

A Shared Future 4 June 2003

Bell, Hazel	Greater Shankill Partnership	
Black, Lynn	HPA	
Bradley, Collette	BCC	
Burns, Elaine	Ardoyne Assoc	
Byrne, Bernie	Council for the Homeless	
Christie, Esther	NIHE	
Corry, Roni	AWARE Defeat Depression	
Crawley, Angela	Donegall Pass Forum	
Cunningham, Geraldine	Belfast Travellers Support Group	
Deery, Jim	New Lodge Forum	
Finlay, Donna	BMAP	
Gowdy, Darren	Ardoyne/Shankill Health Partnership	
Hassard, Andrew	BCC	
Hawe, Robin	NIHE	
Henry, Margaret	NIHE	
Hill, Stephen	OFMDFM	
Holland, Stephanie	EGSA	
Linney, Una	LCF	
Mahaffy, Thomas	UNISON	
McAlinden, Mimi	EHSSB	
McClenaghan, Jacqueline	MBS Services	
McGlade, Anne	EHSSB	
McGlone, Roisin	SICDP	
McKibben, Tony	BRO	
McMurray, Geraldine		
McRoberts, Una	Ardoyne/Shankill Health Partnership	
Morrow, Duncan	Community Relations Council	
Mullan, Brian	Lower Antrim Road Regeneration In	
Murphy, Colette	OFMDFM	
O'Neill, Marie	Ardoyne Assoc	
O'Neill, Paul	Equality Commission	
Persic, Callie	SICDP	
Ross, Ida	N&WBHSST	
Shaw, Bill	174 Trust	
Taylor, Colin	YMCA	
Thomson, Naomi	UCF	
Traynor, Sharon	Taughmonagh Comm Forum	
Williams, Karen	BCC	
Wilson, Ronnie	Opp Youth	

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Belfast Healthy Cities

Response to *A Shared Future: A Consultation Paper in Improving Relations in Northern Ireland*

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the development of a cross-Departmental strategy and framework 'to promote better relationships between and within communities in Northern Ireland, and to ensure that effective and co-ordinated responses to sectarian and racial intimidation are made' (*A Shared Future Consultation Paper p 2*).

We would also like to make the following points on the Consultation Paper:

The aims of *A Shared Future* will not be achieved without the commitment and joined-up working of all Government Departments and relevant agencies, so the document needs to show clearly how it will ensure it is genuinely cross-Departmental, and how those responsible for driving it forward will engage with other agencies to drive this agenda forward. It should also call for policies developed by Departments to be considered in relation to how they might impact on community relations, and to ensure that they have the maximum positive impact and the minimum negative impact possible. While this could be done through the Integrated Assessment Tool, which the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister is currently developing, it would ideally go beyond this.

The Consultation Paper does not make clear the financial implications of Northern Ireland's segregated society. The current situation requires elaborate arrangements for delivery of public services, which has significant implications both for the cost and the quality of those services, and this is an important point to make in setting the context for a community relations strategy. This would highlight an additional reason why integration of communities could bring about improvements in health and quality of life, and challenge people's expectations about availability of services.

There may be many people in Northern Ireland who do not want a shared future. Whilst individual views need to be respected, there may be a negative impact on others of rejecting this vision of a shared future. If this is the case, such views need to be challenged. The fears which, in many instances, underlie this rejection, also need to be acknowledged, explored, and addressed. The Strategy should state clearly where it stands on this point, what approach will be taken to promote integration to individuals who are wholly opposed to it, and whether implementation of the Strategy will focus on providing greater choice for people who wish to live in an integrated way, or on leading the way for integration of all peoples.

Belfast Healthy Cities would like to make the following comments and suggestions on specific sections of the Consultation paper:

Specific policy aims

While Belfast Healthy Cities agrees with the basic policy aims stated in the document (p 8), they need to be more aspirational. It would also be helpful to give clear indications of what is meant by the specific policy aims; what each one means in reality, and how putting them into practice might work.

For example, with the aim *to support the development of integrated/shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together* (p 8); it would be useful to break this down into objectives which could address questions such as, does this mean proactively encouraging people to learn, live, work and play together, and if so, how might this be done? It could also show how people who want to live or work together can be identified. In keeping with the need for the aims to be more aspirational, the document could clearly state that, while many people do not wish to live in mixed communities, a large proportion do, and that the government and other key bodies will actively promote options for living in mixed communities.

Implications for action

In order for actions taken to be effective, community relations needs to be built into other strategies, and there should be more crossover in terms of consultation on strategies, with those responsible for *A Shared Future* contributing to other strategies at an early stage in their development. Planning and housing functions, for example, can play a huge role in supporting the development of integrated communities, and local area plans and housing strategies should set out their role in improving community relations. Existing strategies, for example *Investing for Health*, could also encompass relevant aims and objectives to improve health through improved community relations and better integration of communities; this could be consulted on and set out as an appendix or statement of intent.

It is also essential for political representatives to take an active role; as leaders, they need to lead in their actions and attitudes and promote a culture where diversity is seen as enriching our society. Community relations issues can be used for political purposes and cause or increase division: the area needs to be depoliticized so it is not vulnerable to manipulation by politicians. The Strategy can play a role in doing this.

There needs to be a two-fold approach to implementing actions, with better co-ordination of planning across sectors, in conjunction with an acknowledgement by people in diverse disciplines of the role they can play in improving public relations. For example, while Planners have a remit to identify land in neutral areas for affordable mixed housing, they need to work closely with other agencies, such as local authorities and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, as well as private developers, to ensure that the land is then used for this purpose. For this to happen, Planners, and other key people, need to be made aware that this role is expected of them, and the Strategy is potentially an important tool for doing this.

There is a need to ensure that *A Shared Future* is developed and implemented across society at large, so that discrimination and racism can be effectively addressed. This means that, whilst interface issues are important and a lot can be learnt from work which has been done locally to address these issues, it is not viable to concentrate on interface areas to the exclusion of the rest of society. There exist many areas where mistrust runs very deep but the consequences of this are not highly visible, and it is important to acknowledge this in the Strategy.

Acknowledgement is also needed that people may have limited capacity to take action towards achieving the vision of a shared future. Where communities do not have the capacity to interact together to participate in the process, they will have a variety of needs, which will need to be met before progress can be made. The Strategy should show how these needs will be identified and met.

Implementation of the Strategy will be the crucial element, and this needs to be reflected in the document. It needs to state the quantity and timescale of resources which will be allocated for implementation. It needs to provide concrete examples of actions which can be taken.

Action at regional level

Belfast Healthy Cities appreciates the difficulties in identifying the best place for regional functions to be situated, believes that the success of the decision made around this will be key to the success of implementing *A Shared Future*, and has the following comments on the two alternatives put forward in the Consultation Paper:

Centralise functions within Government: There is a risk that if functions to improve community relations are part of a government department, that little would change. As *A Shared Future* implies, to maximise opportunities of improving community relations, innovative actions need to be taken, and this may not be the case.

An independent body: If community relations function are brought together in an independent body, it will need to meet a number of criteria. These include the need (1) to be totally accountable, (2) to be properly financed so it can carry out its duties in a consistent and professional manner, and (3) to have the power to bring about change. In establishing such a body, important lessons could be learnt from the experiences of comparable bodies, such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Consultation Paper states that *Formal evaluation of the programme should be the responsibility of those charged with maintaining the objectives of the plan (p 18)* Whilst it is important to state in the Strategy who will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation, external evaluation might be a preferable alternative, as this might provide a greater incentive for those who are seeking to maintain the objectives. The results of evaluation at each stage should be made public.

The Strategy should also state what the targets are, to what extent these will be 'soft' targets and why this is necessary, who has set them, and why they have been chosen as targets. When setting targets, a balance needs to be found between targets which are reasonable and ones which are challenging.

Belfast Healthy Cities would also like to make the following general comments and suggestions, which were raised at the Consultation Event held on 4 June 2003.

- Concerns were raised that the Strategy might not be driven, especially if the political will is not there. In line with this, if targets are not being met, who highlights this and drives efforts to tackle it?
- We need good politicians with community relations messages leading the way, as well as local champions and figureheads
- Education is a key element of improving community relations; the opportunity for an integrated education needs to be offered to all people, regardless of their income or where they live
- There needs to be a co-ordinated approach to improving community relations, with those responsible for transport, planning, education and health working together to meet shared goals
- There are a number of good examples of neutral buildings which exist and are used by all sections of the community, including NICVA/City Link Business Park in Duncairn Gardens, and the Springvale Millennium Outreach Centre on the Springfield Road. These should be held up as good practice new developments, and emulated elsewhere
- There is a need to draw out common issues at a local level which all people can identify with i.e. health and environment. Interface areas were given as an example of areas where both sides have the same issues
- There are excellent examples of negotiation at a community level which can be emulated elsewhere, for example, Springfield Inter-Community Development Project's work with people living along the Springfield Interface
- The lack of willingness to share resources locally was identified as a concern. People asked, how can we expect people on the ground to work together when our political leaders and Government Departments won't? The point was also made that short-term piece-meal funding encourages local organisations into a situation where they must compete for funding, and this increases reluctance to work together. Funding which rewards organisations for working together, too often leads to working together 'in name alone' rather than genuine collaboration or partnerships
- The Strategy needs to state what can be expected with and without devolution, and be clear about what is and is not possible if we remain under Direct Rule
- District Policing Partnerships have an important role to play, and they must not shy away from this
- Physical environment can exacerbate trouble in interface areas. Planners have a remit to tackle this

- The Strategy needs to address people's expectations of what it can do, and state its limitations, and the role which must be played by individuals
- Capacity-building is a huge issue, not only for local communities, but for civil servants and political leaders, to enable them to work together and to work with local communities. There is also a need for the people who are responsible for implementing this strategy, who will largely have been brought up within the Northern Ireland tradition, to confront their own prejudices
- There needs to be far more information in the Strategy about how it will be implemented
- The Strategy will not succeed unless it is adequately resourced
- When mechanisms for change are being developed they need to be inclusive and ensure that the right people are involved from the beginning
- The Strategy should look to models of effective practice; most innovative projects come from grassroots
- The Strategy needs to acknowledge the current Review of Public Administration, and outline how its various possible outcomes might affect implementation of the Strategy
- The Strategy should contain clear objectives and action plans relating to each of the identified aims