



**East Belfast
Community
Development
Agency**

The East Belfast Agenda

**A report on the process of
East Belfast engaging on Belfast City Council Belfast Agenda**

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1 – Background

Belfast City Council's community plan for Belfast will be known as the Belfast Agenda. It will be a joint vision for Belfast 2030, created in partnership with key city partners, residents and community organisations. The plan will set out measurable medium and long-term goals for social, economic and environmental improvements for Belfast over the next 15 years.

After attending one of several "Belfast Conversation" events in May 2015 EBCDA decided to begin an engagement process with local community stakeholders to develop a joint vision for East Belfast – the "East Belfast Agenda" – with the intention of feeding this into the Belfast-wide process.

2 – Participants

Between June 2015 and March 2016 EBCDA facilitated: one half-day workshop for community organisations; two days of follow-up conversation events with community organisations; one half-day workshop with churches and faith-based organisations; and a series of workshops with young people, in partnership with East Belfast Youth Practitioners Forum, called "My East Belfast." In total EBCDA engaged with over **100** people from **42** different organisations.

3 – Process

At each event EBCDA adapted the original "Belfast Conversation" questions to frame them from an East Belfast perspective:

- 3.1 *What's great about East Belfast?*
- 3.2 *What are the challenges facing East Belfast?*
- 3.3 *How can we make our East Belfast better?*
- 3.4 *What's the vision for East Belfast by 2030?*

4 – Key Themes

The following overarching themes ran through all the discussions:

- 4.1 **Honesty** about the challenges faced;
- 4.2 **Resilience** shaped by heritage and history;
- 4.3 **Hope** in developing leadership;
- 4.4 **Willingness** to work with others for the benefit of East Belfast.

5 – Responses

Below is a summary of the key points raised in discussion with all participants.

What's great about East Belfast?

- 5.1 The people - what you see is what you get.
- 5.2 Strong sense of community.
- 5.3 Patchwork of mini villages alongside working class areas.
- 5.4 Generations have lived in the same neighbourhoods.
- 5.5 Resilience of people.
- 5.6 Facilities and access to services.
- 5.7 History, heritage and culture.
- 5.8 Broad spectrum of churches.

What are the challenges facing East Belfast?

- 5.9 Multiple deprivation despite excellent access to services.
- 5.10 Managing the tensions and opportunities of changing demographics.
- 5.11 Empowering young people while encouraging aspirational parenting.
- 5.12 Need to move beyond interface work and build genuine relationships.
- 5.13 Socio-economic and health inequalities.
- 5.14 Educational underachievement.
- 5.15 Challenging fear and intimidation.
- 5.16 Traffic and transport infrastructure.

What's the vision for East Belfast?

- 5.17 A vibrant, proactive, visionary community who are proud of our achievements and who excel.
- 5.18 Positive inter-connectedness between community groups, churches and other agencies.
- 5.19 Move on from past industrial legacy to create new legacies.
- 5.20 A distinctive East Belfast identity while strengthening connections to the city centre
- 5.21 A thriving mixed economy of local shops and businesses.

How can we make it better?

- 5.22 Developing new leaders with a wiser, broader vision.
- 5.23 Supporting local, mixed economy on the high street.
- 5.24 Building the confidence of people to aspire and make better choices
- 5.25 Ensuring people having more of a stake in their own community.
- 5.26 Tackling social isolation and inequality of opportunity
- 5.27 Lobbying for appropriately skilled jobs and training.
- 5.28 Recognising the strengths of a diverse community.
- 5.29 Joined-up strategic planning in the best interests of East Belfast.

6 – Recommendations for taking the East Belfast Agenda forward

Based on the overall themes and responses received throughout the East Belfast agenda process, the following recommendations have been developed for consideration by Belfast City Council and all other stakeholders.

- 6.1 **Create a civic-society forum for East Belfast** in order that real honest conversations can take place to plan strategically for the future socially, culturally, environmentally and economically.
- 6.2 **Support existing community programmes that work.** Consistency of services is important for stability.
- 6.3 **A renewed focus on community development principles.**
- 6.4 **Prioritise voice and role of young people in all strategic community planning.**
- 6.5 **Create an East Belfast anti-poverty, pro-opportunity task force.**
- 6.7 **Support sensible tailored training leading to sustainable jobs.**
- 6.8 **Increase coordination between churches and communities.**
- 6.9 **Commit to the challenge of building relationships in the midst of change.**

7 – Organisations

Participants in the East Belfast Agenda process were from the following organisations:

Belfast East Seniors Forum	Kirkpatrick Memorial Pres Church
Bloomfield Community Association	Knock Presbyterian Church
Bloomfield Presbyterian Church	Knocknagoney Church of Ireland
Boring Wells	Lagan Village Youth & Community Group
Branial Church	Ledley Hall Youth Club
Charter for Northern Ireland	Mountpottinger Presbyterian Church
Christian Fellowship Church Belfast	Newtownards Road Elim Church
Connswater Community Greenway	Oasis Caring in Action
Cregagh Community Association	Orangefield Presbyterian Church
Dee Street Community Centre	Palmerston Residents Association
Dundonald Sea Cadets	Paragon Training
East Belfast Alternatives	Round Tower Project
East Belfast Community Counselling	Short Strand Community Centre
East Belfast Mission	St Donard's Church
East Belfast Partnership	St Mark's Parish Church
East Belfast Sure Start	The Dock
East Belfast Survivors of Suicide	The Hopefuls/Island Resource Centre
East Belfast Youth Initiatives	Walkway Community Association
Engage with Age	Willowfield Parish Church
Greenway Women's Centre	Willowfield Parish Community Assoc
Inner East Youth Project	Westbourne Presbyterian Church

8 – Conclusion

EBCDA is committed to working with Belfast City Council to ensure that community stakeholders in East Belfast continue to play a role in developing and implementing the wider Belfast agenda. We would welcome an opportunity to build on existing relationships with Belfast City Council to develop a joint vision for East Belfast and the wider city.