

Lorraine
pl. file under
'review of community
relations policy'

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Memo

From: Jeremy Harbison

Your ref:

Our ref:

Tel:

cc: PS/Mr Loughran

Ms Bunting

Date: 21 August 2001

Ms McAuley

Ms Smyth

To: Mr Haire
Mr Mackenzie
Mr McCusker

Mr Stewart

Mr Hill

REVIEW OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS POLICY

1. You will be aware that earlier this year Mr Mallon announced a review of community relations policy in Northern Ireland following on from a commitment made in the Programme for Government.
2. In his press release Mr Mallon noted that "a key action of the Programme for Government is to review and put in place a cross-Departmental strategy for the promotion of community relations by 2002. It is hoped that this strategy will lead to a significant improvement in community relations, reducing the causes of conflict between the communities especially at the physical interfaces".
3. The Review will take into consideration wider factors affecting current community relations policy and should recommend a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of future policy on community relations issues. The Terms of Reference for the Review are attached [Annex 1].
4. To facilitate discussion with key stakeholders we are currently issuing the attached Working Paper seeking written input by mid-October. In the intervening period we will be holding individual discussions with key participants (including other Departments) and having a number of workshops/seminars for key groups (including voluntary and community organisations, academics, key statutory agencies, etc).

5. Any input into the Review from your respective sides will, of course, be much appreciated.

[Signed by]

J J M HARBISON

REVIEW OF
COMMUNITY RELATIONS
POLICY

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REVIEW OF
COMMUNITY RELATIONS
POLICY

Working Paper

August 2001

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The Programme for Government ⁽¹⁾ set out the Executive's vision that Northern Ireland should become a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society, firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust, with the protection and vindication of human rights for all.

In working together to create a new future the Programme accepted that the Executive had to deal with very deep and painful divisions in our society after decades of division and conflict. It committed the Executive to continue to develop the capacity for compromise and respect, seeking to resolve conflict and creating new links and building trust.

As one of the actions identified, the Programme undertook by 2002 to review and put in place a cross-departmental strategy for the promotion of community relations, leading to measurable improvements in community relations, reducing the causes of conflict between communities.

Earlier this year ⁽²⁾ the Executive announced the establishment of this review and its terms of reference. It emphasised the need for people from all communities and backgrounds to work together and its commitment to tackling the divisions that remain in Northern Ireland society.

The terms of reference (Annex 1) required the review to consider the background to and development of existing community relations policy, to identify their aims and objectives and the policy instruments used to achieve these and to assess the impacts and achievements of current policy. It should consider whether the aims of community relations policy remained appropriate, whether changes were required to existing policy instruments and to consider and recommend a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact on community relations of future policy.

In taking forward the Review the Executive made clear the importance of consulting with key stakeholders, particularly those working in local communities to improve community relations.

BACKGROUND TO PRESENT POLICY POSITION

This working paper is part of the review process. It sets the context and background to current policies, briefly outlines the major policies and programmes and considers their impact, as well as assessing the current state of divisions within Northern Ireland society.

The paper identifies a series of **Key Issues** which should be considered as part of the review process, and seeks comments and views on these (and other relevant) issues by mid- October 2001.

In 1971 a Minister of Community Relations and a Community Relations Commission were established. The Ministry was responsible for advocating policies which would improve community relations and direct resources to areas of social and economic deprivation.

The Commission was broadly modelled on the Race Relations Board in Great Britain and was given a remit of supporting community relations, to act as a bridge, encouraging educational programmes and undertaking a number of research programmes.

The central focus of the Community Relations Commission was raising a community development strategy within communities in order that they might eventually gain the confidence to reach out to the other community. This is described in the Commission's First Annual Report.²⁰

"Our initial consideration of the problem led us to the conclusion that division in the community could not be considered in isolation from other social problems such as relative deprivation and breakdown of community structures. It seems to us that the problems arising from division might more profitably be tackled indirectly in grappling with some of the underlying social problems. We therefore agreed at an early stage to make our approach through community development."

SECTION 2

BACKGROUND TO PRESENT POLICY POSITION

The term "Community Relations" originated in the early 1960s in the United Kingdom as a response to the rise of immigration and subsequent pressures on British society. The approach moved from a concentration on integrating newcomers into British culture as rapidly as possible towards an appreciation of the importance of promoting equality of treatment, human rights and highlighting the distinction between different cultural and national groups.

Government policy in Northern Ireland reflected developments in Great Britain and in 1971 a Minister of Community Relations and a Community Relations Commission were established. The Ministry was responsible for advocating policies which would improve community relations and direct resources to areas of social and economic deprivation.

The Commission was broadly modelled on the Race Relations Board in Great Britain and was given a remit of supporting community relations-focused projects, encouraging education programmes and undertaking a number of research programmes.

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"Our initial consideration of the problem led us to the conclusion that division in the community could not be considered in isolation from other social problems such as relative deprivation and breakdown of community structures. It seems too that the problems arising from division might more profitably be tackled obliquely in grappling with some of the underlying social problems. We therefore agreed at an early stage to make our approach through community development."

After the establishment of the new Power Sharing Executive in 1974 the Community Relations Commission was disbanded on the basis that the new Executive would fulfil the responsibilities previously undertaken by the Commission.

Following the demise of the Community Relations Commission and the subsequent introduction of Direct Rule, responsibility for community relations issues fell to the Department of Education (DENI), local Government and community and voluntary organisations.

Central Community Relations Unit

In the mid 1980s community relations re-emerged as a priority area for Government policy. A convergence of a number of factors led to this development:

- political developments, such as the Anglo Irish Agreement in 1985 which introduced a new dimension in the form of consultation with the Government of the Republic of Ireland, to policy decisions on Northern Ireland and pressure exerted on the United Kingdom Government through US lobby groups to tackle community relations;
- the establishment of the Cultural Traditions Group (an informal group of interested individuals from academic, media, education and art backgrounds) whose aim was to encourage the acceptance of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland society and;
- the completion of two separate reviews of existing policy, one internal Civil Service study carried out within the Central Secretariat and the second completed on behalf of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. ⁽⁴⁾

Both reports were broadly similar in their analysis of community relations issues and led to the then Secretary of State announcing in 1987 a radical re-alignment of the structures for taking forward community relations policy and practice with the formation of the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU). Community relations policy was to have 3 broad objectives:

- to ensure that there was full equality of opportunity and equity of treatment for everyone in Northern Ireland;
- to encourage greater contact between the different communities in Northern Ireland; and
- to encourage greater mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

The new Unit was given 3 functions:

- to provide a challenge mechanism within Government in relation to emerging policies which might have a differential impact on the different communities in Northern Ireland or an effect on relationships between them;
- to undertake a review role in relation to existing policies and programmes; and
- to undertake an innovation role to promote new programmes to encourage greater contact, mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

An inter-departmental committee was also established (chaired at Ministerial level) whose role was to act as an advisory mechanism for the Unit and to consider strategic policy-making in the field of community relations. The Unit, renamed the Community Relations Unit (CRU) and part of OFMDFM following devolution, has responsibility for £5.5 million annual mainstream funding.

Community Relations Council

Following its establishment CCRU began a process of consultation with representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors to explore the possibilities for a new public agency for community relations. The Cultural Traditions Group was influential in these discussions and when Government announced the establishment of the new Community Relations Council (CRC) it was made clear that it would include the themes of both community relations and cultural traditions.

The decision to establish the CRC as independent of Government was based on the view that an 'arms length' approach would allow for wider engagement across Northern Ireland. CRC was established as an independent limited company with charitable status. The CRC is currently managed by a Council consisting of 24 members.

The Council's strategic aim is to help the people of Northern Ireland to recognise and counter the effects of communal division. It does this by:

- providing support for local groups and organisations;
- developing opportunities for cross communal understanding;
- increasing public awareness of community relations work; and
- encouraging constructive debate throughout NI.

The CRC receives funding from the CRU (currently £2.8 million per annum) and grant aid is allocated to:

- the Council's core expenditure;

- the Council's programme expenditure in grant aiding schemes;
- core funding of reconciliation bodies; and
- core funding of cultural traditions bodies.

In addition to support from CRU, the Council worked in the EU Peace Programme between 1995 and 1999 and was responsible for the EU Measure 'Promoting Pathways to Reconciliation'.

District Council Community Relations Programme

The need to develop community relations activities at a more local level was identified and considerable thought was given by CCRU as to how such a programme might be initiated, particularly at a period when there was considerable continuing tensions between some Councils and Government on closely associated issues. In developing the new programme, Government established a number of criteria to be met before Councils could participate in the new programme.

These included:

- that Councils must agree on a cross-party basis to participation in the scheme;
- Councils had to draw up a community relations policy statement;
- the policy statement and the programmes undertaken had to be agreed on a cross-party basis;
- Councils had to appoint a Community Relation's Officer through public advertisement for their area.

- Projects had to include cross-community contact, mutual understanding or cultural diversity;

The aims of the District Council Community Relations Programme (DCCRP) established at its inception in 1989 remain. These are to:

- develop cross community contact and cooperation;
- promote greater mutual understanding;
- increase respect for cultural traditions.

Current funding of the Programme is £1.8 million per annum.

Educational Developments

A further main area of community relations development in the 1980s and 1990's related to policy in education. In 1982 DENI published a circular on 'Improvement of Community Relations: the contribution of schools' ⁽⁵⁾

This stated that:

"Every teacher, every school manager, Board member and trustee, and every educational administrator within the system, has a responsibility for helping children to learn to understand and respect each other, and their different customs and traditions, and of preparing them to live together in harmony in adult life."

The Schools Cross Community Contact Scheme was established in 1987 to support greater contact between Catholic and Protestant young people and in 1988 funding was made available to voluntary reconciliation organisations and cultural traditions bodies which operated in support of community relations initiatives in schools. In the 1989 Education Reform Order

two cross-curricular community relations programmes were introduced: Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage. The Order also included measures to support the development of integrated education.

DENI's Strategic Plan for Education 1996-2000 identified community relations as one of four themes for priority action and identified the three main forms of action as:

- cross-community contact programmes involving young people;
- Education for Mutual Understanding within the NI curriculum; and
- support for the development of integrated education.

Since 1996, the Schools Community Relations Programme (formerly the Cross-Community Contact Scheme) has been administered by the Education and Library Boards. This Programme provides a valuable opportunity to develop and implement school EMU policies and extend classroom work in EMU by developing community relations through links between schools.

DENI also supported many voluntary reconciliation groups who were engaged in programmes which contribute to the improvement of community relations and which involved young people in Northern Ireland up to the age of 25. These groups work in a variety of ways: with individual schools in developing effective community relations programmes, or with organisations which might concentrate on staff development work with teachers.

Current mainstream Community Relations funding is £3.4 million per annum (excluding integrated education).

Integrated Education

A significant development in education in Northern Ireland over the past 20 years has been the creation of a number of integrated schools which are attended in roughly equal numbers by Protestant and Catholic children. In 1981 Lagan College opened as an independent school funded through charitable trust, foundations and voluntary fund raising. By 1989 around 1,400 pupils were enrolled in the 10 integrated schools (5 grant aided and 5 independent).

Since 1990, the Education Reform Order has placed a statutory duty on the Department of Education to "encourage and facilitate" the development of integrated education. This is defined as "the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils". Under this legislation new integrated schools qualify for a recurrent grant immediately provided they meet the minimum criteria. Following a review of the viability criteria in late 2000, those for new primary schools were reduced and a review of the viability criteria for secondary schools is underway. In addition procedures are in place for transforming existing schools to integrated status.

Integrated schools are eligible for 100% funding for their running costs. In the case of new schools, grants for capital development are not available until viability has been established but the school can get assistance with their initial costs from the Integrated Education Fund.

At September 2000 there were 44 integrated schools of which 16 are secondary and 12 are transformed schools. Their aggregate enrolment is over 14,000 pupils, just over 4% of total pupil numbers. There is currently one independent integrated primary school.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

The Department of Education and, following devolution, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, has supported programmes and activities which incorporate community relations objectives, usually in the context of a wider social inclusion or community development framework. Examples include the support of community relations activities funded through the Arts Council, Sports Council and other funded bodies, the promotion of minority languages and efforts to tackle sectarianism in sport.

Housing

Housing issues have been closely interlinked with communal problems in Northern Ireland. The Cameron report into civil disturbances in 1969⁽⁶⁾ concluded that "Council housing policy was distorted for political ends". The reform process which followed led to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as the single, central comprehensive social housing agency. Supplying and improving public housing became a cornerstone of social progress. Housing in Northern Ireland was transformed from being one of inefficiency and policy abuse to one of the most effective, professional and proficient in Europe, unfitness of housing in Northern Ireland reducing from 27% in 1974 to 9% in 1984.

The improvement of public sector housing happened against a trend of increasing residential segregation, violence and the introduction of 'peace lines' to manage community conflict. This trend produced significant problems and complications for the NIHE and their analysis emphasised the structural complexity of the issue and the limits on a social housing agency to address the problems of sectarianism.

The Belfast Agreement ⁽⁷⁾ makes specific commitment to promoting integrated housing and to help people to have the right to freely choose a place of

residence and to live in peace. The subsequent Northern Ireland Act placed a duty on the NIHE, as on other public bodies, to promote good relations.

In 1999 the Housing Executive published a consultation paper 'Towards a Community Relations Strategy' ⁽⁸⁾ which set their analysis of the issues and scope for action. The document acknowledged the housing management aspect to violence and community segregation which included:

- intimidation and segregation are working against the Executive's policy of offering choice to applications;
- it has led to vacant dwellings in particular areas with significant cost;
- the levels of intimidation have produced major pressures on the Executive to secure re-housing; and
- it is becoming increasingly difficult in some areas to re-house mixed religious households.

The policy statement reaffirmed the Housing Executive's stance against violence and concentrated on four related areas: on the control of intimidation; addressing interface violence; treatment of symbols including murals, graffiti and curb stone painting, and addressing segregated housing.

Against these developments, the NIHE estimates that around 70% of estates are segregated, although public surveys do suggest that around the same proportion of people would prefer to live in mixed housing.

The NIHE has recently developed its position and has adopted a wider, comprehensive approach which recognises that community relations covers a spectrum ranging from programmes designed to improve the personal safety of individual residents in all neighbourhoods, through to improving the relationship

between segregated estates and has developed a Community Relations – Community Safety Plan ⁽⁹⁾.

The Government Regional Strategic Framework ⁽¹⁰⁾ which was published for consultation in late 1998 set out the strategic planning context and priorities for the region over the next 25 years. One Guideline aims “to foster development which contributes to community relations, recognises cultural diversity and reduces socio economic differentials”. The strategy adopts a dual approach which facilitates the development of integrated communities but recognises the desire for communities to live apart. Providing neutral spaces, accessible places of employment and safe public transport options were to be promoted.

- the parliamentary estate first in the early to mid 1970s
 - the Belfast Agreement and the subsequent establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland;
 - the introduction of key legislation relating to equality and human rights
 - the development through the 1990s of Targeting Social Need as a key policy priority for the Government and its subsequent endorsement in the Belfast Agreement;
 - the major involvement of the EU in Northern Ireland through its Structural Programme and particularly the establishment of the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation which included the introduction and development of District Partnerships at local level with a Peace and Reconciliation remit;
 - the development of IRI community relations programmes.
- The following paragraphs consider the relevance of these developments to the current review.

SECTION 3

THE CHANGING CONTEXT

Introduction

The policies and delivery programmes briefly described earlier were first established in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Northern Ireland community remained involved in overt conflict and associated high levels of violence. The recent process of political development in Northern Ireland has produced significant political, social, legislative and policy changes in Northern Ireland of relevance to community relations. These include:

- the paramilitary cease-fires in the early to mid 1990s;
- the Belfast Agreement and the subsequent establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland;
- the introduction of key legislation relating to equality and human rights;
- the development through the 1990s of Targeting Social Need as a key policy priority for the Government and its subsequent endorsement in the Belfast Agreement;
- the major involvement of the EU in Northern Ireland through its Structural Programme and particularly the establishment of the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, which included the introduction and development of District Partnerships at local level with a Peace and Reconciliation remit;
- the development of IFI community relations programmes.

The following paragraphs consider the relevance of these developments to the current review.

Political Developments

Since the present community relations policies, structures and programmes were established in the late 1980s there has been radical change in the political environment within which these operate. The ongoing peace process, covering the paramilitary cease fires, the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 and its subsequent endorsement through a referendum led to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1999.

The participants in the negotiation of the Belfast Agreement dedicated themselves to “the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all”.

The structure of the democratic institutions put in place, the safeguards built in to ensure that all sections of the community can participate and work together successfully and the emphasis on the explicit identification of Unionist and Nationalist ‘designation’ in the Assembly process reinforce the importance of shared government between different communities. Further, the provisions in the Agreement relating to issues such as release of prisoners, the promotion of language diversity and work with victims have particular significance for community relations.

Participants to the Agreement recognised the importance of developing reconciliation and mutual understanding and respect between and within communities and traditions in Northern Ireland. They noted “ an essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.”

The provisions of the Belfast Agreement, translated through the 1998 Northern Ireland Act, led to the establishment of devolved Government and the publication by the Executive of its Programme for Government. This was endorsed earlier this year by the Assembly and commits the Executive to addressing directly religious and political divisions in Northern Ireland, and

seeks to create greater mutual understanding and respect for diversity among communities. Throughout, the Programme highlights the interconnectedness of community relations and the promotion of equality and human rights.

Legislative Developments

The period since the current policies were established has also seen significant developments in legislation which have major implications for community relations policies.

The Human Rights Act (1998) which came into force across the United Kingdom in 2000 requires public authorities to act in compliance with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (unless prevented from doing so by statutory rules). The Act seeks to uphold a series of rights covering social and political issues, a number of which have important community relations implications. These would include Article 9 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion covering acts of observance and religious holidays, Article 10 on freedom of expression and Article 14 on prohibition of discrimination.

The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 prohibits discrimination on racial grounds in employment and training, education and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. The term "racial grounds" is defined in the Order as colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins and specifically includes the grounds of belonging to the Irish Traveller community.

The Fair Employment Acts of 1976 and 1989 prohibited discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion in employment and training generally. The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 extends the scope of this protection to the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland to have due regard to

the need to promote equality of opportunity. Without prejudice to these obligations on promoting equality of opportunity, a public authority is also required:

“in carrying out its functions to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group”.

In its Guidance ⁽¹¹⁾ the Equality Commission emphasises that the ‘good relations duty’ extends beyond the religious/political dimension of community relations and that consideration of the needs and interests of minority ethnic groups, including Irish Travellers is important in this context. The Guidance indicates that every public authority in Northern Ireland must now, as a universal rule of practice, take both factors properly into account in the way they carry out their functions relating to Northern Ireland.

Public authorities are each required to produce an Equality Scheme stating how they propose to fulfil these duties and schemes must be submitted to the Equality Commission for approval. In the development of their Equality Schemes Public Bodies must consult with those likely to be affected by their schemes. By June 2000 all public bodies were required to develop Equality Schemes demonstrating how they would build these new requirements into their policies and service provision. There is also a need for the bodies to conduct equality impact assessments of new and existing policies, and these should include an annex showing how the body will promote good relations.

New TSN

The New Targeting Social Need initiative, identified within the Belfast Agreement as one measure to achieve equality of opportunity, is an underpinning principle in the Programme for Government.

New TSN ⁽¹²⁾ operates in 3 linked ways, a special focus on the problems of unemployed people to increase their chances of finding a job, targeting other

aspects of social need such as health, housing and education and a series of special initiatives attempting to meet the needs of people who are disadvantaged in several ways, to such an extent that they are unable to enjoy the full range of life opportunities which most people take for granted.

The policy aims to contribute to the reduction of inequalities among different sections of society. For example, evidence collected over a number of years shows that, compared with Protestants, Catholics in Northern Ireland are over-represented among the unemployed and that consequently they fare less well than Protestants in some socio-economic indicators such as income. Other groups, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, may be multi-disadvantaged. The first 'Promoting Social Inclusion' initiative included consideration of the needs of Ethnic Minority People and of Travellers.

By consistently addressing the problems of people who are objectively shown to be in greatest social need, New TSN should over time contribute to the erosion of social inequalities.

EU Programmes

During the 1990s EU Programmes and funding support became an important driver for community relations action.

The Northern Ireland Single Programme (NISP) supported the economic and social development of Northern Ireland over the period of 1994-1999. The aim of the NISP was to promote economic and social cohesion and one sub programme (Physical and Social Environment Sub Programme) included a specific measure on Community Relations designed to address issues of reconciliation between the main sections of the community in Northern Ireland. It sought to increase the level of cross-community contact, to encourage greater mutual understanding of and respect for different cultures and traditions in the region and to develop a body of information on community relations theory and practice. The total EU grant available was approximately £17 million.

Following the paramilitary cease-fires announced in 1994 the EU sought to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation through a special Peace Programme announced in 1995. One priority objective was to promote peace and reconciliation by encouraging grass roots and cross-community co-operation, as well as action to address specific difficulties faced by vulnerable groups and others at a disadvantage such as victims, children, young people and those previously caught up in violence including prisoners and ex-prisoners.

A specific measure on 'Promoting Pathways to Reconciliation' supported opportunities for enhanced cross-community contact, facilitated cross-community partnerships and developed innovative models for community reconciliation. Funding of £7 million supported this measure, which was delivered through the CRC. A further Sub Programme established District Partnerships in each of the 26 District Council areas. Each District Partnership comprised one-third elected members, one-third voluntary/community sector members and one-third other interest such as business, trade unions and statutory agencies. The specific role of the District Partnerships were:

- representing a voice of concern and the needs of all the different stake holders in the area;
- supporting and developing a peace building vision; and
- becoming a positive model for wider community relations within the area.

Over £80 million in total was allocated to the District Partnership programme.

The second EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, which will cover the period 2001-2006, also contains a community relations measure 'Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace'. The main objective is to provide opportunities for civil society to promote reconciliation and peace-

building efforts and to encourage communities in the areas which had previously experienced violence and polarisation to develop strategies and activities which promote reconciliation as a means to sustaining peace. Funding of around £12 million will be available for this measure over the period.

International Fund for Ireland

Since the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) was established in 1986, it has supported specific community relations projects. Following the establishment of the CCRU and the CRC, the Fund introduced a new Community Bridges Programme which sought to support activities which:

- developed the capacity of communities to address issues of conflict and division at interface areas in Northern Ireland;
- increased the capacity of local groups or communities to develop strategies tackling intimidation or sectarianism at a community or an organisational level;
- developed sustainable and meaningful cross-border partnerships;
- involved and empowered marginalised youth in community relations and/or cross-border work;
- involved local groups, particularly in areas designated as disadvantaged or which had experienced high degrees of violence and polarisation; and
- involved centre-based community relations and/or cross-border programmes.

Over the period 1996-2001 around £8 million was provided by the Fund to support the Community Bridges Programme.

Conclusions

The last decade of the 20th century has seen major political, structural and legislative changes in Northern Ireland which bear heavily on community relations issues. The changes include:

- the introduction of major new programmes and funding from the EU and the IFI explicitly linked to reconciliation and healing community divisions;
- the introduction of the New TSN initiative which requires all public bodies to tackle disadvantage by directing their efforts and resources towards individuals, groups and areas in greatest need;
- the political agreements which led to the establishment of the NI Assembly, the Executive and the publication of the Programme for Government with major commitments for action to reduce divisions in society; and
- the raft of legislation including Section 75 of the NI Act which requires public authorities to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between groups in Northern Ireland.

These developments emphasise not only the extending activities and widening appreciation of issues relating to community relations, but require the current Review to consider their implications for its recommendations on the policies, programmes and delivery mechanisms to reduce the divisions in our society against these broader concepts of promoting cultural, religious and political pluralism.

SECTION 4

DIVISIONS IN SOCIETY: NORTHERN IRELAND TODAY

Introduction

The Programme for Government commits the Executive to improving community relations and tackling the divisions in Northern Ireland society. This section considers briefly available material on the extent of, and trends in, communal divisions over the past 10-15 years ⁽¹³⁾.

Attitudes between communities

Survey data on changes in community attitudes within Northern Ireland are now available, collected from the late 1980s through to the present. This material has been used to measure changes in the attitudes of communities towards each other and assess their perception of tolerance, prejudice and social distance.

The most recent analyses suggests that whilst there has been a general improvement in community relations attitudes between Protestants and Catholics since the 1980s, over the most recent period (1996 onwards) there are suggestions of a decrease in levels of tolerance and respect for diversity. There is also some evidence that the Protestant and Catholic communities have developed notably different attitudes on a range of issues associated with improving community relations. In general, Catholics seem more amenable to efforts to promote cross-community contact and are more confident that their rights and cultural conditions will be protected. This is contrasted to a perceived sense of mistrust and unease within the Protestant community.

Research on attitudes towards race relations in Northern Ireland and the nature and prevalence of racial prejudice has suggested that issues of race and ethnicity are significant. In terms of statements of general principle over 80% of the population tend to express positive and liberal attitudes towards aspects of

race relations. However, with more specific issues which might effect respondents more personally, racial attitudes tend to be significantly more negative. Around a quarter of all the subjects in the study indicated an unwillingness to accept various racial minorities as residents in their local area and over 2 out of 5 people said they were unwilling to accept ethnic minority members as close friends. The study suggested that racial prejudice appears to be twice as significant as sectarian prejudice in the attitudes of the population in Northern Ireland. Moreover, negative attitudes towards specific minority ethnic groups appear to have worsened over the past few years.

Community Relations at Grass Roots Level

Studies of the impact of community relations initiatives at local level indicate a more positive impact. Looking at such outcomes as a greater understanding of cultural diversity, increased willingness to engage in shared working and in an ability to influence wider political processes, the evidence indicates a substantial level of success for community relations interventions at local level.

Education

Whilst the number of integrated primary and secondary schools has been increasing steadily, and in 2000/2001 there were over 14,000 pupils in integrated education, this represented only 4 percent of the total enrolments in schools in Northern Ireland. Most of pupils in integrated schools were at secondary level (over 60%) but this still only represented just over 5½% of the numbers in secondary level education.

Housing

Some research has indicated progressively higher levels of residential segregation in Northern Ireland over the last 20 years with a majority of people choosing to live in polarised districts. Predictably, segregation has increased most in areas experiencing high levels of violence.

The NIHE reports that currently over 70% of public sector housing estates are segregated (using a threshold of 10% present for either religion). The NIHE also reports a continuing trend in some mixed housing estates towards greater segregation. Compounding the problem over the last few years, such increasing segregation has been accompanied by an increase in sectarian related graffiti, flags, curb painting and other manifestations of paramilitary association and cultural/political identity. Problems in estates on interface areas have been particularly severe: in 1999 the NIHE reported that 20 estates in 9 districts were significantly affected by interface violence. Intimidation has increased in highly contested areas and in an effort to tackle this, new peace walls have been erected and others strengthened in interface areas of our two main cities.

Crime

A number of indicators relating to community relations and divisions in society are available. These show:

- In terms of various paramilitary activities (deaths, shootings, bombing and incendiaries) incidents dropped to their minimum in the year after the ceasefire but have since then shown a progressive and continuing increase;
- Paramilitary policing of their own areas (manifesting itself in punishment attacks) has increased since the ceasefire and is now at higher levels than at the start of the 1990s;
- The last five years has seen a dramatic increase in the reporting of racist incidents to the police (up almost 8 fold from 1996 to 2000).

Conclusion

The evidence reviewed above does not suggest that significant progress has been made towards a more tolerant or inclusive society. Despite some positive evidence at grass roots level, and significant increase in the number of integrated schools and children attending them, the amount of sharing in our society in education, housing and personal relationships remains limited. Attitudes and tolerance between Protestant, Catholic and Ethnic Minority Communities continues to portray low levels of tolerance or appreciation of diversity, and measures of crime suggest increasing levels of sectarian violence.

SECTION 5

IMPLICATIONS AND ISSUES

Implications

The changing context of community relations raises important issues for current policies and programmes. A number of recent studies have drawn attention to the impact of the changed environment on the current status and structures of the policy instruments currently operated.

A recent evaluation of the CRC⁽¹⁴⁾ considered the impact and cost effectiveness of the Council in delivering its community relations aims and objectives in the period 1998-2001. The study noted the rapidly changing environment in which the CRC operated and which had major implications for the Council and the activities supported by it. It reviewed the original rationale for establishing the Council as an independent and charitable organisation which reflected the view that Government was not best placed to engage grass roots constituencies in community relation activities. The review however concluded "that recent political dynamics had fundamentally altered the community relations environment and raises questions over the appropriateness of the current status of the Council". Given the priority accorded to promoting community relations in the Programme for Government the review proposed that consideration should be given to changing the status of the CRC to that of an executive Non Departmental Body. Such a change, it was suggested, would strengthen the relationship between policy making and policy implementation and would give a clear focus to the direction and delivery of community relations policy in Northern Ireland.

A further evaluation of the District Council Community Relations Programme⁽¹⁵⁾ also highlighted the changed context in which the Programme now operated. The review noted the profound implications of these changes for the Programme and concluded that whilst the original aims were appropriate for the context at the time of its inception, the changes which have occurred indicated

that its aims need to be radically reviewed and a greater emphasis placed on mainstreaming community relations. Options to develop a permanent locally-based community relations programme should be considered.

A recent report to the Department of Education ⁽¹⁶⁾ included consideration of the development of community relations policy in education. Whilst noting the extent of work in the area and acknowledging the difficult and sensitive nature of the work undertaken by many teachers and others in the education service, the review noted that community relations objectives must move from the periphery to the core of the education service. The Minister and the Department “each has a responsibility to promote mutual understanding and respect for diversity as a seminal purpose of the education service”. The report goes on to conclude:

“significant challenges face contemporary society in Northern Ireland and processes to promote social inclusion and accommodate cultural diversity must be developed.”

In its response the Department endorsed the over-riding principle to demonstrate leadership and commitment to the promotion of a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity. Following the report the Department is taking forward many of its recommendations to strengthen and widen the role and status of EMU and Cultural Heritage across the educational system and to meet its commitment to pluralism.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has also been reviewing its policies in relation to community relations and diversity. It has recently adopted a more strategic approach to cultural diversity following the Face-to-Face Report ⁽¹⁷⁾ which identified as a primary theme striving for:

“an increased understanding of, and for, the communities in Northern Ireland, which will moderate attitudes relating to difference and division, challenge stereotyping and encourage positive attitudes towards cultural diversity”.

The report recommended support for opportunities for expression, education, exploration, exchange and debate on cultural diversity, and proposed:

- the development and implementation of a cultural diversity policy;
- the establishment of an annual cultural diversity budget;
- the development of cultural diversity policies, posts and programmes for resource providers, community arts development organisations, voluntary groups and education centres; and
- the mainstreaming of cultural objectives in Government policy.

The Department has established a Cultural Diversity Branch which will lead on the implementation of these actions.

Issues for Consideration

The paper has outlined the background to and development of existing community relations policy, considered some of the wider factors affecting current community relations policy, and provided a brief assessment of the impact and achievements of current policy and practice set against the wider picture of divisions within society in Northern Ireland. Several key issues are raised by this assessment.

The Programme for Government sets out the Executive Committee's vision for "a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society, firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and the protection and vindication of the human rights of all". A policy to promote better community relations and tackle the divisions in Northern Ireland must agree as to the vision of what a community relations policy is trying to achieve.

Q1 What is the vision for community relations which the policy should strive to promote?

A shared community relations vision for the future for Northern Ireland is essential, but for policy, strategic approach and practice this vision must lead to a number of desired outcomes which can then become a set of aims and objectives for Government to deliver through its strategic approach.

Q2 What main aims or outcomes should the policy set if this vision is to be achieved?

The paper has outlined the current aims of community relations policy and the existing approaches or policy instruments used to meet these aims.

Q3 Are the current aims of community relations policy still appropriate in the light of the changed context in Northern Ireland?

Q4 Are the current approaches or policy instruments still appropriate?

The recently completed review of the Community Relations Council has highlighted the fundamental changes in the community relations environment and identified possible implications of these for the appropriateness of the current status of the Council.

Q5 What should the future role and status of the Community Relations Council be?

The evaluation of the District Council Community Relations Programme also emphasised the changed context within which this programme now operates and questioned whether the aims of the programme remain the most appropriate in the current context. It also recommended that options to develop a permanent, locally-based community relations programme should be considered.

Q6 What should be the future of the District Council Community Relations Programme.

Q7 What options are there to develop a permanent, locally-based community relations programme?

The divisions within society in Northern Ireland are clear, enduring and pervasive. It is of fundamental importance that the impact of future policy initiatives is assessed. The issue of how to measure the impact of policies and initiatives on community relations continues to be a problem. The recent evaluation of the CRC, whilst noting the shortcomings in monitoring and evaluation approaches refuted the view that community relations cannot be measured and recommended accordingly.

Q8 How best can the impact on community relations of future policy be measured to allow appropriate monitoring and evaluation to take place?

An inter-departmental group chaired at ministerial level was originally set up to ensure the co-ordination of community relations action across departments. This group has not developed and there is little current cross-departmental co-operation in community relations work.

Q9 What are the most effective structures within Government in Northern Ireland to drive forward this work?

The review is required to recommend a cross-departmental strategy which tackles the divisions in society in Northern Ireland, which the Executive wish to have in place by 2002.

Q10 What other issues should feed into this strategy?

SECTION 6

WAY AHEAD

The terms of reference for the review stresses the importance of engaging with key stakeholders, including those working in local communities to improve community relations. This working paper is one stage in that engagement and the review team welcome comments and responses to the review and particularly to the key issues raised in this section. The closing date for comments and responses is 19 October 2001.



FOOTNOTES, REFERENCES

- ◆ Responses to the Review of Community Relations Policy Working Paper should be made to:

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- ◆ This document is available on the Community Relations Unit website at www.ccruni.gov.uk.

- ◆ Additional copies are also available by telephoning the above number.

- ◆ This document is available in alternative formats on request.

(1) Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1999). Towards a Community Relations Strategy – a consultation paper. Belfast.

(5) Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2000). Community Relations and Community Safety Implementation Paper. Belfast.

(10) Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) (1995). Shaping Our Future: Draft Strategic Planning Framework for Northern Ireland. Belfast. HMSO.