

APPENDIX 1

Appendix 1

Belfast City Council's Response to 'Partners for Change' Action Plan for 2006 -08

1. General comments

- 1.1 Belfast City Council welcomes this action plan which clearly acknowledges the critical role played by the community and voluntary sector and the way in which this sector can shape and deliver government objectives. The key themes and outcomes are comprehensive and legitimate, based on previously agreed objectives between Government and the community and voluntary sector.
- 1.2 However, we would like to note that the timing of the consultation seems unusual, given that the strategy is for 2006 -08. Nevertheless it is clear that a significant number of government policies and activities are already taking place which strongly involve or support the community and voluntary sector.
- 1.3 As this action plan is very much focused on central government, we would like to stress the importance of the existing strong relationships between local government and the voluntary and community sector, and to ensure that local government is involved in the mentioned policies and activities.
- 1.4 There are only a few references to local government, with possibly the most significant being on page 46 on the impact of the Review of Public Administration (RPA):

"..there is a need to develop a strong relationship between Local Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector. DOE is exploring with DSD and a Voluntary and Community Sector colleagues how the development of such a relationship might be facilitated." We feel that DOE should also involve local authorities in this process. This would allow the development of improved relationships between central and local government, which would ultimately benefit the voluntary and community sectors.
- 1.5 In the context of RPA and the desire of government to move to a two tier administration, the role of local government as the preferred delivery agent, at a local level, through an agreed community support plan, should be highlighted. A number of services within Belfast City Council work closely with the community and voluntary sector, for example Community services, through its delivery of the Community Support Plan, or a variety of community based initiatives to promote and raise awareness of environmental issues, good relations and culture and arts grants, to name a few. Future strategies should make more explicit reference to the work that could be achieved through working with councils, including the work currently being developed, such as the Strategic Neighbourhood Action Programme.

2. Specific comments

More detailed comments are outlined below under the specific questions:

Do you agree that the key themes and outcomes identified in section two are an appropriate way of classifying departmental commitments to action?

- 2.1 In principle, the Council agrees with the key themes and outcomes identified in section two of the document, as it believes that these are an appropriate way of classifying departmental commitments to action. However we would like further explanation of each of the key themes, and a reassurance that they are driving the commitments and not merely a classification developed around existing commitments.
- 2.2 It seems that the set of themes and outcomes are based around the social capital model which the Council strongly supports. They also seem quite closely related to the ingredients of a community development process which the Council has also endorsed.
- 2.3 However we would like to note that in the absence of a comprehensive Community Development Strategy the priority should be to develop an outcome driven regional community development strategy. A multi-stakeholder approach would be necessary in devising such a strategy. This would facilitate the agreement of roles and responsibilities for all partners and would promote a shared performance framework that would target better investment in the community and voluntary sector. In the absence of a regional strategy, this action plan presents merely a multiplicity of initiatives and interventions which might be confusing for citizens and the sector.
- 2.4 It is slightly surprising that the document which is outcome focused does not contain performance indicators which would be reported on a regular basis. Will the set of indicators be published at a later stage?

How will you use Partners for Change?

2.5 The Council plans to use this document in a number of ways:

- To ensure that policy development, service delivery and any other actions undertaken by the Council, together with its partners
 - address social exclusion and contribute to the creation of a cohesive society; and
 - are supportive of the three key themes set out in 'Partners for Change';
- To seek further clarification concerning the DOE's work which is exploring better working relationships in respect of the new Council led community planning role; and
- As a reference guide to the main policies and activities of the central Government departments and how they link to the community sector.

How will Partners for Change impact upon the voluntary and community sector?

2.6 The Council believes that this strategy will have a few important benefits for the community and voluntary sector as it will:

- Clearly demonstrate central government's commitment to the three key themes as set out in 'Partners for Change';
- Create better networking and opportunities for collaboration between government departments and the community and voluntary sector;
- Encourage government departments to consult with and actively engage the community and voluntary sector;
- Identify potential funding or resource sharing opportunities for the community and voluntary sector;
- Identify good practice examples for the community and voluntary Sector; and
- Assist the sector to have a role in the planning and decision making process.

2.7 We believe that Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) should make a more cohesive effort to alert community and voluntary sector of emerging EU funds as there will be so many organisations losing EU aid. Naturally, councils also have responsibility to make clear their role in EU funding, for example, in relation to Peace III funding.

Do you believe that Partners for Change could be better targeted to promote equality of opportunity?

2.8 Although, we agree with the three themes identified by the Partners for Change action plan, we sense that placing disadvantage within some cross-cutting themes and strategies actually lessens the focus on disadvantage. Thus, we believe that focus on disadvantage should be more explicit.

Does Partners for Change have any adverse impacts for any of the Section 75 groups (listed in Annex 1) that you feel we may not be aware of?

2.9 The Council believes that this action plan should have a better attempt at promoting accessibility (as mentioned on page 105).

2.10 We also believe that a reference should be made to Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 ('the Act'), as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006, whereby public authorities, when carrying out their functions must have due regard to the need to:

- Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- Encouraging participation by disabled people in public life.

