

A SHARED FUTURE

CONSULTATION ON IMPROVING

IMPROVING COMMUNITY
RELATIONS

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

COMBER

18TH June 2003.

Facilitated by

Will Glendinning

Introduction:

Paul Killen Community Relations Officer Ards Borough Council engaged Will Glendinning to:

- 1. Facilitate a discussion on the consultation paper ‘A Shared Future Improving Community Relations in Northern Ireland ‘**
- 2. Record the views of the participants**
- 3. Write up the responses in a form that can be sent to the Government and Community Relations Council as a response.**

Two consultation days were run with representatives from the churches in the Ards area one in Newtownards on Tuesday 17th and the other in Comber on Wednesday 18th June. . This report covers the Comber consultation a separate report has been carried out for Newtownards

The format was informal; the role of the facilitator was outlined.

- Explain process of the shared Future Consultation
- Ask questions of the participants
- Stimulate debate
- Take notes
- Not to impose own views
- Write up response
- Produce draft response for circulation to participants.

Background:

The Governments key priorities as outlined in the Foreword to the Shared Future document were presented to the participants along with some of the key facts including:

Key Priorities

- Building Trust & Confidence between and within communities
- Tackling Sectarianism

Key Facts

- NI is a deeply divided society those divisions affecting decisions we make about basic needs of life
 - Where we live
 - Where we work
 - Where we go for services, for example education, training, retail, leisure, or to access to government agencies

Questions:

Participants were asked to consider three Questions:

1. **Vision** What is their vision of Northern Ireland in 25 years time?
2. **Action** What do we need to do to reach that vision?
3. **Structures** Who should take these actions? The following examples were given

LOCAL

Churches?

Community/Voluntary?

Work place?

District Council?

Local Strategic Partnership?

CENTRAL

Government ?

Departments/ DRD etc?

**Agencies/ NIHE,
SEELB, EHSSB?**

**Community Relations
Council?**

Vision:

The following were seen as key components of a vision of a Northern Ireland with improved community relations:

It would be a place where there was:

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- Inclusive sharing of facilities and services
- Respect for difference, a difference that will be become increasingly wider with growing inward migration and resulting ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. Respect for differing political, social, cultural sexual, behaviours and people of differing abilities
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- Freedom to hear and to express differing views
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- Open dialogue
- Community Relations seen as a key component of policy making and delivery

Actions:

To reach the vision the following actions will be necessary:

- Not legislation
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- Community development and community relations developed as a common strategy
- Community relations as a key part of policy making and development
- New marketing of community relations as relevant to every day matters.
- Redefining community relations as an enabling process, wider than religious difference, showing practical benefits
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- Healing the hurts of the past thirty years plus of conflict including
 - Assisting those hurt to be able to tell their storey
 - Helping them to be heard
 - Helping them to move on when they are ready to do so
 - Restorative and redemptive healing

Structures

The structures proposed are divided into LOCAL and CENTRAL

Local

- Town, village, townland all need to take CR actions
- All the bodies listed need to take community relations as being relevant to them and for it to be part of their work
- Role for the creation of bridges between sectors information sharing and relevance of CR to strategies.
- District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Initiatives.
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Central

- All bodies listed need to see Community Relations as a key part of their work and not an add on.
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