



Working together for a healthier Belfast

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Comments on Involving You – A Framework for Community Development and User Involvement, Belfast HSC Trust

2 May 2008

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the opportunity to comment on this document.

We welcome the framework and are very pleased to see that the principles developed focus on working with communities and other sectors, and on tackling inequalities. This is in line with the principles that underpin the World Health Organization European Network of Healthy Cities, and we believe these are essential to make sustainable and significant improvements to health and wellbeing.

We are also pleased to see that the actions proposed will be monitored and measured. While we believe that community development is a long term process, with many intangible and difficult to measure benefits, we believe it is important that users and communities can build a picture of what impact the proposed actions are having. It would be helpful, however, to include more exact timescales, and where possible more outcome focused indicators.

Our main comment relates to the limited reference made to the ongoing health reform and future structures. It is essential to outline how Belfast HSC Trust will work with the Regional Health and Social Care Board, the Regional Public Health Agency and most importantly, the Local Commissioning Group to promote community and user involvement, and ensure that this is embedded into structures in the Belfast Trust area.

We also note that limited reference is made to community planning, and how the Framework will contribute to this. If community planning is to be successful, it is crucial that communities and sectors outside health are engaged. We see an important role for the Trust, and this Framework, in building capacity within communities to participate in the process. Equally, we see a similar role for the Trust in building capacity within Belfast City Council and Castlereagh Borough Council, to engage with communities and the community development agenda.

Indeed, we believe the Trust has a key role in ensuring that the principles engendered in the Framework are translated to the community planning process, and in leading community engagement within it.

Below, we make some comments specific to each section.

Commitment

We believe that commitment to and strong leadership for community development and user involvement at all levels is essential. We particularly welcome the proposal to develop action plans for this within each service group.

Regarding the indicators, we believe it is important that the nature of involvement is considered in addition to sheer numbers, to ensure that engagement is meaningful and makes a tangible contribution to policies and services.

Communication

The importance of communication cannot be overstated, and it is equally important that users and communities can orientate themselves within the Trust. This can currently be very difficult and it is essential that improved information is provided and shared as soon as possible. We suggest that information is also made routinely available in places users visit, including GP surgeries, libraries, childcare facilities and Trust facilities themselves.

In relation to indicators, again the nature as well as amount of feedback is important. The annual satisfaction survey should include a measure of how easy users find it to access the staff and services they need.

We are pleased to note the reference to Belfast Healthy Cities' press release service and briefings. Perhaps further contact details relating to all resources mentioned under this section could be provided in an appendix?

Partnership

The Healthy Cities approach is fundamentally a partnership approach, based on a belief that improving health and wellbeing requires the commitment and contribution of all sectors. Belfast Healthy Cities notes no reference of this organization is made under this section, although Belfast HSC Trust is a partner of Belfast Healthy Cities. We welcome, however, the commitment to work with Belfast City Council, which is particularly important in light of the Council's future role in leading community planning. As noted above, it is essential to outline how the Trust will work with the new health structures, and promote community engagement based on the principles of the Framework. This section should also

explicitly identify sectors that impact on the broad determinants of health, such as housing, education, planning and transport.

We suggest the indicators should include a measure of the extent to which other sectors are engaging with communities, as this is reflected in the guiding principle. This would also provide a measure of the Trust's success in working with and influencing other sectors.

Valuing People

We welcome the proposed actions in this section, although we would welcome recognition of the fact that particular efforts and resources may be required to engage with the most hard to reach groups.

The satisfaction surveys should include a measure of how effective staff training has been in improving attitudes. The Framework should also measure change in the extent to which hard to reach groups get involved or find it easier to access the services they need.

Tackling Inequalities

We are pleased to see the commitment to continue working with Belfast Healthy Cities. However, we believe this action point should refer to broadly tackling inequalities in health, rather than focus on Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans alone. The section should also include working with non health sectors, including housing, education and employment as well as planning and transport, to highlight inequalities and ways in which these sectors can contribute to tackling them.

We suggest the indicators should include evidence of how resources have targeted groups experiencing inequalities.

Health and wellbeing issues

We believe this section is closely connected to the Partnership and Tackling Inequalities sections, which should be considered as a holistic and strategic, as well as community oriented, package. We again welcome the commitment to Belfast Healthy Cities and also the commitment to improving joint working. However, we believe this is part and parcel of partnerships, and should explicitly refer to intersectoral working, to emphasise that health and wellbeing is everyone's business.