play, enjoy a healthy natural pursuit and reinforce a sense of belonging among families.

Belfast has also been proactive in promoting sustainable travel in conjunction with the Department for Regional Development and other statutory bodies and we would want to encourage and help facilitate Belfast to become a walking and cycling city.

We would encourage elected members to continue to pursue an inclusive approach to policy development which ensure that all members of society can live, work and enjoy their leisure time in our city.

As candidates in the forthcoming election we are asking you to consider our priority policy areas:

- *We are seeking commitment from new and returning Councillors to acknowledge the detrimental impacts of continuing health inequality and to undertake to address all of the policies and influences through a health in all policies approach which can help redress the inequalities.*
- *We are seeking commitments from elected members to promote a focus on 'places for people' as a priority within the Local Development Plan and community planning*
- *We would encourage elected members to continue to pursue an inclusive approach to policy development which ensure that all members of society can live, work and enjoy their leisure time in our city.*



© 2014 Belfast Healthy Cities

Belfast Healthy Cities
22-24 Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RD
T: +44 28 9032 8811

www.belfasthealthycities.com
[@belfasthealthy](https://twitter.com/belfasthealthy)