

# **RESPONSE TO INQUIRY INTO TOGETHER BUILDING A UNITED COMMUNITY FROM STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S GOOD RELATIONS PARTNERSHIP**

## **1. Introduction**

The Good Relations Partnership is an interagency group that oversees the work of the Good Relations Section of Strabane District Council. The purpose of the Partnership is to provide a forum for local civic, commercial, statutory and community representatives to discuss how to progress the development of local communities in an environment where religious, political, racial and cultural expression and differences are understood and expressed in a way that is sensitive to others.

The partnership consists of elected members, community representatives, a BME representative and a representative from the LGBT sector. The following agencies are also represented: PSNI, NIHE, Western Health and Social Care Trust, Western Education and Library Board and DOE Roads Service.

## **2. General Response**

At the last meeting of the Partnership (9/9/14) the Inquiry into TBUC was discussed and the following observations made:

- Generally Terms of Reference viewed as vague
- Little reference made to hard issues such as flags, emblems and parading which some perceived as a step backwards with regard to A Shared Future
- Timing: TBUC has yet to be delivered on as Letters of Offer have only just been received by Councils from OFMDFM in respect of delivering the Council's Good Relations Programme.
- General concern that many areas of work are being targeted under TBUC, however no additional funding is being made available. In fact the opposite is happening with budget cuts across all Departments
- A lot of evidence already exists re good practice in Good Relations work, gathered by a number of agencies including the Department of OFMDFM via GR quarterly and annual reports
- LGBT issues have no mention in the strategy, yet are vital in promoting and accepting diversity and identity

## **3. Examples of Good Practice**

Members of the Good Relations Partnership highlighted the following examples of good practice locally in bringing divided communities together:

- Fleadh in Castlederg: A genuine cross community event in a divided community
- Annual LGBT festival: a series of events over a three day period to enhance awareness and visibility of the LGBT community
- Community Relations Week: A series of events involving a range of different communities to highlight and showcase good practice in good relations
- Sports and Arts initiatives that promote Good Relations
- Attitudinal surveys that assess perceptions re Good Relations, particularly on hard issues such as parading, flags and emblems

- Capacity Building work with West Ulster Bands Forum to develop a strategy for engagement
- Mentoring with groups to develop awareness and engagement on a cross community basis
- Awareness raising events to promote all aspects of Good Relations & Equality, particularly inclusion of all groups including LGBT
- Intergenerational activities: For example a photographic exhibition developed by local groups to highlight the differences and commonalities between young and old and to build relationships
- Strabane Ethnic Community Association ten year celebrations and opening of a Town Centre premises, associated celebrations and festivals e.g. Diwali, Intercultural Food and Entertainment Night

On behalf of Strabane District Council's Good Relations Partnership I hope that you find the above comments/observations useful.

Amanda Biega

Good Relations Officer, on behalf of Strabane District Council's Good Relations Partnership