

**REVIEW OF**

**COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

**POLICY**

**Report of the Review Team  
January 2002**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Programme for Government undertook to review community relations policy and to put in place a cross-departmental strategy for the promotion of Community Relations.
2. Section 2 describes the review process, the extent of engagement with key stakeholders undertaken and the material upon which the review is based.
3. Current policy and associated policy instruments were established at a particular period in the history of Northern Ireland between 1987 and 1990. The aims and objectives of community relations policies and actions were designed to improve relations between the two main traditions in Northern Ireland through the encouragement of greater contact and the development of mutual understanding and respect for different cultural traditions. (Sections 3 and 4)
4. Assessment of the effectiveness and impact of current programmes indicates: (Section 5)
  - major problems continue in Northern Ireland society relating to inter communal conflicts and tensions;
  - there is little evidence of significant increases in shared education and housing;
  - policies and policy instruments have had limited but positive impacts and achievements; and
  - evaluations point to the importance of the changed context in Northern Ireland and the need to re-consider current policies and programmes.

5. There is widespread agreement that the aims of community relations policy do not remain appropriate and that changes are required to existing policy instruments. (Section 6)
  
6. An analysis of responses to the review identified a number of critical issues with implications for future policy. The context within which policy is being developed is outlined and a number of examples of good practice given. (Section 7)
  
7. The recommendations (Section 8) are based on a number of fundamental principles which emerged through the review process. These are:
  - the need for political leadership and acknowledgment of the problem;
  
  - a clear vision with articulated aims and outcomes;
  
  - the need to mainstream action;
  
  - building on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act;
  
  - a change of language to that of promoting good relations;
  
  - action must involve all government departments and their associated agencies; and
  
  - engagement with and ownership by all sectors of society, and a long term commitment to action.

8. The vision as articulated in the Programme for Government was overwhelmingly endorsed:

- *“that Northern Ireland should become a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society, firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust with the protection and vindication of human rights for all”.*

9. The aims or outcomes for policy to promote better relations in Northern Ireland proposed are:

- *to facilitate 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; and*
- *to shape policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow.*

10. To achieve the main policy aims and outcomes proposals are made;

- for action at Executive and Central Government level;
- for action at regional and local levels;
- for development at community level.

11. At **central** level the review recommends:

- there should be a named and identified designated Minister leading a cross Government group;
- this Group should develop and take responsibility for an overarching Strategic Plan for the Executive;
- there is need for a strengthened central resource within OFMDFM to support this work;
- other Departments should contribute on action within their areas to promote better relations;
- Executive Programme Funds should be made available to support joint delivery of the Strategic Plan;
- the Equality Commission should review its Guidelines to Statutory Duties to further develop, articulate and improve the effectiveness of the Good Relations actions of Public Authorities;
- consideration should be given to amending legislation to extend the Equality Commission's statutory authority to promote good relations to all groups included in Section 75(2).

12. Three models are considered for delivery of those remaining functions required at **regional** level which are outwith central government. The review recommends that the Equality Commission should be given additional responsibilities for pro-actively promoting Good Relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

13. At **local** level the review recommends that:

- the current District Council Community Relations Programme should be phased out over an agreed time period; and
- a new programme at local area level should be developed linking District Council Section 75 responsibilities, Local Strategy Partnerships and local integrated area plans, delivered by the District Councils.

14. The importance of community action in building better relationships at **local and interface** areas is acknowledged. The review recommends:

- formal recognition and finance should be provided by Government for the contribution being made by community and voluntary organisations to the development of better relations;
- a more integrated approach between community development and promoting better relations activities;
- the need to strengthen formal links between the work of the Voluntary Activity Unit and OFMDFM;
- all funders of the sector should examine how they might facilitate the sector in their work to promote better relations;
- the Task Force being established by the VAU should include in its remit the need to promote better relations; and
- current work on developing community infrastructure should explicitly support infrastructures to promote better relations within and between communities.

15. The financial implications of the recommendations are also considered.

16. A framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of future policy is outlined. This proposes:

- a 3 level framework for monitoring and evaluating the new strategy;
- supported by a dedicated research programme; and
- following endorsement of the aims and objectives of the strategy a list of indicators linked to these aims and objectives should be developed and assessed as appropriate.

17. The review concludes that the proposals and recommendations must be seen in the broader context of the Executive's commitment to Northern Ireland growing as a community underpinned by the core principles and values of equality and human rights.

## SECTION 1

### INTRODUCTION

- 1.01 The Programme for Government set out the Executive's vision that Northern Ireland should become:

*'A peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust, with the protection and vindication of human rights for all.'*

- 1.02 The Programme accepted that in working together to create a new future the Executive had to deal with very deep and painful divisions in our society after decades of division and conflict. It committed the Executive to continue to develop the capacity for compromise and respect, seeking to resolve conflict and creating new links and building trust.
- 1.03 The Programme undertook by 2002 to review and put in place a cross-departmental strategy for the promotion of community relations, leading to measurable improvements in community relations, reducing the causes of conflict between communities.
- 1.04 Earlier this year the Executive announced the establishment of this review and its terms of reference. It emphasised a need for people from all communities and backgrounds to work together and its commitment to tackling the divisions that remain in Northern Ireland society.

## **Terms of Reference**

1.05 The terms of reference for the Community Relations Review are to:

- review the background to, and development of, existing community relations policy;
- identify the aims and objectives of existing community relations policy and the policy instruments used to achieve them;
- assess the impact and achievements of current policy;
- examine, in the light of relevant developments, including the recently completed evaluations of the District Council Community Relations Programme and the Community Relations Council, whether the aims of community relations policy remain appropriate and whether changes are required to existing policy instruments;
- consult with key stakeholders, particularly those working in local communities to improve community relations;
- make recommendations on further policy aims and objectives; and
- recommend a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact on community relations of future policy, to fulfil the Programme for Government intention that improvements stemming from the new strategy should be measurable.

1.06 Following the establishment of the review and clarification of its terms of reference, a small team was established to take forward the review. This paper is the outcome of the work undertaken by the review team.

## SECTION 2

### THE REVIEW PROCESS AND CONSULTATION WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

2.01 To meet the timescales as set out in the Programme for Government, and to ensure that key stakeholders were adequately engaged in the work:

- a working paper was prepared and widely circulated from August (Annex 1);
- over 55 individual meetings were held with central government departments (including the NIO), major statutory bodies, key voluntary and community organisations and a number of individuals with specific knowledge and expertise (Annex 2);
- twelve seminars/workshops were held with groupings of key individuals or organisations (Annex 3) along with participation in associated conferences and seminars with significant community relations implications.

2.02 This paper is based on the outcome of that work and other material commissioned or made available to the review team. This includes:

- more than 85 formal responses made to the review by Assembly Committees and other political bodies, government departments, statutory bodies, district councils, voluntary and community organisations and individuals (Annex 4);
- the records of the seminar discussions and individual meetings;
- a research paper commissioned from INCORE to consider developments in public policy and interventions related to improving

inter-community relations in other relevant jurisdictions (Executive summary included as Annex 5) and a scoping paper from government economists on the public expenditure cost of a polarised society (Annex 6);

- a paper commissioned from RES on options for locally delivered community relations programmes (Annex 7);
- the recently completed evaluations of the Community Relations Council and District Council Community Relations Programme (Executive summaries in Annex 8);
- draft chapters from a book on 'Researching the Troubles: Social Science perspectives on the conflict in Northern Ireland' (Hargie and Dickson) were also made available.

2.03 During the course of the review a number of other consultation papers, published reports or relevant draft documents became available. These included:

- the reports from the Home Office on Building Cohesive Communities;
- the consultation by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland;
- the consultation paper on a Single Equality Bill;
- the report of the Burns group on the future of post primary education in Northern Ireland;
- the consultation on the development of a Victims Strategy and the responses to that consultation; and

- the publication of 'Partners in Change' by the Voluntary Activity Unit of DSD.

The following sections consider the specific remits of the Review in the light of the above information.

## SECTION 3

### THE BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING COMMUNITY RELATIONS POLICY

#### Background

3.01 The Working Paper (Annex 1) provides in greater detail the background to the present policy position. To summarise, current policy:

- was established in the mid to late 1980s;
- was put in place under direct rule in the period following the Anglo Irish Agreement of 1985;
- was influenced by a series of political developments such as the Anglo Irish Agreement which introduced a new dimension to policy decisions on Northern Ireland in the form of consultation with the Government of the Republic of Ireland, and to pressure exerted on the UK Government through, for example, US lobby groups;
- was further influenced by the coming together of an informal group of interested individuals from academic, media, education and art backgrounds with the aim of encouraging the acceptance of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland society;

- was informed by the publication by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights of a report on Improving Community Relations, at much the same time as the completion of an internal civil service study by the Central Secretariat on the issues.

3.02 These were amongst the factors which led to the then Secretary of State announcing in 1987 that community relations would be a priority area for government policy and to a radical re-alignment of the structures for taking forward community relations policy and practice.

### **Development of Current Policy and Policy Instruments**

3.03 The 1987 announcement established a Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) at the centre of government reporting directly to the Secretary of State. The new unit was given 3 functions:

- to provide a challenge mechanism within Government in relation to emerging policies which might have a differential impact on the different communities in Northern Ireland or an effect on relationships between them;
- to undertake a review role in relation to existing policies and programmes; and
- to undertake an innovation role to promote new programmes to encourage greater contact, mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

3.04 An inter departmental committee was also established (chaired at Ministerial level) whose role was to act as an advisory

mechanism for CCRU and to consider strategic policymaking in the field of community relations.

3.05 A series of policy initiatives followed the formal identification of community relations as a key area for action and the establishment of CCRU. These included:

- in 1987 the establishment of a schools cross-community contact scheme to provide funding to support better contact between Catholic and Protestant young people; and to support contact programmes for youth, community and sports groups;
- in 1989 the Education Reform Order:
  - introduced education for mutual understanding (EMU) and cultural heritage (CH) to the statutory curriculum
  - included measures to support the development of integrated education
- in 1990 the Community Relations Council was established as an independent limited company with charitable status with the aim of helping the people of Northern Ireland recognise and counter the effects of communal division;
- in 1990 the District Council Community Relations Programme was initiated to develop community relations activities at a local level.

## **Conclusion**

3.06 The main policy developments and associated policy instruments upon which current policy is based were thus established at a particular period in the history of Northern Ireland over a relatively limited period of time. The following sections consider the aims and objectives of these policies and policy instruments and assess their impact and achievements.

## **SECTION 4**

### **THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF EXISTING COMMUNITY RELATIONS POLICY INSTRUMENTS**

4.01 The policies and policy instruments developed during the late 1980s to promote community relations were fashioned within the prevailing political and economic climate of Northern Ireland, under direct rule and during a period where paramilitary violence was continuing at a high level.

#### **Central Community Relations Unit**

4.02 On its establishment CCRU was given 3 broad objectives:

- to ensure that there was full equality of opportunity and equity of treatment for everyone in Northern Ireland;
- to encourage greater contact between the different communities in Northern Ireland; and
- to encourage greater mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

4.03 As indicated earlier the unit had 3 functions: to provide a challenge mechanism within Government, to undertake a review role and to promote new innovative programmes to encourage better contact, mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

## **Community Relations Council**

4.04 As part of its innovation role CCRU consulted on the possibilities for a new public agency for community relations. This resulted in the establishment of the Community Relations Council (CRC) as a body independent of Government to enable it to have wider engagement across Northern Ireland.

4.05 The Council's strategic aim was to help the people of Northern Ireland to recognise and counter the effects of communal division. It did this by:

- providing support for local groups and organisations;
- developing opportunities for cross communal understanding;
- increasing public awareness of community relations work; and
- encouraging constructive debate throughout NI.

## **District Council Community Relations Programme**

4.06 The need to develop community relations activities at a local level was identified by CCRU. This was at a period when there was considerable and continuing tensions between a number of district councils and government on closely associated issues. In developing the new local programme the Government established a number of criteria to be met before councils could participate in the new programme, the aims of which were to:

- develop cross community contact and co-operation;
- promote greater mutual understanding; and
- increase respect for cultural traditions.

## Education Reforms

4.07 The 1989 Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order specified a new common curriculum. Included within this curriculum were 6 education themes, 2 of which, 'education for mutual understanding' and 'cultural heritage', were designed to promote community relations. Guidance for this work proposed that, through the development of study programmes within subject areas of the curriculum and through the values which inform the school ethos and relationships within the school, pupils should:

- Learn to respect themselves and others;
- Appreciate the inter-dependence of people within society;
- Know about and understand what is shared as well as what is different about their cultural traditions; and
- Appreciate how conflict might be handled in a non-violent way.

4.08 A further feature of the reform programme was an attempt to broaden parental choice to opt for integrated education for their children. The Order placed a statutory duty on the Department of Education to: "encourage and facilitate" the development of integrated education. This was defined as "the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils".

## **Cross Community Contact Scheme**

4.09 The cross community contact schemes promoted ongoing contact between schools, youth, community and sports groups. The emphasis was on continuing systematic programmes of work and activities which aimed to:

- breakdown traditional barriers;
- dissolve the myths of history and cultures; and
- encourage children and young people from different backgrounds to work together for a common purpose.

## **Conclusion**

4.10 The aims and objectives of community relations policies and actions throughout this period were designed to improve relations between the 2 main traditions in Northern Ireland through the encouragement of greater contact and the development of mutual understanding and a respect for different cultural traditions.

## SECTION 5

### THE IMPACT AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF CURRENT POLICY

#### Public Expenditure Investment in Community Relations

5.01 The diverse nature of much community relations work makes it difficult to identify the total resources that are being devoted to community relations from the overall £6 billion budget available to the Executive. In relation to the policy areas identified earlier, funding for the financial year 2000/01 was as follows:

Community Relations Unit:

- Community Relations Council: £2.7m
- District Councils Community Relations Programme: £1.7m
- Funding of capital projects and organisations which fall outside the remit of the Community Relations Council: £700,000
- Research, information etc: £300,000

Total: £5.4 million

Department of Education: £3.4 million

5.02 In addition, £10 million capital expenditure was allocated to Grant Maintained Integrated Schools by the Department of Education in the 2000/01 financial year. Recurrent grant aid for Grant Maintained Integrated Schools in that financial year was £32 million.

5.03 Other funding sources have become available for community relations work during the 1990s. Some of the main resources were:

- EU programmes: in the period 1994-1999 funding from the EU included
  - a specific measure on community relations with grant available being £17 million

- under Peace I a specific measure on community relations was delivered through the CRC with funding of £7 million
- the International Fund for Ireland: the Community Bridges programme supported community relations activities and for the period 1996-2001 around £8 million was provided to this programme.

### **Impact: Current Divisions in Society**

5.04 Available material on the extent of and trends in communal divisions over the past 10 – 15 years is reviewed in Annex 9.

5.05 To summarise the evidence would indicate:

- a general overall improvement in community relations attitudes between Protestants and Catholics since the 1980s;
- more recently an indication of a decrease in levels of tolerance and respect for diversity;
- some recent evidence of a perceived sense of mistrust and unease within the Protestant community;
- continuing high levels of racial prejudice which appear to have increased recently;
- progressively higher levels of residential segregation over the last 20 years with a majority of people choosing to live in polarised districts;
- increased levels of housing intimidation during the late 1990s;

- whilst there has been an increase in the number of children attending integrated schools, around 95% of children of school age still attend separated schooling;
- little changes in the extent of inter-community friendship patterns, and levels of mixed marriages remaining low but showing some recent increase;
- a number of indicators from the criminal justice system relating to community relations and divisions in society show progressive and continuing increases in related criminal behaviours.

5.06 The evidence does not suggest that significant progress has been made towards a more tolerant or inclusive society.

### **Community Relations Unit**

5.07 The CCRU (which subsequently became the Community Relations Unit following devolution) had 3 functions: to provide a challenge mechanism within government in relation to emerging policies which might have a differential impact on the different communities in Northern Ireland, to undertake a review role in relation to existing policies and programmes and to undertake an innovative role to propose new programmes to encourage greater contact, mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

5.08 In assessing the impact and achievements of CCRU it is important to recognise the major developments relating to the objective of the Unit to ensure that there was full equality of opportunity and equity of treatment. These developments are outwith the remit of the current review but the major achievement of the Unit in this area must be recognised.

- 5.09 The CCRU successfully delivered the establishment of the Community Relations Council, with associated responsibility for cultural traditions and community relations, and promoted community relations action at local level through the establishment of the District Council Community Relations Programme.
- 5.10 The Unit also emphasised the importance of developing policy on the Irish language which led to the establishment of the Ultach Trust. Following the establishment of a devolved administration responsibility for promoting language diversity passed to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.
- 5.11 The Unit also promoted programmes of information and research as an integral part of its actions. Three research strategies have been published, the most recent in 1998 which ensured that the prioritised research activities remained consistent with policy needs.
- 5.12 Whilst the Unit has achieved much in its innovative role to promote new programmes to encourage greater contact, mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity, political and administrative developments have inhibited its challenge and review roles. The cross departmental group chaired at Ministerial level met initially on only a small number of occasions and not thereafter; cross departmental co-ordination and action has not developed.
- 5.13 In more recent years the Unit has found itself heavily engaged in grant making activities through its involvement with European programmes, and this has limited its ability to further policy development.

## **Community Relations Council**

5.14 A series of triennial evaluations of the CRC has taken place, the most recent covering the period 1998-2001 (Annex 8). The aim of the evaluation was to assess the impact and cost effectiveness of the Council over the 3-year period.

5.15 Overall the review concluded that the CRC had made a significant contribution to promoting community relations within Northern Ireland. Some of its significant achievements included:

- the establishment of mediation and other conflict changing techniques and accessible resources throughout NI through the development of the Mediation Network and other organisations;
- development of and support for interface projects which have reduced tension across interfaces;
- the development of training programmes for marshals of parades and provision of trained marshals which is now recognised as an important factor in the reduction of tension at such parades;
- achieving recognition by departments and agencies that community relations are part of their work and agenda.

5.16 The most recent evaluation concluded that:

- the Council's aims were more operational than strategic and not sufficiently focused on community relations outcomes;
- there was a lack of strategic direction in relation to grant making;

- there remained inadequacies within the evaluation of activities supported and that as a matter of urgency the Council must address the issue of how to measure the impact of community relations; and
- greater action on dissemination of good practice was required.

5.17 Overall, the evaluation concluded that recent political dynamics had fundamentally altered the community relations environment and raised questions over the appropriateness of the current status and scope of the body.

### **District Council Community Relations Programme**

5.18 This programme has similarly been subject to a series of evaluations, the most recent completed in 2000 (Annex 8).

5.19 A major achievement of this programme is the development of community relations activity across all 26 district council areas in Northern Ireland with currently 25 out of 26 councils participating in the programme.

5.20 Evaluation of the programme suggested that:

- overall the programme has been positive at local levels and much valuable work has been done
  - in improvements in cross community contact, mutual respect and understanding; and
  - improved single identity work
- it has facilitated the establishment of infra-structure at local level;

- there is increased awareness within the Councils of the need for and value of community relations training for staff, elected members and community leaders;
- some weaknesses relate to the temporary nature of the programme and the lack of professional development of its staff.

5.21 Again the changed context within which the district council programme now operates was highlighted in the evaluation as was the fact that the programme had not been permanently established. The evaluation concluded that whilst the original aims of the Programme were appropriate for the context at the time of its inception, the recent changes in the context raise critical questions on the programmes, aims and delivery.

### **Education Initiatives**

5.22 A number of evaluations on the curriculum developments and cross community contact schemes has been completed.

5.23 In relation to education for mutual understanding, a 1996 report found:

- that schools tended to adopt a minimalist approach to its implementation, sufficient to meet statutory requirements but little more;
- that EMU as a cross curricular theme was too disparate and fragmented;
- there was little evidence of positive impacts on attitudes or behaviours; and

- many teachers experienced difficulties in delivering the sensitive issues and felt ill equipped to do so.

5.24 A more recent report to the department examined ways of enhancing the contribution of all schools to the promotion of a culture of tolerance. The recommendations of this report included:

- that the core values of EMU should pervade all policies in the education service;
- the planned review of the curriculum should provide for explicit reference to the aims and values of EMU;
- that there should be an integrated strategy of support and capacity building for teachers engaged in EMU;
- consideration should be given to the inclusion of training in dealing with diversity and management of conflict within teacher education;
- the department should commission a study to assess the need for a co-ordinating structure for community relations.

5.25 The most recent study on the cross community contact scheme indicates:

- a take up of the scheme by almost fifty percent of the schools in Northern Ireland;
- under 10 percent of pupils participated in the schemes;
- there was a dropping off in participation by post primary schools compared to earlier evaluations;

- schemes within schools still appear to be operating at the periphery rather than the heart of a schools activity;
- contact was seen as an end in itself and not followed up by sustained action to integrate contact into other activities; and
- there was a need for an overall school plan which would incorporate a range of activities relating to community relations;

5.26 A recent review of the Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme reports that:

- the programme is providing significant numbers of young people with practical opportunities of gaining a greater understanding of the main cultural traditions in Northern Ireland;
- the levels of commitment and support provided by the leaders and the youth organisations involved are significant;
- there is a lack of comprehensive evaluation of work being carried out; and
- the scheme appears to provide a flexible framework for providing opportunities for practical community relations work with young people.

### **Integrated Education**

5.27 The number of integrated primary and secondary schools has been increasing steadily to a current total of 46. In 2000/01 there were over 14,000 pupils in integrated education. This however represented only 4 percent of the total enrolment in schools in Northern Ireland. Most pupils in integrated schools were at secondary level (over 60%) but this

again represents just over 5½% of the numbers in secondary level education.

## **Conclusions**

5.28 In the most recent financial year approximately £9 million was spent directly on community relations programmes, with further funding coming from EU and IFI sources. In addition, significant public expenditure supports developments in integrated education.

5.29 Assessment of the effectiveness and impact of current programmes indicate:

- major problems continue in Northern Ireland society relating to inter communal conflicts and tensions;
- there is little evidence of significant increases in shared education and housing;
- policies and policy instruments have had limited but positive impacts and achievements; and
- evaluations point to the importance of the changed context and the need to re-consider current policies and programmes.

## SECTION 6

### DO THE AIMS OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS POLICY REMAIN APPROPRIATE?

6.01 The terms of reference required the review to examine, in the light of relevant developments, including the recently completed evaluations of the District Council Community Relations Programme and the Community Relations Council, whether the aims of community relations policy remain appropriate and whether changes are required to existing policy instruments.

#### Changes in Policy

6.02 The policies and delivery programmes described earlier were established in the late 1980s when the Northern Ireland community was experiencing overt conflict and associated high levels of violence. The recent process of political development in Northern Ireland has produced significant political, social, legislative and policy changes of relevance to community relations.

6.03 These changes are described in greater detail in Section 3 of the Working Paper (Annex 1). To summarise, they include:

- political developments which have led to radical changes in the political environment, including the ongoing peace process covering the paramilitary cease fires, the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 and its subsequent endorsement through the referendum which led to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly, its Executive and the Programme for Government;
- major legislative developments including;

- the Human Rights Act (1998)
- the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
- the Fair Employment Acts 1976 and 1989
- the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and in particular Section 75(2)

which requires public authorities in carrying out their functions to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group;

- important new stakeholders in the community relations area including:
  - the EU and
  - the International Fund for Ireland;
- significant policy developments in closely associated areas, for example New Targeting Social Need, one of the underpinning principles in the Programme for Government. New TSN operates in three linked ways:
  - a special focus on the problem of unemployed people to increase their chances of finding a job
  - targeting other aspects of social needs such as health, housing and education; and

- a series of Promoting Social Inclusion initiatives attempting to meet the needs of people who are disadvantaged in multiple ways to such an extent that they are unable to enjoy the full range of life opportunities which most people take for granted. Examples include the needs of Ethnic Minority People and of Travellers.

## **Responses from Consultations**

6.04 The working paper sought the views as to whether the current aims of policy and policy instruments remained appropriate. There was an almost unanimous response that current policy and the associated policy instruments require reconsideration. Respondents gave a range of reasons to support this position which included:

- current policies do not recognise or acknowledge the centrality of divisions within and across Northern Ireland society;
- the legislative provision of Section 75 transformed the context within which public authorities had to operate;
- the changed political context within which relationships between communities should be considered;
- the importance of the devolved structures of government;
- current aims of policies were too limited and specific;
- current policies had limited applicability to wider government actions; and
- current aims and objectives did not recognise the plurality of communities which existed in Northern Ireland.

## **Evaluations of Community Relations Council and District Council Programme**

6.05 As recorded earlier, both the recently completed evaluations of the CRC and the District Council CRP identify the significantly changed context in which the organisation and programmes operate, and recommend a fundamental re-appraisal of them in the light of these changed circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

6.06 There is widespread agreement that the aims of community relations policy do not remain appropriate and that changes are required to existing policy instruments.

## SECTION 7

### CONSULTATION ISSUES

7.01 The working paper (Annex 1) sought input on a number of key issues identified in relation to the terms of reference. From the formal responses, the seminar and workshop discussions, the individual meetings with key stakeholders and individuals and the commissioned studies a number of critical issues relating to future relationships within Northern Ireland have been identified which have implications for future policy. These are considered below in terms of the **context** within which policy should be developed, **key issues** influencing the future policy and **other significant points** identified. The review also highlighted a number of examples of good practice at policy, and action levels.

#### Context

7.02 Many respondents, whilst accepting and identifying the many inter and intra communal tensions which persist in Northern Ireland, emphasised the distance that Northern Ireland has come since current policies were initiated.

7.03 Many of these changes have been already identified in terms of the changed context of Northern Ireland society but respondents wished to identify and acknowledge:

- the overall positive changes within Northern Ireland society;

- the major political progress not only through the development of the Northern Ireland Assembly and its Executive, but also the constructive changes at district council level where shared responsibility and civic leadership is increasingly developing;
- the significant changes in the security situation; and
- the greatly improved social and economic environment experienced by the majority of Northern Ireland's population.

7.04 A number of respondents argued strongly and persuasively about the complex inter-linkages between developments on equality, human rights and community relations, and made the point that further progress on improving community relationships must be seen in the wider context of development on equality and human rights.

7.05 The CCRU on its formation had as one of its three objectives ensuring that there was full equality of opportunity and equity of treatment for everyone in Northern Ireland. This review has earlier identified legislative and policy developments relating to equality and equity as critical concomitants of improved community relationships. The Belfast Agreement and the Programme for Government stress the importance of equality and human rights developments in the creation of a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society. Such inter-connection is exemplified by the then Secretary of State's input to the debate on the Northern Ireland Bill when she said:

*"[We] regard equality of opportunity and good relations as complementary. There should be no conflict between the two objectives. Good relations cannot be based on inequality between different religions or ethnic groups. Social cohesion requires equality to be reinforced by good community relations".*

7.06 The review is clear that the protection of human rights and the promotion of equality and social inclusion must be an integral part of overall action to promote better relations within the Northern Ireland community.

7.07 The INCORE comparative study of action in other, relevant jurisdictions to improve community relations (Annexe 5) interestingly indicated that throughout the world there is very limited experience in this field and only isolated examples of practice. The review concludes that “Northern Ireland does lead the way in the range of activity and the evaluation of the impact of this activity”.

### **Major Issues**

7.08 A number of critical issues was identified by respondents which should influence future policy aims.

7.09 These included:

- that inter- and intra-community divisions are a major, continuing and (potentially) developing problem for Northern Ireland;
- the critical nature of these divisions must be identified as a priority issue for action by the Executive;
- political leadership, example and action were essential if significant and lasting change is to occur;
- there must be sustained cross-Executive and cross-Departmental action, based on a clear vision for the future of society, with associated, clear and meaningful aims and objectives;
- action must be mainstreamed and must be

- cross-departmental
  - long term
  - multi-faceted
  - co-ordinated
  - monitored and reviewed, and
  - involve all public bodies.
- in any raft of actions the key importance of supporting the development of local community infrastructure and the critical role played by community based organisations in promoting better relationships and in managing disputes at community level; and
  - community development action must include improving relations within and between communities and recognise the important role that such development can have in promoting greater social inclusion.

### **Other Important Points**

7.10 Other issues of importance identified by numbers of responses to the review included:

- a general distaste by respondents from very different perspectives for the current language of ‘community relations’ – the terminology was seen as tarnished, outdated and divisive;

- the importance of developing a competence for managing diversity and promoting inter-dependence among leaders in all sectors of society – public, private and voluntary, and in particular the education area where avoidance of discussion or consideration of issues relating to diversity or division were repeatedly identified as a serious limitation of current work;
- the significant costs of current and developing divisions in society, as manifested in:
  - the **direct** costs of a polarised society which include not only the financial impact of civil strife, but other costs borne by the health and social services, housing, education and transport and the blight of land and property near interface areas;
  - **inefficiencies** through the duplication of services ranging from health and social services provision, through transport, training and job centres, duplication of teacher training, to the increasing demand to provide separate youth, leisure and other provision as a result of the increasing separation within communities;
  - other **additional costs** resulting from a polarised society (for example DETI estimate that approximately £25 million of their annual budget is dedicated to counteracting issues relating to a polarised and separate community);
- the importance of recognising that divisions between communities are not only an urban issue, but raised additional and particular problems in rural areas;

- the impact that an uncertain and difficult funding climate for the voluntary and community sector has on the long term required community development particularly in interface areas and those areas with weak or non-existent community infrastructure; and
- the identification of education as a key area where policy action can make major impact through:
  - greater development of sharing between schools
  - more active and positive curriculum development relating to the role of young people as citizens
  - the need to develop greater sharing in the training of teachers to enable them to cope with managing diversity and promoting inter-dependence amongst pupils
  - opportunities for developing (through the Youth Service) changes in attitudes and behaviour amongst key groups of young people
  - the need for FE and HE institutions to recognise the importance of community divisions and to work proactively to promote better relations within their populations.

### **Some Examples of Good Practice**

7.11 In the discussions and inputs to the review a number of examples of good practice was identified. These included:

- at policy level the new regional development policy enshrined in “Shaping Our Future” which includes a policy approach combining plurality and integration;

- a number of developments at local authority level in which a joint and coherent approach to equity and good relations policies and actions are being developed across all council actions;
- the development in the Youth Service of the JEDI programme which is designed to embed equity, diversity and inter-dependence into the structures, policy and practice of youth work across Northern Ireland; and
- a number of impressive community projects, such as the Springfield Inter Community Development Project, which are undertaking community action to promote inter- and intra-community development and action along key interface areas.

## **Conclusion**

7.12 This section has reflected key issues identified through the review process. It has further noted examples of good practice emerging, but it is important to recognise that examples are:

- fragmented and piecemeal;
- un-coordinated both horizontally and vertically; and
- do not operate within any over-arching policy, structures or strategy based on a clear vision for the future development of society in Northern Ireland.

## SECTION 8

### RECOMMENDATIONS ON FURTHER POLICY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

8.01 Based on the Review findings, this section proposes recommendations for future policy aims and outcomes. These recommendations are based on a number of principles, which are first outlined. Critical for the policy recommendations is the desired vision which the Executive subscribes to; this, and the associated aims or outcomes of policy are next considered. Flowing from the principles, the vision and proposed aims for society are a series of recommendations:

- at central government level;
- on delivery issues at regional and local level; and
- at community level.

Finally, the financial implications of the recommendations are considered.

#### Principles

8.02 The recommendations are based on a number of fundamental principles which emerged through the review process:

- (1) **Acknowledgement of the problem:** acceptance that the issue of dysfunctional relationships between communities in Northern Ireland is a major and continuing problem facing society and that divisions are the manifestation of deeply rooted mistrust and suspicion which extend into the core patterns and structures of relationships at all levels in Northern Ireland. Policy should focus on encouraging action which engages people in their public and private relationships at all levels of society.

- (2) An acceptance and endorsement of a **clear vision**, associated with clearly articulated **aims**, for the future of society in Northern Ireland. This issue is considered further below.
- (3) Action to improve relations between various communities must be **mainstreamed** to achieve the desired aim of enhanced community relations.
- (4) The legislative base for such action should be **Section 75** of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which requires public authorities in carrying out their functions to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group;
- (5) The future language of vision, policy and action should be within this legislative base, that is, of **promoting good relations**; action to promote good relations should condition and influence policy making in all spheres and at all levels of government activity and decision making;
- (6) Such actions must involve **the leadership of the Executive and all government departments** and their associated agencies. The work of the review emphasised that whilst dysfunctional relationships are of particular importance in some areas of government, all departments are engaged in policy and decision making which significantly impacts on relationships within society;

- (7) Action to promote better relations must **engage and be owned by all sectors of Northern Ireland society** – the voluntary and community, and the private and business sectors alongside the public sector. The important role and influence of the main faith and church groupings in supporting action to promote better relations must be encouraged;
- (8) **A long term commitment** to Government action is required with the associated investment of time, resources and application;
- (9) Policies and decisions to promote better relations must be developed and delivered on a **cross-government, co-ordinated and joined up basis**. Action must be associated with the ability to challenge and review policies associated with promoting better relations, and action must be coupled with effective reporting and accountability mechanism;
- (10) Action must be **open, transparent with active engagement** with all sectors in Northern Ireland.

### **Vision, Aims and Outcomes for Future Policy**

8.03 The vision for Northern Ireland as articulated in the Programme for Government – set out in the Belfast Agreement – was overwhelmingly endorsed by respondents to the review. That is:

*“that Northern Ireland should become a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society, firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust with the protection and vindication of human rights for all.”*

8.04 Many respondents, however, took the view that such a vision required further articulation in a set of aims or outcomes which could clearly establish guidelines for policies and actions of departments and their agencies.

8.05 The INCORE Review of policies and interventions in other relevant jurisdictions geared to improving community relations (Annex 5) identified a number of different outcomes relating to inter-community relations to which particular countries aspired. The review identified four distinct orientations which imply different approaches and policies by government and other interested parties:

- **homogenisation** which aims to include the whole population in one common identity based around citizenship and assimilating minorities;
- **separate development** where the government promotes separation rather than contact and where different communities may develop independently;
- **co-existence** which seeks good relations between the different communities without reference to the issues and concerns that divide them; and
- **pluralism** with a goal of creating a pluralist society, encouraging a positive diversity or pluralism within an overarching goal of increased integration and sharing.

8.06 Evidence made available to the review highlighted the complexity of inter- and intra-community dynamics in Northern Ireland, influenced by socio-economic, demographic and urban/rural factors. It is clear that there are significant areas of Northern Ireland society where increasing separation and polarisation of communities is taking place. This not

only relates to the main community groupings, but evidence indicates increasing intra-community fragmentation particularly in some of the most disadvantaged urban areas.

8.07 The review team believe that a fundamental decision is required as to the future policy aims in Northern Ireland; should these be:

- **To accept ongoing trends towards a more segregated society and attempt to stabilise relationships within and between the 2 main communities;**

or

- **To encourage and promote a more integrated and sharing society, recognising a plurality of groupings whilst accepting that there will continue to be areas where communities currently wish to live apart.**

8.08 The review believes that acceptance and/or support for either 'separate development' or 'co-existence' is inherently unstable, undesirable, inefficient and not an outcome implied or desired in the Programme for Government. The review team conclude that Policy should commit to an over-arching goal of a **cohesive but pluralist society**. Underpinning such a view of Northern Ireland are the 3 principles of Equity, Diversity and Inter-dependence which should encapsulate government's commitment to promoting better relations.

8.09 The **aims** or **outcomes** for policy to promote better relations in Northern Ireland proposed are:

- *to facilitate 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; and*
- *to shape policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow.*

## **Recommendations**

8.10 The following recommendations are based on the clear acceptance of leadership by the Executive and individual Departments, working together to make a strategic and sustained effort to promote better relations within our society and to reduce the divisions and fear currently so widespread.

8.11 To deliver the agreed vision for Northern Ireland and to achieve the main policy aims and outcomes desired, proposals are made:

- for action at Executive and central Government level;
- for actions at regional and local level;
- for development at community level.

## **Executive and Central Government:**

### 8.12 Recommendations are

- **There should be a named and designated Ministerial lead within OFMDFM to promote better relations;**
- **A cross-government group should be established, chaired at Ministerial level and preferably including Ministers from key departments, to lead on action to promote better relations;**
- **This Group should develop an overarching Strategic Plan for the Executive with associated actions and targets, to promote good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The plan would focus on the key strategic aims identified above and harness the efforts of a wide range of partners across the statutory, voluntary/community and private sectors in the delivery of action;**
- **The Minister and cross-government group should be supported by a strengthened central resource within OFMDFM which would, working with all departments:**
  - **develop the Strategic and associated Action Plans engaging all departments**
  - **ensure that actions are aligned within and across departments**
  - **facilitate the development of new policy initiatives**
  - **develop the framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the strategy and associated actions;**
  - **monitor and review the development of this strategy; and**

- **challenge any policies or decisions coming to the Executive which might influence the development of good relations;**

**(Funding responsibilities should be separated from these responsibilities; where possible, grant making should be devolved to the most appropriate level, regional or local)**

- **DCAL should assume explicit lead responsibility for developing cultural diversity;**
- **DE should lead on co-ordinated action involving schools, teacher training, the development of the curriculum and the Youth Services to support and facilitate greater sharing and promote better relations within the school population;**
- **DSD through the VAU should promote community development particularly geared to areas of weak community infrastructure, and action to support and facilitate greater sharing in housing;**
- **all Departments should contribute on action within their respective areas of responsibility to promoting better relations;**
- **it will be important to ensure that NIO, with its responsibilities for community safety and other relevant areas, contributes to this cross government action;**
- **Executive Programme Funds should be made available to support joint delivery of the Strategic Plan.**
- **consideration should be given to amending the legislation to provide the Equality Commission with statutory authority to have a duty to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or**

**racial group (the Commission currently has this duty only in respect of race);**

- **the Equality Commission should consider, in its forthcoming review of the Guidelines to the Statutory Duties, that particular attention should be paid to how the Good Relations duty can be further developed, mainstreamed and made more effective.**

### **Delivery Issues : Regional.**

8.13 The evaluation of the CRC raised fundamental questions about the future status and role of the body, and this was an issue identified in the working paper. Respondents differed significantly in their views and proposals as to the needs for and future of a regional body.

8.14 The functions or actions suggested by respondents for regional level delivery included to:

- develop a strategic plan for good relations
- deliver such a plan
- monitor and report on delivery of a strategic plan
- have an independent audit/challenge function for public bodies
- hold public bodies to account
- implement community relations/good relations policy
- strengthen the relationship between policy making and policy implementation
- give a clear focus to the direction and delivery of policy

- promote good relations action in statutory sector
- promote cultural diversity
- undertake research
- develop training
- be the focus for expertise and good practice
- disseminate good practice information
- give good relations work a high profile
- promote action in voluntary, community, youth and church sectors
- be independent and able to promote high risk action
- promote innovation and flexible responses to particular issues
- core fund critical regional organisations which provide support and resources at regional or local levels eg mediation, training
- develop action at interface flash point areas

8.15 To a considerable extent the mainstreaming of good relations actions and the associated recommendations at central government level will subsume many of these functions. Those remaining actions could be delivered through different models. Three are suggested, any of which could include the core support for key regional organisations and training responsibilities. Grant making for smaller organisations should be delegated to local level (see para 8.24)

8.16 **A strengthened and focused CRC** remaining at arms length of Government would have:

- Advantages of independence, flexibility, ability to take risks, development of core expertise and dissemination activities, could be developed as resource to respond to flashpoint incidents.
- Disadvantages would include limitations on its influence, separation, and confusion on equality and better relations responsibilities and a perceived lack of plurality in its targeted actions.

8.17 Establishing a **new non-departmental public body** would have:

- Advantages of a clear focus for the direction and delivery of good relations policy and a higher profile.
- Disadvantages would include perceived additional bureaucracy, confusion relating to responsibilities over Section 75 (unless the NI Act were amended), the need to develop expertise in good practice and dissemination and additional costs of a new NDPB.

8.18 Allocation of **additional responsibilities to the Equality Commission** would have:

- Advantages of a strengthened and co-ordinated Section 75 role, ability to facilitate main streaming of good relations, clear association of good relations to equality, and anti-discrimination actions, enhance the plurality of good relations practice.
- Disadvantages would include a perception of a compliance driven approach to good relations and the need to develop expertise in good practice and dissemination.

8.19 On the assumption that the mainstreaming and central government recommendations are accepted, considerations of coherence with current structures and legislation, and limiting additional bureaucratic and resource demands, leads to the review team recommending:

- **that the ECNI should be allocated additional responsibilities for promoting good relations.**

This would:

- strengthen the relationship between policy making and policy implementation;
- build on current Section 75 responsibilities;
- clarify the Commission's role in taking a clear pro-active and positive approach to promoting good relations in support of government action (with a possible legal extension of the Good Relations duty as noted earlier);

- pro-actively facilitate good relations through:
  - core funding and support of key regional groups which provide resources to support local level actions at interface areas
  - developing expertise and good practice
  - outreach to the voluntary/community sectors
  - dissemination of good practice
  - further develop good relations within the work force
  - enhanced public profile for good relations activities.

### **Delivery Issues: Local Level**

8.20 The evaluation of the District Council Community Relations Programme also raised fundamental questions about the future aims and delivery of this programme, despite the evidence of the positive impact the programme has had at local level, and this was a further issue raised in the working paper.

8.21 There was general agreement that despite its achievements the district council programme in its present form should be discontinued because of:

- limitations in current aims, structure and level of grant-aid
- the significantly changed context in political and legislative terms
- the development of Local Strategy Partnerships to deliver Peace II and
- the development by a number of councils of different models to build good relations action into core business of the community.

8.22 There was however considerable agreement about the need to continue a programme to promote good relations at local level. Such a programme should consolidate and facilitate work undertaken and retain and develop the expertise at local level. There was also recognition of the importance of mainstreaming good relations with equality responsibilities in all council area actions and the need to further encourage elected members in their civic responsibility role.

8.23 The review therefore recommends that:

- **the current District Council Community Relations programme should be phased out over an agreed time period;**
- **a new programme at local area level should be developed.**

8.24 Such a programme would:

- build on councils section 75 responsibilities;
- remain under District Council responsibility but encourage links with their Local Strategy Partnership to develop a partnership approach;
- build on local integrated strategies; and
- assume responsibility for the CRC small grants programme which would be devolved to Councils/LSP level.

(one such possible local area model is developed in Annex 7).

8.25 The review team was interested to learn that the forthcoming community safety strategy, to be published by NIO, identifies offences motivated by prejudice and hatred as a key issue. The strategy will advocate a partnership approach between the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, working together at local district council level to both identify problems and devise solutions appropriate to local communities. The strategy will recommend that this should also be delivered at local District Council level through the Local Strategy Partnerships.

### **Community Action**

8.26 A major issue throughout the review has been the recognition that the voluntary and community sectors have made a powerful contribution to the achievements of better relationships between communities and the need for an over-arching strategy to confirm and support that role, especially in the most disadvantaged and interface areas. There is also agreement that an integrated approach needs to be found on the relationship between community development and community relations.

8.27 The Programme for Government identifies the importance of building the capacity of local communities to express their needs and to participate in the development and implementation of programmes to meet these needs. Such action to promote social inclusion is closely related to improving relationships between and within communities. The close and complex links between such community development action and promoting better relations both within and between communities needs further development. The distinction between *bonding* social capital, designed to build-in group solidarity and capacity, and *bridging* social capital that has a more external and inter-dependent focus is increasingly being recognised.

8.28 Current 'single identity' work has the danger of promoting bonding social capital which can reinforce exclusivity and may interfere with the opportunities for bridging or integration. Accepting this, however, the reality is that in Northern Ireland communities differ in the extent of their level of community development and infrastructure; the 'one model fits all' approach is not appropriate. What is important, however, is the need to recognise the close inter-dependence between supporting community development and encouraging better relations within and between communities and the essential and necessary role that such organisations have in improving, resolving and managing relationships at community level.

8.29 The review therefore recommends:

- **formal recognition and finance should be provided by Government to develop the substantial contribution being made by community and voluntary organisations to the development of better relations within Northern Ireland;**
- **Government should achieve a more integrated approach between community development and promoting better relations work at all levels;**
- **a need to strengthen the formal links between the work of the Voluntary Activity Unit and the enhanced central capacity recommended for OFMDFM;**
- **in the light of the contribution which the voluntary and community sectors can bring at local level, all funders of the sector should be encouraged to examine how they might facilitate the sector in their work to achieve better relations outcomes;**

- **the Task Force being established by the VAU to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Document on Funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector should take into account better relations outcomes when identifying mechanisms to achieve the sustainability of the voluntary and community sector;**
  
- **current programmes that are working to develop community infrastructure (Executive Programme Funds, Peace II, Community Service Plans) should explicitly support infrastructures required to promote better relations within and between communities;**

### **Financial Implications**

8.30 The current proposals should not lead to significant public expenditure implications. They require committed leadership at political and departmental levels and the decision to deploy current mainstream funding more effectively to promote better relations within an overarching and co-ordinated framework. The recommendations are underpinned by the need to mainstream actions across government, building on current legislation, and offering the opportunity, if successful, of delivering public services more effectively and efficiently.

8.31 At central government level, the review recommends that OFMDFM should review its structures to ensure that good relations work is supported and driven across government through the preparation of a unified strategic plan for the Executive. Departments will experience some opportunity costs through contributing to the Strategic Plan and building in systematic monitoring and evaluation of their actions.

- 8.32 The immediate effect of the recommendations on current community relations funding will be largely neutral (unless the decision is taken to create a new NDPB). The changes recommended relating to the CRC and the ECNI should be met through re-direction of current levels of funding.
- 8.33 The broader implications for funding across mainstream programmes will only become apparent following development of the Strategic Plan. However, action on promoting good relations should fit easily into planned mainstream policy development in such areas as education, regional strategic planning, urban regeneration and culture, arts and leisure.
- 8.34 The review recommends the winding down of the current District Community Relations Programme, to be replaced by a new local area programme developed through the local integrated strategies being prepared by District Councils and Local Strategy Partnerships. Again, this should be largely resource neutral.
- 8.35 The funding of voluntary and community organisations engaged in community development and better relations activities and their future sustainability remains a fraught issue. The review strongly endorses the need for continuing support for such work; it recommends that the Task Force to be established by DSD into future funding for the sector should include in its remit the needs of the sector to support the overall strategic thrust built into this review.

8.36 In summary, significant funding is already committed to community relations. The review's overall recommendation is the need to prioritise action to promote better relations as a central issue for Government, and to demonstrate leadership at political and departmental levels to the required redirection of effort. It requires the redevelopment of current dedicated funding in a complementary fashion to the use of the significant mainstream resourcing already devoted to key areas within a strategic effort coupled with effective reporting and accountability mechanism to ensure that the key aims and outcomes of the new policy thrust are being achieved.

### **Conclusion**

8.37 All recommendations in this section must be seen within the context of the development of an over-arching strategy geared to the promotion of good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group, and linked to wider Executive action to promote social inclusion, equality and human rights as part of 'growing as a community'.

## SECTION 9

### A FRAMEWORK FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF FUTURE POLICY

9.01 It is clear that to date community relations activity has been inadequately monitored and evaluated. This was recognised widely during the review. Equally, however, the practical and methodological difficulties in meaningfully and adequately monitoring or evaluating such activity was stressed by many respondents.

9.02 Section 5 of this review considers the impact and achievements of current policy. The most recent evaluation of the CRC concluded that as a matter of urgency the Council must address the issue of how to measure the impact of community relations. The Council has subsequently commissioned work on this area which is awaited with interest.

9.03 A helpful and constructive workshop was held with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), following which the agency undertook to consider the necessary framework to monitor and evaluate the new strategy. The suggested approach is summarised here and developed in more detail in Annex 10.

9.04 If the vision and associated aims and outcomes articulated in Section 8 are endorsed, policy objectives for the new strategy would include:

- promoting sharing/integration
- reducing fear
- improving relations
- mainstreaming better relations
- promoting inter-dependence

- reducing prejudice and increasing tolerance
- decreasing sectarianism and racism
- reducing social distance between differing communities
- increasing social capital within (bonding) and between (bridging) communities.

9.05 The monitoring and evaluation framework will have to encompass a plurality of communities (religious belief, political opinion and racial grouping); in addition intra-community friction is increasingly recognised as a major dysfunctional influence within particular localities and must be included within any framework.

9.06 Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the new strategy must be an integral part of the Executive Strategic Plan to be developed (see para 8.12). Measuring the impact will not be straight forward:

- the multi faceted nature of the programme
- the wide range of aims and objectives
- the need to factor in extraneous developments which may impact on actions during the course of the Plan.

9.07 It is proposed that change in community relationships and programme impacts should be monitored at three levels:

- at **macro** level where attitudes would be routinely monitored using social survey data;
- at a **meso** (lower) level where indicators would be identified which get nearer to the behavioural dimensions of better relations. Such indicators can provide insights into the dynamics of relationships within and between communities;

- at **micro** level there will continue to be a role for monitoring and evaluation at project or programme level.

9.08 In addition to the above framework for monitoring and evaluation the new strategic framework must be underpinned by a dedicated **research strategy** to ensure that policy and practice at central, regional, local and community levels are informed by a better understanding of the dynamics and development of better relations in Northern Ireland.

9.09 In conclusion, NISRA colleagues note the methodological and technical difficulties in finding reliable and robust indicators of the impact of the new better relations strategy. However they identify macro and meso level indicators which can provide evidence of attitudinal and behavioural change from which inferences about the state of intra and inter community relationships can be drawn. In addition, through systematic monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes useful information can be obtained in terms of good practice.

9.10 Annex 10 indicates the type of indicators which could be developed to measure and evaluate objectives which might emerge from the Strategic Plan if the aims and objectives are endorsed by the Executive.

9.11 The review team recommend:

- **there should be a 3 level framework for monitoring and evaluating the new strategy built in as an integral part of the Strategic Plan;**
- **this should be supported by a dedicated research programme;**

- **following endorsement of the aims and objectives of the strategy a list of indicators should be developed and assessed as appropriate.**

## SECTION 10

### CONCLUSION

10.01 The Programme for Government recognises that tackling the divisions in society and promoting better relations cannot be dealt with by individual departments or agencies working alone: rather they require a cross-cutting strategy that involves both statutory bodies, other stakeholders and local communities. The present review puts forward proposals for dealing with these issues and proposes an overarching structure within which current and future issues can be dealt with strategically, jointly and effectively. The delivery of such a programme will however require leadership and a long term commitment by the Executive, by individual departments and their agencies, engagement with voluntary, community, private business and church sectors and the ownership by all in Northern Ireland.

10.02 These proposals and recommendations must be seen in the broader context of the Executive's commitment to Northern Ireland 'growing as a community' underpinned by the core principles and values of equality and human rights. Taking forward work together on the promotion of human rights, equality of opportunity and the promotion of better relationships is fundamental to a peaceful, cohesive, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society.