



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Health and Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	Peace III - Phase II Project Proposals
Date:	4 th August 2010
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Relevant Background Information

The Belfast Peace Plan is one of 14 plans led by local authorities in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. The plan aims to build positive relations at the local level and tackle sectarian and racist attitudes with a focus on conflict resolution and mediation at the local community level. The plan is 100% funded by the EU.

Belfast City Council has been invited to develop a plan for Phase II of the programme to be submitted to Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) by September 2010. An initial draft plan has been developed under the direction of the Good Relations Partnership. The final draft of the overall plan will be taken back to the Good Relations Partnership (and to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee) in August, however this report is to advise the Health and Environmental Services Committee of projects proposed for phase II of the Belfast plan to be led by the Health and Environmental Services Department.

Key Issues

Four projects were proposed originally by the Health and Environmental Services Department which were deemed to match programme objectives and subscribe to the work undertaken by the Health and Environmental Services Committee. The indicative budget required for the 4 projects was estimated at £1.865m from a total council bid of £7.845m.

At the Good Relations Partnership meeting on 25th June it was agreed that one of the four Health and Environmental Services proposals should be withdrawn (North and West household recycling centre – a new shared space - indicative budget £750k). It was concluded that risks associated with obtaining necessary planning approvals to develop a site at Springvale may have resulted in failure to complete the project within the Peace III programme timeframe.

Work is continuing to develop detailed cases for the following 3 projects for submission to the managing authority for the programme (SEUPB) in September. The anticipated cost/income for the remaining projects is in excess of £1m. An outline summary of each proposal is listed below.

1. Belfast sectarian and racism tension monitoring and response project – indicative budget £600,000

The primary purpose of tension monitoring is to reduce the impact and number of actual or potential community tensions at interfaces and across neighbourhoods in the city. This project is based on a strategy of establishing a multiagency approach to improve communication, information sharing and community engagement to manage and respond rapidly to community tensions before they rise to such an extent that it results in unrest and violence. It seeks to:

- coordinate a multi-sectoral approach to monitoring and responding to identified community tensions and delivering targeted responses that reduce or minimise the impact and number of community tensions, before they get out of control;
- provide a process whereby quantitative and qualitative information is collated and analysed to inform understanding of community tensions; and
- engage with relevant communities and partners, in particular those from underrepresented and at risk groups; for example, those living in areas affected by sectarian and interface violence; disability groups; LGBT groups and minority ethnic groups.

The project would support a monitoring process and a rapid intervention approach within neighbourhoods through the strategic coordination and deployment of resources at times of increased tension or crisis. There are still areas within the city facing inter-communal tensions resulting in youth-led violence at interfaces and race relations issues. Incidents are often associated with significant anniversary or commemorative events but can also be sparked off by a series of seemingly minor community / neighbourhood issues.

This project will enable and support communities to better manage and reduce tensions, through the deployment of an 'on the ground' community support team to provide reassurance and the delivery of positive interventions that have been shown to reduce community tensions. In order to reduce the incidence of tensions, a number of partner organisations will support reporting of crime, services for victims and witnesses and liaison with service providers.

The project will collate information on community tensions and develop action plans where it is determined that tensions are at levels that might lead to hate incidents or crime. It will promote Belfast as a Shared City Space by reducing tensions in areas that may be at risk of violence or a breakdown in community relations and cohesion. The project is collaborative in that it will bring together statutory, voluntary and community organisations and seek to build a sustainable capacity to reduce the incidence of tensions over time.

2. Youth engagement programme – indicative budget £350,000

This programme aims to improve the quality of life for communities in interface areas by working with marginalised young men in a partnership programme which provides hope and purpose and diverts involvement in gang and paramilitary activity.

In Belfast, there is deemed to be a huge gap in engaging with young men, especially those at risk from continued paramilitary involvement as we emerge from conflict. Improving the quality of life within some communities and the attractiveness of Belfast in terms of investment and tourism will require continued effort to address 'residual' conflict issues which manifest in ongoing paramilitary activity, sectarian violence and so called "recreational rioting".

The proposal is based on a successful partnership approach to address criminal and anti-social behaviour which operates in Birmingham as part of the 'total place' pilot in the city. The lessons learned from the project have been documented extensively. This proposal seeks to adopt a similar model to reduce sectarian and racist anti social behaviour in interface areas in Belfast.

The proposed programme would engage with 'hard to reach' young men involved in, or on the periphery of, local paramilitary or gang activity to reduce incidents of violence and create alternative pathways to improve their life chances to:

- deter involvement in gang, dissident and paramilitary activity;
- influence young men's attitudes to violence and sectarianism;
- address mental health issues including youth suicide (potentially connected to a society emerging from conflict); and
- develop community resolution of, and resilience to, gang violence and rioting.

Activities will involve a range of interventions including:

- assertive outreach with groups of hard to reach young males by a team of highly skilled staff;
- mentoring programmes;
- connections to schools, training providers and probation services;
- targeted responses for families at critical times in the family's life or its wider social circle (for example conviction to, or release from, custody);
- targeted responses for communities at critical times, e.g. commemorations, parades, protests
- development of inter-agency strategies to sustain long term disengagement from gang and paramilitary activity; and
- creation of an agreed comprehensive framework of interventions to reduce violence.

3. Roots of Empathy – indicative budget £165,000

Roots of Empathy (ROE) is an evidence-based not-for-profit programme that has shown a dramatic effect in reducing levels of aggression (against others from different backgrounds) among school children by raising social and emotional competence and increasing empathy. It is critical that as Belfast emerges from a period of sustained violence, that young people are equipped with the skills and understanding to manage aggression, increase empathy and live in a culture of tolerance and non-violence. The core themes of the project are:

- to engender a positive understanding of diversity;
- to teach children to respect one another and to build a culture of caring;
- to develop empathy and to enable children to value inclusion;
- to value participatory democracy; and
- to promote a culture of non violence and anti-bullying.

The programme will be rolled out in schools across the Belfast City Council area, for children aged 8 or 9 (Primary 5). The reason for the programme being focused on this age group is that according to Queen's University, primary 5 represents the peak age for victimisation in a school setting and it would also complement the start of key stage 2 in the NI Curriculum (Primary). The programme will run through the academic year.

The programme will be delivered in each school by trained instructors, who will mainly be sourced from the consortia organisations. Each instructor, who may be a health visitor, a classroom assistant, a community worker, a worker with Barnardo's or one of the other partners will undertake four days of intensive training to become certified Roots of Empathy instructors. The programme will include outreach work to ensure that local community representatives avail of opportunities to become trained instructors.

The three projects proposed are expected to contribute significantly to the Council's Community Safety, Good Relations and Health Improvement agendas and will foster improved links with various agencies to achieve common goals.

Resource Implications

None, 100% funding to include administrative costs.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked note the proposals.

Decision Tracking

Detailed proposals will be submitted for consideration by the Good Relations Partnership (and subsequently to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee) in August and, if agreed, to the SEUPB in September.

Key to abbreviations

SEUPB - Special European Union Programmes Body.
LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender.