

Ballymoney Community Resource Centre

For the community, by the community, with the community.



Submission from Ballymoney Community Resource Centre to the OFMDFM Inquiry into Together: Building a United Community

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Background Information

Ballymoney Community Resource Centre (BCRC) provides a support network for community and voluntary groups; providing advice, guidance and information on community development issues, projects and funding; as well as focused support to areas of weak community infrastructure (Including three Small Pockets of Deprivation). BCRC is committed to promoting universal rights and addressing inequalities and also manages an Ethnic Minority and Migrant Workers Support Project for the Causeway Coast and Glens area, a CRC core funded Community relations Programme, a Reaching Out: Connecting Older People's project and a Disability Development Programme. BCRC organises events, seminars, conferences, and the website and newsletter promote the work of the local community and voluntary sector. Other services include needs analysis, research and evaluation, use of venue and office equipment etc. BCRC is particularly active in promoting cultural diversity and equality. As most of our area of influence is rural, we are also very active in addressing issues of rural isolation and inequality.

Ballymoney Community Resource Centre aims:

To articulate the voice of the community and voluntary sector and provide a link to policy and decision making at local and regional level;

To promote and facilitate relevant training and capacity building initiatives to the community and voluntary sector in the NE, in order to increase group capacity and sustainability;

To promote good relations and build social capital throughout the new Causeway Coast and Glens council district;

To promote a networking culture;

To manage and develop the Disability Programme;

To manage and develop the Ethnic Minority and Migrant Workers support programme;

To provide support and services to older people;

To provide relevant, accessible information to community and voluntary groups to aid the advancement of their community and work.

RESPONSE

Ballymoney Community Resource Centre welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the enquiry on Together: Building and United Community from the perspective of community development and community relations practitioners, some of whom have in excess of 20 years experience of working in conflict resolution and peace-building.

- 1.1 If the strategy is committed to exploring perspectives on sectarianism, division and good relations, including theory and practice, it is essential that representatives of all sections of society are included in the research, planning and implementation – this has to be an inclusive bottom-up and top-down process, not one that is imposed on grassroots communities.
- 1.2 There is no real acknowledgement of the need still to deal with the past and the legacy of the conflict. There also needs to be much greater recognition of the role that civic society can play in implementing this strategy – local communities are cast very much in a support role for statutory agencies rather than as key players. It is essential that the voices of young people, victims and survivors, interface communities, prisoners, ex combatants, women and others are fully included in the implementation of TBUC. A cohesive, united community can only become a reality if the concept is embraced at all levels of society and the contribution to peace-building by grass roots activists acknowledged. There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution, and while learning from other international conflicts or even sharing good practice around Northern Ireland can be valuable, every area is unique and policy makers and practitioners must take this into consideration.
- 1.3 BCRC believes that in order to bring people and communities together and build stronger relationships founded on trust greater emphasis should be placed on developing and implementing plans to address the following:
 - Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling disadvantage. We have to demonstrate a real commitment to addressing the ‘hard issues’. Tackling the ‘multiple social issues effecting and entrenching community separation, exclusion and hate’ should be a short term aim. This fits well with the theme of ‘community

renewal' and is of particular importance in areas of relative deprivation. It is particularly important in times of recession that addressing social deprivation should continue to be a priority, to avoid even more 'protectionism', envy, fear and mistrust of other communities.

- Tackling the visible manifestations of racism, sectarianism, intolerance and other forms of prejudice. Cultural identity, including issues around flags and emblems, murals, bonfires, cultural expression, language and popular protest' should be addressed as soon as possible and not left as a long-term goal. We must not underestimate the power that these forms of cultural expression have to affect good community relationships at all levels of society, with territorial marking and contentious parades cementing segregation and division.
- Encouraging shared neighbourhoods and reducing and eventually eliminating segregated services must be goals for the immediate future, resourcing segregated services cannot be sustained in times of recession.
- Adopting a zero tolerance approach to all incidences of, and reasons for, attacks motivated by sectarian, religious, racist hatred or prejudice, including those on symbolic premises, cultural premises and monuments;
- Creating a new and improved framework for the management and regulation of public assemblies including parades and protests. Rasharkin and Dunloy are both in Ballymoney Borough, and a new and improved framework for the resolution of public assembly disputes is essential as members of both traditions are highly critical of recent determinations by the Parades Commission. We need only to look back to the extended periods of community tension and conflict during recent marching seasons to see that this must be a priority. There will still be a need for a politically independent organisation to act as an arbiter in parading disputes, however.
- Achieving the full participation of all sectors in all aspects of society;
- Supporting local communities to resolve local issues through local solutions;

1.4 Working with **young people**, both through formal education and through street intervention initiatives is of primary importance, and should start immediately and be permanently ongoing. Anti-social behaviour has an adverse affect on intergenerational relationships as well as on community safety and fear of crime, plus

there is a perception (not always accurate) that young people are heavily engaged in erecting flags, building bonfires, protests and riots etc

- 1.5 Education is key, particularly integrated education from early years, but there must be recognition that community education and participative learning is as important as formal education, and that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for building the capacity of our young people to engage with the peace process and become active citizens. Street intervention programmes, 'dream schemes' and sports programmes have all been used to good effect when working with disaffected young people.
- 1.6 However, we have to get beyond the 'contact theory' of the 1970s – yes it is good to bring young people from different community backgrounds together to learn, train, play sport, go on holiday together, but these can't be short term, one off initiatives or opportunities for people to work or play together. Relationships built on trust take time to develop, and the foundations for building relationships will only bear real weight when all services including education are truly shared. This will also have benefits for the economy.
- 1.7 This is the third policy statement to be released since the 1998 Agreement. Shared Future was a vision that many practitioners in the Community and Voluntary Sector and others could work towards. Cohesion, Sharing and Integration lacked substance and failed to meet the needs of many of the Section 75 groups, not to mention victims and survivors and ex-combatants. Together: Building and United Community has diluted the vision of a Shared Future even further. Unless our political, civic and community leaders show a real commitment to implementing this document and addressing the hard issues through a detailed action plan, which is adequately resourced, this too will end up on the shelf and communities will become more polarised rather than more united.
- 1.8 It is important to nurture leadership at local level – there is a great deal of work to be done with our elected representatives to encourage them to become transformative leaders and to take responsibility for good relations in their boroughs without disappearing into their traditional political silos. It is essential that community leaders

and grass roots activists are also empowered to speak and act for their communities, and that their voices are listened to with respect. Together: Building a United Community must become part of the foundations for each new council's Community Planning process.

- 1.9 While it is important that local councils are part of a delivery process for good relations work, and that they are encouraged to accept their statutory obligation to promote good relations, it is hard to believe that all of the new councils will step up to the mark, set aside political difference, and make decisions based on the common good. Local council good relations officers are competent and committed, but levels of commitment amongst councillors fail to inspire confidence.

- 1.10 If the Together: Building a United Community policy document is to be effectively implemented it must be adequately resourced, and those resources must be distributed via a mechanism that is politically independent, transparent and accountable to the public.