

A SHARED FUTURE
CONSULTATION ON IMPROVING
IMPROVING COMMUNITY
RELATIONS
IN NORTHERN IRELAND

NEWTOWNARDS

17TH 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 Newtownards consultation a separate report has been carried out for Comber.

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:

- Trust
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- Respect for difference, a difference that will become increasingly wider with growing inward migration and resulting ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. Respect for differing political, social, cultural sexual, behaviours.
- Learning from one another
- Freedom to hear and to express differing views
- Mutual cooperation
- Dialogue at grass roots not just at leadership level
- Reconciled people
- Protection of freedom to worship reflecting the differing religious beliefs
- Respect for faith based communities in human rights

Actions:

To reach the vision the following actions will be necessary:

- Encouraging alternative models of living beyond current segregated ones.
- Education leading to community ownership/responsibility
- Developing understanding and awareness of cultural diversity.
- Promoting local regeneration
- Strategies for the removal of symbols of division
- Community development and community relations developed as a common strategy
- Recognition that there are choices
- Developing community relations within communities and not just between.
- Recognition/listening process for the hurts of the past thirty years

- Healing the hurts of the past thirty years plus of conflict including
 - Assisting those hurt to be able to tell their storey
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 - Coming to terms with our recent history
 - Recognition that the hurts are still continuing that the conflict is present and not just in the past.
 - Assisting people to a preferred future



Structures

- - Interagency working
 - Churches particular as part of their social witness working with others
 - Churches involved and aware
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- - There is a need for some central monitoring / coordinating/ campaigning body. Whether this is the Community Relations Council or not is open to debate. There is concern about the mixture of being a funding body and a delivery mechanism