

GOOD RELATIONS PARTNERSHIP

FRIDAY, 7th NOVEMBER, 2008

MEETING OF THE GOOD RELATIONS PARTNERSHIP

Members present: Councillor Long (Chairman); and
Councillors C. Maskey, McCausland,
McCarthy and Stoker.

External Members: Ms. H. Smith, Protestant Churches;
Rev. S. Watson, Protestant Churches;
Mr. P. Scott, Catholic Church;
Mrs. M. Marken, Catholic Church;
Mr. R. Galway, CBI;
Mr. P. Bunting, Irish Congress of Trade Unions;
Mr. P. Mackel, Belfast Trades Council;
Ms. J. Hawthorne, Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
Mr. M. Wardlow, Voluntary/Community Sector;
Mr. S. Brennan, Voluntary/Community Sector;
Ms. M. De Silva, Voluntary/Community Sector; and
Ms. A. Chada, Minority Ethnic Groups.

In attendance: Ms. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager;
Mr. D. Robinson, Good Relations Officer;
Mr. I. May, Peace III Programme Manager; and
Mr. J. Heaney, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillor Kyle, Ms. L Coates and Miss. E. Wilkinson.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th October were taken as read and signed as correct.

Bonfire Management Programme – Presentation by Community Consortium

The Good Relations Officer reminded the Partnership that, at its meeting on 10th October, it had agreed to receive a presentation in respect of the community's role in the development of the Bonfire Management Programme. It was reported that Mr. Paul Hutchinson, Imagined Spaces, together with Messrs. T. Greer (Roden Street), C. Patton (Roden Street) and P. White (Annadale), was in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Hutchinson presented a discussion paper which he stated had emerged from discussion between seven of the fourteen groups which were participating currently in the Council's Bonfire Management Programme. He indicated that the purpose of the paper was to instigate discussions with the key stakeholders regarding the subject of bonfires within the wider aspects of loyalist culture and within the "shared city" space.

Mr. Hutchinson highlighted the areas which had been considered during the discussions within the consortium and these had included:

- (i) the a perception that the existing Bonfire Management Programme was merely a policing exercise, lacking in any long-term strategic vision. This had resulted in the consortium posing the question of what was the Council's vision for Bonfires? The consortium had suggested the action required could be to create a shared vision, which would include buy-in from all of the fourteen groups participating in the programme and an outreach been made to all of the other bonfires groups in the City;
- (ii) bonfires could only adequately be addressed within the larger context of loyalist culture/tradition. In this respect the group had sought answers to the questions relating to why other organisations, such as the Loyal Orders, Band Associations and Politicians were not significantly involved in the programme and they had suggested the creation of Cultural Committees to promote and manage Bonfire Programmes;
- (iii) the grant-aid framework should be removed and finance should be allocated on the basis places of a firm commitment to the proposed principles. The consortium had suggested that this would mean that any breach of the principles would endanger future financial support and the decision for entry and exit from the programme would be made at a multi-party forum;
- (iv) a piece of research should be commissioned to explore the economic, environmental and cultural benefits of the Bonfire Management Programme;
- (v) there should be a twin track-approach to future Bonfire Management Programmes. Firstly, the 2009 programme should continue with the current programme, but with the possibility of revisions arising out of the consultation exercise. Secondly, a pilot Cultural Committees Forum should be created in order to explore other aspects of loyalism that impacted or connect with Bonfire.

The deputation then outlined the suggested principles which had emerged from its consultation exercise. Foremost among the proposals was the need for the development of Cultural Committees in each area to look at the promotion of all aspects of loyalist culture and expression. Mr. Hutchinson suggested that the Cultural Committees would take responsibility for the monitoring of materials collected and determine the starting date for collections. The process for dealing with fly-tipping, untidy sites, health and safety issues and post bonfire clear-ups would be worked out in conjunction with the Council and other stakeholders.

In regard to the development of bonfire beacons, Mr. White indicated that the beacon and associated celebrations which had taken place at Woodvale Park had been a tremendous success. However, he suggested beacons were viewed as an alternative to bonfires, to be used only where there was not sufficient space to build a traditional

bonfire. The deputation indicated that the consultation they had undertaken had suggested that tyres should not be collected or burned on the bonfires and that the fire should be restricted to the burning of wood only. The proposed Cultural Committee should, where possible, seek to promote positive expressions of loyalist culture and attempt to limit the display of sectarian or paramilitary trappings. The proposed Cultural Committees should also attempt to build and maintain strong relationships with statutory bodies and should seek actively to have a representative involvement in the planning and delivery of inclusive family/community events over the July period.

The deputation concluded the presentation by suggesting that, where practical, local communities should seek to explore ways of working together with neighbouring loyalist communities in the sharing of resources, training skills and cultural activities.

The Members of the deputation answered questions from various Members in relation to their discussion paper, in particular, the use of the beacons and the future development of the Bonfire Management Programme. The deputation thanked the Partnership for receiving them and they retired from the meeting.

The Partnership noted the information which had been provided.

Belfast City Council
Bonfire Management Programme

The Partnership considered the undernoted report, together with the executive summary of the Evaluation Report which had been produced by Mr. J. Byrne, Institute of Conflict Research.

“Relevant Background Information

Members may be aware that the Council has had a Bonfire Management Programme for the past few years. The Council initiated work in this area in response to a number of public concerns:

- **an increase in the number of bonfires across the city**
- **significant paramilitary displays in some areas**
- **considerable media coverage around issues such as dumping, fly-tipping and the general state of land on which bonfire sites were located**
- **greater awareness about environmental issues such as the burning of tyres.**

There was also an emerging view that there was a desire and willingness within many communities to move forward on the issue and address many of the negative elements about bonfires. Following some initial pilot programmes, in January 2007 the Council approved a 3-year programme for a Council-led initiative to work with communities in a more sustained way on promoting better bonfire management.

An inter-agency Working Group meets regularly to monitor the programme, with representatives from the following agencies: the Council's own Cleansing, Anti-Social Behaviour, Community Safety, Parks & Leisure and Good Relations Units; NI Fire & Rescue Service; PSNI; NIHE Community Cohesion Unit; NIO Community Safety Unit; DRD Roads Service; and Environment & Heritage Service. Groundwork NI, a UK wide environmental organisation, delivers the programme on behalf of the Council. Reports have been made to the previous Good Relations Steering Panel on progress.

An independent evaluation of the 2008 programme has been completed by the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) and the Police Service for NI (PSNI) have analysed relevant statistics (reports attached). Some general findings of these reports are worth noting:

- Although there was a significant increase in bonfire related reported incidents throughout NI in 2008 and Belfast in particular and an increase in call-outs to the Fire Service in Belfast, the PSNI report a 30% reduction and the Fire Service a 12% reduction on call-outs to incidents in and around sites on the programme.
- Communities themselves report 'a significant decrease in incidents of anti-social behaviour, especially involving young people and alcohol'
- The Council's Bonfire Management programme was deemed to be a 'success', with a 'number of positive outcomes' and sites on the programme showing 'steady progression'.

Key Issues

The Bonfire Management Programme is having a positive impact on communities, agencies and the city as a whole. Many of the issues being addressed within the programme not only contribute to the Council's corporate objective of promoting Good Relations, but the strategic objectives of all of the partner agencies:

- The environmental concerns have been met within the programme; illegal dumping at sites and the burning of tyres have been substantially tackled
- Paramilitary influence and trappings are no longer a central component of bonfires within the scheme

- The 11th day festival celebrations were much more family friendly and focused on the wider community including events for children and senior citizens
- Improved community safety is being reported across the board, with a marked reduction in the consumption of alcohol and greater community involvement being reported
- Within participating communities, there is a greater understanding of the significance of bonfires within loyalist culture
- More groups want to participate in the scheme. In 2008, the programme worked at an introductory level with an additional 14 sites.

The success of the Programme can be attributed to a number of factors:

- Proactive engagement with the communities on the programme by the Council
- Local bonfire committees and communities are delivering on the guidelines set out in the programme and this leadership is demonstrated at a local level
- The positive partnership between Groundwork NI, Imagined Spaces and the Council
- The role of the inter-agency committee in advising and engaging actively within the programme. The contribution of the external agencies and the various BCC Departments has been very positive
- Council support for the programme
- The very successful Beacon project within the Woodvale community.

Performance related grant-aid framework

In the 2008 programme, the grant aid framework was adjusted to take into account many of the communities' concerns around some of the issues that proved to be difficult; these changes have been generally successful and ICR recommend that the grant-aid framework is retained. (see Appendix to this report for details).

Beacons

The local Woodvale committee used a bonfire beacon for the first time in Woodvale Park. It was an outstanding success and the evaluation report highlights the fact that although the beacon was the focal point and catalyst, in reality it played a minor role in the overall programme in 'transforming the Eleventh night celebrations into a family festival that was open to all neighbouring areas and provided opportunities for an exploration of the history and culture around the Eleventh of July'. The report notes that a significant change in approach is possible, given the commitment and hard work of the local committee and key individuals and the incorporation of the beacon concept within a broader programme of events and activities. The beacon concept was developed jointly by the Council and Groundwork NI and the Good Relations Unit has co-ordinated the research, design, construction and testing to date; funding has been from a variety of sources. The beacon structure requires further testing to assess its longevity and this will be carried out shortly by the Fire Service at their HQ test centre.

Difficult issues

There are still some very difficult issues in relation to bonfires in Belfast in general:

1. *Groups who are not engaging with better bonfire management and areas that have been described as 'problem areas' by the PSNI report.*

The PSNI statistics suggest that we try to incorporate some of the 'problem' areas in 2009, specifically East Belfast and the Donegall Road area into our 2009 programme. This was supported by the inter-agency Working Group.

2. *The continued burning of nationalist symbols on 11th July bonfire*

The evaluation report notes that discussions have commenced within communities on this issues and although progress seems slow, a number of bonfire committees have made significant progress and this will be addressed in the longer term.

3. *Some emerging difficulties within republican communities around 8th of August internment commemoration bonfires*

This is sporadic and is best managed by developing a series of cultural and commemorative events to engage local people; key to success here has been the partnership with the statutory agencies and access to resources.

4. *How to manage the issue of bonfire management and wider cultural issues at the end of the 2009 programme.*

Further discussion, consultation and input will be needed over the coming year to agree any future initiatives that can command community buy-in. Indeed, there is a huge opportunity to build on what has been achieved thus far on bonfire management. All of the stakeholders are keen to actively participate in this process.

Resource Implications

Financial Continuation of the 3rd year of the agreed 3-year programme (of £50,000 per year for 3 years) as agreed by Council in January 2007.

Human Resources Continued Good Relations Unit staff engagement with the programme

Recommendations

- (a) That the Good Relations Partnership notes the information in the attached reports and adopts the key findings set out in the Executive Summary of the ICR report.
- (b) That the Bonfire Management Programme begins a proactive process of engagement with areas identified within the PSNI report as being 'problematic'; namely East Belfast and Donegall Road, with the aim of reducing the number of overall reported incidents within these areas in 2009
- (c) That the introductory work with the additional 14 sites from 2008 continues in 2009.
- (d) That the Programme continues to seek the additional funding for year 3 of the current pilot programme from the partner agencies.
- (e) That the Good Relations Unit begins drawing up proposals for the post 2009 programme in partnership with other stakeholders

- (f) To agree that the revised aims and grant-aid framework, set out in the Appendix to this report, are included in the guidelines for participating groups in the 2009 programme.

APPENDIX

Bonfire Management Programme aims:

1. To continue to support a number of communities in Belfast in the celebration of their cultural tradition through positive engagement
2. To continue proactive engagement with a number of communities on the perceived negative aspects that have become associated with bonfires
3. To target resources and attention to areas that have been documented by agency statistics as recording an increase in reported incidents
4. To work with and support local communities to bring about improvements in bonfire management, particularly in terms of inclusivity, safety and increased family atmosphere.
5. To further reduce the adverse health and environmental impacts of bonfires on the city including the illegal disposal of waste.

Grant aid framework

1. Successfully create a community committee by March 1st that is representative of the key stakeholders in the area and includes a balance of people in terms of age, gender, role within the community and young bonfire builders. Award: £300
2. Engage with programme deliverers to create a programme for communities to:
 - develop a local tool kit of resources for engagement on cultural heritage issues

- build local capacity to deliver locally based programmes
 - facilitate engagement with local elected representatives
 - develop local dialogue to begin to address issues of Nationalist flags on and within the vicinity of bonfires.
 - A plan of activities to be developed by April 1st.
Award: £400
3. Having no collection by the 1st of June remains the ideal position within the programme. However, there is an awareness and recognition of the difficulties that the date for beginning of collection of bonfire materials presents to local committees. It is also true that many groups see the collection date as something that is good for the local community. Therefore, to balance these positions, the following guideline will be part of the programme for 2008.
- Consult within the local community and with relevant statutory agencies on the site, location and size of the bonfire. Ensure no collection of materials on the site by May 16th. Award: £100
 - If groups refrain from collecting materials, there will be an additional award of £400 if collection of bonfire materials has not begun before June 1st.' All groups will also be invited to send representatives to Fire Service HQ around this time to discuss health and safety issues around bonfires.
4. Successfully maintain a clean, compact, tidy, tyre-free site, also free from materials such as plastics and other carbon negative materials up to July 11th Award: £300
5. Continue with a 'Most improved Bonfire programme' prize as an additional incentive for groups to create positive changes, with the following criteria:
- Progress on achieving the guidelines in comparison with the previous year
 - Efforts made to deal with difficulties within the programme

- Innovation in community activities planned for the 11th day
- Innovation in the capacity building and reflection element of the programme”

Evaluation of Bonfire Management Programme 2008

Executive Summary

ICR was commissioned by Belfast City Council (BCC) to undertake an evaluation of the 2008 BCC Bonfire Management Programme. The programme aimed to support a number of communities in Belfast in the celebration of their cultural tradition through positive engagement, whilst engaging with the perceived negative aspects that have become associated with bonfires; to work with and support local communities to bring about improvements in bonfire management, particularly in terms of inclusivity, safety and increased family atmosphere and to further reduce the adverse Health and Environmental impacts of bonfires on the city including the illegal disposal of waste.

The 2008 programme was the second year of a 3-year programme undertaken by BCC. The evaluation was qualitatively based and involved a number of discussions and site visits with participating communities, meetings with BCC representatives, along with discussions with Groundwork NI (GWNl) who were tasked with assisting with the day to day delivery of the programme.

The following table documents the key findings to emerge from site visits and discussions with participating communities.

Table 1 Key Bonfire Management indicators and bonfire site findings

Indicators	Comments
Collection of materials prior to May 16th	Eleven of the fourteen (Loyalist/Unionist) sites managed to adhere to this guideline. A number of sites did not begin collecting until the end of June
Collection of materials prior to June 1st	Eleven of the fourteen sites (Loyalist/Unionist) managed to adhere to this guideline. A number of sites did not begin collecting until the end of June

Indicators	Comments
Tyres	None of the sites had tyres on them. This is a significant achievement for the programme. A number of bonfires outside of the programme continued to burn tyres, although this has been largely reduced in the greater Belfast area
Evidence of fly-tipping	According to bonfire committees there was not as much illegal dumping as in previous years. The independent contractor and fence in Annadale) contributed to assisting committees maintaining sites.
Use of independent contractor	Of the fifteen sites in the programme (including Lower Falls) only three did not require the use of the contractor. The majority of the sites were well maintained and the contractor has contributed to the environmental improvements.
Displays of sectarian/paramilitary trappings	All but one of the sites adhered to this guideline. There does not appear to be a direct association between bonfires and paramilitary organisations. Bonfire committees continue to transform the Eleventh into a more family orientated festival. However, the practice of burning Tricolours and Republican/Nationalist perceived flags and symbols continued at the majority of bonfire sites
Community participation in bonfire organisation	All of the sites had activities for adults and young people. There was a strong sense of increasing family participation on the Eleventh.
Amalgamation of bonfire sites	Attempts were made where appropriate to combine bonfires within a community into one site. In the coming years site availability will become more problematic in certain communities.

Paramilitary shows of strength on 11th night	There were no paramilitary shows of strength at any of the bonfire sites within the programme.

Indicators	Comments
Participation in the programme of reflection and capacity building	This element of the programme again needs further development and improvement. There were many improvements on the experience of groups compared with last year. The concept was positive, but its practical implementation did not achieve the desired impact. One complicating factor is that many groups are now engaged in similar work at a local level, and maybe the programme is duplicating what is already happening on the ground.
Attendance at Participants Forums	There was one Participants Forum that was attended by representatives from nine bonfire committees. It was widely felt that the forum this year was very constructive and positive.
Progress from 2007	There has been consistent progress from last year. Committees are becoming stronger and communities more environmentally and culturally aware of the impact of bonfires.

This was the second year of performance linked funding in an attempt to encourage greater co-operation in the delivery of the Bonfire Management Guidelines. The following table documents the performance of communities against the key targets that formed the Grant Aid Framework.

Table 2 Overall performance of groups against the Grant Aid Framework

Key target	Action	Outcome (funding awarded)
Create community committee by March 1st	All fourteen groups established a bonfire committee.	All groups were awarded £300
Create a programme of reflection and capacity	All fourteen groups worked in conjunction with GWNl and Imagined Spaces to develop a	All groups were awarded £400

building on Good Relations and Cultural Traditions by May 1st	programme.	
--	-------------------	--

Key target	Action	Outcome (funding awarded)
No collection of material before May 16th	Eleven of the sites adhered to this guideline.	Eleven of the groups were awarded £100. Those not awarded were Sandy Row, Inverary and Donegall Road.
No collection of material before June 1st	Eleven of the sites adhered to this guideline.	Eleven of the sites were awarded £400. Those not awarded were Donegall Road, Inverary and Sandy Row.
Maintain a clean, compact and tidy site till July 11th	All fourteen groups managed sites in a suitable manner.	All groups were awarded £300

There have been a number of key developments in the 2008 Bonfire Management Programme that have been outlined below:

Programme engagement

There was a significant amount of effort put into the delivery of the programme this year by BCC and GWNI. Between July 2007 and July 2008, BCC developed a very strong process of engagement with participating communities. In 2007, there was significant criticism of the programme – mostly centred around the grant-aid framework. There was also significant community suspicion with the programme in terms of what it was ultimately seeking to achieve. Therefore, after July 2007, BCC engaged strongly with a number of stakeholders within the programme.

(a) Participating communities

Each group was met with by BCC in August and September in 2007 to hear at first hand peoples experience of the programme. These views and opinions were subsequently incorporated into a review of the guidelines of the programme and the grant aid framework. The communication of the outcome of the Council's decision – and a copy of the revised guidelines – were presented individually to all of the groups in November and December. This engagement signalled a continuous process of engagement

with all of the bonfire committees and provided a feeling of the programme being year long as opposed to being seasonal.

(b) Belfast City Council elected members

Programme delivery staff met with each of the political parties on Belfast City Council to discuss with them the shape and scope of the Bonfire Management programme as it moved into year 2 of the current 3-year cycle. The Council adopted the amended proposals at its November meeting in 2007.

(c) Inter-agency partnership

The inter-agency partnership continues to make a huge contribution to the delivery of the programme. In April 2008, representatives of a large number of those groups represented on the inter-agency partnership met with a number of the bonfire committees to look at the bonfire issue and share perceptions and formulate a common understanding around the issue.

There is no doubt that all of this engagement has kept an important momentum within the programme and has been extremely important to participating groups. There has been a growing feeling among groups this year of the sincerity of the programme, what it is seeking to achieve and an understanding of a clear demonstrable commitment to supporting Loyalist communities within Belfast in their cultural expression.

A number of recommendations emerged from the discussions with bonfire committee representatives, BCC and GWNI. These have been documented below:

Programme impact

Community safety

1. There has been a significant change in the attitude of local communities towards Eleventh night celebrations. It may be appropriate for BBC Community Safety Unit to build upon the initial success of the Bonfire Management Programme and provide a more direct link to bonfire committees in supporting community safety initiatives within their areas.
2. This is the second year of the pilot programme and the PSNI have reported a 30% reduction on call-outs to bonfire related incidents in and around sites on the programme compared with 2007. (down from 36 to 25) The NIFRS reported 19 call-outs to sites on the programme – down 4, or 12% on 2007. Similar targets should be set for the programme in 2009.

Programme content

Cultural sessions

3. There are three possible scenarios for the future direction of this aspect of the Bonfire Management Programme: (A) a number of communities are engaged with statutory and community groups in programmes around good relations, diversity, history and cultural awareness. It may be appropriate for BCC to provide guidance, support and resources to existing programmes to facilitate discussions that provide a context for the bonfire; (B) for those communities that do not have on-going programmes and initiatives they have the opportunity to apply to BCC Good Relations Unit for funding for a specific programme on good relations; (C) this element of the programme is discontinued and is addressed through existing charters and not simply viewed through the context of bonfire management.

Bonfires and culture

- 4 It may be appropriate to examine the potential for developing a strategy that encompasses bonfires within the context of an overarching view of cultural expression within Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities.

Site maintenance

External contractor:

5. There is no doubting the success of the external contractor. However, the costs incurred are significant. Therefore discussions need to take place to determine its long-term role in the process of bonfire management.

Fencing

6. The costs incurred in managing the Annadale bonfire site are high. Although, it is widely acknowledged that the fence has restricted the amount of illegal dumping, the external contractor has continued to remove large quantities of fly tipped material. It is important that discussions take place between BCC, GWNI and the bonfire committee to determine the viability of continuing the programme with or without a fence.

Clean up

7. The agencies represented on the Interagency Forum should examine the costs incurred in the cleaning up of bonfire sites, both within and outside of the programme. Further discussions on the issues surrounding the clean up of bonfires should take place between GWNI and the bonfire committees.

Sectarian flags and symbols

8. The practice of burning Nationalist and Republican symbols and flags on the bonfires needs to be challenged within participating communities. Discussions led by BCC need to be focused on the context for engaging in this aspect and the conditions necessary for removing it as a practice associated with Eleventh night bonfires.

Programme structure

Grant Aid Framework

9. The fact that eleven of the fourteen sites adhered to all of the guidelines indicated a willingness to commit to all aspects of the programme. Interestingly, two of the sites that were unable to meet the collection date in 2007 were successful in 2008. Therefore, this element of the programme should be retained.

New developments

Bonfire beacons

10. The Bonfire beacon has been a resounding success. It is crucial that the lessons emanating from Woodvale community are documented and used to inform other communities and statutory organisations of the positive impact that the Bonfire beacon can have within a community.
11. In relation to Woodvale it is important that they receive continued support for their Bonfire beacon plans in 2009. They were supported by the statutory organisations this year, and it is important that interest does not wane and that the same organisations maintain a close interest in what Woodvale are attempting to achieve.

Additional sites

12. Each of the additional sites has noted positive benefits to being involved with the Bonfire Management Programme. They have provided groups with an opportunity to transform their Eleventh celebrations. Furthermore, local communities are developing an understanding of the complex environmental and cultural impact of bonfires. They have been briefed on the aims and objectives of the programme and several have the capacity and knowledge to participate more fully in the process if the opportunity arose. It is important that this work with the additional sites continues and where possible successful groups are identified and incorporated into the full Bonfire Management Programme.

The way ahead

Independent consultation

13. Providing bonfire committees with an opportunity to independently discuss their views of the programme and offer potential changes to it has proven to be a positive development. The bonfire committees have acknowledged that BCC are attempting to incorporate their views and experiences into future models of bonfire management. It is important that the ideas of the consortium are presented to BCC's Good Relations Partnership and appropriate feedback given to the participating bonfire committees.

Progress in 2008

14. The success of the programme to date cannot go underestimated. The programme has begun to challenge local communities ideas and perceptions around bonfires. It is therefore important that the Bonfire Management Programme continues. Furthermore, it may be appropriate for the Interagency Group and more specifically BCC to begin to assess the role of the programme after 2009, and any future responses to bonfire management issues.
15. Ongoing engagement by BCC with groups is now a central positive element within the programme and this should be sustained."

The Good Relations Manager highlighted various aspects of the report and drew the Members' attention to the success of the Beacon project at Woodvale Park, indicating that further development work had been undertaken by the Council in regard to the beacon structures and the type of material used. She pointed out that the development tests had been witnessed by the Minister for the Environment and by representatives from various Councils throughout Northern Ireland.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations contained within the report.

Peace III – Update on Progress

The Partnership considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant background information

The Peace III Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007-2013 has an increased focus on reconciliation and is based on two strategic priorities, each with two key areas:

- 1. Reconciling communities**
 - 1.1 Building positive relations at the local level**
 - 1.2 Acknowledging the past**
- 2. Contributing to a shared society**
 - 2.1 Creating shared public spaces**
 - 2.2 Key institutional capacities are developed for a shared society**

Priority 1.1 - Building positive relations at the local level

This is the key priority for this Good Relations Partnership and £6.3 million has been awarded to Belfast City Council. The newly appointed Peace III Programme Manager, Isaac May, has prepared a separate paper and will give a more detailed outline of the proposed approach to the implementation of the Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan.

Priority 1.2 - Acknowledging the past

The Consortium made up of the Community Relations Council and Border Action has been appointed by the SEUPB as the joint delivery mechanism for priority 1.2 of the Programme.

The strand entitled 'addressing legacy and truth in public memory' is out for open call at present. The Good Relations Unit is preparing an expression of interest under this strand for an oral history project related to the conflict in Belfast and the Council's role in delivering public services during a very difficult period.

Priority 2.1 - Creating shared public spaces

In 2007 the SEUPB called for expressions of interest for potential capital projects to be funded under this measure. They sought capital projects that would contribute to a shared society by creating shared public spaces. The key objective is to regenerate urban, rural and border areas that appear derelict, segregated, underused, threatening and/or unwelcoming and transform them into shared spaces. In addition, successful projects are expected to:

- act as a catalyst for transforming the local community
- be iconic with a capacity to provide a lasting legacy to the Peace III Programme
- incorporate high design and environmental quality
- demonstrate long term sustainability
- range in size from €1.5m to €10m.

The Council's Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on 15th June 2007 noted a list of 8 schemes to be submitted for the following projects:

- Lagan Canal Gateway Project
- Laganside Foot and Cycle Bridge
- Renewing the Routes – the Challenge of Interfaces
- Your City Your Space – Belfast Heritage Trail
- Northern Community Greenway
- Skatepark
- The Chorus Centre
- Giant's Park Education Centre

Subsequently the SEUPB ruled out 7 of the 8 schemes submitted, leaving only the Skatepark to progress further to a more detailed stage.

This has now been re-titled the Urban Sports Park as it includes scope for other sports – BMXing, in-line skating and parkour (free running) and appears likely to be awarded joint funding from Peace III and from Sport NI of around £500,000. This was reported to the Parks Committee on 16th June 2008.

The Council had made a major application to the Big Lottery Fund for the Giant's Park project but unfortunately this was unsuccessful; the Connswater Community Greenway was the successful Belfast project, being awarded £23m from the Big Lottery Fund.

As the North Foreshore bridge proposal had already been granted Council approval as part of the overall Giant's Park Lottery bid, the bridge element has been developed for submission to the SEUPB for Peace III funding under this priority 2.1. The Lottery bid preparation meant that a lot of the back-up documentation and information was already in place and that a major public consultation exercise on the proposal had been completed. This proposal is still under consideration.

Priority 2.2 - Key institutional capacities are developed for a shared society

As agreed by the Good Relations Partnership on 15th August, a bid under this priority for a proposed inter-agency training and learning good relations programme in Belfast was submitted to the SEUPB in early September and is under consideration at present.

A second call under this priority was made this week under the banner of 'European and international networking: exchange of good practice'. The Council's European Unit is likely to make an application under this priority.

Recommendations

The Partnership is requested to note the information in this report and grant approval to a bid under priority 1.2 as outlined above."

The Partnership adopted the recommendations contained within the report.

Peace III, Priority 1.1 – Building Positive Relationship at Local Level

The Peace III Programme Manager outlined for the information of the Members the approach which had been adopted in relation to the implementation of the Council's Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan, including the background to the development of the plan, the next steps, the roles and the responsibilities and the initial project output.

He advised the Partnership that grant-aid of £6.3 million for the Plan, under Priority 1.1 of the Peace III initiative, had been agreed by the Peace III Programme Steering Committee.

A Letter of Offer had been received dated 26th September, 2008 which, amongst other conditions, had stated that failure to meet agreed annual spend targets might result in the removal from the project of the unspent balance of grant. The Programme Manager pointed out that, in addition to the various standard conditions of grants, the Letter of Offer set out also a number of conditions which were specific to the Council's Peace and Reconciliation Plan. These had included, inter alia, the development of an appropriate monitoring framework, the submission of an implementation work plan by the end of December, 2008 and the provision of details on the cross border dimension of the plan.

The Partnership was informed that, given the timescales involved, there was an urgent need to commence the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan. The Programme Manager then outlined the key steps which needed to be undertaken during the period from November, 2009 till January, 2009.

The Programme Manager reported that the Partnership would be responsible for endorsing the Action Plan and any changes which might be required. He outlined for the information of the Members the role of the Programme Manager and the other members of the Project Plan. He indicated that it was anticipated that the full Project Team would be in post by mid-January. The Good Relations Manager pointed out that some of the preparatory work, such as the development of the small grant scheme, had been undertaken by the staff in the Good Relations Unit in advance of the Peace III personnel being appointed.

The Partnership noted the information provided.

**PROPOSED COUNCIL RESPONSE
TO SECTION 75 STATUTORY DUTIES**

The Committee considered the undernoted report and draft response.

“Relevant Background Information

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) recently completed an Effectiveness Review of Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and proposes revising its Guide to reflect the findings of that review.

The Commission's draft Guide includes proposals to require designated bodies to:

- introduce another level of 'screening' policies to be termed 'filtering'
- extend the consultation period (currently 8 weeks) to 12 weeks, to apply to all policies, even those that are 'screened out'
- produce an equality action plan to be informed by 'an audit of inequalities within its geographic boundaries' and to include international standards
- produce a revised Equality Scheme, in advance of the Review of Public Administration.

Key Issues

The Council has clearly demonstrated its commitment to the promotion of equality over the past 7 years. We received an excellent report from the Equality Commission in 2006/7 on our 5-year Review of the Equality Scheme, commending us for the excellent progress made in implementing our Scheme and highlighting a number of areas of good progress and good practice. These included:

- top level commitment
- mainstreaming of equality and good relations
- good relations training initiatives.

The Equality Officers from most District Councils in NI have met and agreed that the proposals are highly impractical and in general unacceptable. The attached proposed joint response outlines their comments in detail.

The most unreasonable proposal is that of requiring revised Equality Schemes within the next year. The ECNI proposes that following 'approval of the revised Guide by the Secretary of State, the Commission will call for revised Equality Schemes from public authorities to reflect the provisions of the revised Guide'.

The Guide also specifically goes on to state that 'public authorities must also undertake a review of their Scheme before they merge with another authority'. It is not clear whether Belfast's boundary changes would be regarded as 'merging'.

With the Review of Public Administration, a time of substantial change within the public sector in general and local authorities in particular, the production of a revised Equality Scheme and the review of that Equality Scheme would impose an unnecessary burden for district councils; such Equality Schemes would then have to be revised again following the establishment of the new Council boundaries in 2011.

Recommendations

District Council Equality Officers have agreed that the recent ECNI proposals are unrealistic and unworkable. The draft Guide shows a lack of understanding of the realities of the decision-making and operational aspects of Council activity. The Equality Officers' comments on the draft Guide have been compiled by the Local Government Staff Commission as the attached joint response to the Equality Commission.

The Partnership is requested to note and endorse the attached comments which will be submitted to the Equality Commission.

Proposed Response to Draft Guide to the Section 75 Statutory Duties

General comments

Councils are committed to implementing the Section 75 duties in relation to equality of opportunity and good relations. However they are concerned that what is proposed in the revised Guide would not streamline the process and may make it unworkable.

The Guidance, as a whole, shows a lack of appreciation of the operational systems in public authorities. It also shows a lack of awareness of the length of time and the cost of completing an EQIA. It is clear that equality practitioners were not consulted when the Guidance document was being drafted.

This new Guidance is much more process driven and gives no credence to an Equality Officer's professional judgement or previous experience in implementing Section 75. What is required is a much lighter touch in order to successfully mainstream the equality agenda across organisations.

It appears that the Guidance has been strengthened because in the past a number of high level policies have been screened out as not requiring an EQIA. This is really an issue for the Equality Commission as to how they should 'police' the duties, or provide additional support for those who are not implementing the duties effectively. Public authorities who have been trying to implement the duties effectively should not be penalised because of the few who have not.

Page 15, Para 1.33

'Final Report on Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the NI Act 1998' – councils have not received a copy of this report yet although it was published in July 2008. It also does not seem to be available on the Commission's website.

It is suggested that the Commission use a practitioner group to develop the 'compliance standard' and auditing and validation process, as well as issuing these for consultation.

Page 26, Para 2.17

The equality impact should only be assessed where there has been a significant change to a policy. In councils, policies can be changed by elected members at a council meeting or a new project may be commenced as a pilot, or a policy in development and, by its very nature, would change many times before it is finalised. It would not be realistic to equality impact assess these changes every time unless they were significant.

Page 27, Para 2.22

Sometimes although every effort is made to research information, there is no evidence available, for example, if the information is protected by data protection legislation or has been raised by a 'whistleblower'.

Page 30, Para 2.34

The suggested date of 30th June for submission of the annual report on the review of progress would be more convenient for councils and would fit in better with their council and committee structures. However the preparation of this report is held up every year by the delay from the Equality Commission in issuing the report template. This year the template was not issued until 13th June and although we were told in advance that it would be streamlined, it was effectively the same as in previous years.

The Commission seems too focussed on the process of Section 75 and, in particular, in receiving information from public authorities in standard templates and formats. If the public authority is ultimately responsible for implementing its Section 75 duties, then it should be left to the public authority to determine how they wish to report on progress in a way which is appropriate to the needs of that organisation. For example, the reporting template on the disability duties was difficult to complete and did not 'fit' with the action measures which had been included in the Disability Action Plans.

Page 29, Para 2.29

Councils are familiar with the development of an action plan having previously developed one for their Disability Action Plan. However it is difficult to comment on the effectiveness of the Action Plans since the majority of council have had no feedback from the Commission on their Disability Action Plans although they were submitted in June 2007.

It would be useful if the Commission provided examples of what the Commission expects to be included in an action plan and, in particular, examples of performance indicators and targets related to relevant S75 equality categories.

Our preference would be for a timetable of actions similar to what was included in the original equality schemes, rather than an action plan.

It would also be useful if the Commission developed a model integrated action plan rather than having separate action plans for Section 75 and the disability duties.

Page 29, Para 2.31

The requirement on a public authority to undertake an audit of inequalities within its geographic boundaries is onerous and would require a big resource commitment from public authorities. Councils, and other public authorities, are trying to reduce their expenditure in the current economic climate and future budgets will be very tight.

This type of audit may be more appropriate in other sectors such as health, education or housing where their policies have a greater impact on the public than in councils.

Is this not something which the Commission could undertake, and which would filter down from the research on its Statement on Key Inequalities? Alternatively this type of data could be made available by NISRA or built in to the Census questions.

Page 29, Para 2.32

The requirement that '...objectives, targets and milestones relating to the measures must be built in to corporate and annual business/operating plans' is unrealistic. Most corporate/business plans are written at a high level and would not go in to this level of detail. Corporate plans are cascaded down into departmental, section and individual plans and there would be no benefit in repeating information which is already detailed in the equality scheme timetable or action plan.

Page 29, Para 2.33

Reporting 'at the most senior level' is too frequent. Six monthly reporting would be sufficient.

Page 30, Para 2.36

The requirement that public authorities undertake a review of their scheme before they merge with another authority or cease to exist is also unrealistic. For example the priority for councils as they merge to form 11 new councils in 2011 will be to work together to develop a new equality scheme rather than to review the scheme of the old authority.

We would seek agreement from the Commission to make special arrangements for councils and other transferring bodies in the phasing arrangements for the development of new equality schemes.

Page 42, Filter exercise

The screening process is difficult and it has taken public authorities some time to fully understand it and embed it into their organisations. Line managers are only now becoming familiar with the screening process. It is too early to change this process so fundamentally.

If a policy is assessed as not relevant to the duties, to issue a filter report for a consultation process of 12 weeks would considerably slow up the policy making process. There is no requirement to consult on a screening exercise in the UK gender equality scheme process.

We would suggest that the filter report could be issued for information purposes for 12 weeks rather than for consultation. Some policies have clearly no impact on equality and should not be delayed by a 12 week consultation process.

The requirement that the consultation commences within 4 weeks of filtering is unrealistic. At present, screening reports are issued once a year and it would be impracticable for both the public authority and potential consultees to consult on individual screening exercises.

Page 45, Step 7

It appears from this diagram that public authorities are required to monitor and publicise the annual monitoring results of policies which are screened out as not requiring an EQIA. This is not practicable as public authorities would eventually be monitoring hundreds of policies on an annual basis.

Page 47, Para 2.4

We would suggest that the word 'significantly' is added to the first question. This would filter the more strategic policies in for equality impact assessment.

Page 48, Para 2.9

There is also concern at the suggestion that all filter reports should be signed off by the Chief Executive. The Head of Department or Director should be able to sign them off.

Page 48, Para 2.11

The effect of this requirement could mean that the voluntary and community sector could effectively veto the result of the filtering exercise. It should be possible for the public authority to consider their comments/evidence but still not proceed to eqia.

Page 48, Para 2.12

If a policy can be improved by a simple change at an early stage, surely this should be done rather than delaying the process by proceeding to a full eqia. An example of this would be if a family ticket to a venue was changed to include 2 same sex partners as well as opposite sex partners.

Page 57, Glossary

It would be useful if the Commission provided definitions of what it meant by other words which are used throughout the document in this glossary, for example, 'robust evidenced based' (page 42 and page 45) and 'inequalities'.

Guidance document in general

There is concern about the language used in the document, for example, the use of words such as 'must' and 'should' which makes it very prescriptive. For example, 'The plan should include international standards.....' (para 2.31) when there may be no international standards available.

Additional comments

It would be useful if the Commission:

- provided a practical example in the guidance, working through the policy appraisal process

**Good Relations Partnership,
Friday, 7th November, 2008**

- **considered the RPA timescales in developing a timetable for the development and approval of new equality schemes, taking into consideration the intention that the existing 26 councils will cease to exist in 2011**
- **put together a group of equality practioners to assist in reviewing the Guidance prior to agreeing a final document**
- **convene a group of equality practioners to establish an ongoing formalised engagement process between the Commission and public authorities”**

The Partnership agreed, with three Members abstaining, to endorse the draft response to the Equality Commission proposed.

Chairman