



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY
FIRST MINISTER**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and
Integration**

23 June 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

**COMMITTEE
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

23 June 2010

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr Francie Molloy
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Ms Evelyn Hoy) Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Tim Losty)

The Chairperson (Mr Kennedy):

The programme for cohesion, sharing and integration has been considered by Departments and key stakeholders, and we will now get a briefing on it from officials. I invite Tim Losty and Evelyn Hoy from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to join us. Good afternoon; thank you for joining us. I am sorry for any delay. The session is being recorded by Hansard. You may wish to make a brief presentation and then take questions.

Mr Tim Losty (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

Thanks for the opportunity to come to the Committee to talk about the draft programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. I apologise for the delay in forwarding the paper to the Committee. I understand that members will have had very little time to go through the programme, but hopefully Evelyn and I will be able to answer any questions that you may have on it.

Members will be aware that the revised programme has changed substantially since officials spoke to you on 24 March. At that stage the programme was really a skeleton document requiring a lot of additional work, including inputs from all the other Departments and the content and future delivery mechanisms for the programme. The revised draft now includes input from all the Departments, more substantive detail on the mechanisms for implementation of the programme, as well as the options for delivery of OFMDFM funding to the community and for seeking policy advice.

The equality impact assessment is still under development and will be forwarded to the Committee as soon as possible; hopefully either this afternoon or early tomorrow. Our research colleagues are also working to finalise the consultation questionnaire, which is mentioned in the brief. That will form an important aspect of the overall consultation exercise.

Since the last presentation by officials to the Committee there has been a round of bilateral meetings with Departments and key stakeholders, including the Community Relations Council, the Equality Commission and the PSNI. The meetings were useful in informing departmental responses to the document. Inputs to the text reflect where Departments are currently achieving positive good relations outcomes and highlight where Departments can work together in a more aligned way, which is what we are trying to achieve with the OFMDFM management of the programme.

We have taken on board the Committee's comments and input and included those in the revised draft. We have also worked on the language in the document to reflect the fact that we are talking about one community with various sections, as opposed to a number of different communities. Although the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration is not intended to benefit everyone in our community, its core aim is to tackle the issues of sectarianism, division and racism. The programme itself has a number of key aims that strive to make a difference to

people and places across our society.

A number of key priorities for government to specifically target include issues relating to disaffected young people; issues relating to minority ethnic groups; tackling the conditions that perpetuate interfaces and segregation; provision and expansion of shared spaces; and tackling hate crime and other incidents promoted by intolerance and prejudice. The revised programme now includes a range of case studies that highlight the good work, funded by OFMDFM and other Departments, that is already taking place to tackle sectarianism and racism in our community.

We plan to bring the programme paper to the Executive. I understand that there will be a meeting in early July at which the document can be tabled. Ministers remain committed to trying to launch the programme for consultation before the summer.

The consultation will be extensive and far-reaching. There will be significant opportunity for everyone to take part in the consultation process. We expect and want the consultation to be meaningful and inclusive. Public consultation meetings will be matched with more sectoral and targeted specific events. The sectoral events will be held throughout August and September, and the public meetings will start in September. We will provide more information on dates, times and locations of those for the Committee and others.

Again, I apologise for the delay in getting the document to the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to update you on it. Evelyn and I will be happy to answer any questions.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for the presentation. I am slightly confused; will you clarify the consultation process? The document will be tabled at the Executive in early July and the Executive will consider it and, presumably, clear it for public consultation. Is that the process?

Mr Losty:

Yes.

The Chairperson:

You hope to begin the events in August, leading to public meetings in September, as part of the

consultation process. How long will that last for?

Mr Losty:

It will last for 12 weeks.

The Chairperson:

OK; it will last for 12 or 13 weeks. Clearly, we are only just in receipt of the document, and to be fair to members of the Committee, we have not had time to assess it. It may well be that we need further opportunity to pose some questions. This session will be a preliminary go at that, if that is alright.

Mr Elliott:

Obviously, as the Chairperson said, we have not had much time to read the document, but page 31 states that:

“In the 2009 Life and Times survey, 95% of Protestants and 95% of Catholics surveyed indicated that they respected the other’s culture.”

I assume that the paper refers to Roman Catholics. However, the next page states that:

“attacks on GAA halls increased to 13 in 2008 from 1 in 2005. ... Attacks on Orange Halls more than doubled from 35 in 2005 to 71 in 2007”.

That does not sound as if there is much respect for each other’s culture. Do you believe the statistic that 95% of both the main traditions respect each other’s culture?

Mr Losty:

The research that has been carried out is credible, so we have to go on that information. It shows that there are small minorities in our community who are intent on causing damage to symbolic premises. That is one of the key issues that we try to address within the strategy.

Mr Elliott:

So, do you believe that those are a strong indication of the feeling in society?

Mr Losty:

As part of the work on the document, we will establish a baseline of information looking at good relations indicators. That is how we will measure our progress. Any statistical information that we will include in the outworkings of the strategy will be robust and tested, so if there are any difficulties or inconsistencies in that research, we will certainly be able to identify it before we go

into the implementation of the work.

Ms Anderson:

Thank you very much for this paper. I appreciate and can see from its volume that it is a lot more substantive than the earlier draft. However, we literally only got it when we walked into the room, and I have not had time to look at it at all. I could have questions at some other stage, but given that tomorrow or sometime very soon we are going to get the equality impact assessment, I would rather look at it in its totality, and I would appreciate another opportunity to come back to you on it.

Mr Losty:

That is understandable. We would be keen to come back before the Committee.

Ms Anderson:

I do not want to be dabbling in and out of the paper to ask questions for the sake of it. I would rather give a considered opinion of it.

The Chairperson:

You indicated that you are producing the additional document overnight, or within the next 48 hours, for members to consider. We may seek to have another session at next week's meeting. Thank you very much for your attendance.