



Derry City Council  
Comhairle Cathrach Dhoire  
Derry Cittie Cooncil

6<sup>th</sup> October 2014

**RE: Inquiry into Building a United Community**

Dear Mike Nesbitt MLA,

Derry City Council Community Relations team would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister Inquiry into Building a United Community. Please find our response enclosed.

The response concentrates on the functioning and funding of the 'District Council's Good Relations Programme' specifically. The Good Relations Working Group of Derry City Council (A formal sub-group of council comprising of 1 elected councillor from each of our political parties – UUP, DUP, SDLP, SF) have authorised us to make this response. The response does not discuss wider policy issues or broader content of TBAUC as that is the role specifically of our elected political parties rather than necessarily the officers working to deliver Derry City Council's Good Relations Strategy.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact the Community Relations Team via [sue.divin@derrycity.gov.uk](mailto:sue.divin@derrycity.gov.uk) tel: 71365151 ext 8218.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Divin, Carol Stewart, Angela Askin.  
Community Relations Officers

**TBAUC Inquiry**

**Submission of Evidence from Derry City Council Community Relations Team**

**October 2014.**



**Submitted to: [committee.ofmdfm@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:committee.ofmdfm@niassembly.gov.uk)**

**Committee for OFMDFM, Room 285, Parliament Buildings, Belfast, BT4 3XX.**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Value of opportunity to submit evidence**

Derry City Council Community Relations team would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister Inquiry into Building a United Community. The 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy has a key impact on Derry City Council's Good Relations service delivery and we value the opportunity to submit evidence to the inquiry into it.

### **1.2 Context of Derry City Councils CR Team submission**

This response is submitted by the Community Relations Team in Derry City Council. This team comprises of 3 Community Relations Officers, 2 placement students and one Part-Time administrator – all of whom work in the field of the promotion of Good Relations and collectively have around 30 years experience in delivery of Good Relations by and through local government in the Derry~Londonderry area. The Good Relations Working Group of Derry City Council (A formal sub-group of council comprising of 1 elected councillor from each of our elected political parties – UUP, DUP, SDLP, SF) have authorised us to make this response and are aware of its content.

### **1.3 Focus of the response on District Council's Good Relations Programme**

The response concentrates on the functioning, funding and content of the 'District Council's Good Relations Programme' which is specifically referenced in the 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy (p.107 paragraphs 6.32 – 6.38). The response does not discuss wider policy issues or broader content of TBAUC as that is the role specifically of our elected political parties rather than necessarily the officers working to deliver Derry City Council's Good Relations Strategy. It is hoped that the response will highlight the breadth and quality of the work currently funded under the District Council's Good Relations Strategy and give constructive feedback on the practical management of the District Council's Good Relations Programme within OFMDFM.

## **2.0 Main issues and relevance to terms of reference.**

### **2.1 Specific relation to terms of reference**

This response relates to the issues as identified in Terms of Reference: 'Make Recommendations in order to support and enhance policy and decision-making with regard to building a united community' and 'Seek views on...[how] division can be addressed...'

### **2.2 The District Councils Good Relations Programme**

The District Council's Good Relations Programme has existed since before the Good Friday Agreement and has developed significantly over this time. All 26 District Councils currently participate. Through it OFMDFM asks District Councils to bid for funding annually based on their 'Good Relations Internal and External Audits and Action Plans'. Many councils term this their 'Good Relations Strategy'. OFMDFM then assess the applications and issue letter of offer for whatever amount they see fit. 75% of the total offered is funded through OFMDFM with councils providing 25% match funding. Claims are made quarterly by councils and reimbursed. Councils also must provide an annual report to OFMDFM outlining their spend and the actions delivered/outcomes achieved. The committee may find it useful to examine the annual reports submitted by councils to have a full picture of the work under the District Council's Good Relations Programme. Headings in councils Action Plans mirror the TBAUC aims.

### **2.3 Importance of the District Council's Good Relations Programme**

Derry City Council has participated in this programme since its inception and recognises that it provides an important and valuable funding stream for the promotion of Good Relations work locally. Without the District Council's Good Relations Programme much of the work done by councils would be severely reduced due to lack of funding. The type, quality, range and scale of the work done by participating councils under the scheme varies significantly from council to council. Many researchers, consultants and interested individuals sometimes make the assumption that District Councils simply give out 'Good Relations Grant Aid' under the scheme. In fact Grant Aid is only a very small part of the work done by Community Relations / Good Relations Officers in District Councils.

### **2.4 Diversity of Local Government Good Relations work.**

Derry City Council encloses its own current Good Relations Strategy as evidence of the range of Good Relations work and professionalism of its service provision under the District Council's Good Relations scheme. Further information can also be found on [www.derrycity.gov.uk/goodrelations](http://www.derrycity.gov.uk/goodrelations) Work done by Derry City Council under their Good Relations Strategy / DCGRP includes: Good Relations Core and Project Grant Aid to groups; provision of free Good Relations related training or training with a positive GR outcome to community groups/statutory agencies/staff; primary and secondary schools good relations, citizenship and anti-prejudice initiatives; interface diversionary and strategic work; Black and Minority Ethnic Strategic work; Ubuntu Global Festival; regular support to all types of community and other groups for the promotion of Good Relations; Community Relations Week; Local Democracy Week; GR intergenerational work; inclusion of GR in sports summer schemes; mainstreaming of Good Relations into council services such as Heritage and Museums, Environmental Health, City Engineers, Sports Development; Language and Local Awareness initiative for migrants/BME communities; publication of resources tackling prejudice and promoting diversity; Section 75 focused GR work; initiatives dealing with

the past; Single identity inclusion work (eg. Political ex-prisoners, loyal orders, AOH, Londonderry bands forum); work on shared space; Bonfires/Alternatives to bonfires initiatives; anti-Hate Crime work and general promotion of Good Relations work through the media.

## 2.5 Annual Lateness of Letters of Offer under DCGRP from OFMDFM

Whilst Derry City Council views the DCGRP as a positive initiative and welcomes its inclusion in TBAUC there are however some issue we wish to highlight. One of these is the annual extensive delay in the issue of Letters of Offer to District Councils. Councils usually receive a 4-6 week deadline for submission of applications once the commissioning letter has been received. Overwhelmingly this is the issue raised repeatedly over 10 years by local councils with OFMDFM and it has not improved. The following is a list of the dates that OFMDFM issued its Letters of Offer to District Councils for funding under the programme in recent years:

Financial Year	Date of Commissioning letter from OFMDFM asking councils to bid for funding	Date of Letter of Offer to Derry City Council	% of funding request allocated by OFMDFM to Derry City Council
2014/15	22 <sup>nd</sup> January 2014	27 <sup>th</sup> August 2014	82%*
2013/14	13 <sup>th</sup> May 2014	18 <sup>th</sup> October 2013	100%
2012/13	14 <sup>th</sup> February 2012	21 <sup>st</sup> September 2012	100%
2011/12	17 <sup>th</sup> January 2011	29 <sup>th</sup> July 2011	100%
2010/11	23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2010	23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2010	100%
2009/10	6 <sup>th</sup> March 2009	8 <sup>th</sup> July' 2010 (revised letter 11 <sup>th</sup> August 2010)	100%
2008/09	Archived	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2008	Archived
2007/08	Archived	21 <sup>st</sup> May 2007	Archived
2007/07	Archived	21 <sup>st</sup> June 2006	Archived

\*18% cut imposed on programmes expenditure to all district councils to the best of our knowledge.

This response wishes to highlight to the committee is that District Councils are (and for at least the last 9 financial years of this scheme) expected by OFMDFM to work 'At Risk' on expenditure and Good Relations Delivery. Please note particularly the dates that Councils receive their letters of offer and the trend around the delay in the issue of these which is getting worse rather than better. For the last 7 years councils have received their letters of offer for that respective financial year after the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the financial year has already passed. For the last 3 financial years the letters of offer 5-7 months into the financial year.

## 2.6 Negative impact of lateness of Letters of Offer annually.

The negative impact of the routine lateness of Letters of Offer on service delivery through the District Council's Good Relations Programme from OFMDFM cannot be overestimated. As this is the key vehicle for TBAUC delivery by District Councils we would request that the committee investigate why OFMDFM cannot manage to issue letters of offer for the financial year on 1<sup>st</sup> April annually and why this issue is getting worse rather than improving. Some of the impacts on TBAUC delivery are as follows:

- Local Councils are being expected to work at unacceptable risk. The DCGRP is now deemed a 'high risk' funding programme in Derry City Council. This damages the reputation of OFMDFM funding for TBAUC delivery.
- Budget cuts imposed late into the financial year mean that councils can no longer prioritise or plan as strategically as they wish. Derry City Council had to cut several initiatives completely and curtail others due to budget cuts this financial year – even if further funds are found that councils can bid for as verbally stated by officers in OFMDFM it is too late in the year to restore these programmes. This damages the implementation of TBAUC.
- The annual issue of letters of offer make longer term strategic planning difficult. This damages the implementation of TBAUC.
- Many staff (primary Good Relations /Community Relations Officers and support staff) funded under the DCGRP are placed on short term temporary contracts due to the annual nature of the DCGRP funding scheme and also due to the lateness repeatedly of letters of offer and the financial risk the DCGRP poses to councils. This means there is a high turnover of staff in these posts and a repeated drain of expertise out of these job roles. This damages the implementation of TBAUC.
- Many councils have had to take the decision to not issue grant aid letters of offer to groups until the Letter of Offer is received. This damages all Good Relations work related to this but may from now on mean councils can no longer fund summer diversionary and key interface work or Community Relations Week events as all of these traditionally require funding to be in place in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the financial year.
- Community Relations Week has for over 10 years been a key public focus of Community Relations Delivery delivered in April/May/June (date set by CRC). Council's may no longer be able to participate in this higher profile event across Northern Ireland if letters of offer are not issued in time as the financial risk may be too great in light of recent budget cuts.

## **2.7 Transparency in competitive or non-competitive nature of DCGRP**

There is at least a partial lack of transparency about understanding whether the DCGRP is a competitive programme or not. When applications are submitted by councils they are scored. In some previous years anecdotally we have heard that the 'top 5' councils got 100% of what they bid for with other councils taking a cut of some description in what was bid for initially and then having the chance in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter to bid for additional funds if they wished. In 2014/15 financial year it would appear that all councils took an 18% cut in their programmes budget regardless of the quality of their bid – but we have no definite evidence on this.

## **2.8 Proportionality of application of budget cuts**

It is unclear whether the current budget cuts at Stormont are impacting the DCGRP disproportionately. Anecdotally it has been understood that many other departments programmes and initiatives have not been cut to the level of 18% at this stage. If the implementation of TBAUC is valuable to Northern Ireland then funding cuts applied to it (and specifically the DCGRP) should, if necessary at all, be proportionate.

## **2.9 Implementation of existing evaluation of DCGRP**

Derry City Council's Community Relations team would draw the attention of the committee to the already existing findings of an evaluation of the District Council's Good Relations Programme 2 years ago. The NISRA 2012 'Evaluation of the District Council's Good Relations Programme' was set up to:

“Assess the impact and effectiveness of the District Council Good Relations Programme (DCGRP) and make practical recommendations for the development of the programme.”

(P.3 Executive summary of 2012 NISRA Report)

The 2012 Report made 29 recommendations. TBAUC specifically endorses these. We would ask why it has taken 2 years to endorse these and why scrutiny has not been applied to see what progress was made in the 2 interim years?

## **2.10 Existing recommendations of DCGRP evaluation**

Some of the Recommendations specifically included:

1. ‘Establish a working definition of Good Relations specific to the DCGRP’ – to the best of our knowledge this has not been done.
2. ‘Encourage the focus at Council level to provide funding to inclusive projects as opposed to single identity or projects with a weak link to Good Relations’ – To the best of our knowledge the programme appears to have applied budget cuts regardless of quality for 2014/15.
3. ‘A growing concentration and focus on hard issues following the release of the CSI Strategy, particularly among those council areas where significant progress has already been made on softer issues.’ – To the best of our knowledge the programme appears to have applied budget cuts regardless of quality for 2014/15.
4. ‘Review the scoring framework used to assess annual action plans submitted by Councils, to shift focus from spend to impact and account for previous activity/performance. – To the best of our knowledge the programme appears to have applied budget cuts regardless of quality for 2014/15.
5. Provide a higher level intervention in relation to ‘selling’ DCGRP to Council senior management and Councillors. – We would be keen to know if any progress has been made on this to date, in particular with the new Chief Executives for the new supercouncils and councillors for the new supercouncils.
6. Undertake a more transparent assessment of action plans with particular reference to relevance of individual activities to Programme objectives – To the best of our knowledge the programme appears to have applied budget cuts regardless of quality for 2014/15.
7. Investigate the feasibility of changing funding allocations to a longer cycle- This is still urgent and needed, especially in the climate of budget cuts and financial uncertainty.
8. Address the recurrent delay in the issue of LOOs - This is still urgent and critical, especially in the climate of budget cuts and financial uncertainty.
9. Hold in-year events to bring GROs from all Councils together – Budget cuts and current priorities from OFMDFM seem to indicate this has been reduced rather than even maintained at previous levels.



### 3.0 Recommendations:

1. **Letters of offer:** As an absolute priority OFMDFM must ensure Letters of Offer under the District Council's Good Relations Programme are issued on the 1<sup>st</sup> April annually so that negative impact on TBAUC implementation is avoided.
2. **Transparency/Competitiveness:** That the District Councils Good Relations Programme should be open and transparent in how competitive it is and that councils submitting the strongest bids and evidencing high quality of Good Relations work in line with TBAUC should be rewarded financially for their quality of service.
3. **Budget cuts:** That the District Council's Good Relations Programme should be valued for the quality of work it delivers and consequently treated proportionately in terms of any budget cuts rather than taking a higher level of budget cut than elsewhere.
4. **NISRA 2012 Evaluation:** That all recommendations made in the NISRA 2012 evaluation be implemented.
5. **Officers evidence:** That if the committee wish to be further informed by oral evidence on the District Council's Good Relations Programme that they invite a selection of willing Good Relations / Community Relations Officers from a number and range of councils to give evidence collectively.

### 4.0 Publication of information and further information.

Derry City Council Community Relations team are fully aware that this submission or extracts from it may be published and have no issue with this.

Derry City Council Community Relations team will be happy to provide further evidence or give oral evidence if requested by the committee.

Derry City Council Community Relations team will not be formally publishing their evidence but note that the information contained in this submission could be made public if requested under Freedom of Information.

### 5.0 Contacts for the Community Relations Team in Derry City Council:

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