

Belfast – Phase VII Situational Analysis Executive Summary

Each city applying to be a member of the World Health Organization (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network in Phase VII is required to complete and provide a **City Situational Analysis** in relation to the overarching themes which will be taken forward during the Phase.

This document is an Executive Summary of the analysis for the City of Belfast. It was completed following an engagement exercise with Government Departments and Statutory Bodies. The full analysis is available on the Belfast Healthy Cities Website.

PEOPLE

The situational analysis highlighted that an extensive range of programmes on **early years** currently exist and while the impact of the built environment on the health and wellbeing of children and young people is increasingly being recognised, few initiatives are in place to address this issue. An increased emphasis on issues including tackling household dysfunction and support for vulnerable parents is needed.

Older people are being supported through a wide range of programmes and initiatives, while specific programmes are also in place to address the burden of ill health experienced by other **vulnerable populations** including migrants.

Mental health and wellbeing, and in particular suicide prevention, is generally acknowledged as an important public health issue and programmes are in place to deal with the impact of social isolation and the legacy of the conflict (troubles). There is a recognised need to include users in the design and delivery of mental health services.

Public health capacity: community organisations/citizens are supported through Healthy Living Centres and efforts are ongoing to make health facilities more accessible. Agencies and departments interviewed identified a continued need for effective intersectoral working to tackle the underlying determinants of poor health.

The promotion of **healthy diet and weight** is gaining significant traction. There is a recognised potential to enhance the promotion and implementation of sustainable food policies.

The prevention of **harmful use of drugs, tobacco and alcohol** has been given significant policy attention and a number of guidance and prevention programmes are in place.

Agencies and departments acknowledge the importance of skills development for boosting health and wellbeing and a number of programmes are in place to help improve the knowledge and skills of citizens.

The importance of **social trust and social capital** for achieving good health and wellbeing is widely acknowledged and promoted through a range of social cohesion strategies and programmes, although it is acknowledged there is a requirement for ongoing focus on this area.

PLACE

The situational analysis highlighted significant programme development and investment on the priority issues within this theme. There is a clear recognition of the need to deliver **healthy urban planning and design** emerging among public agencies and community sectors.

The situational analysis also identified the need for a whole of government approach to **healthy placemaking**, and that the community planning process and the Local Development Plan have presented new opportunities for doing this.

Combatting the detrimental impact of car dependency, particularly in terms of air quality and road safety, is now recognised as a priority and various programmes and initiatives are in place to reduce the use of private vehicles. However, the levels of car use in the Belfast area are high, particularly among the large number of daily commuters to the city.

Recognition of the benefits of integrated sustainable **healthy transport** systems and improved access and use of **green and blue spaces** is now emerging across agencies and departments. There are a growing number of programmes and initiatives on these issues but there is a recognised need for further development to deliver public health benefits, particularly when compared with experience in other cities in Europe.

Acknowledgement of the need to develop child and age friendly environments is a growing and there is the potential to enhance coordinated action on these priority areas.

Reducing fossil fuel dependency and increasing **energy efficiency** of buildings and modes of transport is now widely being pursued by agencies and departments, but there is a need to enhance action in this area if global goals to tackle climate change are to be realised.

PARTICIPATION

The situational analysis highlighted that an extensive range of programmes exist in Belfast on the priority issues within this theme. The wellbeing of **older people** and other **vulnerable groups** is being supported through a wide range of programmes and initiatives although initiatives to tackle social isolation and gender differences require further development.

It is recognised that the participation of **vulnerable population groups** is underrepresented in relation to public involvement in the development of services.

Participation in **physical activities** is being recognised by agencies and departments as a way to boost social interaction and a sense of belonging in the community, particularly in the context of post-conflict reconciliation. Multiple programmes and initiatives that seek to promote social interaction by offering opportunities for engaging in physical activity are in place, although there is a recognised need to improve the uptake of these programmes among vulnerable groups.

Recent strategic and institutional changes have helped to **transform models of health care** and to deliver local services that have the potential to improve general health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities. However, it is acknowledged that whole of government, whole of society integrated approaches with strong political leadership require strengthening.

Improving **health literacy**, although relatively new to the city as a concept, is now increasingly being acknowledged by Health and Social Care services as a way to empower those experiencing health inequalities to improve their health and wellbeing. However, most programmes are at an early stage of development and there is still a need to build capacity within organisations.

Understanding of the importance of **cultural diversity** within Belfast is growing, particularly in relation to using culture to improve community relations, however, recognition of the cultural determinants of health could be enhanced.

PROSPERITY

The situational analysis highlighted the work underway in Belfast on the priority issues within this theme. The importance of **creating resilient communities** which empower people living within them to deal with adverse health impacts and sustain their own health is acknowledged by all agencies and departments. A range of programmes and initiatives are in place to build resilience amongst communities. However, high levels of inequalities still exist across socio-economic groups.

Programmes that provide social and economic protection for **older people** are in place, and focus on issues such as fuel poverty.

The impact of deprivation on **mental health and wellbeing**, has been widely recognised. Programmes have been put in place that seek to build coping strategies for individuals and to provide educational courses to promote self-management, well-being and recovery to anyone with an interest in mental health

and wellbeing including service users, family members and staff.

Healthier homes and workplaces are being pursued by the application of housing standards to new builds and retrofits, although there is a recognised potential for more action in this area.

The relevance of active transport for creating healthier neighbourhoods is now widely recognised by agencies and departments and a range of programmes and initiatives that promote more sustainable forms of transport including walking and cycling now exist. However, there is the potential to explore other ways of using the design of the built environment to boost public health.

Health and well-being measures are now included as indicators as indicators of progress in the Programme for Government. There is the potential to establish indicators which could be employed to measure progress at local level during Phase VII.

PEACE

The situational analysis highlighted that a wide range of programmes exist in Belfast on the priority issues within this theme. Many strategies and programmes are in place which seek to deal with the impact of 'the troubles' through good community relations programmes, while also working to include other communities such as immigrants.

A number of programmes and initiatives are in place to support communities at risk of the effects of paramilitary behaviour; reduce levels of violence and strengthen community cohesion through **place-based solutions** that seek to enhance access to shared facilities. It is increasingly recognised that there are long term impacts for the mental health of citizens arising from the period of conflict.

Strategies have been developed to tackle organised crime and support systems have been developed for victims of crime. Services have been developed to raise awareness and provide support in relation to domestic abuse.

Agencies and departments are generally well equipped for **emergency preparedness** and response to ensure human security, while strategies are in place for managing public health crises.

PLANET

The situational analysis highlighted that most priority issues within this theme are emerging as public policy priorities within the Belfast context. Efforts to **mitigate climate change** focus on improved energy efficiency of buildings and transport. There is a recognised potential to build on current initiatives and to tackle issues, including air pollution.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of **protecting biodiversity**, and the role of planning to support this. Programmes and initiatives that support biodiversity can be developed further during Phase VII.

There are specific policies and standards in place to ensure responsible disposal of **waste and maintain water quality**. Recycling standards have led to an increase in recycling rates.

There is a recognised potential to enhance the use of health and sustainability impact assessments for policies in relation to this theme.

The situational analysis has revealed that there is a wealth of strategic and operational actions underway in Belfast which are relevant to the Phase VII Themes. There are recognised areas in all themes, outlined in the full report which will be developed further to enhance the health and well-being of our citizens

Learning from the experience of other cities is a key opportunity provided by membership of the network. Belfast looks forward to active participation with WHO and the other members of the network in taking forward the identified priority themes for Phase VII.