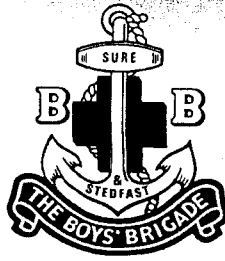


The Boys' Brigade

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Belfast Battalion

*Serving
The Greater
Belfast Area*

Chief Executive: *Maurice Williamson MBE BSc (Econ) DPA (London)*

Our Ref G130

[REDACTED]
Community Relations Unit
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3SR

24th September 2003

Deen Kznie,

A SHARED FUTURE

Enclosed please find our Boys' Brigade (Belfast Battalion) contribution to the consultation process on 'A Shared Future'.

We have used the very helpful pro forma which was provided as part of the main document and our experience incorporates the note which Joanne Murphy provided to you a short time ago and to which you referred in your e-mail to me of 3rd September 2003.

We look forward to seeing, in due course, the outcome to the overall consultation process.

Yours sincerely

Maurice Williamson

Enc

RT65R45

OBJECT: The advancement of Christ's Kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends toward a true Christian Manliness

A Shared Future

Policy Aims

Q1 Do you agree that the overall aim for policy must be for a more shared and pluralist society?

For example

Should we accept existing segregation and division and focus on stabilising and managing conflict?

or

should we try to promote more rapid progress towards a more integrated and shared society?

Supplementary question

What is your vision for NI in twenty five years?

Tell us what you think

It is our view that if we are to be worthy of being ranked as a modern, civilised society we must seek to eschew segregation and division and do all that we can to move towards a more integrated and shared society free from paramilitary groups. One hundred per cent success is probably an aim and aspiration beyond most countries but we must do better than at present. It may be painfully slow and there will be many set backs but we should give more credit to the fortitude and the common sense of the larger proportion of our people and build on that.

Our 25 year vision is of more integrated housing areas, with more people emerging from and growing out of their laagers of more integrated education of more inter-community recreational and activity areas of more tension free work places of increasing isolation, but not abandonment, of those who live in hate and social antipathy.

Intentional or otherwise the increasing isolation of the Protestant population from all that they have held dear e.g. their integral link with the rest of the UK has had a very unsettling effect on community relations. If the effect is intentional then it has backfired and the longer it continues the less successful will be the overall efforts to bring about a shared society built mutual respects.

The general feeling that the police service is operating with work procedures which make their task unnecessarily difficult needs to be addressed and not ignored.

Specific policy aims

Q2 What do you think should be the main policy aims and outcomes which should drive the new approach to promoting good relations in society?

For example

to support the development of integrated/shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together;

to encourage communication, tolerance and trust in areas where communities are living apart;

to promote respect, encouragement and celebration of different cultures, faiths and traditions;

to eliminate sectarianism and racism and to enable individuals to live and work without fear or intimidation;

to reduce tension and conflict at interface areas

and

to shape policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow.

Supplementary questions

What are the main problems / issues which stifle good relations?

What would help build good relations?

Are you aware of any models of good practice in good relations?

Tell us what you think

Policies and targeted outcomes which encapsulate all of the above must be our way forward in Northern Ireland for the alternatives are not to be contemplated. But to achieve this we must provide adequate funding support to those who are willing and prepared to be positive in their contribution to success. This means providing funding responsibly, patiently and in an understanding way to appropriate organisations be they established youth and adult groups or newly emerging groups willing to try new ideas.

Such funding must be prepared to contemplate 'failure' as part of the progress to success.

Main problems and issues revolve round a lack of understanding and appreciation of other cultures and of background perceptions which have not been appropriately expressed to one another.

Good relations can be built by programmes which are led by or have availability to competent and properly trained individuals. There are just not enough of these available at present.

We believe that there has been a tendency, even within umbrella youth bodies, to relegate, if not deride, the standards and methodology of what are seen as traditional mainstream youth organisations in favour of purely activity orientated organisation for young people. There should be greater recognition that the values and standards of uniformed Church-based youth organisations are more important than ever in trying to develop a better society for all.

Fundamental principles

Q3 What do you think ought to be the principles upon which a new approach to promoting good relations in NI should be based?

For example

Sharing or separation?

Public debate or neutral silence?

Promotion of partnership?

Tell us what you think

In many ways we are like the three drunk men 'United we stand, Divided we fall'. If we are to be a positive, vibrant and forward-looking society we need to share with one another in as many areas and at as many levels as possible. This is not just an altruistic objective but total realism in an advanced society.

Silence leads only to misunderstanding, tension and needless suspicion. We need to be open and transparent.

We believe in the promotion of partnership but would urge that this should not be a condition for financial and other support.

Implications for actions

Q4 What action needs to be taken at local government and community level to underpin the development of good relations between and within communities?

For example

- *What advice and guidance might the Equality Commission offer on the statutory duty concerning good relations under Section 75(2)?*
- *How could District Councils play a more central role in developing and coordinating action at local level to promote better relations and manage conflict?*
- *How should funding be targeted?*

Tell us what you think

The association of local government bodies with politics and partisanship is not conducive to their being the lead player in the development of good community relations. While they have an important role to play in promoting inclusivity, partnership and mutual understanding their role should be complementary to that of a central, objective, focused, impartial and understanding body such as the Community Relations Council.

Funding should be targeted towards those who are willing and prepared to engage in the continuing development of good community relations.

In the field of youth work, education and library boards, working to augment the role of the C.R.C., are better equipped to support projects involving young people and youth organisations.

Action at regional level

Q5 What functions do you think should be carried out at regional level? Should these functions be delivered within Government or by an independent body, such as the CRC or a new statutory authority?

Tell us what you think

The role of developing and supporting the improvement of community relations is best repositied in an independent body such as the C.R.C. which should be strengthened and more fully resourced.

It should be responsible for

- developing new initiatives
- encouraging basic projects as well as imaginative ones
- training and increasing the number of C.R. workers
- provision of funding and other resources.

In so far as youth work with young people is concerned the C.R.C. should work in conjunction with Education and Library Board Youth Divisions and with JEDI. We are not sufficiently familiar with the full roles of the C.R.C. and JEDI to say whether they should be one body but their inter-relationship should be considered to establish whether they could / should be one.

Central Government

Q6 What action do you think Government Departments should take to improve relations?

Tell us what you think

While government departments should be supportive of the principles and development of good community relations the latter should not be a sine qua non of project funding. While the latter may gain from having a community relations element and whilst it will be legitimate to require its inclusion in particular projects and developments it should not necessarily be a condition to allow a worthwhile idea to proceed.

Government Departments should concentrate on what they do best viz provide objective and impartial administration but should be supportive, where appropriate, of C.R. policy and should work in conjunction with whatever body emerges in the lead role in C.R.

Monitoring and evaluation

Q7 How do you think that a new strategy for improving relations ought to be monitored?

For Example

a decrease in sectarian and racist incidents
a decrease in flags and emblems in public places
an increase in shared facilities and services
an increase in mixed marriages
an increase in integrated education
an increase in mixed housing
an increase in cross-community contact and co-operation
an increase in tolerance and respect for cultural diversity
awareness raising, better understanding and acceptance of 'others'
improved and developing relationships
acceptance and implementation of good relations approaches
increased recognition, demand and support for good relations initiatives
positive impact of good relations initiatives

Tell us what you think

No one with an aspiration to see much improved community relations in Northern Ireland in a shared and pluralist society could quarrel with any of the above. We prefer to think in terms of a developing policy rather than the introduction of a 'new' Strategy per se. C.R. has been an evolving area since it first became part of the Strategy of central government back in the 60s / 70s.

All of the measurements listed are pertinent in an overall context while some are more pertinent to particular projects e.g. the increase in the number of full-contact youth projects.

‘A Shared Future’
Community Relations Consultation

Consultation: Belfast Boy’s Brigade
Date: 26th August, 2003
Facilitator: Joanne Murphy
Recorder: -

Vision

- The Group felt that the vision should be for a shared future and that this should be the aim of the Government and the communities themselves.
- The vision also included a Northern Ireland without paramilitary activity.
- The Group felt that paramilitary activity controlled and destroyed communities and left people frightened and disempowered. It also made it very difficult for organizations like the Boy’s Brigade to sell there message effectively.
- The BB as an organisation felt that had taken on board the message of community relations, both in relation to the issues of religion and race and wanted to be responsive to the changing community around them.
- They felt that ethnic minority communities should also be responsive to the wider community and that ‘good relations’ was a two way thing that required all sections of the community to work together.
- The vision was for an integrated school system but the group acknowledged many problems with this model that were difficult to address.

How to get there...

A number of issues arose which the Group felt needed action but in many cases a lack of consensus emerged in terms of what that action should be. The following section details key issues and some of the concerns within the Group.

- Segregated education came up as something which needed to be confronted. Some members of the Group felt that the sooner you got kids learning together the better and that if everyone went to the one school there would be less division and segregation. Others pointed out however that it wasn't just schools that were divided but communities and that the infrastructure of schools and transport would make it almost impossible financially to integrate the school system. Many present thought that Churches had a role to play in this issue that that the view of many churches (in particular the Catholic Church) were so opposed to integration that it was hard to see a way forward without serious government intervention. So while the vision was for an integrated education system it was hard to see that developing.
- Housing was another issue which participants felt strongly about. Again segregated housing has increased in the last number of years but it is difficult to see how this situation could be addressed. One suggestion was that communities themselves should be effectively resourced and funded to build strong community organizations and develop good relations with other communities close to them. Safety was regarded as the most important determinate in any change in housing policy.
- There was a view expressed within the Group that the Protestant population in Northern Ireland were feeling increasingly isolated and under pressure. Fear of a united Ireland was one concern, as was the demographic shift from traditional protestant communities to new communities outside Belfast.
- Flags / Murals / Football shirts was also raised as examples of territoriality among communities. It was felt that the aim of government policy should not be to suppress or destroy identity, but to develop confidence in identity and respect for the identities of others.
- There was a feeling that 'citizenship' as a concept and as a reality within society was not being taught enough. There needed to be an increase in respect for other people and for the worth of other people within society.
- The role of the Churches was raised. Some participants felt that the Churches didn't reach out enough to each other and that they further fragmented an already insecure Protestant population.
- The need to develop community relation's networks and protect and reinforce those networks that already exist was cited as an example of building on existing good work. This was about building relationships and finding interests and themes people can agree on. Good work should get more publicity and people should be aware and speak positively

about events that go on. People should focus on the eighty or ninety years of experience we have collectively as a community.

- Politicians should focus more on the good of the whole community and not just on developing their own political careers.
- The Government should do more to promote a 'shared identity' and this must include minority groups as well as the two major communities.
- Many of the problems arose from socio-economic issues and these should be urgently addressed. Many problems confronted in Northern Ireland were also problems elsewhere and we should remember that violence and crime takes place in all societies.
- The role of the civil service and policy makers was regarded as important and concerns were raised about key decisions about the future of areas being made by people who knew little about the areas or who were a long way personally from being part of those communities.
- Funding (especially small strategic grants) was seen as vital to support and develop effective intra-community and inter-community work. It was felt that young people needed help and guidance and that covered both those who were already in difficulty and those who were not as yet sucked into sectarian violence. The role of responsible citizens and the voluntary sector shouldn't be underestimated.
- Leadership (political, community and organizational) was seen as vital to change and organizations such as the BB could play a key role in such change.
- Work needs to be realistically monitored and evaluated but groups have to jump through too many hoops at present to get funding – the whole system could be simplified.
- Indicators, which were seen as sensible, were things like; a decrease in sectarian incidents; increase in integrated education; decrease in the display of flags and emblems; an increase in mixed housing.

Who should deliver it...

- The group were largely against community relations funding being more widely distributed by local councils and felt that organizations like theirs would lose out in this arrangement.

- Organizations like CRC were seen as Quango's but there was no real consensus in the Group as to the best method of distributing funding in the future.