

SHARED FUTURE CONSULTATION REPORT

**Castlereagh Borough Council
17th September 2003**

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

- Yes because the only way forward is via co-operation, we can't live apart because it isn't feasible. However Republicans don't want us to have a choice, they have promoted and encouraged polarisation.
- The principle of consent does not run deep enough, it doesn't get to the core, it hasn't engaged the real protagonists and until such times as it does the old wounds that undermine community relations will remain.
- There needs to be a recognition of shared responsibility, there have been protagonists on both sides of the community and no one has a monopoly of right or wrong.
- It's hard to share when both sides are not equal. The Protestant Community has not been able for a multitude of reasons to establish the 'capacity' required to work effectively in 'partnership with the Catholic community'. There is a need for more single identity work to be undertaken.
- The Government through policy, practice and funding decisions has encouraged competition in and between communities, such competition is not a healthy foundation on which to build and promote partnership.
- There are those in public service (civil servants/ Quango's) who are happy with the status quo. They do not wish to hand over authority to locally elected politicians.
- Legislation which carries punitive consequences has exacerbated rather than helped the problem.
- We need to look forward rather than spending so much time looking back. There needs also to be a recognition on all sides

of legitimate constitutional and democratic objectives.

- There is a need to find a place in society for those people who see themselves as neither Protestant, Catholic, Unionist or Nationalist.
- We can't have a shared understanding when we don't understand each other, such partnerships traditionally fail.
- We can't have a shared society until we tackle the core problems rather than addressing the symptoms.

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?

- That community relations should be at the core of all aspects of Government decision making (both central and local government) rather than tagged on as an after thought. The reality is that this is not currently the case; you only have to look at the local council who took up the community relations brief because of the money that was available from central government.

Furthermore key statutory departments such as Education do not consider community relations practices and principles to be at the heart of their decision making process.

Outcome – not identified

- That such a core consideration cannot continue to be funded on a piecemeal basis. This does not encourage and promote long term development and undermines partnership building.

If we are in this for the long haul there is a need for Government's funding commitment to be long-termist rather than short-termist as is currently the case.

Outcome – core funding commitment from government

- There is a urgent need for a 'joined – up' approach to community Relations both from the top down and the bottom up. There currently is no clearly identifiable strategy and as such there is no consistency in terms of practice and delivery.

Outcome – hope the strategy that comes out of the Shared Future consultation will be the definitive document.

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

- Security both in terms of the person's physical security -with individuals enjoying movement throughout the province without fear of intimidation and/or violence.

Security of mind to be able to express views and opinions that do not conform with the local norm.

- Delivery of community relations locally led. However locally elected representatives are not currently in the position to be able to do so.

There needs to be a commitment by government to the training of such locally elected representatives. It can not be presumed that because they hold positions of authority that they appreciate and understand the community relations debate and are able to legislate locally for the delivery of appropriate practice.

- The focus on addressing the causes rather than the effects is crucial. Any new strategy must have at its core the intention to work with those communities and within communities who remain unconstituted combatants.

There is also a need to recognise that there is a gangster element within society that is likely to remain unconverted.

- There is a need to recognise and reward good practice rather than rewarding bad behaviour as currently seems to be the norm.

Q4/ What action needs to be taken at local government and community level to underpin the development of good relations

- We need to devise community relations strategies at a local level that are responsive to local needs. This is not currently the case with most councils being motivated by the financial support available from Central Government rather than to a true commitment to community relations.
- Local Councillors need to set a positive example – unfortunately the track record of most isn't good. Training could and should help.
- The actions at a local level, while they need to reflect local need, should dovetail with an overall strategic approach. Currently there seems to be too many agencies involved in various aspects of the delivery of community relations and the absence of both clear strategic direction and consistency of approach.
- The power of Quangos that control so many elements of our Society need to be eroded.

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?

- **We did not have the time to address this question fully.**
- There was a general recognition that while in many of the more affluent parts of the province community relations have improved, in many more working class areas the situation has actually deteriorated.

So the current arrangements for the delivery of community relations have achieved a level of success that has to be recognised.

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

- A 'joined up' approach which shows consistency of practice and Procedure.
- address the issues of short term funding and support for good practice.

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

- Again this question was not really discussed – there was general consensus that the stated measures given were in many cases inappropriate measures

Other points raised:

- a/ We cannot really move forward in the Protestant psyche until Protestants get their heads around the majority of Catholics voting for Sinn Fein. There is a need for education around this whole matter.
- b/ Many Protestants also feel that it is the Catholic Church that has stood squarely in the way of Integrated Education. Again this whole issue needs to be discussed and debated at a community level.
- c/ Many areas lack a sense of community hence it is hardly surprising that community relations is largely absent.
- d/ We need to be realistic, perfect harmony never has and never will exist. We have got to remember that divisions exist in all societies/communities and that we are not unique.