

Introduction

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to submit the enclosed information to the Committee of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister as part of its inquiry into the Government's Together Building a United Community Strategy.

As the Council understands it, the Inquiry seeks to undertake the following:

- Explore perspectives on sectarianism, division and good relations including:
 - an examination of theory and practice with regard to good relations, shared space and shared services;
 - consideration of best practice, both locally and internationally, in bringing divided communities together, and in developing shared space and shared services;

- Seek views on what good relations means and how sectarianism and division can be addressed, with a particular focus on the challenges at interface areas, both urban and rural. This might include:
 - seeking views on what issues need to be addressed in order for interface barriers to be removed;
 - examining the role of communities in policy and decision making in relation to community integration and particularly, the removal of interface barriers; and
 - consideration of the effectiveness of the Good Relations Indicators in monitoring and measuring the progress of government interventions.

- Make recommendations in order to support and enhance policy and decision-making with regard to building a united community, including on actions to tackle sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance, and to help deliver the Executive's commitment on removing interface barriers.

Belfast City Council hopes that the following may assist the Committee in its tasks and is happy to provide any follow-up information should this be required.

Response

1. *Explore perspectives on sectarianism, division and good relations including:*
 - *an examination of theory and practice with regard to good relations, shared space and shared services;*
 - *consideration of best practice, both locally and internationally, in bringing divided communities together, and in developing shared space and shared services;*

Through all-party agreement, Belfast City Council adopted "Promoting Good Relations" as a key corporate objective in 2001 and established a dedicated Good Relations Unit within the organisation. It developed an initial Good Relations Strategy in 2003 which was underpinned by the reconciliation theory outlined by Hamber and Kelly.

The Council's own Good Relations Strategy states that we "will encourage and support good relations between all citizens, promoting fair treatment, understanding and respect for people of all cultures". The principle of equality of opportunity underpins the Council's approach to all good relations issues.

The Council set up a Good Relations Steering Panel in 2004 – later becoming the Good Relations Partnership – and developed a City-wide Good Relations Plan in 2007. The purpose of this plan was aimed at "tackling sectarianism and racism & promoting cultural diversity". The underpinning objectives of the plan were to:

- Secure Shared City Space
- Transform Contested Space
- Promote Shared Cultural Space

- Build Shared Organisational Space.

Within this, the Council developed a series of 'shared space principles'. It is important to understand that 'shared space' is not neutral space; it is a place where ones identity can be expressed in an open and non-hostile environment. Shared space should therefore be:

- **Welcoming** - where people feel secure to take part in unfamiliar interactions, and increase an overall sense of shared experience and community
- **Accessible** – well-connected in terms of transport and pedestrian links within a network of similar spaces across the city and managed to promote maximum participation by all communities
- **Good quality** – attractive, high quality unique services and well-designed buildings and spaces
- **Safe** – for all persons and groups, and trusted by both locals and visitors.

The Good Relations work of the Council is 75% funded by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister under the District Council's Good Relations Programme. Each year the Council develops an annual Action Plan, which is based on an independent audit of Good Relations needs within the City. The Action Plan seeks to develop programmes that can address the issues within the audit and also challenge others to embed these shared space principles into all activity. Most of the activity in the Action Plan is delivered through a grants programme by third party community and voluntary organisations, or through direct delivery by Council officers. The Action Plan is targeted at areas such as work around interfaces, bonfires, decade of centenaries, participation & inclusion of migrant and minority ethnic communities, mural replacement programmes and training.

In relation to Council delivered programmes, the funding is targeted at those programmes and projects that primarily contain interactive activity on specific Good Relations issues. Therefore, the following criteria are a central component for participation in Council funded or delivered programmes:

- Ideally programmes and projects should contain participation that is cross community. However it is also recognised that some groups require single identity projects, which can be supported on the understanding that this LEADS to inter-community engagement.
- Projects that demonstrate 'interactive' engagement between participants will command a higher score for funding than those where engagement is 'social' or 'passive'.
- Interactive dialogue commands the highest funding award, in recognition of the reality that this will have the best Good Relations outcomes.
- Good Relations events will be open to all and there will be no elements (music/flags/bunting etc) that the general public could perceive as being offensive present at such events.
- Generally projects should achieve an outcome that facilitates participants in respecting differences through greater understanding of the 'other'.

The Good Relations Unit is a small unit of staff and therefore it relies on the role of community leaders in actual delivery of projects. The Council sees its role as being to support them in the delivery of projects at a neighbourhood level under the above criteria. This can be challenging for local workers. However as a Unit, the Good Relations team in the Council spend a lot of their time in relationship building and fostering trust between the Council and community leaders. This in itself is a crucial engagement process in the task of building Good Relations within the City.

The Council, as the Civic leader in the City, sets the criteria, vision and envisaged outcomes for Good Relations work – but delivery is reliant on buy-in from community leaders, community groups and the general public.

Good Relations Partnership

The Good Relations Partnership is a working group of the council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the Partnership is comprised of political and external representatives, which deals with issues around equality, good relations, sectarianism, racism and cultural diversity. This group was formed to include cross-party representation in addition to people from a range of other sectors, including minority ethnic organisations, churches, central Government, statutory, trade unions, business, and the community and voluntary sectors to ensure that it is as representative of the wider community. It is the only council working group to include external representatives in recognition of the importance of being accountable to, and engaging with the wider community on good relations issues. It has been central to gaining the political and community buy-in to Good Relations practice and delivery in the City and adds 'external voices' to the challenges faced by the political make-up of the Council.

Shared Space

The "welcoming, accessible, good quality & safe" principles, as detailed above underpin the development of shared space in Belfast and should be reflected in the design, programming and management of project activity, particularly emerging capital projects.

PEACE III

It is important to note the significant contribution made by the European Union's support for peace building and reconciliation work funded under the various PEACE Programmes.

Many worthwhile projects have been delivered in Belfast and the Council has led the delivery of a successful local action Plan under the current PEACE III programme which is now drawing to a close.

The opportunities presented by the proposed new PEACE IV Programme have also been welcomed by the Council as reflected in its submission to the Special EU Programmes Body's consultation on the Draft Operational Programme for PEACE IV.

Collaborative approach

There is a huge transformative potential of major developments which have Good Relations and Shared Space principles at their core. City master plans, community planning, transport networks and other major initiatives all have the potential to build better relationships between people from different neighbourhoods. Such projects can facilitate the opening up of civic space, collaboration at a local level on development, networking of ideas and ultimately promote local engagement and relationship building.

There is a need for increased consideration of shared space principles and good relations impacts of major infrastructure/ capital projects. .

Some examples of projects that demonstrate good practice

1. Preventing a return to conflict:

From 2010 – 2011, 3 ex-prisoners organisations got together to develop 2 booklets called "Preventing a return to conflict" and "Time stands still". The first of these booklets was a summary of the experiences of former Republican and Loyalist Prisoners of prison life. They sought to de-romanticise prison life by detailing their experiences. This booklet was then used for workshops with young people involved in interface conflict and the result was a reduction in incidents at one notorious interface flashpoint area in Belfast. The second booklet sought to document the forgotten experiences of the partners, wives and children of prisoners. Their powerful story brought different communities together in a common human experience and provided former prisoners with a story that had not been heard before. These booklets had a number of outcomes: a sharing of a

common story between former enemies, greater understanding of the reality of prison life, education for young people who were 'romanticising' conflict and prison life, the reality of the experiences of families of prisoners and a reduction in interface conflict.

2. Creating Cohesive Community project

This was led by LORAG and South Belfast RoundTable and was funded under the PEACE III Programme. The project sought to promote cohesive community relations in south Belfast and tackling discrimination & prejudice and building links between migrants and host communities. It targeted mainly the Roma community in an effort to foster greater education and cultural awareness as well as providing social activities for young people to interact and integrate.

3. Decade of Centenaries Programme

The Council has led on a series of actions and activities to support the City in marking and commemorating the current Decade of Centenaries. In 2011 the all-party group of Councillors agreed to a series of Principles around which the Decade of Centenaries would operate. Following this agreement the Good Relations Unit facilitated Members in developing a series of programmes to cover three areas, the first of which would be the 1912 – 1914 period. For this period, the Council produced a unique exhibition entitled "Shared History, Different Allegiances". The exhibition incorporated the events of the signing of the Ulster Covenant, the Gaelic Revival, the Larne and Howth gun running, the Suffragette movement and the rise of the Labour movement. There were huge numbers from across the political divide who viewed the exhibition. In addition there were a series of talks and events held which drew large numbers in a programme that brought people together for a joint exploration of our common history.

Other examples of good practice include:

- an inter-agency joined up collaborative approach to tackling anti-social behaviour and needs of young people especially around interfaces in the city.
- Drawing Down the Walls Project and associated re-imaging programmes
- Creative Legacies Project led by Belfast City Council's Tourism, Culture & Arts Unit
- Numerous Good Relations and intervention programmes funded by the Council and OFM/DFM and delivered by community and voluntary organisations

2. *Seek views on what good relations means and how sectarianism and division can be addressed, with a particular focus on the challenges at interface areas, both urban and rural. This might include:*

- *seeking views on what issues need to be addressed in order for interface barriers to be removed;*
- *examining the role of communities in policy and decision making in relation to community integration and particularly, the removal of interface barriers; and*
- *consideration of the effectiveness of the Good Relations Indicators in monitoring and measuring the progress of government interventions.*

In 2011, Belfast City Council agreed to a notice of motion on interfaces which called for work to begin to seek to remove all barriers within the City. This was a political initiative. Following this motion, the Good Relations Unit in the Council developed a 'framework for action' to put together a series of interventions to begin this process within the City. Also in 2011, the Community Relations Council developed a guide to tackling interface issues. It cannot be stressed enough of the importance of putting communities at heart of any process with regard to any intervention on interface barriers. The two underpinning principles to the Council's work on interfaces are that the safety and security of those living closest to any barrier is paramount & nothing will be done to any barrier without the involvement and consent of those living closest to it. Those who live closest to interface barriers must be willing to consent to change and this involves intensive, effective

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engagement and communication with residents. Part of this is to manage expectations and allay concerns and fears.

The Council has developed a programme of work, in partnership with the Department of Justice, on 15 physical barriers in the City. The current process centres on what we have termed a “softening” of the barrier through small scale environmental works, addition of art-works, removal of items such as barbed wire, replacement of a steel gate with a see-through fence and other elements. It is deemed to be the case that a softening will build confidence and could lead to a further transformation of the barrier, possible adjustment of the barrier and may lead to ultimate removal.

There are huge resources required for this work as much of the physical works require an injection of capital moneys. In addition, there are significant barriers placed on this work by a lack of a joined up approach to the issue by statutory and Government agencies. Emergency powers legislation catered for the erection of barriers, but there is no equivalent in place to facilitate their removal.

A long term strategy is required with the appropriate resources and a comprehensive inter-agency approach. Legislation may also be required in order to speed up the process (planning permission, ownership, confidence building measures)

In addition, the issue of interface barriers has become one of equality. The poorest people within our City (from all communities) are those who live closest to interface barriers, where their life expectancy is 10 years less than people who do not live at an interface. The quality of life and health & well-being for such residents suffers as a result of their address where safety fears, lack of opportunity and poor health dominate their daily lives. All statutory and government interventions should seek to tackle these inequalities at interfaces, which can ultimately have a positive outcome on the removal of physical structures.

3. Make recommendations in order to support and enhance policy and decision-making with regard to building a united community, including on actions to tackle sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance, and to help deliver the Executive's commitment on removing interface barriers.

Tackling sectarianism and racism needs to be at the core of all public policy and programming. The goal of tackling sectarianism and racism should underpin capital projects, educational programmes, community initiatives and civic events. Such initiatives should seek to define how their project or programme will build better relationships between people from different political, racial and religious backgrounds.

Dedicated and adequate resources for programmes such as the District Council's Good Relations Programme need to be long term and sufficient to deliver real change within and between neighbourhoods. The recommendations within the recent NISRA evaluation of the District Council's Good Relations programme need to be adopted by OFM/DFM and implemented into strategic policy and delivery.

The District Council's Good Relations programme can be the best tool under which to deliver effective intervention programmes that meet the needs and requirements of locally elected and accountable civic leaders. Grant aided programmes should be intercommunity (or single identity leading on to intercommunity engagement) and interactive in order to positively change attitudes and perceptions of the 'other'. Grant aid programmes should also seek to develop interactive engagement between minority ethnic communities and host communities. Some good examples of projects that engage on participation and inclusion of minority ethnic communities include the Council's Migrant Forum and the PEACE III funded “Creating Cohesive Communities” programme which seeks to undertake practical programmes to support inclusion and participation.

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As part of the impending devolution of Community Planning powers to Council's, Good Relations needs to be at the heart of this process. A community plan that facilitates connectivity and mobility within and between neighbourhoods can succeed in connecting people across communities.

Civic leadership, from the top of Government down needs to be prominent, focussed and dedicated to the promotion of Good Relations and have an impact into all aspects of civic and social life.

Progress on interface barriers requires a need to place communities at the centre of this process. Validation and resources are required to the phased approach as set out in point 2 above.

In relation to making progress on interfaces and changes to physical structures, legislation may be required to force statutory agencies and Government Departments to speed up the delivery of any interface intervention.