

COFMDFM Inquiry into Building a United Community

Stakeholder Event - 28 January 2015

Summary

1. Experience of the implementation of T:BUC Commitments to date

a. T:BUC - general comments

- Some welcomed T:BUC as a promising strategy with good vision - it is going somewhere and something is happening at strategic level
- Others felt that there was little public confidence that anything would change or that there would be delivery on commitments
- Some questioned whether T:BUC is as ambitious as it says it is
- However it is too narrowly focused and should include all minority groups
- Experience of the implementation of T:BUC commitments to date has been mixed
- It was suggested that those with expertise have not been asked for their input into the delivery of T:BUC outcomes, while others felt that this is a good opportunity for the community and voluntary sector to be involved
- Concern that T:BUC is too focused on urban areas and not enough on rural areas
- Gap in defining 'sectarianism' and what is meant by 'good relations'
- Need to be clearer about what we mean by 'shared housing vs shared neighbourhoods'
- Concern about lack of clarity regarding plans to merge the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council
- How do you get creative ideas into government? - Scottish model which brings in the business and third sector into the life of Government
- Use a shared approach to deal with issues
- T:BUC has to be seen as a core policy by Departments

b. Role of Community and Voluntary Sector/Civic Society in the implementation of T:BUC

- Process of co-design was seen as possible by some community and voluntary sector representatives
- T:BUC focuses too much on public service and publicly funded organisations and groups
- The policy is stopping people from getting actively involved in the process of practical involvement and submitting their proposals or comments
- How do small independent organisations get their voice heard
- Poor information coming out to the sector on the progress of T:BUC

c. Co-design

- Co-design was described as the latest iteration of consultation and partnership - not just about government listening but the active engagement of communities
- Mixed experience of co-design amongst attendees Not a panacea but can engage groups that don't normally get involved
- DoJ has led engagement and co-design process for interface areas - probably more straightforward to see the motivation for co-design at interface communities
- Experience of work at interfaces has been top-down and bottom-up - DoJ currently working with UU on evaluation of the first 3 year period of this work to feed in to the next period of this work
- Other experience of co-design was that it is excruciatingly frustrating and difficult, that it is laborious and doesn't take us where we need to be
- United Youth Programme cited as a positive example of a good co-design process, but concern about lack of follow-up action
- Timing of programme for summer youth programmes - slow to get off the ground and not enough time for organisations to do the necessary groundwork to make programmes effective
- Others felt that the summer programmes had been drawn up with participation of children and young people and that feedback had been built into the programme design

d. Allocation of funding

- Concern across the sector that due to uncertainty regarding funding those with expertise in cross-community work are moving to other areas and organisations with years of collective experience are having to close
- Funding creates competition so less likely to share expertise
- Criticism over the Central Good Relations Fund and delays in finding out about funding decisions. Funding validates and gives authority to your work - the funder can take on the role of champion

e. Evidence that learning from previous good practice has been incorporated into T:BUC

- Feeling that good practice by organisations had been ignored
- Lack of recognition of expertise and engagement with organisations should have come earlier

f. Co-ordination of activity amongst Government departments and statutory agencies

- Concern over lack of information and communication with stakeholders - unclear where responsibility lies
- Should be greater cross departmental co-ordination - conscious of silo effect
- Strategies don't necessarily join up. Potential gap with new councils picking up community planning
- A suggestion that T:BUC was misunderstood by statutory organisations at the start - made it harder to co-operate with the process

2. Best practice in bringing divided communities together and in developing shared space and shared services

a. Examples of good practice from organisations represented around the table

- Super centres - a neighbourhood renewal project in North Belfast
- Localised examples of good practice like the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group - celebrating cultural difference
- South Tyrone Empowerment Partnership
- Women's organisations across the city
- Black Mountain Shared Space
- Getting communities to look jointly at shared issues rather than differences and not focusing on the religious make up of participants
- There's no need to reinvent the wheel - big programmes in youth work should be used if properly resourced
- IFA - Football for All initiative
- GAA - lacks universal appeal of IFA but works to engage with non-traditional areas through schools
- 2 arts programmes removing sectarian artwork
- Intercultural arts programme (migrant and indigenous culture)
- DCAL/DSD 3 year programme to promote volunteers
- Tramway , Glasgow - a development for multiple faiths in a secular space
- Neutral shared space in Belfast e.g. Custom House Square
- Botanic Primary School has undertaken good integration work with Roma children - part of a longer term experience with the Chinese community and Eastern Europeans.
- Fair employment legislation

b. How lessons learned from good practice are best publicised and circulated

- There was feeling amongst some that much good experience was not being considered as a model of best practice
- Every bit of good practice needs to be recorded and disseminated
- Weak communication to share best practice
- Ballynafeigh Community Development Association - better known internationally than in Northern Ireland - visitors come from all over the world to see it as an example of integration.
- Seminars and conferences tend to look abroad for speakers but there is local experience

c. Opportunities for learning between organisations

- Opportunities for learning between organisations is lost because of the competition over funding
- Youth Council and GAA working together to address issues of road safety
- Are groups aware of each other's actions?
- Is there a way of showcasing T:BUC progress?

d. The challenges faced in developing shared spaces and shared services

- Shared neighbourhoods are not regarded as valuable as divided communities
- There are different methods to building on shared space
- Language used when talking about shared space can sometimes be problematic
- Many within rural areas do not recognise that there is a sectarian divide
- T:BUC too focused on contested spaces due to sectarianism
- There are areas of space within the city e.g. Sirocco site which would be ideal for growing shared space within the city. But need something big and visible for communities to get behind
- Issue around funding - might give the same amount of funding to two different groups but one performs much better than the other. What are the other important factors?
- Redevelopment of Alexandra Park has not resulted in more integration
- More opportunities for mixed communities are needed
- Should we be trying to integrate communities - if communities feel safe living in their own areas they should be left to do so
- Disappointed by the focus on new shared spaces when many existing shared spaces need support to be sustained
- Not clear what is meant by shared space - concern about the connotation that people are being forced together

e. Opportunities to feed back into government policy

- We need feedback on the implementation of policy actions
- Feeling that by the time organisations submit their views on a consultation the policy has been written and views only identify gaps within the document.
- Stakeholders need to the ability to shape policy before decisions are taken and policy documents written
- Government puts sport in a box but it should be more collaborative - e.g. provision for young people beyond sport

3. Role of communities in policy and decision making, particularly in areas of contested space or interfaces

a. Experience of involving communities in policy and decision making

- Some people are hard to reach - e.g. Black Minority Ethnic, socially excluded etc.
- Some people have difficulty in responding to consultations - are there other ways to reach them?
- View of rural communities not being heard
- Submissions to consultations are ignored or not acted upon - departments don't listen
- Policies are written before community input is considered
- Arts and sports organisations - everything is built around local communities and champions

b. Barriers faced by communities wishing to be involved in policy and decision making

- Many citizens are not aware of the work of politicians in policy and legislation but should be their responsibility to find out
- Duplication of services
- Develop mechanisms for young people to have a say
- Need to look at the best way to engage - face to face not always the most effective
- Funding isn't always based on need and progress
- Civic space can become congested
- Community involvement needs to reflect the make up of community - more female/youth/ethnic minorities
- Policy documentation is too detailed for community consumption
- Alienation between community and decision making
- Consultations are not accessible - Departments should make use of existing bodies to make communities more aware of consultations that matter to them
- Policies should be developed with people rather than presenting them to people after they have been developed

c. How to build capacity within communities wishing to be involved in decision making

- Use social media more to find out what people think and get feedback
- Motivation is key to getting people involved
- Provide funding for focus groups
- Have a women's officer in each Council
- Youth Councils can help young people develop communication skills
- Consider provision of standardised pro forma for submissions
- Resource communities to give them the skills to engage

- Scottish model - representation from District Electoral Areas as a sub-structure of the council
- There are different demographics so a mechanism is need for engagement to ensure input
- Women are more and more exclude from communities - what role do women have in community and decision making?

d. The potential for 'community planning' to be a useful vehicle for community involvement in decision making

- Communities have to be at the front and centre
- Answers sit within communities - they can often give you the most cost effective and easy way to implement a solution
- Positive view of community planning but should be used as a more challenging tool for communities
- Could facilitate communities to come together to discuss areas of mutual interest
- Fear that structure will just do what councils want
- Has to take account of an obligation for sharing - has to include community engagement
- Will take time and is not the final answer but helps to build relationships and promote engagement
- Community planning in border areas could include cross-border engagement, but this can be contentious
- Provides an opportunity to designate partners

e. Challenges faced in areas of contested space or interfaces

- There's a need for longer term planning
- The loudest voices aren't always the representative voices
- Failure to implement economic development opportunities has held communities back
- Some people living at interface areas don't want anything to do with paramilitaries but we have put paramilitaries in control over certain communities
- Diminishing resources
- Lack of inter departmental collaboration
- IFA: Limestone United is a project which uses football to bring together young males at a contentious interface area in North Belfast.
- Contested spaces create a fear for safety and security, but it's not just a policing issue. Engagement could be facilitated through Section 75 (NI Act 1998) statutory duties
- Cost of communities at interface is not socially recognised

4. Recommendations to support and enhance policy and decision making with regard to building a united community, against a backdrop of constrained financial resources

a. Challenges faced by constrained financial resources - how to do better with less

- Children and the hidden victims of austerity
- Models of good practice need to be sustained - otherwise risk losing expertise
- Duplication needs to be identified
- Could be more collaboration across groups
- Better collaboration across Government Departments
- A lot of the infrastructure is in place - need to make it more effective rather than create something new
- Need appropriate policy levers to ensure money is spent well (e.g. opening up a peace wall required traffic calming measures but was not straightforward to get the resources necessary to do this)
- Difficult for an outsider to challenge individual spending priorities within Departments
- Government is risk averse and resistant to creativity
- If you can nip things in the bud it's not always necessary to spend a lot of money
- Use existing infrastructure - e.g. youth work should make use of volunteers working together
- Ambiguity about what resourcing is - lack of clarity about the budget and the timeframe

b. Relationship between central government funding and other external funding bodies like PEACE, Atlantic Philanthropies

- Funding is piecemeal and the external funding is going
- Need to remove competitive attitude with regard to funding
- Need to streamline allocation of funding from Departments
- Needs to be a balance between central funding and private funding

c. The benefit of exploring common issues like parenting, tackling deprivation, environmental improvement

- Need for universal 'good relationship' education for young people - young people need to be taught about healthy relationships
- Programmes should not just focus on one part of peace building - it needs to be progressive and a route of engagement
- Brings communities together without the necessity of discussing differences and highlights commonality

d. Resourcing the strategy

- Executive needs to fund for change
- Need more funding for mental health and special educational needs
- We strive for perfection - we want everything in place before we start but we need to start somewhere
- Can there be a central government pot that Departments can dip into to support collaboration?
- Statutory obligations for T:BUC?

e. Measuring progress

- DoJ research - mapping people who live at interfaces from the cradle to the grave - an impact assessment which can be used as a basis for evidence with which to engage other Departments
- More information required - particularly important to highlight progress
- Provide access for civic society to ask questions - more connection with committee structures and MLAs
- Be more specific about the action plans in the long and short term
- Regular communication between the Committee and Ministers/Department
- More clarity about which Department is responsible for which actions
- Importance of case studies - not always numbers and facts
- The sort of change that T:BUC wants to achieve is hard to measure
- Interim evaluation to assess throughout - needs live feedback