



FALLS COMMUNITY COUNCILS TRUSTEES REPORT

April 2022 – March 2023

AN OVERVIEW OF FALLS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Falls Community Council (FCC) was established in the mid-1970s as an umbrella organisation for community groups in West Belfast. Its original aim was to bring community organisations together, to share resources, and to advocate on community concerns.

FCC has maintained a pivotal role in developing the community infrastructure and harnessing community activity in West Belfast. It has continued to develop a comprehensive range of services, in response to identified need, which contribute to the enhancement of community life, health, and well-being of all the residents of West Belfast. Its premises are located on the Falls Road in Belfast.

FCC's Strategic Plan details an innovative programme that will continue to support and strengthen the community infrastructure and provide opportunities for people to gain the confidence, skills, knowledge and vision to fully participate in civic society.

Most people want to live in a place where they know their neighbours and feel safe. A place with good homes, local shops, jobs, and opportunities for young people to get a good education. Creating these places requires a community input into the way communities are planned, designed, built and maintained. But sustainable communities are about more than bricks and mortar. They require good local governance, public participation, partnership working, excellent public services, and civic pride. They are about learning from the mistakes of the past and linking social, economic and environmental programmes. Local community organisations such as the Falls Community Council play an increasingly significant part in the development of sustainable communities.

A statement of the three purposes as defined by the charity commission are:

- The advancement of education
- The advancement of citizenship or community development
- The advancement of health or the saving of lives

Who do we help

FCC works to help the general population of West Belfast. We do this through advocacy for the local community and interagency working for the benefit of the community. However, we do have a particular focus on specific elements within the local community. These include:

- Specific areas of deprivation
- Unemployed/low income
- Addictions (drug/solvent/alcohol abuse)
- Interface communities
- Volunteers
- Adult training
- Voluntary and community sector
- Youth (14-25 year olds)

How do we do this

FCC offers a range of services for the local community. We act as advocates for the needs identified by the local community and we also provide a range of services that seek to address specific need these include:

1. Advice/advocacy/information
2. Community development
3. Relief of poverty
4. Human rights/equality
5. Youth development
6. Education/training
7. Welfare Advice
8. Community enterprise
9. Research/evaluation

Beneficiaries

Our beneficiaries are the general population of West Belfast. However, we do focus on particular areas and issues as identified by the various needs analyses which have been done within the local community. All our programmes of work are directed to local areas and local people who are in most need according to identified statistics.

The NI Assembly June 2017 Constituency profile for West Belfast identifies clear areas of need through the extracted statistics

Demographic profile – age and gender

As at June 2015, there were 94,585 persons living in Belfast West – 5.1% of the Northern Ireland population. The constituency of Belfast West had the sixth lowest population. The population of Belfast West decreased by -0.06% since June 2014.

Overall, 22.9% of the Belfast West population were children aged 0-15 years, higher than the Northern Ireland average of 20.8%. Older persons made up 13.3% of the Belfast West population, lower than the Northern Ireland average of 15.8%.

Health

Belfast West had the highest age standardised mortality rate due to circulatory disease in the under-75s (2010-2014).

The constituency of Belfast West had the highest proportion of all births which were to teenage mothers.

Belfast West had the highest age standardised mortality rate due to respiratory disease in the under-75s (2010-2014).

Education

Belfast West had the third lowest proportion of school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent.

Belfast West had the fourth lowest proportion of people aged 16 and over enrolled in further education institutions

Employment

Belfast West had the highest number of redundancies in 2015.

Belfast West was the constituency with the second highest unemployment claimant count.

Low Income

Belfast West was the constituency with the highest proportion of people aged 16 and over claiming at least one benefit.

Belfast West was the constituency with the highest proportion of people aged 16-64 years claiming Employment and Support Allowance.

Belfast West was the constituency with the highest proportion of working age people claiming income support.

Belfast West was the constituency with the highest proportion of housing benefit claimants.

Belfast West was the constituency with the highest proportion of children aged 0-15 years living in low income families.

Crime

Belfast West was the constituency with the third highest recorded crime rate.

Belfast West was the constituency with the third highest rate of anti-social behaviour incidents

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES TO CARRY OUT OUR PURPOSE FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT

- The advancement of education
- The advancement of citizenship or community development
- The advancement of health or the saving of lives

Falls Community Council has 5 strategic priority areas as shown below:

Strategic Priority 1: Leadership & Advocacy

Strategic Priority 2: St Comgall's

Strategic Priority 3: Community Relations

Strategic Priority 4: Community Empowerment

Strategic Priority 5: Community Enterprises

HOW DO THESE ACTIVITIES PROVIDE A BENEFIT?

During the period 1st April 2022 - 31st March 2023 FCC provided the following services:

WELFARE ADVICE

FCC is the Lead Partner of the West Belfast Advice Consortium

FCC provides a Welfare Advice services which deals with the most vulnerable members of our society. The types of advice given include:

- Social Security Benefits
- Housing
- Consumers Rights
- Employment/Unemployment
- Money/debt related enquiries

This year the project dealt with

Total enquiries 6,559

And generated an income of £957,677

We are working in conjunction with Advice NI and the Law Centre as well as other advice agencies in West Belfast to alleviate any hardship caused by changes to welfare benefits.

CAPACITY/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Falls Community Council provides support to groups with low capacity. An example of this is St James Community Farm.

St James forum runs a very successful urban farm but does not have the capacity to provide management and financial administration which is provided by Falls Community Council.

Ulster Wildlife, St James Community Farm and Falls Community Council were successful in securing National Lottery funding through its 'People & Communities' programme for a four-year programme centered around the Community Farm at St James and adjoining Bog Meadows managed by the Ulster Wildlife Trust in West Belfast.

The key elements of the Lottery funded project are to support and connect local communities to the urban farm at St James and Bog Meadows nature reserve through a range of activities, volunteering, traineeships and education programmes. The successful application stated that:

'Local people will enjoy health and well-being benefits through working with animals and growing their own food at the farm as well as exploring, learning and relaxing in their extended garden-the wild, green space offered by Bog Meadows.'

FCC also delivers a programme of capacity building throughout the area. This year we have delivered a Transformative Leadership accredited programme to over 100 participants.

As an organization we strive to align ourselves with Government and public policy. All our programmes take recognition of key policies and programmes of work. These include

1. The Northern Ireland Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework, 2021-2026
2. The Belfast Agenda -Belfast City Council Community Plan
3. Belfast Inclusive Growth Strategy – Belfast City Council
4. Building Inclusive Communities, 2020-25, Department for Communities
5. Emerging People & Place & Anti-Poverty Strategies, Department for Communities
6. Together: Building a United Community, The Executive Office
7. Core Funding Programme, Community Relations Council

We also work giving support to resident's associations to tackle issues of concern in their areas and to provide advocacy on their behalf.

Active Partnerships

We work at both an operational and strategic level with a wide and growing range of partners as the scope of our work continues to grow and diversify. These include Belfast City Council, Department for Communities, Police Service Northern Ireland, District Policing and Safety Partnerships, Social Investment Fund, Active Communities and the Upper Springfield Development Trust.

Good Relations Programme

Falls Community Council deliver a programme of training, public talks and private engagements, to address the issues of deep division that continue to evolve and present challenges in our society. Our programme responds to the evidence that we live in a divided society, legacy issues remained potent, culture, identity and history are still contested.

Delivery

In the year April 2022 to March 2023 we engaged 335 people in the good relations programme of training and public talks. Of this, 207 took part in public discussions covering public policy issues, such as exploring a way forward on bonfires as set out in the FICT report, and sensitive history topics such as the centenary and partition. 104 young people and 81 adults took part in our cross-community training courses which covered culture, identity, anti-sectarianism, experience of the conflict, and conflict to peace process.

Approach

In our public policy talks we aim to create a respectful and informed exchange of views. We frame the talks carefully and engage speakers with expertise and practical community experience, to enable informed debates that can help build solutions around contested issues. In this way we organised a cross community talk in October 2022 about the report of Flags, Identity, Culture & Tradition Commission and a follow up talk in January 2023 about the FICT report's recommendations on bonfires.

In our historical talks we aim to create curiosity about the past and support a complex view of history. The talk we organised on unionist reactions to 1916 was first held in Shankill Library in October and then we worked to build trust to hold the talk in Ballymacash Regeneration Network in November 2022.

Our training materials are continuously updated and informed by ongoing societal debates. Each course is different and tailored to the needs of the group. The purpose of the training is to provide information, expand understanding and build relationships to allow multiple points of view to be aired. The training resources include oral history, surveys, guided discussions, theoretical models, case studies, roleplay, film and drama.

St Comgall's

The completion of St Comgall's close to an interface has given us new opportunities for engagement and the creation of a welcoming space for all communities. This builds on the strong relationships we have created over many years.

Partnership

Partnership working is a key part of our approach. In the last year we worked with Black Mountain Shared Space Project, Shankill Women's Centre, Workforce, Tar Anall, Act Initiative, Falls Women's Centre, Barron Hall, Shankill Area Social History, Ballymacash Regeneration Network, Made to Parade Podcast, South Belfast Alternatives, Glen Community Centre, Avoniel Women's Group, Shankill United, Saints Youth Centre.

Impact

Our feedback consistently shows that participants have appreciated the opportunity to have new conversations and have gained confidence to deal with conflict and division. In bespoke anti-sectarianism training we delivered for the North Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership in February 2023, these comments were typical: *Very in depth, everyone was heard, all opinions appreciated. /Really engaging and interesting topic and facilitation. /Room was engaged and interested throughout.*

AMPS MUSIC STUDIO

AMPS is a music technology project which provides training and support to artists in the music industry. We offer bespoke training in all aspects of sound technology. Key achievements this year include

L2 award in Composition was achieved by 20 individuals.

15 Persons completed a L2 award in PA set-up and gained unit certification.

L3 Live Sound Engineering/Multi-track Recording and Mixing is on-going.

18 Artists were provided with an opportunity to perform live throughout the year.

PA Systems were provided for awards ceremonies for Conway Education Centre and Workforce training

Publication of industry workshops on AMPS YouTube channel provided musicians locally with advice on Touring, registering with PRS and IMRO and when to engage a Tour Manager. 60 subscribers

Information on Courses for skill development within the music industry was provided to 50 individuals this period.

COMMUNITY DRUGS PROGRAMME

The Community Drug Programme offers a range of services which concentrate on two distinct elements;

One to one individual and family support: this service acts as a first point of contact for individuals and families who are experiencing difficulties from the negative consequences of drug and alcohol misuse. The service is designed to offer confidential advice and support to the person misusing and to family members affected. We also offer Auricular Acupuncture as a detox and relaxation therapy for clients misusing drugs and as a relaxation therapy for those in the family who wish to avail of the service.

Throughout the year CDP worked with 64 clients – 42 males and 22 females during this period, this covered 160 sessions in total; we worked on stabilising their life at that time, then continued to work with them on changing their lifestyle choices and further support when and where necessary. FCC has also been in conversation with another client's social worker re their engagement with our project, and access to their child.

Education, intervention and prevention awareness programme. CDP offers a range of courses which can be tailored to meet the needs of all groups, accredited and non-accredited. Our primary target group is anyone from the Belfast Trust area. Our users come from all social and economic backgrounds in Belfast. We also work with communities, education and sporting bodies who wish to avail of our drug prevention programmes.

Throughout this period 250 people attended our courses.

CDP took part in 6 Health Days during this period.

Parents Group

CDP have continued to meet on a number of occasions with parents who have been bereaved through drugs. This is a support group which is proving very beneficial to the members.

St COMGALLS

St Comgalls is a B1 listed building situated in Divis St close to the City Centre and to the Westlink motorway in both directions. The building is owned by Falls Community Council who plan to restore the building as a multi-functional public space for community, cultural, learning and tourism.

The building is based in the Falls ward of West Belfast which is rated number 2 in terms of multi deprivation in the North.

FCC has secured £7 million to renovate the building and will be working with our partners in Belfast City Council and the Executive Office to restore the building and deliver a much needed capital regeneration project in the area.

The restoration of St Comgalls will be a great benefit to the area and will bring opportunities to:

- Tackle dereliction
- Increase employment opportunities (during and post construction)
- Increased educational opportunities
- Increased economic opportunities
- Increase in visitors numbers to the area
- Increase in social economy opportunities
- Increase in health and wellbeing for the people of the area

The project has now been completed and FCC took over the building in Oct 2022. This is a major milestone in the development of the organization. As well as housing FCC staff the building has the potential to become a hub of community activity. A programme of events will be rolled out from summer 2023.

Below is a sample list of committees and strategic bodies that FCC are represented on:

- Chair of the West Belfast Partnership Board
- Chair West Wide Groups
- Member of the Board of Failte Feirste Thiar
- Lead on West Belfast Advice Consortium
- Member of the DFC Emergency Leadership Covid response committee
- Member of the West Belfast DPCSP
- Member of the Board of Relatives for Justice
- Chair of Whiterock Locality Planning Group
- Member of St Comgalls Steering Group

Above is a representation of the work of Falls Community Council in line with the objectives as set out to the Charity Commission.

In setting our objectives and planning our activities for the year the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities have helped to achieve the charity's purposes and provide a benefit to the beneficiaries.

DECLARATION

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature

Chrissie McAuley

Full Name(s)

Chrissie McAuley

Position

Treasurer

DATE: 23/01/2024