

Belfast City Council Corporate Response

Consultation on Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

September 2010

Introduction

The Council welcomes the publication of this draft Programme. We have noted that no action plan has been attached and we understand that this will be developed at a later date. We assume therefore that this offers an opportunity for dialogue and for the Council to have an opportunity to be involved in shaping the development of the Programme.

The promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations have been key objectives of the Council over the past few years and our recent public survey demonstrates that Belfast residents also regard good relations as an area of continuing concern. The document recognises that the Government cannot tackle problems of prejudice and hate, sectarianism and racism alone and the Council is committed to playing its part at city level.

Unique Position of Belfast

The Council would advocate that the Programme acknowledges the unique situation of Belfast. There is clear evidence that Belfast was disproportionately affected by the years of conflict and many areas are still characterised by ongoing community tensions and entrenched divisions, manifested through murals, flags etc. Although the document does refer in general terms to the link between areas which suffered most from the legacy of the conflict and areas of high deprivation, this is most obvious in Belfast which has 9 of the 10 most deprived areas in terms of multiple deprivation. These areas are marked by low levels of educational achievement, poor health, high unemployment and low levels of mobility. These factors have contributed to the creation of a vicious circle of low self and community esteem and such areas are often located at interfaces or at flashpoints.

As a result of the conflict, Belfast has over 80 peace walls or interfaces, by far the greatest number anywhere in NI. Erected originally to improve security, they remain almost 40 years later and have contributed to the perpetuation of the cycle of division and segregation. Mayor Bloomberg, for example, referred to the continued presence of interfaces as clear evidence that things are still not quite normal in Belfast. He said it was "in the interests of peace and prosperity" to remove the barriers "and the sooner the physical barriers come down... the sooner the flood gates of private investment will open."

Role of Local Government

Since a substantial part of the OFM/DFM's current good relations programme is already delivered by local government through the existing District Councils Good Relations Programme, it is disconcerting to note that our work does not even get a mention until page 52 of the document. The paper does acknowledge the "unique placement" of Councils and their valuable role and states that Government is committed to supporting the current Programme. Belfast's good relations work has developed initiatives which have then been rolled out in other areas – e.g. work around bonfire management, re-imaging of murals, interfaces, migrants' forum etc. – and we would be happy to take on an enhanced role, subject to being resourced accordingly.

Apart from its specific Good Relations Unit's activities, Belfast City Council is already involved in active delivery of various other parts of the CSI agenda, by work in other areas e.g. community services, community safety, children and young people, events, leisure, parks and open spaces,

capital developments and the creation of shared space etc. We would therefore like to see more explicit reference made to the key role of Councils at local level.

Shared Space

The Council welcomes the commitment to ensure that all spaces and facilities are “shared and welcoming” (para. 3.35) and would point out that as most of the spaces mentioned are not within the remit of central government, all agencies, including the voluntary, community and private sectors, must work together in the delivery and maintenance of these shared spaces.

In Belfast there has been a general acceptance of dual provision of public services across the city, with the associated increased costs. With increased pressure on public expenditure, there is a real urgency now for all levels of government to look at ways of working together to deliver services and maximising the use of current, and future, assets and resources.

The Council would highlight, as a model which could be replicated, the successful example of partnership working at the Grove Wellbeing Centre, where health, leisure and library services are delivered under one roof. We would seek to ensure that a joined-up approach becomes the norm in future, to minimise the duplication of services and to provide the efficient, effective and value for money services that our citizens deserve. We would advocate that the delivery of shared services itself should become a central and explicit objective in the programme.

The ability to travel freely and access key facilities is vital in an open city. Many people live in areas that are highly territorial and their “mental maps” can affect their daily choices of where to live, work, shop, socialise etc. We need to increase people’s confidence in accessing services located in areas perceived as being outside their traditional comfort zones. Access and connectivity of proposed new developments should be analysed with regard to their potential to transform existing patterns of use since these will be important in facilitating mobility across a segregated city. The Council would therefore urge the Government to move forward with the implementation of the proposed Rapid Transport System since this would probably contribute much more to Belfast’s becoming a shared city than many of the other measures mentioned.

Implementation

Although the aspirations in the draft CSI Programme are commendable, there is very little detail on when, how or by whom these will be achieved. In particular, the Council has concerns round the absence of a proposed action plan, timescale, targets, outputs and outcomes and the mention of a specific resource to support delivery and implementation of the programme, especially at a time of unprecedented financial pressure within NI. We believe that for any programme to be successful, a detailed action plan against which progress can be measured is essential. We would seek a commitment from central government that resources will be ring-fenced and protected for delivering actions under this Programme given its strategic importance.

The Council would seek an assurance that the aims of this programme are being aligned and mainstreamed into the ongoing work of all central government departments, given the tangible and intangible links with housing, community development, neighbourhood renewal, children and young people.

We would like an assurance that the programme’s aims will be embedded and reflected in any new policies/strategies that are developed and would seek clarification on how existing and future policies will be measured against the aims of this strategy.

RESPONSE TO OFMDFM CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

I am responding:	as an individual	
	on behalf of an organisation	✓
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GOALS

Chapter 2 sets out the key goals of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration as follows:

- To urgently address the physical and community division created by interfaces with the support of communities;
- To ensure and promote the safety of vulnerable groups;
- To tackle the visible manifestations of racism, sectarianism, intolerance and other forms of prejudice;
- To adopt a zero tolerance approach to all incidences of, and reasons for, attacks motivated by sectarian, religious, racist or hate prejudice, including those on symbolic premises, cultural premises and monuments;
- To promote equality of opportunity and tackle disadvantage;
- To provide and expand safe and shared spaces;
- To build a society where cultural diversity is embraced and celebrated and to promote pride in who we are and confidence in our different cultural identities;
- To create a new and improved framework for the management and regulation of public assemblies including parades and protests;
- To achieve the full participation of all sectors in all aspects of society;
- To support the local community to resolve local issues through local solutions; and
- To take action which will address sectarian behaviour at spectator sports events.

Do you agree/disagree with the key goals of the programme?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – is there anything that has not been included/should be omitted?

We agree with the stated goals and welcome the opportunity to build greater alignment between our current programme of work and that proposed through this CSI strategy.

However, we have some concerns:

- Some goals would be more properly described as cross-cutting themes.
- They are ambitious, may be difficult to measure and may represent a lack of focus.
- The Programme is not set in context - there is little recognition of current work or that of groups over the past 25-30 years. There has been no attempt to evaluate previous programmes or to assimilate previous learning.
- The programme needs to be realistic and long-term in nature; as a society we may not have moved as far ahead in the last decade as has often been supposed and serious fundamental issues have often been avoided rather than being directly addressed.
- The document appears to be concerned to treat the symptoms of the division- e.g. flags, interfaces, rather than examining their causes and the underlying problems of division.
- Some groups are entirely omitted from the document e.g. victims, ex-prisoners, women, churches etc.
- Where does this strategy fit in the hierarchy of other government strategies? If addressing issues of division and sectarianism are the primary goal of NI society does the CSI programme take precedence?
- Are the CSI goals integrated within the Programme for Government? Only by tackling these issues that NI can seriously deliver solid economic sustainability and a prosperous future.
- The paper states that the current good relations indicators will be used (2.5) but any new programme of intervention will require new PIs to facilitate measurement of outcomes

What exactly does “to achieve the full participation of all sectors in all aspects of society” mean? This is too broad and general a statement to be meaningful.

We feel that the strategy could benefit from an emphasis, particular in the current economic climate, on encouraging shared services as well as shared spaces. This is perhaps even more appropriate now in view of probable reductions in funding for major capital infrastructure work.

Tackling “the visible manifestations of racism and sectarianism” are of course important but the invisible damage to victims of such forms of prejudice also needs to be addressed.

A “zero tolerance” approach to hate crime is laudable but there is no mention of how this will be enforced, in view of reducing PSNI budget; no changes are proposed to the current legislation or court system.

In these challenging economic times, it is even more essential that all levels of government work together to deliver shared solutions to problems. We would advocate that this partnership approach is reflected more strongly in the document to ensure shared aims and objectives and where appropriate the alignment of priorities and resources. The Council has 2 key Partnerships - Belfast Community Safety Partnership and Good Relations Partnership – which have worked together in developing initiatives and adopting a coordinated approach.

THEMES FOR ACTION

Chapter 2 states a number of themes for action as follows:

Short Term

- Developing 'Shared Space';
- Enhancing community capacity to play a full role in implementing the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration;
- 'Crisis Intervention' and the need for a mechanism to co-ordinate multi-agency rapid responses to tackle sectarianism and racial violence and all forms of hate crimes;
- Ensuring good relations considerations are embedded within all government policy making;
- Early and strategic intervention to tackle anti-social behaviour and tensions around interfaces; and
- Promoting Cohesion, Sharing and Integration through a process of community renewal.

Medium Term

- The relationship between young people and the community;
- Providing a new and improved framework for the resolution of public assembly disputes; and
- Ensuring the sharing of best practice projects aimed at improving cohesion, sharing and integration across all areas where appropriate and when required.

Long Term

- Interfaces;
- Encouraging shared neighbourhoods;
- Reducing and eventually eliminating segregated services;
- Tackling the multiple social issues effecting and entrenching community separation, exclusion and hate; and
- Cultural identity, including issues around flags and emblems, murals, bonfires, cultural expression, language and popular protest.

What are your views on the themes for action currently identified?

The Council is generally supportive of the themes and timescales outlined (2.6) but it is difficult to comment meaningfully without greater detail as they are fairly broad. The wide focus of the Programme needs to develop a clear framework aligned to that of other departments and strategies.

There is some inconsistency round interfaces; these are to be addressed "urgently" (2.3) but are listed (2.6) as a long-term theme for action.

The Belfast Community Safety Partnership would commend as a model of good practice in a multi-agency rapid response approach (2.6) its establishment of a tension monitoring process, which allows for sharing of information in real time and the development of coordinated responses to address situations where tensions are identified either geographically, by issue or on a group basis.

GOOD RELATIONS AND THE RACIAL EQUALITY STRATEGY

The Programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration is not intended to supersede or replace the Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-10, which was endorsed by the motion made by the Assembly on 3 July 2007. Rather, it provides the framework for the delivery of aspects of that strategy relating to good race relations in a co-ordinated, joined up process (paragraph 1.10).

Do you agree/disagree the programme will complement the delivery of the Racial Equality Strategy?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

How could the relationship between the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and the Racial Equality Strategy be strengthened?

The paper refers to existing policies like the Racial Equality Strategy but states that it is not intended to supersede or replace it. It appears to assume that this Strategy is still fully functional; however it only runs until 2010 and has in reality been shelved for the last number of years.

Where does this leave the Racial Equality Strategy and the departmental action plans that were to stem from it? Will the goals of the Race Equality Strategy remain and will there be new departmental action plans? It would be useful if discussion around the current status of the Race Equality Strategy formed part of the consultation around CSI.

The Council would recommend that the Race Equality Strategy should be re-visited and evaluated to judge what progress has been made in the past 5 years. The Strategy would also need to be revised to take account of the opportunities and challenges brought about by recent inward migration.

(1.14) The Council notes with interest the comment regarding those who have "no recourse to public funds" and welcomes the support that may be given here.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration aims to make a difference to both people and places across our society (Chapter 3). The key aims for people and places are:

- Public spaces, thoroughfares, community facilities and town centres should be safe, shared and welcoming to the whole community;
- All public authorities, including District Councils, should discharge functions and deliver services equally and inclusively recognising the diverse nature of the community they serve and the barriers which can be experienced by minority ethnic people in particular;
- Unnecessary duplication of services should be targeted through the enhanced delivery of shared services on the basis of objective need;
- Safe and secure shared community spaces should be developed in a culture of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect; and
- Displays of flags and emblems, graffiti or murals, parades or public assemblies or festivals should be held in an environment which respects individual and community rights.

Do you agree/disagree with the proposed aims for people and places?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – is there anything that has not been included/should be omitted?

Belfast City Council generally agrees with the proposed aims but would welcome greater clarity on how and when change will be affected.

Places

The Council is a substantial landowner in Belfast and has considerable physical and environmental assets at its disposal. We welcome the paper’s emphasis on shared space and are proud of the fact that many of our own facilities, including the City Hall, Waterfront and Ulster Halls, the Zoo, parks, leisure centres, playing fields, playgrounds etc are regarded as shared, safe and accessible and are used by all communities.

Perceptions are also important; all Council facilities are open to all but some people have the perception that it is not safe for them to use particular facilities. Such perceptions must be addressed. Parallel service provision may in fact reinforce patterns of segregation and Belfast’s current public transport system indirectly contributes towards continued separation. Mobility and connectivity must be improved if shared services are to become a reality.

We welcome the focus on creating shared space and would advocate that government play a leading role by encouraging the use of secure by design principles in new developments, which should be open and welcoming to all.

People

The paper notes that equality legislation has been instrumental in bringing about positive good relations outcomes in the workplace (3.8-3.9). No reference, however, is made here to the role played by Trade Unions, which has been considerable in challenging discrimination and promoting respect. The Council has found some tension between this duty, usually regarded as neutrality, and the need to create a “good and harmonious environment” (3.36), where

expressions of diversity are welcomed; we are already examining this area of debate.

The paper is confusing as occasional references to individual actions by Government Departments are inserted (presumably following inter-Departmental consultation, prior to publication); the reference here to DFP's procurement policy (3.11) is rather bizarre.

We agree that the promotion of good relations is not just the responsibility of the integrated schools sector and that all schools have a part to play (3.13-3.14). There has been substantial research which indicates that sectarian attitudes in NI are imprinted from a very early age in our society. The Programme may therefore need to consider emphasising the importance of work with younger children.

Opportunities for greater sharing and engagement should be supported in Belfast at this time when the rationalisation of the school estate is being seriously considered. Surveys indicate public support for this approach. Schools can help shape attitudes and promote positive views on difference and cultural attitudes and values and we believe all schools in NI should prepare pupils for a shared society.

The Council recognises that health and well-being is largely determined by the social, economic, physical and cultural environment and that links between health and deprivation are well documented. The development of a healthier city is one of our key priorities and we have developed an integrated plan to improve health and wellbeing.

Earlier this year we set up a special Belfast Health Development Unit, bringing together 3 sponsoring partner organisations – Council, Health & Social Care Trust and Public Health Agency - to ensure maximum impact. The Unit's initial priorities include developing effective action with disadvantaged neighbourhoods experiencing the sharpest inequalities in health; as stated in the paper, these are found particularly in the areas that suffered most during the conflict (3.19).

The Council has been heavily engaged in and supported local efforts to remove/reduce displays that could be perceived as being sectarian e.g. flags, murals, bonfires etc (3.32-3.34) and is happy to consider adopting a revised Flags Protocol.

One of the Council's current key delivery mechanisms is in supporting local initiatives at a community level through Good Relations small grants. Getting relevant programmes running at a local level involves providing resources to those groups that are delivering important work 'on the ground'. Working in this way involves working with local elected representatives, community workers, locally based community organisations and residents.

We are also supporting a range of local initiatives, some funded through our Peace III Programme, to promote local partnership work with the NI Housing Executive, develop community gardens and local festivals; all these contribute to the concept of shared space.

We would seek clarification on the timeframe for the DRD's revised Regional Development Strategy regarding guidance on city and town centres as shared spaces (para 3.40) and how this will be aligned with the DSD's city and town centre master-planning programme (para 3.37).

Graffiti should be removed from the final list on p.23 – this is usually simply an act of vandalism and should not be considered as equivalent to the other items.

Empowering the Next Generation

The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration proposes a number of specific aims to empower the next generation (Chapter 4):

- Under the auspices of the Ministerial Panel for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (see Chapter 2 & 10), establishing a major initiative aimed at developing a longer term strategic approach to helping marginalised young people;
- Supporting young people to increase their civic responsibility including facilitating and empowering youth groups to work together on civic responsibility projects;
- Focusing on education and promoting greater understanding of shared values; and
- Establishing multi-agency partnerships between indigenous and minority ethnic and migrant worker communities to address the specific needs of the young people in those populations.

Do you agree/disagree with the proposed aims for empowering the next generation?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – is there anything that has not been included/should be omitted?

The Council agrees with the paper's emphasis on empowering the next generation. We are keenly aware of the exceptionally limited resource currently available to support the youth sector, particular in view of recent cuts in the education budgets, and welcome the opportunity to identify new opportunities to support work in this field. However, most of this chapter appears unduly negative, depicting young people as a problem to be dealt with, not as a bright resource for the future.

The Council seeks to promote citizenship and civic participation by linking young people to governance decision-making structures and processes at neighbourhood, city, national and international levels. The Council's Youth Forum acts as a mechanism that gives practical expression to the concepts of civic engagement and civic responsibility and may be of wider interest in regard to promoting cohesion, sharing and integration.

By using its political influence to shape policy and better integrate service provision in conjunction with other providers in the statutory, community and voluntary sectors across the city, the Council is keen to promote a long-term framework for children and young people under which a range of programmes and projects can be initiated that address directly issues of division.

The Council invests considerable funding through annual summer schemes for young people in community centres, leisure centres, parks, community safety and good relations. We particularly welcome the recognition (4.4) that "we progress beyond a short-term year-on-year approach" in regard to diversionary/intervention programmes and have already begun work in this regard, aiming for better co-ordination and targeting of funding for 2011. We are actively involved in supporting various projects that divert young people from possible conflict and that educate them about the reality of violence. Two major projects proposed for Phase 2 of our Peace III Plan will specifically tackle youth engagement.

We welcome the statements about the important role of the Department of Education and its proposals regarding youth work (4.7 and 4.8) but would point out that it is difficult to foresee substantial change, given the recent major cuts in youth service funding.

We welcome the statement (4.10) regarding the Department of Education’s commitment to promoting the wider use of school premises. The Council has already worked with some schools in this and would like to explore the potential for greater partnership in the future with schools, for example re. the use of school sporting facilities such as pitches. This would not only prove efficient in financial terms but would assist schools to integrate more fully with their local communities and could promote positive community relations.

The Council is extremely supportive of more effective collaborative working. However, most multi-agency approaches, though fine in principle, have a poor track record in actual delivery. Agencies involved will need to have clearly defined lines of accountability and targets to be truly effective.

RESPECTING CULTURES

The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration recognises the importance of respecting the cultural diversity within our community and sets out a number of aims in relation to this (Chapter 5):

- Building a peaceful climate of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect;
- Working with and supporting the local community to resolve contentious cultural issues;
- Promoting greater understanding of cultural diversity and expressions of cultural identity;
- Encouraging greater engagement with, and understanding of, cultural diversity and intercultural relations;
- Working to eliminate attacks on cultural, sporting and other symbolic property and monuments; and
- Promoting cultural exchanges, joint events and tourism initiatives.

Do you agree/disagree with the proposed aims for respecting cultures?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – is there anything that has not been included/should be omitted?

The Council recognises the positive contribution that cultural diversity brings to society. We are committed to the concept of celebrating diversity and undertake substantial work to support this aim.

All new recruits to the Council receive training in equality and good relations, which specifically addresses the requirements of delivering services to our increasingly diverse population. includes reference to our city’s increasing diversity. The Council has also organised diversity awareness programmes for employees to encourage them to engage with and understand the needs of communities from differing cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The Council itself promotes a number of major civic events and supports others, either through community festival grants or by supplying a suitable venue to show case events – e.g. the Mela in Botanic Gardens or the Chinese New Year celebrations in St George’s Market. We have also supported numerous smaller events for minority and ethnic groups in the City Hall through the Lord Mayor’s programme in recent years e.g. the end of Ramadan, Hanukah and Polish Cultural Week. Through our Good Relations and Peace III funding, we have supported various projects that seek to develop meaningful engagement and interaction between communities to foster understanding and respect for different cultures.

With regard to the Orangefest example quoted (5.26), we would point out that it was funding through the Council’s Peace III Programme that enabled Belfast City Centre Management to encourage shops to stay open on 12 July 2009 for the first time, not the DSD.

The Council agrees that cultural tourism can make a positive impact on the wider community and that the broader potential economic and social benefits from tourism have still not been fully capitalised. Central to this, however, is the image of NI and the need to ensure that it is seen as safe and welcoming for everyone. The Council welcomes the commitment (5.32) that action must be taken in this regard.

The needs of Irish Travellers and the Roma communities are mentioned only with regard to education; these groups require particular attention. The legal framework for much of this work is already in place but a serious commitment to enforcement appears to be lacking.

A SECURE COMMUNITY

The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration recognises the need to create a secure community and sets out a number of aims in relation to this (Chapter 6):

- Encouraging community events which reflect cultural diversity and are open, welcoming and inclusive to all;
- Ensuring that all responsible agencies continue to provide a high level of community safety delivered within a rights based framework and an overarching ethos of mutual respect;
- Continuing to promote initiatives based on the principle of mutual respect, which reflect acceptance of cultural diversity and the ways in which it is expressed;
- Building community support networks across community, cultural and minority ethnic groups; and
- Building capacity of the local and minority ethnic communities to support people who have experienced hate crime.

Do you agree/disagree with the proposed aims for a secure community?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – is there anything that has not been included/should be omitted?

The Council is committed to working closely with the PSNI, local partnerships and others through its own Belfast Community Safety Partnership and other structures to build a safer community to tackle hate crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime.

The Council's Good Relations and Community Safety Units are already working well together on joint projects in areas of work such as interfaces, summer intervention and local engagement and we welcome the proposed introduction of a good relations duty to the new Crime Reduction Partnership arrangements (6.12).

The strategy could also seek to tackle hate related behaviour at all public events, not solely sports events (6.15).

The Council agrees that the removal of peace walls should be a key priority (6.16-6.18) for a city that has over 80 such barriers; we would like to ensure that the special needs of Belfast are highlighted through this cross cutting programme given the number of interfaces in the city. We have already commissioned research round this and are supporting active engagement and early discussion about plans for their removal or reduction.

We already support a number of innovative projects through our Peace III funding, including work led by Falls Community Council round interface regeneration (6.17).

Current projects seeking to remove some barriers continually encounter bureaucratic hurdles, such as ownership of the barrier, traffic calming measures following removal, resources to fund barrier transformation/removal. All these require cross Departmental commitment and the CSI Programme might be useful in producing greater collaboration between Departments on these issues.

The language used is confused and contradictory – e.g. "neutral shared space" (6.21)

A COHESIVE COMMUNITY

The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration recognises the need to progress towards a more cohesive community and sets out a number of aims in relation to this (Chapter 7):

- Zero tolerance for crimes motivated by prejudice and all forms of hate crime, whilst actively promoting rights and respect;
- Promoting intercultural work through the Minority Ethnic Development Fund;
- Building an inclusive community open to all, regardless of their background;
- Promoting greater understanding between established sections of the community and new arrivals;
- Working closely with the PSNI, the new Crime Reduction Partnerships and Probation Board in local areas to address racism and hate crime;
- Encouraging greater understanding of new cultures and new sections of the community; and
- Developing and supporting workplace initiatives to promote respect and understanding of cultural diversity.

Do you agree/disagree with the proposed aims for a cohesive community?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – is there anything that has not been included/should be omitted?

The Council supports the aims expressed and is already working closely in these areas through both its Good Relations Partnership and Community Safety Partnership to address sectarianism, racism and hate crime.

On the one hand, the role of criminal justice agencies is key to developing zero tolerance, along with the full use of powers to promote and encourage respect, and where necessary, to enforce appropriate behaviour. This has to be balanced along with working with communities to support positive activity and challenge negative behaviour. Our Good Relations Unit staff have designed and developed specific anti-hate crime and migrant awareness training which has been delivered both internally within the Council and externally to a range of voluntary groups. We recognise that community dynamics are complex and engage on this basis, while reinforcing the fact that violence and hatred should not be tolerated.

In addition, we are actively involved in promoting respect and understanding of cultural diversity and supporting integration initiatives between established communities and new arrivals to Belfast. We have developed a successful Migrants Forum where all agencies that are involved in providing services for migrants meet regularly to exchange information and develop joint initiatives and programmes.

The Belfast Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) has made dealing with hate crime a priority theme and in recent years has undertaken a range of activity to develop co-ordinated approaches to dealing with hate crime and promoting cohesion in the city. BCSP has supported research relating to vulnerable groups such as the Travelling Community and Transgender Community and is finalising a strategy to address hate crime and cohesion in Belfast.

The BCSP also supports initiatives such as a hate crime training programme, an annual Hate Crime Conference for Belfast (branded the *Unite against Hate* Conference in 2009) and the funding of dedicated staff to address the issue of hate motivated crime and cohesion in Belfast.

The Belfast Community Safety Partnership and Good Relations Partnership have jointly funded community safety advocates within the Chinese, Polish, and LGBT communities, with a range of other funders including NIHE and PSNI.

Supporting Local Communities

The Programme for Sharing and Integration recognises the need to support local communities in delivering good relations and sets out aims to ensure this (Chapter 8):

- Continue to support Councils’ delivery of Good Relations programmes and funding;
- Ensure the local community is integral to the Good Relations decision making and implementation process; and
- Nurturing leadership at a local level and empowering the local community to identify solutions to local issues.

Do you agree/disagree with the proposed aims for supporting local communities?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – is there anything that has not been included/should be omitted?

As democratically elected civic leaders, local Councils play a key role in championing and facilitating discussion round issues of concern to local communities. The current Good Relations Partnership in Belfast is made up of elected Members on a cross-party basis, plus representatives from a number of external bodies i.e. statutory agencies, trade unions, private business, churches, voluntary and community and minority ethnic groups. We believe this to be a good model where the Partnership members engage fully with the local community in the design and delivery of a tailored local programme.

The Good Relations Partnership also supports the work of other Council-led structures such as the Community Safety Partnership, to co-ordinate projects and to ensure that resulting service delivery is complementary.

In Belfast, our Good Relations Unit works directly with the Community Relations Unit within the OFM/DFM (8.3) and has spent considerable time developing and continually improving our own funding criteria and associated programmes, based on evaluations and best practice and submitting annual action plans (8.4). We are happy that this direct relationship should continue.

Belfast City Council has invested significant resources in community development activity and manages 22 community centres in some of the most deprived areas in the city. We work with individuals and community organisations to enhance the quality of life in our neighbourhoods. We have developed or supported programmes and activities designed to build important local skills; to foster participation; and to encourage communities to address local issues. We regard community development principles as fundamental in underpinning any CSI strategy.

We note with concern that there is no mention of the Review of Public Administration and the key role that Councils will have in the future in relation to community planning. Although the RPA may be temporarily stalled, the Council’s commitment to community planning and the principles behind it remain strong. Decision-making within local communities regarding good relations issues can not and should not be made in isolation from wider decisions on other service provision. A comprehensive and collaborative approach is required so that programmes at government and local service delivery level are connected. Recognising shared goals and interdependencies at local level will be crucial to long term viability and success.

LOOKING OUTWARD

The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration recognises that improving relationships within our society has to be viewed in the wider context of developing strong relationships on a North/South, East/West basis and proposes that an effective outward looking dimension is part of the programme with the following aims (Chapter 9):

- Identifying key exemplar projects which have proven track records of success in promoting good relations;
- Sharing of relevant research and experiences on a North/South, East/West, European and international basis; and
- Mutual promotion of cultural diversity and encouraging better social networks on North/South, East/West, European and international level.

Do you agree/disagree with the proposed aims for looking outward?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – is there anything that has not been included/should be omitted?

The image of NI abroad is crucial since it has a direct influence on potential investment. Our divisions and conflict have a direct impact on our social and economic aims and our future prosperity. It is difficult to promote tourism and cultural programmes in a city where summer rioting is endemic and violence is never far away. The NI Executive should take the lead in sending out the message that it really leads and supports this work and that it is integral to the Programme for Government.

Belfast City Council is keen to explore opportunities for continuous learning in a wider context both in the UK and at a European level.

The Good Relations Unit in Belfast has itself been involved in a number of European based initiatives examining integration and diversity, through the Eurocities network. We often host visits from international academic or local government based organisations, who are interested in the work being done at local level in a divided city. Over the past month alone, we have had visits from Norwegian local politicians and US academics. We also respond to requests for information worldwide.

Belfast is the only Council in NI with a full-time European Unit, which up-dates staff with current activity and policy at European level and co-ordinates related Council activity. One current programme of relevance is our Open Cities project, being undertaken jointly with the British Council, which is examining how cities attract and retain economic migrants.

Belfast Community Safety Partnership has developed relationships with regional centres of learning and good practice in order to build our knowledge base and support the development of partnerships and projects. Specifically these include: Institute for Community Cohesion; Beth Johnston Foundation; Centre for Intergenerational Practice; and European Forum for Urban Safety. We continue to explore opportunities for learning at all levels.

MECHANISM TO OVERSEE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CSI

Chapter 10 sets out mechanisms for the co-ordination of the actions to implement the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. The key features of implementation are;

- A Ministerial Panel chaired by OFMDFM Ministers, key statutory and community partners;
- A Senior Officials Steering Group which will be tasked with co-ordinating the cross-departmental alignment of activities and allocation of resources;
- An Advisory Panel of practitioners and experts to provide advice to Government.
- A Funders Group that will advise the Ministerial Panel on good relations funding issues and seek to improve the targeting and co-ordination of funding from many different sources.

Do you agree/disagree with the mechanism to oversee the implementation of the programme?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Strong Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓			

Comments – are there any improvements that could be made to the proposals for implementing the programme?

It is important that the role of local government forms a strong element within any final model. The paper recognises the unique place that local authorities can play in meeting the aims of the Programme and delivering good relations at the local level.

Given the special circumstances of Belfast as the capital city and regional economic driver of the economy within NI, we would advocate a strong role for Belfast City Council within this mechanism.

The Council would request that it be represented on both the proposed Ministerial Panel and the Senior Officials Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the policy. We would point out that in our view it will be vital in this regard to ensure that politicians and senior officials are drawn from the areas principally affected by conflict and the Department should take this into account. It is imperative that Chief Executives who have faced problems and devised practical local solutions are represented at this level as there will be a very clear need to turn the aspirations of CSI into operational practice, with political support.

We expect that both the Ministerial Panel and Senior Officials Group will be attempting to find ways to eradicate sectarianism and racism and their causes rather than simply “manage” them. The Council notes that the NI Executive advocates tolerance, understanding and co-operation at community level and will expect therefore to see similar values displayed at various levels of government, both at NI and Council level.

The Council welcomes the idea of the Funders’ Group, especially in a time when very substantial external funding for peace and reconciliation, from both the EU and USA, is coming to an end; this will improve co-ordination and collaboration, improve targeting and reduce duplication. We would propose that the funding role of Councils could be increased, requiring other local funders in an area to liaise with the local Council to ensure that all proposed funding activities were in

line with the Council's Good Relations Plan for that area (as already required by the OFM/DFM). It will also be important to ensure the sustainability of current programmes where there is much evidence of good practice.

We note that those on the proposed Advisory Panel will be asked to serve on a voluntary basis (10.9) and would contrast this with those who sit on the Equality, Human Rights and Parades Commissions in paid positions; we would enquire why a distinction is being made and why issues relating to good relations are continually reduced to second class status.

The Council notes with concern that there is no mention of the Review of Public Administration and the proposed key role that local authorities will have in the future in relation to community planning.

OPTIONS FOR THE DELIVERY OF FUNDING AND POLICY ADVICE

Chapter 11 outlines options for the delivery of funding and advice to Government on good relations policy to support the implementation of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. The options are as follows:

Option 1: Advisory panel and direct or contracted funding

Option 2: Services provided by organisations (procure the delivery of advice and funding from one or more organisations)

Option 3(a): Statutory non-departmental public body with funding function

Option 3(b): Statutory non-departmental public body without funding function (funding delivered direct or contracted)

Please specify which of the above options (or any alternative you may wish to suggest) represents the best choice for the future of the delivery of funding and policy advice to Government. Please provide reasons for your choice and comment on any changes that could be made to your preferred option to improve delivery of funding/policy advice.

There is a need for greater clarity round the roles of the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council - at present, public authorities are required to make annual reports on progress to the Equality Commission on both equality and good relations progress, but not to the Community Relations Council.

We believe strongly that an independent organisation, along the lines of the current Community Relations Council, is required to be able to provide expert unbiased advice and a strong challenge function to government, to offer a critique on the delivery of the programme and the contribution of government departments and to undertake relevant research. This independent body would be able to attract independent funding from non-governmental sources for certain activities.

We do not believe that the Community Relations Council should necessarily retain its funding role. There are already examples of agencies which provide advice and guidance to government that do not also have a funding role – e.g. the Equality Commission and Human Rights Commission.

In Belfast, our Good Relations Unit has a very good direct working relationship with the Good Relations Unit within the OFM/DFM and has spent considerable time developing and continually improving our own funding criteria and associated programmes, based on evaluations and best

practice. We are pleased that our innovative work in good relations is recognised and publically acknowledged; we are willing to enlarge our role and take on additional responsibility. We have already delivered funding directly on behalf of the OFM/DFM – Summer Intervention Fund in the summer of 2010 – and are happy to assume an enhanced role in future funding for organisations based in Belfast.

We would make the point that “funding” might be better described as “investment” and give the examples of summer diversionary activity and the bonfire management programme, where by investing relatively small amounts, substantial sums of public money can be saved in return.

As stated above at Q11, we would propose that the funding role of Councils could be increased, requiring other local funders in an area to liaise with the local Council to ensure that all proposed funding activities were in line with the Council’s Good Relations Plan for that area.

In view of the current economic climate we would not advocate Option 3 (a or b) as we are keen where possible to keep administrative costs to a minimum and see the establishment of a completely new structure as unnecessary. It is also essential that government is seen to be providing strategic leadership on this issue and relinquishing responsibility might result in a loss of cross-departmental commitment.

OFMDFM FUNDING FOR GOOD RELATIONS WORK

Chapter 11 sets out options for structures and mechanisms for the delivery of advice to Government and funding delivery services whilst Chapter 12 describes how OFMDFM Good Relations funding will be allocated across three strands as follows:

- Local District Council Programme;
- Thematic; and
- Targeted and Emergency

What are your views on the three strand approach for funding?

The 3 strands of funding identified - local government, thematic, and emergency - are appropriate and we support the need for work to be both planned and reactive. We would stress the need for improved co-ordination between the 3 strands, as this will be essential to ensure their effectiveness and to eliminate duplication.

We acknowledge the need for the Council’s Good Relations annual action plan to set out clear targets and expected outcomes in advance. We would point out however that District Councils must often also respond to emerging crises and their resource allocation should be sufficient and have enough flexibility to accommodate this.

Q. 14 FURTHER COMMENTS –

Please see Introduction making a special case for Belfast.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY ISSUES

We are seeking views on the equality implications of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and would be grateful for your comments on the following:

The proposals in this document should not impact adversely on any of the groups listed under Section 75 and in fact should have a positive impact on those groups.

There is a lack of consistency in the document – equality is often mentioned alongside fairness and human rights and is often linked with good relations. Clearer definitions would be useful.

The document also makes specific reference to a commitment to publish a strategy on sexual orientation but no similar commitment for other Section 75 groups. It would be interesting to see the rationale for this decision.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your questionnaire must arrive at the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister no later than **29 October 2010**.