

GOOD RELATIONS STEERING PANEL

MINUTES OF MEETING

FRIDAY, 6th JUNE, 2008

- Members present: Councillor Long (Chairman); and
Councillors Hanna, Humphrey (nominee of
Councillor McCausland), C. Maskey
and Stoker.
- External Members: Rev. D. Baker, Presbyterian Church;
Canon B. Dodds, Church of Ireland;
Rev. S. Watson, CALEB;
Mr. P. Scott, Catholic Church;
Mrs. H. Smith, Methodist Church;
Mr. R. Galway, Bombardier Aerospace;
Ms. E. Chan-Hu, Chinese Welfare Association;
Mr. K. Salem, Northern Ireland Council for
Ethnic Minorities; and
Mr. D. Morrow, Community Relations Council.
- In attendance: Ms. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager;
Miss A. Deighan, Good Relations Officer;
Mr D. Robinson, Good Relations Officer; and
Mr J. Heaney, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors McCausland and Kyle.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 9th May were taken as read and signed as correct.

Chicago Study Visit

The Good Relations Manager provided an update on the Study Visit which had been undertaken to Chicago, the principal purpose of which had been to engage Belfast Elected Representatives in discussions on the task of building a welcoming, peaceful, prosperous and open City. The visit had sought also to explore the strong inter-linkages between Good Relations and economic competitiveness and examine the political leadership in relation to Good Relations issues in Chicago. She pointed out that ten Elected Members, together with four members of staff, had undertaken the visit which had proved extremely useful and beneficial and it was anticipated that a number of action points arising as a result of the visit would be put in place and implemented by the Council.

Dr. Morrow reported that he had been tasked to compile a report in relation to the aforementioned action points which had been identified. He indicated that the report would be presented to the Good Relations Partnership at its meeting to be held in August.

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Several Members who had attended the visit stated that it had been a worthwhile exercise and commented, in particular, upon the positive attitude and leadership which had been shown by the representatives of the City of Chicago. They indicated that, by drawing on the experiences of the North American representatives in managing inter-ethnic relationships, the Members would be able to play a more effective role in implementing the Good Relations agenda throughout the City.

A Member stated that, given the adverse publicity which had surrounded the Study Visit in certain areas of the media, it was important that the actions resulting from the visit should be implemented since, in his opinion, this would be ample justification for the visit being undertaken.

The Steering Panel noted the information which had been provided and noted further that the report to be presented to the Good Relations Partnership would be considered also by the Council's Development and Parks and Leisure Committees insofar as it would contain information and advice relating to the use of public space and leisure facilities.

Peace III Update Report

Good Relations Partnership

The Good Relations Manager advised the Steering Panel that agreement had been reached among the various Protestant Churches in respect of nominations to the Good Relations Partnership. She stated that the representation would be on a rotational basis for the next four years, with the representatives from CALEB and the Methodist Church acting on behalf of the sector in 2008-2009.

In relation to the appointment of the final representatives on the Partnership, the Steering Panel was advised that training on selection and recruitment had been completed and that the interviews in respect of the voluntary, community and minority ethnic sectors would take place shortly in order that membership of the Panel could be finalised prior to the proposed initial meeting on 20th June.

Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan

The Steering Panel was reminded that Belfast had submitted a bid for £12 million to the Special European Union Programme Body (SEUPB) for priority 1.1 of the Peace III Programme. The Good Relations Manager reported that the SEUPB's Steering Committee had met and decided that Belfast be allocated just under £6.3 million and therefore the City's bid had to be reduced significantly. She explained that the SEUPB had stated that the Plan should be revised in accordance with the detailed economic appraisal which had been carried out and she tabled an outline of the revised reduced allocation which could be awarded to specific project areas based on the amount to be apportioned to Belfast.

The Good Relations Manager pointed out that, despite the very large reductions that were required to be made, she had attempted to maintain the allocations under the "open calls/small grants" at a relatively high level in order to enable maximum participation from the voluntary and community sectors.

She reported that the SEUPB had stated that a maximum of 10% of the total allocation could be used for management/staffing support. A revised staffing structure would be drawn up and submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration at its June meeting to enable recruitment to start immediately.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

**Response to Interim Consultative Report
on the Strategic Review of Parading**

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the response to the Interim Consultative Report on the Strategic Review of Parading:

“Relevant Background Information

In February 2007, the (then) Security Minister, Paul Goggins, announced a Strategic Review of Parading. The terms of reference of the Review were announced in February 2007 and the appointments to the Review Body made in April 2007.

The Chairman was Lord Paddy Ashdown and the members are:

Sammy Douglas; Mervyn Gibson; Geraldine McAteer; Sean Murray; Garvan O’Doherty; and Mervyn Rankin. Dr Duncan Morrow, Chief Executive of the Community Relations Council, acted as advisor.

The Government recognised that the establishment of devolved political institutions represented a new beginning for Northern Ireland and a historic opportunity for change, allowing us to address outstanding disputes and discuss difficult community issues. The Review Body has undertaken an extensive consultation exercise and has met and heard the views of key stakeholders, organisations and individuals.

The interim report was published on 29 April 2008 and details the Review Body’s thinking to date and the principles, procedures and structures that it believes would help remove the controversy that has too often surrounded parades and other public assemblies.

The Review Body hopes to deliver its final report to the Secretary of State in the autumn of 2008 and wants to hear the views of as many people as possible on its current proposals and how they might be amended or refined. It recognises that these proposals can work only with the broad support of all the communities in Northern Ireland.

Summary and Recommendations of the Interim Report

The proposals in the report should apply to all public assemblies of 15 or more people, all public processions and all related protests.

Key Principles

The report is founded on seven key principles:

Local dialogue and local agreement

It should be fundamental that conversation, dialogue and local agreement become the normal way of doing things, resolving differences and difficulties before they escalate and involve the mediation or adjudication processes proposed.

Re-engaging democratic politics

Devolution now provides a new and unique opportunity to move towards normality by reconnecting decisions around these difficult issues to local democratic politics.

Management - Standards for the Conduct of Public Assemblies

Some disputes about public assemblies have centred on issues of behaviour or on the meaning of symbols in sensitive areas. As a result, the Review Body has developed robust Standards for the Conduct of Public Assemblies in Northern Ireland.

Improving understanding

An immense gulf in understanding of the culture and traditions of each community is a prime contributor to the difficulties in reaching local accommodation regarding parades and protest issues. The Review Body makes recommendations to address this.

Transparency and openness

The need for transparency and openness in dealing with disputes is paramount and wide consultation leads to more community ownership and increased mutual understanding. The Review Body proposes that independent monitors be appointed.

Independent adjudication

Where local dialogue or mediation fails, or results in only partial agreement, the mediation and adjudication functions should be kept separate and transparent.

A rights based approach

Ultimately, the aim of the Review Body is to reach a point, over time, where parades and assemblies are dealt with in Northern Ireland as they would be in any other European democracy. A human rights framework, defined principally by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, is central to this. This recognises that there may be a number of competing rights that come into play when dealing with parading in the Northern Ireland context, each of these rights deserving equal consideration.

Procedures

Where issues cannot be resolved at local level, the Review Body recommends a staged process involving notification to the local council, registering objections, a mediation stage where necessary and, where agreement is not reached, a final adjudication with an opportunity for a post event review where appropriate. The Review Body places greatest emphasis on local contact and agreement in the early stages and hopes that adjudication will be used only as a last resort.

The report identifies a role for local councils to administer procedures in non-contentious areas and the Office of the First Minister/Deputy First Minister in contentious areas.

Mediators, adjudicators and monitors are to be recruited on an open public appointments process. Adjudication on contentious matters will be by a panel of 3 members, chaired by a qualified expert in human rights and appointed by the First and Deputy First Ministers together.

All adjudications will have to demonstrate how human rights concerns were engaged, how issues relating to behaviour relate to the Standards of Conduct and how behaviour on past occasions is factored into decisions.

Issues for further discussion

There are two issues on which the Review Body still has to reach a conclusion. They are the parades at Drumcree and the Ormeau Road and the interpretation of the rules set out in the Standards with regard to the UVF 1912 flag and the YCV flag. These will require further consultation.

Proposed Timescale

The Review Body believes its proposals could and should be brought into effect early in 2009 but unless and until new legislation is enacted, the Parades Commission will, in the interim, continue to be the final arbiter on parades.

Resource Implications

Not applicable at this stage.

Recommendation

This Interim Consultative Report has also been circulated to all the political parties seeking comments and individual political groups will make their own responses on the issue.

The report states that the Review Body makes their recommendations ‘in the light of the new political atmosphere and in the expectation of continued progress towards a peaceful, fair and inclusive society’.

It is recommended that the Council responds in a similar positive manner, supporting the report in general terms and welcoming any proposal that assists in addressing and resolving difficulties and tensions around parading in line with our own objective of achieving a more shared, peaceful, welcoming and open city.”

After a lengthy discussion in relation to the response from the Good Relations Steering Panel, during which the Members were advised that the Strategic Review Body had issued an open invitation to meet with anyone or any organisation who had an interest in the issue of parading, the Chairman recommended that she contact the Party Group Leaders and the various party representatives on the Steering Panel in order to investigate the possibility of forming an informal group, representing all parties, to meet and seek to develop a general response prior to meeting with the Review Body.

The Steering Panel adopted the recommendations.

Annual Report on Progress April 2007 – March 2008

The Steering Panel was advised that the Council’s Equality Scheme and Good Relations Strategy stated that regular reports on progress were to be submitted to the Good Relations Steering Panel and to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Good Relations Manager reminded the Panel that the Good Relations Unit of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister also required an Annual Report on progress on Good Relations issues to be submitted. In addition, the Council was required to submit to the Equality Commission an annual report on the progress which had been achieved in respect of the implementation of Equality and Good Relations duties imposed under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

After discussion, the Steering Panel noted the contents of the Annual Report which would be presented for consideration to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and to the Equality Commission and noted also that a copy of the reports would be available to the public on the Council's website.

Funding for Training

The Steering Panel was reminded that, at its meeting on 9th May, it had agreed that applications currently with the Good Relations Unit seeking access to training programmes remain on hold in order to permit discussions to be held and an appropriate policy to be devised in relation to the provision of funding for training.

Mr. Robinson, Good Relations Officer, reminded the Panel that it had recommended that groups seeking to undertake training should apply to a number of different funding organisations for the total training package, therefore, targeting different funds for differing elements. He pointed out that this was to enable the Unit to fund pilot training proposals but not to support the core services of training providers. The Good Relations Unit had drawn up a draft policy seeking to deal in a fair and equitable manner with those groups seeking access to funding for training. The overriding aim of the policy would be to ensure that the need of the group was primarily being met and that the Good Relations Fund did not supplement the core funding of training organisations. Accordingly, the Good Relations officer recommended that:

- (i) applications received to date be processed as before and the Good Relations Fund be used to support the good relations engagement elements of the training and that groups be encouraged to apply to different funding bodies for the other elements of the training package;
- (ii) the Good Relations Unit do not accept applications from training providers directly, unless the demand for training was clearly apparent within the community;
- (iii) should the cost of the training element exceed £3,000, the groups requesting support be required to supply at least three quotations from three different training providers, as was the case with the Council procurement guidelines;
- (iv) officers engage promptly and directly with groups seeking to undertake training in order to ascertain the need and motivation for the training and the choice of provider; and
- (v) the Good Relations Fund application form and associated guidance notes be amended appropriately to include a specific section on training, requiring groups to illustrate the need for training, provide details of three quotations and details of the providers, together with a list of any conflicts of interest which may arise with the proposed provider.

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After discussion, the Steering Panel adopted the recommendations of the Good Relations Officer and agreed also that requests for funding for training be monitored for a six-month period to ensure compliance with the new policy.

Good Relations Grant-Aid

The Good Relations Manager 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.

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

Ref no.	Organisation	Recommendation £
279/1182	Belfast Humanist Group	1,000
688/1167	Concern Worldwide	5,000
591/1191	Egyptian Society of NI	7,500
279/1171	Feile an Phobail	7,500
695/1183	Northern Ireland Children's Enterprise	3,900
595/1173	African Association of NI	1,290
682/1150	Diversiton	5,040
575/1180	NI Council for Integrated Education	4,000
687/1166	Women's Common Path Network	5,525
369/1187	Ardoyne Fleadh Cheoil Project	4,000
689/1168	Belfast Activity Centre	7,000
694/1178	Highfield Women's Group	7,050
577/1179	Mna Cluain Ard	7,050
625/1185	Waterfront Artistic Troops	Does not meet criteria
696/1184	Artlinks	Late Application
620/1186	Nubia South Belfast Eagles	Application Withdrawn
Provisional Total This Month		65,855

Churches Forum for Belfast

The Panel was reminded that, at its meeting on 7th March, it had suggested that it might be beneficial if a Churches Forum was formed to consider, not only Good Relations issues, but all matters relating to the Council.

Miss Deighan, Good Relations Officer, reported that a number of other Councils had been contacted in relation to the formation of Church Fora and, to date, those that had responded had indicated that Church Forums were predominantly Christian in their make-up and were either Council-managed or independent but received financial support from the Council. In each case arrangements had been ad hoc in nature with each Council having its own structure.

She reported further that, following meetings with Church representatives already on the Good Relations Steering Panel and with other Church leaders, a number of common themes had emerged. These had included concerns about duplication, particularly in view of the Faith Liaison and Advisory Forum which the Minister for Social Development had intended to establish. There had been discussions around the merits of an inter-faith versus a Christian Church Forum and concern was raised also in relation to the level of attendance which might be achieved at such meetings given the busy schedule of Church leaders.

Accordingly, she recommended that an inaugural meeting be held to which all faith-based organisations would be invited where they would be provided with information in relation to the Good Relations Partnership and Good Relations Funding. In addition, all participants would be encouraged to enter into a dialogue in relation to how faith groups might contribute to civic affairs. Meetings thereafter would continue as and when required.

The Steering Panel adopted the recommendation.

Day of Private Reflection

The Steering Panel was advised that the Healing Through Remembering organisation was promoting a day of private reflection to be held on 21st June, the purpose of which was for personal and private reflection on the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. It would be a day to acknowledge the deep hurt and pain caused by the conflict and to reflect on what more might have been done and what remained still to be done in order that the conflict should not be allowed to happen again.

After discussion, the Steering Panel agreed to support, in principle, the ideals of the Day of Private Reflection, however, agreed that it would not be recommending that any Council-owned space be used in connection with the holding of the event.

Eurocities INTI Cities Project

The Good Relations Manager provided an updated report in relation to the Eurocities Project, indicating that the Project had reached the half-way stage and that teams from participating cities were visiting other cities to carry out peer reviews in relation to the support provided for migrant workers to enable benchmarking against an agreed framework.

Noted.

Final Meeting

This being the final meeting of the Good Relations Steering Panel, the Chairman thanked all the Members of the Steering Panel both past and present for their contribution to the improvement of Good Relations throughout the City.

Chairman

