

Armoy Community Development Association

Armoy is a village in North Antrim situated 6 miles from Ballycastle and 9 miles from Ballymoney. With a population of around 500 Armoy has had population split of 50:50 Protestants to Catholics for over 100 years. The area has suffered neglect for decades. When the Armoy Community Association started in 1994 the neglect, the division and the separation were visible within the community.

The group has faced many challenges but positive things have happened; The new play park, the new street lighting, the new Tilly Molloy Community facility, the work with youth, the Over 55 Club, the Sure Start Project. Problems have and are being tackled and it is in the interests of both traditions to seek solutions to these issues.

The neglect of the area and the lack of opportunities for jobs are just some of the issues which we are trying to tackle,

Getting those with resources to address the real issues of need will require perseverance, persistence and dedication but is essential if we are to develop this mixed community. We hope that the new strategy for "good relations" will act to make this a reality.

Consultation Workshop on "A Shared Future"

One of the first questions the consultation paper asks is about a vision for N. Ireland.

"What is your vision for N. Ireland in 25 years time?"

What does it look like?/What's going on?

- Vibrant community
- Moving on to better things
- Healthy economy is very important
- Positive environment to live in, one to be proud of
- Lots of housing, facilities, work
- Lots of local events that everyone can attend
- Lots of classes
- Clubs for children all year round
- Opportunities for children to mix with each other
- Youth clubs, proper youth provisions with permanent workers
- Summer schemes
- Festivals
- Needs to be community venue where everyone can come to and use and all of above can take place

What's different?

- People will have taken ownership of/acknowledged differences and problems in the neighbourhood and be managing them. People need to realise that accepting others differences does not mean losing your own identity
- The community/village no longer being neglected, no need to continue to suffer in silence,
- We will have an effective cross community voice which is being listened to
- Tensions will be gone
- Deprivation/poor housing, lack of facilities, poor health provision all gone
- Real political representation for everyone
- Access to resources not a problem

- Some kind of local structure where people can meet
- Diversity welcomed and developed without losing identity

What's the same?

- Our own unique mixed rural community
- The environmental improvements, people feeling pride in their community, very visible and illustrates how little money had a huge positive affect
- Work that both schools have been doing together for 18 years, the acceptance by both boards having positive impact
- Having a mixed group/club/event to come to

Overall Aim of Consultation Paper

The group was asked if they agreed with the overall aim of the paper and if they had any comments about it.

- Its not just about conflict within the two communities; in this community there is an absence of conflict but that is because they are so far apart and the division is so huge that they don't come together. All types of community relations is meant to be going on but in reality they are not mixing
- Diversity needs to be welcomed without losing out identity

Important Issues

The document asks what the main objectives of the policy should be so the group were asked:

"What are the main issues for you?"

- The environment
- Two separate communities not mixing
- Resources and money
- Lack of facilities
- Health
- Access to resources
- Nothing for young people
- In networks groups such as youth are excluded
- Children - lack of resources/provision
- Local economy
- Need professionals to develop projects the group can't do all of the work- it's spread too thin
- Everything is expected of the group and we don't have resources/workers to deal with it

"What are some of the solutions, what can the government do?"

- Provide resources and money(a little can go along way here)
- Come and ask us what we need
- We need a voice, a representative to go between us and statutory bodies who is not caught up either in red tape or in own agenda.
- Eliminate some of the competition for resources, councils with particular budgets and agendas etc. makes it too difficult to access what we need or to be listened to (particularly as our District Council is one of the smallest in the province)
- Our real needs need to be on someone's agenda, we need some kind of regional body that actually has "teeth" i.e. the influence to get things done
- Rural network doesn't seem to work for us
- Need someone who is going to engage with us at the grass-root level but that has the ear at higher level

- There is a Community Relations Officer in Moyle but we are not aware of what goes on
- The council should engage with us and let us know what is going on or what is available (this isn't currently happening)
- The Sure Start programme worked really well and so more programmes and partnerships like that would work
- Provide good training opportunities for women
- Spend less on consultants and more on actual work that needs done
- It is important to us that we have an opportunity to articulate our needs to the government. We need a positive interest from the politicians- we feel this has been lacking due to being a small mixed community
- We were involved in what we thought was a good community audit in 1996, however we need workers and resources to put this into practice.
- Interagency meetings work well for small things initially but our needs have to be part of their programme or remit or it becomes a talking shop, it might work if it was done right, need a plan for the area to follow, having plans is the key, not just being reactionary
- Those involved in interagency work with groups need trained in community development and what it really means; they need to come and ask us what's needed and what's going on
- Interagency meetings need to be attended by people who then are in a position to implement change or even make recommendations (this is too often not the case)
- Being part of the health action zone might be positive help as it has been well planned (with consultation ?)
- Provide training schemes for local people to be trained as youth workers, crèche workers etc. but we also need access to other professionals who could be working at regional level
- Need to share information, perhaps a forum of dedicated community relations activists/workers without the in-house politics, dealing with the real issues/difficult stuff
- Need to tap into the people with influence
- The resources/departments need to be accountable to the people in the community, needs to be open and transparent, we don't want to do the governments job but we want them to do it properly and to be seen to be helping our local community

