



## CONFEDERATION OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

### **The Confederation of Community Groups of Newry & District.**

### **Regeneration Bill - Consultation response to the Social Development Committee**

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft Bill.

The Confederation of Community Groups has been in existence since 1973 and is a leading sub-regional Community Development (CD) organisation providing services to the Newry and the wider region. Rather than reply to the exact wording of the Bill we would like to take this opportunity to voice our concerns over the implications of the Regeneration bill and the impact on the independent Community and Voluntary Sector.

In particular we would like to highlight the threats looming due to the possible loss of core funding (via the Community Investment Fund) to independent Community Development practitioners such as ourselves and others responsible for the infrastructural delivery of CD. This infrastructure has been built over many years in partnership with DSD who have provided the core funding throughout. In these times of severe austerity, and when our services are in greatest need, we now find ourselves in a precarious position due to the possible loss of this core funding.

We have met as part of the Community Development Network Forum and with other CIF funded organisation (see details below) and have advised DSD of the possible outcomes of transferring mainstream CD finances to Councils under RPA without at least ring-fencing this funding for independent CD organisations.

#### **Key Issues which we encourage the committee to consider;**

1. The Bill **fails to honour the Government's commitment** to work together as social partners to build a participative, peaceful and inclusive community in NI. Examining the **Concordat** between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the NI it is clear the development of the Regeneration Bill and its implications does not meet the Concordat principals of Partnership working.

2. **Lack of information** – There is a significant lack of information on the proposed transfer of resources between DSD and the new Councils – How much is being transferred? For what purposes? etc  
What is critical in this process is any transfer documents (between DSD and Councils).  
Have Transfer Documents been developed by DSD which are integral to the agreement on what will be transferred to councils from DSD including budget lines? Have these Transfer Documents become the discussion tool for the meetings with councils to agree, disagree or otherwise, on the contents? Are the transfer documents the legal document for councils - containing all the detail as to what elements from Government Departments would transfer? Do these documents exist? Are they available for scrutiny? Have these been discussed with the Community and Voluntary Sector in an open and transparent process? If not - why not?
3. **No joined up thinking** – this was addressed in a letter the Fermanagh Trust sent to the Committee on behalf of CIF funded organisations. What has become even clearer in recent weeks is how the lack of connectedness in terms of regeneration that exists within the Assembly. A recent exchange at the Social Development Committee made this very clear. (see Fermanagh Trust response)
4. **Timing** – new Councils are not ready and in many instances will not be ready to fulfil the role and outcomes currently undertaken by the CIF funded organisations. Why risk so much without having a clear understanding of the implications? The Confederation of Community Groups recommends the Transfer of resources only takes place if and when there is a clear direction of travel which honours the Concordat both in spirit and action. The approach which is currently planned is totally unacceptable and will have major repercussions on the services and support provided.
5. What are the implications if the Community Investment Fund is transferred in April 2016? A comprehensive survey of the impact on the work of 26 CIF funded organisations was recently undertaken asking :
  - What services will be lost if CIF funding is transferred to Councils
  - What are the implications for organisations across NI

The impact on service provision will be significant.

Training, advice, support, information provision, community relations work, support for Women, BME families and others will all be severely affected as will the Independent voices and advocates on behalf of the sector :

## Key Findings of our research (see details re impact)

- **£1.5 million** will be lost to the community infrastructure organisations across NI directly (from 26 organisations who receive CIF funding)
- The transfer of CIF funding will result in at least **16 organisations closing their doors** if they lose CIF funding and are not core funded by

Councils post April 2016. To date a number of those who will close without CIF core funding, understand from their Councils that the 'CIF money' will be used in house by the Councils. Closures and loss of independent umbrella organisations in communities across NI will be inevitable.

- CIF Core Funding has **levered in over 9 million into the Organisations** to deliver community projects **in 2014** (24 responses)
- CIF core funding **levered in £7.6 million to external organisations** in 2014 to deliver community projects (21 responses)
- The loss of core funding from CIF will lead to **over 70 redundancies immediately and may lead to an additional 56 job losses** (22 responses) Only 2 organisations will be able to sustain current employment levels.
- **60% of Organisations have engaged with their Councils to discuss transfer of CIF funding** (in only *1/4 of these cases* has these meetings been initiated by Councils, in other cases the Councils have not 'been ready' to discuss )
- **50% of respondents understand Councils will deliver in house** (25% will use a Service Level Agreement and 25% are considering tendering)

## **Conclusion**

The Department of Social Development has the key lead responsibility for supporting the Community and Voluntary Sector. We would ask the Committee and the Department to **URGENTLY** take stock and time to listen to what is happening on the ground now and the direction of travel going forward. The loss of major independent funders, the challenges being faced by European funded organisations ie ESF funding, and now the apparent end of Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Investment Funding etc is and has the potential to decimate the work of tackling poverty and making an effective contribution to the lives of many communities across NI.

We encourage the Social Development Committee to take a lead role in ensuring the NI assembly and the Department of Social Development in particular honour the wording and the spirit of the Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Government. We would therefore request that further dialogue with the Com/Vol sector is instigated immediately and provisions made to the Bill to safeguard the independent CD voice under RPA.

Appendix

4

Respondent	What services will be lost if CIF funding is transferred to councils?	What are the implications for the community and voluntary sector with the loss of CIF infrastrucutre support?
1	Our ability to provide funding support, governance guidance, strategic support and our ability to both develop and run strategic initiatives for our community will be impacted	The loss of Community Infrastructure support to a statutory provider will have important implications. The Councils across Ni have run Community Support for many years - this has not helped build volunteerism or an effective community and voluntary sector in our area. Decision not evidence based.
2	Core strategic services, advocacy, capacity building and volunteer development.	Impact will be short, medium and longer term depending on how much new council understands and thus values the work and impact of the community and voluntary sector. If keeping rates low and reducing spend is the only priority then the impact could be catastrophic for people in need who are the ultimate beneficiaries of services the community and voluntary sector provides.
3	Training, advice, support, information, networking events, inspirational women events, older women projects, health events, cross-community initiatives international women's day, summer scheme for women, summer school, signposting, information dissemination to 500+ groups / individuals.	Councils have an obligation to deliver on its strategy and if this can be done in house I feel that this is what they may do however they do not have the contact with disadvantaged urban or rural areas that our organisation would have - they also would not have the vision or innovation to devise and deliver projects which will enable and benefit women.
4	If CIF funding is withdrawn 400 people (weekly) from disadvantaged communities will not have access to education & employment skills training. 400 people from disadvantaged communities will not have access to front-line support services. 150 community based childcare places will be lost to support women's access to education and training 40-50 women and families from BME communities will not have access to services and support to build a shared future (14 organisations). 116 people will not be able to access 1-1 counselling services and personal support. The organisation will not be able to support young mothers and school age mothers.	The uncertainty will create instability in disadvantaged communities where services and support are already threatened. Community infrastructure in disadvantaged communities will be weakened and in many areas lost completely. Progress towards women's equality and equality for the most excluded in society will be set back years. Marginalised people and families in disadvantaged communities will have less chance of social inclusion and employment. BME families will be further isolated and marginalised. Our Shared Future strategy will be jeopardised. People who live in disadvantaged communities may become more unstable and disappointed particularly young people who see no future for themselves.

5	<p>If it is not a service level agreement to maintain post we will lose our financial management capacity, HR capacity and part of our community development capacity.</p>	<p>The current situation is unclear but it appears that the community developments budget will decrease. We are still not sure what the long term plans of the council are. For instance will they want to adopt projects and programmes as direct council initiatives or will they be happy to develop SLAs with independent Community organisations</p>
6	<p>Core Community Support Agency offering a range of capacity building/ technical assistance/social inclusion/ learning programmes/activities etc to 50+ local C/V groups, 20 nursery, primary and secondary schools and residents (population 26,000 +/10,000 households) past 19 years and Loss of current contracts/SLAs with range of agencies including delivery of Family support Hub, secretariat to 6th largest Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership, Training and Employment Services, Essential skills programmes, Management of 2 extended school clusters, Early intervention projects such as ASPIRE, Talking To Our Babies Early Years Communication Project, FAST, Arts and Culture programmes and activities, the support/development of a range of capital infrastructure projects within the community and the loss of management staff to oversee a 3.2m SIF programme over the next 4 years.</p>	<p>We would hope that our agency and C/V sector in our area will be integral to the development and role out of the Community Planning process and we would anticipate that the Council will require our direct assistance, leadership, knowledge and experience to develop and/or manage the proposed new locality based planning process/structure and programme of activities for our area.</p>
7	<p>Information - advice - signposting - independent representation - advocacy - sectoral events - group support</p>	<p>New councils are simply not ready - whatever about willing - to adopt responsibility for Community Development and Urban Regeneration. There is no clear route map or strategic framework that instils confidence or clarity - this can only lead to confusion and information/resource/support gaps for groups in the area. Thankfully - in this area - proposals for a transitional approach to Grant Aid is shaping up though this may not be sustained as 2015-16 progresses. A range of supports continue to be needed (grant aid info, social enterprise opportunities, tendering skills etc.) that simply have no future without the above-mentioned structure being meticulously planned out.</p>

8	Administration and fundraising services.	An important base and support for the sector will be removed.
9	This community will fall further into deprivation as key local services will be lost. This community will become dis-empowered and unemployment will rise.	Yes
10	Independent advice on governance; conflict resolution; understanding policy context & participation in consultation response; organisational mentoring; holding government to account; independent advice & support to BME and other excluded groups around which community tensions exist	I Short & Long term - Independence; energy; flexibility and innovation of sector will be lost as will developed expertise and experience gained in the sector; Immediate - Jobs will be lost; longer term : skilled professionals will relocate from rural communities to cities to get jobs; spending power and skills and sustainability of communities lost to rural area Decreased independent sustainability of communities.
11	Community based Education and Training Quality Affordable Childcare Family Support Services Health Programmes Young People's Peer Education Project	Closure of community organisations providing vital services.
12	Childcare Provision Youth Provision Care to Vulnerable Adults Community Development & Partnership working Delivery of statutory bodies strategic objectives	Create uncertainty on service provision.
13	Independent community development support, capacity building, effective engagement with statutory bodies.	Loss of effective lobbying process loss of independent advice & support reduced capacity reduction in funding (less applications and poorer quality) reduction in governance.
14	Support to 60/70 community groups in the borough.	Groups will not get the support they need to continue they will not be consulted groups will close down.
15	Community development support - charity registration support - governance review support - volunteer development, recruitment and management support - community development training - community development opinion forming meetings - responses to Govt policies - funding leverage (as described in 2) - funding management (as indicated in 3) - co-ordination of local forums	If council do not continue with similar support as is currently supported, it will be lost forever, never to return.

16	Independent support for groups, a voice for the community particularly the hard to reach. All of our additional services in relation to older people, community education, disability development, community relations and ethnic minority support will be put at risk.	The ability to engage hard to reach groups and individuals who are suspicious or lack confidence in statutory bodies will be compromised. An independent voice for grass roots development groups will be lost. Additional specialised services which have existed for years and cannot be easily replaced will be lost to communities and those most in need of support. A vast body of relationship building, knowledge and expertise in those specialist areas will also be lost not just to organisations but the communities they serve.
17	Shopmobility project Advocacy work for Travellers, LGB/T Community Community Representation on strategic Boards/Partnerships Vital Practical Resources Specific in-house Training.	The implications will be wide-reaching, stretching over the short-term and long-term and ultimately taking us back to the way things were in Mid-90's, where Council did not listen to voice of local community. Community Groups had to come together and unite in order to set up a Forum to identify and more structured and cohesive approach to dealing with the full range of Statutory and Voluntary agencies.
18	Coordinator post, admin post and financial administrator post lost. As childcare project will no longer be viable two childcare workers and childcare coordinator post will be lost, 25 volunteer placements will disappear. A comprehensive health, education and training programme will end, A childrens programme comprising a crech, afterschools project and young womens project will end. Counselling services will be lost, Cookery, Accredited ICT, Horticulture, Womens rights, Crafts, Health and Social care, First Aid courses will not run.	Social Isolation, removal of access to services for adults and children with physical and learning disability, loss of opportunity to access accredited training, skills development, childcare support and child development. An increased strain on all the health services including GPs, counselling, social services, Surestart. A decline in progression from access course to college course and ultimately employment. Access to advice on benefits and other issues removed. Increased reliance on benefits.
19	We co-ordinate the existing activities within the Partnership and its member groups to promote collaboration and efficiency as a means to enhance long term sustainability. It assists local community groups to develop their capacity to deliver services which will create income streams and work to develop support mechanisms and structures for the local social economy sector. This will enhance local opportunities for training and employment and help promote inclusion and cohesion within the community. No other organisation delivers this in the Creggan community.	We co-ordinate the existing activities within the Partnership and its member groups to promote collaboration and efficiency as a means to enhance long term sustainability. It assists local community groups to develop their capacity to deliver services which will create income streams and work to develop support mechanisms and structures for the local social economy sector. This will enhance local opportunities for training and employment and help promote inclusion and cohesion within the community. No other organisation delivers this in the Creggan community.

20	Integrated training, non-accredited training, accredited training support, childcare, health promotion, older adult education, young women's support.	I honestly don't know.
21	Community Development Networking Centre housing 12 support organisations and many external support providers Management and support for 4 estate based community hubs. Numerous community based projects not supported No CD support across the entire Borough with relationships which has been built up over past 16 years with communities on the ground in disadvantaged areas. Numerous community infrastructure support projects PHA Funded programme OFMDFM Good Relations Project Peace Impact Projects Various other project activities.	Lack of support services on the ground in most disadvantaged communities Loss of capacity to deliver local services effectively, Lack of local support for 350 + local groups and organisations, Loss of training and employability programmes Local people not able to access services and gain appropriate information, advice, support and training Loss of jobs and employment opportunities created by the Learn to Earn Programme we deliver. Lack of access to services including debt advice, womens aid, linking generations, DARD funded MARA programme. PHA funded Health Inequalities programme and many more activities and support services currently accessed by all sections of the community on a daily basis. Footfall for Community Network Centre and 4 Community Hubs alone is 700+ per week.
22	We have on average 200 women per week accessing our services and 90 childcare places in our creche. This would be lost to the local community.	I believe a lot of the priorities would change and therefore the potential for accessing funding could be severely hampered.
23	The independent advice and lobbying services to the community sector. The 1 to 1 mentoring for community groups and individual activists. OCN accredited training at levels 1,2 & 3 on drug & alcohol, community development, active citizenship, event management and fundraising. Suicide prevention support. Youth intervention programmes, good relations training and support. Financial advice and support to community groups, Older peoples support & training.	There will be a huge gap in provision for the community sector as the network organisations have direct contact with the groups. The networks are also fully aware of the services and support that the groups require. Also the potential loss of services as stated in question 9.
24	Belfast City Council is currently planning to out source community development services. If this goes ahead as planned core community services should be retained however we will not know the reality until that happens.	This will depend on a number of factors including: Total budget that is transferred Councils terms of reference for allocation Method of tendering



25	<p>Provision of neutral and accessible town centre accommodation for individuals and groups. Hosting community and charitable organisations offering a range of support services to disadvantaged individuals. Admin and finance services for CVSE sector e.g. Payroll, HR advice, Design and Printing services. One to one funding information, advice and support. Support provided to over 180 groups. Help to establish and develop groups e.g. BME , Older People, People with Disabilities, including Governance advice, Charity Registration Capacity building through the delivery of training and support programmes to support groups and individuals to develop skills and knowledge. Promoting community development Promoting communication via multi media platforms Providing networking opportunities Acting as a voice for the sector at a local level.</p>	<p>If the powers are transferred to the new Councils and the Councils fail to tender out CIS or enter into SLA's with currently funded CIF organisations , we believe that there will be a significant negative impact including a loss of skills , knowledge and experience from the local CVS sector and the infrastructure developed over a significant period will be lost.</p>
26	<p>Childcare Family Support Training &amp; Education Access to other support services</p>	<p>1. Re access further and/or other funding streams - acknowledged government department support is an added advantage. 2. Council could stipulate conditions which would restrict development and progress of unique services. 3. It minimises influence on implementation of policies designed to promote equality</p>