

GOOD RELATIONS STEERING PANEL

MINUTES OF MEETING

FRIDAY, 8th FEBRUARY, 2008

- Members present: Councillor Long (Chairman); and
Councillors Hanna, C. Maskey and McCausland.
- External Members: Rev. D. Baker, Presbyterian Church;
Canon B. Dodds, Church of Ireland;
Rev. S. Watson, CALEB;
Dr. D. Morrow, Community Relations Council; and
Mrs. H. Smith, Methodist Church.
- In attendance: Mr. D. Robinson, Good Relations Officer;
Miss E. Brough, Good Relations Officer; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillor Kyle and Messrs. R. Galway and P. Scott.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th January, were taken as read and signed as correct.

Peace III – Revised Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan

The Steering Panel was reminded that, at its meeting on 11th January, it had agreed to defer consideration of the Peace Plan in order to provide the various political groupings represented on the Council with an opportunity to consider the matter. The Good Relations Officer pointed out that, since that date, a number of briefings had been held for the groupings concerning the Plan.

The Panel then considered the undernoted report, together with the Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan, a copy of which is available in the Members' Library or on request from the Good Relations Unit:

“Relevant Background Information

The Steering Panel will be aware that a draft Peace Plan, approved by Council on 1 October, was out for public consultation during October and November 2007. The Consultation Document outlined how we proposed to manage and deliver Peace III funding under the priority 1.1 ‘building positive relations at the local level’.

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Every effort was made to ensure wide public awareness of the Council's proposals and an extensive consultation process was undertaken:

- the full Consultation Document was available on the Council's website
- a press release was issued in the name of the Lord Mayor
- articles were published on the NICVA e-Bulletin and the Community Relations Council's Information Bulletin
- advance notice was sent to the 5 District Partnership Boards, requesting them to issue attached fliers to their own local organisations and inviting them to organise an event in their own area
- fliers were issued to over 650 groups on our Good Relations mailing list
- a letter was issued to the major statutory bodies in Belfast
- an article was included in *City Matters*.

We organised 4 meetings in the north, south, east and west of the city in the last week in October. We ensured that special sessions were held with representatives of S 75 groups, young people, older people and women (all target groups identified by the SEUPB). In addition we responded to 9 additional requests for meetings with various sectoral interests.

Good Relations Unit staff made presentations on the Council's proposals at all these events and we had a pool of 6 independent researchers, chosen from the Community Relations Council's select list, who facilitated the discussion at the consultation meetings. We engaged Gráinne Kelly (who co-devised the principles of peace and reconciliation used by the SEUPB) to collate all the responses made both at the consultation sessions and in written submissions and produce a final report for the Council.

Altogether over 220 participants, representing 125 organisations, took part and we received 15 written submissions. A copy of Gráinne Kelly's full report along with a table summarising the key points raised during consultation and the Council's response to those points are included as Appendices to the revised Peace Plan.

Key Issues

As a result of comments and suggestions made during the consultation, some substantial changes have been made to the document. The principal differences are:

1. There is more detail around the guiding principles, values and vision.
2. The Action Plan is more detailed, with specific proposals and named partners.
3. There are up-dated references to the Programme for Government and the Chicago visit.
4. There is a detailed report on the extensive public consultation exercise undertaken in relation to the Peace Plan.
5. The Good Relations Partnership will be established in shadow form as quickly as possible so that the Partnership members may be fully trained in preparation for their roles and may begin to start firming up the criteria to be used in determining applications for funding. The shadow Partnership will be reviewed in 6 months time, in line with SEUPB advice.
6. There was considerable discussion around the composition of the Partnership and the revised recommendation is:
 - elected Councillors – 6, one from each political party group
 - voluntary sector – 2 nominees
 - community sector – 2 nominees
 - other statutory agencies – 2 nominees from the Belfast Chief Executives' Group
 - trade unions – 2 from ICTU
 - private business sector – 2, one each from CBI and Belfast City Centre Management
 - churches – 2, one each from the Protestant and Catholic churches
 - minority faith groups – 1 nominee from appropriate organisations
 - minority ethnic groups - 1 nominee from appropriate organisations.

Subject to Council approval, letters will be issued in the next couple of weeks to relevant organisations and umbrella bodies, inviting nominations for appropriate representatives for the Good Relations Partnership.

The area where we envisage difficulty in achieving consensus on representation is in the voluntary and community sectors. In consultation it was quite clear that these 2 sectors wished to be treated separately and the proposed membership has been revised accordingly.

The guidance issued by the SEUPB states that: 'Local authorities will be required to work with social partners to develop strategic responses to locally identified needs in a manner that represents the independence of social partners, and in particular respects the right of social partners to identify their own representation. The demonstration of active partnership will be a requirement for funding'.

It is therefore proposed that the organisation NICVA (NI Council for Voluntary Action), the recognised umbrella body for voluntary and community organisations in N Ireland, should act as a nominating agent for both these sectors. The use of an independent organisation lends impartiality to the process and means that the Council can not be accused of political favouritism or partisanship in the selection of Partnership representatives.

The proposed Good Relations Learning & Development Strategy will be withdrawn, as most respondents felt that the principal beneficiaries of this would be Council employees and not those in the wider community. This will be re-submitted in due course under priority 2.2 of the Peace III Programme 'developing key institutional capacities for a shared society', which is more appropriate for this project.

The Council's bid is for an amount of £12 million or €18 million; this figure includes the additional staffing required and our projected management costs of just under 10% of the total.

The Action Plan outlines the proposed methodology for implementation. To retain a strategic outcome focused approach and ensure that the activities under the Plan are delivered in a co-ordinated and coherent manner, we will commission the majority of the work (80%) and distribute 20% of the funding by way of open calls. This is based on advice from SEUPB and other EU funders, who recommend that open calls should be reduced, as the assessment of these is very resource intensive and often results in a low success rate for applicants. The SEUPB have agreed with this 80/20 ratio.

We will also set up a small grants scheme of up to £500,000 per year (assuming a successful bid of £12m).

The proposed timescale for the delivery of the Peace III Programme will have to be postponed as the SEUPB now inform us that they will require a minimum of 13 weeks from the time they receive our final Plan until they are able to make any decision. We hope to be able to submit our Plan in early February so may not receive any response until around May 2008. Although we may begin to draw up procedures and draft up Job Descriptions etc for anticipated staff in a parallel process at this time, we will not be able to advertise or begin a recruitment process until we receive a formal SEUPB notification of offer.

The SEUPB have also informed us that they expect spending targets to be even over the period of the Plan. Our original proposal was that most expenditure would take place in the later years of the Plan so the spend targets have also been revised.

SEUPB have agreed to train our financial staff in EU procedures when we receive their Financial Guidelines, promised in May 2007.

Various minor textual changes have also been made and these are outlined in the Consultation Summary Table.

Recommendations

This Peace Plan will be submitted to the Good Relations Steering Panel at its meeting on Friday 8th February, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on Friday 22 February and, following Council ratification, to the SEUPB in early March.

Decision Required

The Good Relations Steering Panel is requested to consider the content of this Peace Plan and approve it for submission to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on Friday 22nd February.”

A number of editorial amendments to the Plan were suggested by various Members. The Good Relations Officer undertook to ensure that these changes were made before the Plan was submitted.

Following a lengthy discussion, the Panel agreed that the Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 22nd February, subject to the following amendments being made:

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- (i) the community/voluntary sector would be entitled to appoint four representatives to the Good Relations Partnership and the Council would set the criteria for the representatives to be appointed and would undertake the associated recruitment process;
- (ii) the Council would liaise with the Churches to ascertain their views on how they wished to be represented on the Partnership;
- (iii) the business and Trade Union sectors representation would remain unchanged. However, the criteria for their appointment would be devised to ensure that the representatives liaise with their respective sector; and
- (iv) the Plan indicates the work being undertaken currently of the Good Relations Steering Panel would continue to be undertaken by the Good Relations Partnership and that Peace III would neither replace nor duplicate the existing Good Relations work being undertaken by the Council, rather complement it.

Following further discussion, the Panel agreed that the “Community Engagement – Good Relations and Good Practice Guide” prepared by Ms. Grainne Kelly be submitted to the SEUPB and requested to use the Guide as a basis for the other relevant measures of the Peace III Programme, specifically Measures 2.1 and 2.2. The Panel agreed further that the Council should monitor attendance at the meeting of the Good Relations Partnership to ensure that vacancies resulting from the non-attendance of a representative from a sector should be filled in an agreed fashion.

Good Relations Grant-Aid

The Good Relations Officer submitted for the information of the Panel a report detailing a summary of applications to the Good Relations Grant-Aid Fund, together with the associated recommendations. He informed the Panel that, subsequent to the papers being issued, it had been ascertained that the request from Finaghy/Horn Drive Community Centre Committees should be reduced by £400 and that from Botanic Primary School should be reduced by £800. In addition, he informed the Members that CHARTER would be provided with a list of facilitators which the organisation could use in connection with its project.

Accordingly, after discussion, the Steering Panel agreed unanimously that grant-aid be awarded, under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive, to the following organisations:

Ref No.	Organisation	Recommendation
		£
670/1122	Finaghy/Horn Drive Community Centre	6,045
668/1120	Botanic Primary School	4,200
254/1129	Irish Football Association	5,605
671/1123	Upper North Belfast Community Empowerment Partnership	4,750
517/1130	Northern Ireland Community Builders Programme	7,500
669/1121	Open Doors Learning Centre	5,800
672/1131	Harlandic Male Voice Choir	700
673/1135	CHARTER	7,500
	Provisional Total this Month	42,100

Finaghy/Horn Drive Community Centre Committees

In answer to a Member's question, the Good Relations Officer undertook to forward to her the dates when the Community Centre Committees would be holding their events.

On-going Issues: Update

The Good Relations Officer reported that the Egyptian Society intended to organise an event on 18th March to explain the work undertaken by the group and that the Steering Panel would be invited to attend.

During discussion, several Members indicated that, given its proximity to St. Patrick's Day, the date was not particularly suitable and therefore suggested that the Society be requested to hold the event on a different date.

In reply, the Good Relations Officer undertook to forward the suggestion to the Egyptian Society.

March Meeting

The Good Relations Officer informed the Steering Panel that, since a Council Committee would be held in the Council Chamber on the morning of 7th March, it would be necessary for the Steering Panel's March meeting to commence at 12.30 p.m.

Noted.

Chairman