

Holywell Trust, Peace & Reconciliation Group and The Junction Response to Inquiry into Together: Building a United Community

This paper was informed through engagement with the wider community at two sessions (23rd September & 1st October) and with representatives from each organisation.

About Our Organisations

1. **Holywell Trust** exists to facilitate understanding and healing, and sees itself as being at the heart of the social regeneration of the walled city. Holywell Trust is the lead partner of the DiverseCity Community Partnership, a collective of 10 organisations that have recently opened a new purpose built community building in the centre of Derry/Londonderry. The Partnership is working towards establishing our city centre as a truly diverse space.
2. **Peace & Reconciliation Group** has as its mission to promote and develop understanding and co-operation within and between individuals, communities and organisations. The PRG works towards this mission through a series of projects, the delivery of training and the facilitation of mediation.
3. **The Junction** is a community relations and peace building initiative set up to address issues of ongoing concern that are barriers to peace and a shared future. Among the projects that The Junction has developed and leads up are Ethical and Shared Remembering (concerned with a decade of violence and change 1912-1922 using the distant past as a prism to unpack the more recent conflict and violence of recent troubles), Towards Understanding & Healing (an organisation that recognises and validates individual experience in the context of the much wider story of the conflict in Northern Ireland and across these islands) and, City of Sanctuary (developing the city as a place where individuals and groups feel welcome, safe and embraced, where culture and cultural diversity is enriched through sharing together).

Reflections on the Strategy

4. **Welcome** – we welcome the publication of the Together: Building a United Community (T: BUC) strategy. The overall vision outlined in the document is clear and describes a society that our organisations are working towards. We were disappointed that, in our opinion, the headline priorities fall somewhat short in helping to achieve the vision of ‘a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation’.
5. **Resourcing** – we are concerned that there are no resources mentioned throughout the T: BUC document. A government strategy without ring-fenced resources is often no more than an aspirational document. The commitment of resources would reinforce government’s commitment to addressing the important issues within the document.
6. **Timeframes** – we were surprised to note that the document only contains three actions that have defined timelines, one of which (review and consult on

the Good Relations indicators by the end of 2013) has already passed unachieved. Essential to the success of achieving targets is to set realistic timeframes aligned to dedicated budgets – this is core to any strategy.

7. **Connection with Programme for Government** – the current Programme for Government, to which this strategy is tied, is currently due to expire in March 2015. This inquiry is due to overrun this time period raising questions on the change that may result.
8. **Development of Strategy** – we were frustrated with the lack of engagement with the wider community in the development of the strategy. As a result there is an obvious disconnect between the strategy and community relations practice in local communities. The important work of community relations organisations and practitioners is undervalued throughout the document which is overly focused on delivery at the departmental level.
9. **Definition** – whilst several key themes, e.g. reconciliation, good relations and diversity, are all mentioned in the document there is a need for these to be clearly defined to the highest international standards. This will support the monitoring and evaluation of progress against each and allow for best practice to be shared internationally. In addition the underpinning principles would also benefit from further definition within our wider societal context, e.g. if we are to have interdependence as an underlying principle what is meant by this, what does it look like in practice?
10. **Reconciliation** – whilst reconciliation is highlighted as a key concern of the strategy little detail is given on how this is likely to be achieved or how issues arising from the past are going to be addressed. The reference to the establishment of an all party group to address issues from the past does not inspire confidence as elected representatives have generally avoided dealing with these challenging issues in a constructive manner – the issues continue to stunt the development of relationships and effective governance.
11. **Political Leadership** – within the strategy political leadership is highlighted as key to the successful implementation of the strategy. This remains a challenge to the full implementation of the strategy as there does not seem to be a strong political commitment to achieving the vision contained within this document as evidenced by the current need for further political talks.
12. **Legislative Change** – broadening the remit of key organisations such as the Community Relations Council and Equality Commission for Northern Ireland will require a legislative change to Section 75. We are concerned that this legislative change may impact adversely on both the equality duty and on good relations work and commitments of public bodies. Our concern is that the promotion of good relations may be reduced to a tick-box exercise rather than a core function.
13. **Community Relations Council** – the strategy recommends that this independent charitable organisation is folded into the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. We feel that the strategy is reaching beyond its remit to

directly impact on an independent organisation. The Community Relations Council is a valued and vital organisation in the promotion and delivery of good relations work throughout Northern Ireland, an organisation that the sector support and want sustained. The Community Relations Council currently help to support the co-ordination of good relations activity throughout Northern Ireland – a function that should be sustained.

14. **Interface Challenges** – the target of removing physical barriers between communities is welcome. However, by focusing on the physical element of interfaces without addressing the psychological challenges is potentially damaging.
15. **Limited Actions & Existing Priorities** – the actions contained within the document seem to reflect existing priorities within government departments repackaged as good relations activity. There are few new initiatives within the document or actions that reflect on the current best practice within the community and voluntary sector.
16. **Implementation** – limited detail is given on how the strategy will be rolled out. Departmental action plans are mentioned but progress against these is far from obvious. Community relations practitioners, who have significant experience in the developing and delivery of good relations activities, are entirely absent from any implementation process within the strategy.

Recommendations

17. **Leadership** – there is a need for good relations champions within government departments and the political sphere. These champions should have the power and influence to affect change and create meaningful connections and relationships with practitioners working at the local level. At present there is a dearth of, but appetite for, inspiration – real leadership that can result in encouraging positive change.
18. **Resources** – finances need to be clearly identified for the delivery of good relations activities within each government department. This should also include resources to directly sustain community relations practice within the community and voluntary sector. How resources are distributed should also be open and transparent and the impact of projects subject to monitoring and evaluation.
19. **Ambition** – the headline priorities and actions contained within this strategy need to be more ambitious. This type of strategy is trying to create a society that is some distance from our current reality. The achievement of the vision set within this strategy will take a long-term strategy using a range of approaches – a robust strategy that is informed by but looks beyond Programme for Government timeframes.
20. **Integrated Education** – how we educate our children needs to be transformed so that meeting someone from a different community or ethnic background is the norm rather than the exception. We cannot continue to be brought up apart. We cannot continue to sustain institutionalised division. We

are not serving the needs of our children or society as a whole. In our opinion, the best way to educate our children is through one fully integrated system. This needs reflected in this and any future strategy of this nature.

21. **Focus on Youth** – there is a continued need to focus on young people, to capture their energy for the creation of a new, shared society. Programmes should continue to be targeted at all young people. However, it is also vitally important that the issues arising from the conflict are addressed by wider society. Important, often divisive issues, cannot simply be left unaddressed in the hope that young people will not be burdened by them.
22. **Engagement with Wider Community** – the Civic Forum should be revisited and refreshed with a view to being a key vehicle in formulating approaches to dealing with difficult issues. A functioning and effective forum could provide the support and guidance required to help government and political leaders to address challenging issues in a positive manner.

Oral Evidence

23. Representatives from our organisations would welcome the opportunity to give oral evidence to the committee.

October 2014

Engagement Details

24. **23rd September** – engagement was carried out through the Conversation Space programme delivered by Holywell Trust. The event was attended by:
 - Eamonn Baker (Towards Understanding & Healing)
 - James Greer (Europa Acadamé)
 - Jill Tellez (Europa Acadamé)
 - Seamus Farrell (The Junction)
 - Dr. Inder Pal Singh
 - Linda Morgan
 - Maureen Hetherington (The Junction)
 - Lisa Wilkinson
 - Michael Doherty (Peace & Reconciliation Group)
 - Dennis Golden
25. **1st October** – a workshop to inform this joint response to the inquiry was held as part of the Garden of Reflection Lunchtime Event programme. This session was attended by:
 - Carol Wright (Towards Understanding & Healing)
 - Richie Hetherington (The Junction)
 - Kevin Burns (The Junction)
 - Marjorie Baker (Garden of Reflection)
 - Gerry Sharkey (Pink Panthers)
 - Bornach Sharkey
 - Nuala Crilly (North West Community Network)
 - Gemma Harkin (Holywell Trust)

- Neola Nelis McCrossan (North West Community Network)
- Linda Nash (BSMC)
- B Doherty (BSMC)
- Flavio Oboti
- Owen Donnelly (Peace & Reconciliation Group)
- Colin Devine (North West Community Network)
- A Lucrak (NICEM North West)
- Jenny McClelland (Derry City Council)
- Carol Stewart (Derry City Council)
- Lisa Clements (Holywell Trust)
- Roisin O'Hagan (Holywell Consultancy)
- Lynne Edgar
- Colm Cavanagh (Foyle Trust for Integrated Education)
- Ursula Birthistle
- Denis McLaughlin (Customised Training Services)
- Matt Jennings (University of Ulster)
- Vincent Coyle
- Zach Jones (Peace Walls Project)
- Julia Fair (Peace & Reconciliation Group)
- Rebecca Carroll (The Junction)
- Lisa Anderson (Culturlann)
- Dr. Inder Pal Singh
- Kate Nash (Bloody Sunday March Committee)
- John McCormack
- Frank Cary (St. Columb's Park House)
- John Lindsay
- Charlotte Gordon
- Dennis Golden
- Anneliese Gregg
- Kirsten Arbuckle (Peace Walls Project)