

Full
46/2001

FOREWORD

To the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Minister for Social Development

Dear Ministers

You called the three of us together last December, with the support of the six North Belfast Members of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Frazer Agnew, Mr Fred Cobain, Mr Nigel Dodds, Mr Billy Hutchinson, Mr Gerry Kelly and Mr Alban Maginness. You gave us a task which we have found demanding from beginning to end. Nevertheless, we are conscious that however demanding we have found the challenge it pales into insignificance compared with the problems which many people face on a day to day basis in North Belfast.

In the Report we have described in some detail the conditions under which many people have to live. While statistics are illuminating, there is no substitute for visiting some of the most troubled areas and hearing and seeing at first hand what it is like to live there. We have been touched and moved by what we have heard. In some of the interface areas there is not only physical dereliction, there is social decay, ill health, uncertainty, violence, and a considerable amount of fear. The stories which we have listened to tell of conflict, anger and stress.

Yet it must be said that North Belfast also includes some of the most pleasant and convenient parts of Belfast in which to live as well as some of the best schools and social amenities in Northern Ireland. Even within the most troubled communities there is a high degree of energy and a deep desire for a peaceful future.

Many people give voluntarily of their time to help in many community projects in order to improve the quality of life of people of all ages who live in their neighbourhoods. We applaud such people, but we have heard from them of the temporary nature of much of the assistance for the projects in which they are involved and in the course of our consultations we met many people who, within days, were on the point of losing their jobs when the funding finished.

While we were asked to address social and community issues, especially that of community capacity, we want to acknowledge the importance of representative democracy and the work of MPs, MLAs and Councillors who, we are convinced, work hard in the interests of the people they represent.

CS/2205-2/4

Sectarianism is widespread in Northern Ireland crossing social, religious and political barriers. It diminishes all of us who are affected by it and makes us less than we ought to be. Nowhere are its debilitating effects more keenly felt than in the sharp verbal and physical exchanges which are so characteristic of the interface areas. Those who have not lived in these areas need to be careful about rushing to judgment in condemnation of their fellow citizens who have lived through the worst effects of the 'Troubles' and currently have to endure what is unacceptable.

We have found that North Belfast is a patchwork of small communities in which people have an intense sense of belonging. In a peaceful world such diversity could be a cause of enrichment. The trouble is there is such suspicion and fear that this patchwork quilt is not stitched together but is constantly being torn apart. The American Sociologist of Religion, Robert Bellah wrote that as well as the physical universe needing attention, so also does the social universe because it is damaged "not only by war, genocide and political oppression. It is also damaged by the destruction of the subtle ties that bind human beings to one another, leaving them frightened and alone."

Those subtle ties are in urgent need of restoration in North Belfast. Major attitudinal change is essential if there is going to be a future different from the past.

While we have tried to describe what we have found without apportioning blame for specific incidents, it cannot be the case that extensive rioting, intimidation, drug dealing, violence, attacks on the Police and social instability have any acceptable place in a peaceful present or a decent future.

We cannot overstate the significance of this problem or its potential to destabilise other parts of Belfast and of Northern Ireland. We have been told that the situation in some areas is getting worse. While assistance is necessary from outside the area, such assistance must help local people, at all levels, to have the confidence and generosity of spirit to constructively tackle their local problems which are often the result of the breakdown of relationships and therefore of trust. Everyone has a responsibility to play a constructive part in this matter. Co-operation is essential otherwise the additional assistance we are calling for will be wasted.

North Belfast has the capacity to absorb resources, destroy people, impoverish children and destabilise other parts of Northern Ireland. The price of failure to address and resolve the issues is high and is made up of direct and indirect costs.

The direct costs include: the enormous cost of policing, the high cost of caring for an increasingly unhealthy population and the costs of intensive social support across several agencies.

The indirect costs include: a diminished sense of self-worth, sapping of confidence, lost opportunities, resistance to economic development, recurring cycles of violence and disorder, the waste of human potential and damage to the image of Belfast and Northern Ireland.

The decline in North Belfast cannot be arrested unless it is considered a priority case for intensive care over a number of years. We are not suggesting that it be provided with an expensive life-support machine forever but it does need intensive attention so that it can get up on its feet and walk with confidence into the future. The additional assistance which this Report calls for must be targeted and used for shaping a vibrant, sustainable and therefore different future which will be marked by confidence, tolerance and co-operation at all levels.

It is very important that the North Belfast communities can see that action is planned as a result of the Report and that the capacity of malign influences to continue to promote hopelessness is curbed by Government's clear determination to act.

To that end the Team would like to see Government agree the following:

- a commitment to recognise that North Belfast needs urgent special treatment;

- a recognition that improvement must be based on sustainability, partnership and a joined up approach by Government and others;

- a commitment to create a dedicated unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister working, through a Departmental Steering Group, with the Department for Social Development to lead a plan of action aimed at improving life for the communities in North Belfast;

- additional ear-marked funding of £3million per year ideally for a 5 year period (or at minimum a 3 year period with a review before the end of 3 years) to facilitate community capacity building and to encourage communities to engage in partnership working with agencies and one another;

the creation, through this dedicated unit, of arrangements to facilitate a greater degree of integration in Government and Agency work in North Belfast;

this unit to take the lead in co-ordinating a Government response to interface issues;

additional resources to address health and education issues;

support for projects to lift the spirit and morale of communities in North Belfast; and

support in principle for major physical redevelopment projects.

We alone are responsible for the contents of this Report but we want to record our thanks to all those who contributed to our work, especially the Advisory Forum nominated by the North Belfast Members of the Legislative Assembly and the members of the small, hard working Secretariat who were seconded to the Project. We appreciate the trouble many people took to attend the public consultations and others who made verbal and written submissions. Many people who made contributions about the needs of their areas will find much of that material in the appendices. This will provide a challenge for what needs to be done following the presentation of this Report in the pursuit of the creation of a potentially beautiful patchwork quilt, which is North Belfast.

We thank you for the privilege of being asked to address an urgent and important problem and we commend this Report.

JOHN DUNLOP

ROY ADAMS

TOM TONER

29th May 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Belfast Community Action Project ("the Project") is a joint initiative of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the Department for Social Development, with the co-operation of the six North Belfast Members of the Legislative Assembly. It was officially launched on 3 December 2001.

The Project's vision is the eventual creation of a vibrant and sustainable community in North Belfast that is influential in supporting peace building.

The Project's area of study covers the communities within the boundary of the Belfast North Parliamentary Constituency area which stretches from the Shankill to Rathcoole.

We were guided by the following Terms of Reference:

"To put in place a plan of short, medium and long-term actions to address social and community issues in North Belfast. It will focus in particular on building community capacity in those areas in which this is weak. In addition to maintaining the current level of service, the project will focus on producing very outcomes and practical assistance to local communities."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Report we have described in some detail the conditions under which many people have to live. While statistics are illuminating, there is no substitute for visiting some of the most troubled areas and hearing and seeing at first hand what it is like to live there. We have been touched and moved by what we have heard. In some of the interface areas there is not only physical dereliction, there is social decay, ill health, uncertainty, violence, and a considerable amount of fear. The stories to which we have listened tell of conflict, anger and stress.

Yet, it must be said, North Belfast also includes some of the most pleasant and convenient parts of Belfast in which to live and contains some of the best schools and social amenities in Northern Ireland. Even within the most troubled communities there is a high degree of energy and a deep desire for a peaceful future.

Analysis

Our analysis of the issues facing North Belfast is based upon consultations, presentations, research and actions already taken on the ground. From our analysis we have concluded the following:

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"To put in place a plan of short, medium and long-term actions to address social and community issues in North Belfast. It will focus in particular on building community capacity in those areas in which this is weak in addition to maintaining community activity where this is working well. The project will focus on producing early outcomes and practical assistance to local communities."

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Analysis

Our analysis of the issues facing North Belfast is based upon consultations, presentations, research and actions already taken on the ground. From our analysis we have concluded the following:

North Belfast is a patchwork of small communities, often separated by walls and 'peacelines', in which people have an intense sense of belonging. The issue of territoriality – particularly acute in the context of housing - has become a highly emotive subject and it has damaged already fragile relations between the two communities. Because of fear, people are not prepared to travel through some areas and find it difficult to access shops, jobs, post offices, health centres, leisure facilities and schools.

Territoriality is arguably the most contentious issue in North Belfast and reflects itself in overcrowding in Catholic/Nationalist areas and vacant spaces in some Protestant/Unionist areas. The rapidly changing population profile of the area, with a young and growing Catholic population, compared to an ageing and declining Protestant population, is a source of concern to Protestants, who see themselves being 'squeezed out' of the area. Housing conditions in the Protestant communities of North Belfast are substantially worse than those in Catholic areas. The Catholic community, on the other hand, feel that their need for housing is not being taken seriously and that they are trapped behind 'walls of fear' even though there may be available space within Protestant areas. The North Belfast Housing Strategy is based upon the premise that the demands of both communities can be met within the timescale of the Strategy without any territorial shift.

'Sectarianism' is widespread in Northern Ireland and crosses social, religious and political barriers. It finds its most destructive form in interfaces particularly when the two communities are so closely jammed together that avoidance is impossible and where markers of distinction in the form of flags, murals, election posters and street names become sources of conflict. Such sectarianism diminishes all of us who are affected by it.

It is clear, both from the experiences of people living and working in North Belfast and from the Police figures, that the issue of sectarian interface violence remains a serious and recurrent problem across the area. The primary responsibility for dealing with public disorder and sectarian violence in interface areas, when it breaks out, should rest with the Police. However the responsibility for the improvement of community relationships lies with the communities themselves and their leaders as well as with the Police and the elected political representatives. Building relationships between the Police and local communities and between the communities and their leaders will increase feelings of safety and assist in defusing potential riot situations.

There is a lack of understanding and consequential mistrust of 'the other side'. 'Segregated living' has become part of North Belfast's spatial and social fabric

with many residents now feeling that they need to live among those who share their identity and outlook. This is particularly relevant in interface areas where the problem of sectarianism is seen in its most destructive form. Innovative approaches to break down divisions in the area are required.

Reporting details of life in North Belfast presents a challenge to the media. When communities feel that their convictions have not been explained, and the underlying issues have not been sympathetically explored, they are left with the feeling that they have not been heard and their alienation deepens.

In social and economic terms some parts of North Belfast are prosperous while others suffer from multiple disadvantage, with even the relatively affluent areas containing pockets of major deprivation. The area has the capacity to absorb resources, destroy people, impoverish children and destabilise other parts of Northern Ireland and for that reason there is a need for urgent special treatment.

North Belfast has suffered from a serious lack of investment over recent decades. The division and polarisation which existed, and still exists, discourages inward investment. There is a need to overcome division and restructure the local economy to provide lasting job opportunities together with the basic skills necessary to access employment.

Overall educational standards in the area are low, notwithstanding the existence of a number of very good schools and a perceptible improvement in the performance of some of the other schools. Parental and communal support for mainstream education is often low and there are areas where pre-school provision is grossly inadequate.

North Belfast has some of the poorest health and social care indices in Northern Ireland, with high incidences of cancer, asthma, bronchitis and other diseases, partly because of the high level of deprivation and relatively poor housing. Our Report draws attention to the problems of substance abuse and mental health which are prevalent throughout the area as well as suicides among young people. These health problems have been exacerbated by the fact that, in the last 30 years, North Belfast has experienced the highest levels of 'Troubles' related deaths and injuries of any area in Northern Ireland and continues to host bitter internecine and sectarian conflict.

There is little chance of improving people's standard of living and overall quality of life, in a sustainable way, without their collaborative participation in planning processes. This requires community capacity building, leading to empowerment.

Issues of finding and dealing with interface tensions. During the course of our Project we committed almost £100,000 to carry out projects in encouraging

There are some associated with them who try to exercise constructive leadership and have worked to improve their communities and in some cases to build relationships across the divides. However, there are others who exercise a malign influence and are barriers to progress.

Criminality associated with protection rackets and drug dealing depletes the financial, social and human assets of the community, impairs the quality of life and destroys the spirit of enterprise. There is a need for everyone with influence to redouble their efforts to convince communities including paramilitaries on all sides - that violence, division, conflict and instability are seriously inhibiting progress in North Belfast.

There is no sense of a strategic or shared vision for North Belfast and therefore no 'big picture' to which individual communities can be directed for hope and inspiration. There is a need to develop a long-term integrated strategy for community development in the area.

No single department or agency working on its own can deliver sustainable improvement. A dedicated delivery mechanism which has both the authority and the capacity to address North Belfast's specific problems and to develop an appropriate and realistic development programme for the area is needed. It is clear that any improvement must be based on sustainability, partnership and a joined up approach by Government and others.

There is a real need for a large-scale physical regeneration project to lift the spirits of the community and provide a contrast to some of the worst environmental features in the area.

Action Initiated by the Project

We welcomed the opportunity for our Project to engage positively with the North Belfast community on a wide range of practical actions that gave us valuable, first-hand experience of the key issues of the area. In particular we appreciated our direct engagement with the voluntary sector, which we believe has a significant role to play in the area.

We were also involved, in the latter stages of the Project, in some very key strategic work which was only possible through the trust developed with the community groups. The Project was able to build on this trust by promoting, encouraging and supporting the communities in their efforts to address the key issues of funding and dealing with interface tensions. During the course of our Project we committed almost £100,000 to early action projects. In encouraging

new approaches by the communities, we endeavoured to ensure that they fully understood the need for cooperation, acceptance of responsibility and accountability.

We believe that a major challenge for North Belfast is how to take the risk of getting to know the 'other' community through meeting and sharing experience and knowledge. Throughout the course of this Project, we have detected among all the key organisations a definite willingness to engage and a genuine enthusiasm for bringing about real change.

Recommended Further Action

In the final part of our Report we have drawn up a list of areas on which we would like to see further action. It includes action to:

- a. enable Government to respond in a more 'joined up' way;
- b. address interface issues;
- c. boost community capacity;
- d. improve the economic, social and cultural life in North Belfast; and
- e. improve health and education in the area.

Specifically our recommendations for action are:

- a. to set up a **dedicated senior level Unit** working with the full authority of Government, located in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister but working closely, through a Departmental Steering Group, with the Department for Social Development. The functions of the Unit will be to build **community capacity**, develop a **long-term strategy** for North Belfast, encourage **partnerships** and also take responsibility for addressing issues in **interface areas**;
- b. to create a **Community Capacity Building Programme** which should be a major function of the dedicated Unit. This programme should be special to North Belfast. It should be adequately resourced with staff and additional funding and given sufficient time to make a difference, with community groups able to access assistance in ways relevant to their areas of need.
- c. to make available **£3million additional funding per year** for community capacity building (under a new concept of **Community Empowerment Partnerships**) ideally for a **5 year period** (but at minimum, 3 years with a review before the end of the 3 years) for this Programme. These

partnerships will involve and service smaller community groups within the partnership.

- d. to encourage Government to develop a **major site** involving mixed-usage to serve as a symbol of hope and economic regeneration for North Belfast;
- e. to develop a **Centre for Citizenship**, located in North Belfast to promote learning about citizenship and related concepts including the rights and the obligations that accompany them;
- f. that the **North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust's bid for almost £11million of Executive Programme Funds** is accepted to enable the Trust to invest in two new Health and Well-being Centres for North Belfast as well as the redevelopment of an existing site. This will enable the Trust to establish a dedicated service drawing together all the relevant strands of service provision with the capacity and specialist skills to respond appropriately to the levels of need of residents in North Belfast;
- g. that **additional resources** be made available to schools to boost the key links between school and home; support be given to the Department of Education's proposal to extend its **Youth Work in Schools Initiative**; for schools in North Belfast to participate in the **pilot scheme** created by the Department of Education for the 14-16 age group (Key Stage 4); and Belfast and North Eastern Education and Library Boards to review the level of **support for voluntary youth organisations**;
- h. to develop **e-technology** in the area to create an environment whereby homes in North Belfast are able to communicate in a non-confrontational manner both on an 'intra' and 'inter' community basis via the Internet; and
- i. for North Belfast to aim to become a **Music Action Zone** within which we would envisage a new **School for Percussion** to offer fresh opportunity, especially for disadvantaged people as a means of cross-community contact.

For the purposes of our work we define community capacity as **“the ability and will of people who live in a locality to act collectively for their common good”**. The level of capacity is varied within and across the two communities, and is generally weaker in Protestant areas. Each community suffers in different ways from multiple deprivation. Common to all communities is the complexity of searching/applying for grant assistance and the lack of sustainable funding for community projects.

Community groups feel isolated when they encounter problems, because they do not have networks that they trust and respect through which to access support. There is a need to develop community leadership competencies, networking mechanisms and sustainable funding arrangements.

Youth in North Belfast represent a tremendous asset and source of creative potential for the community. In the context of prevailing conditions, this asset is often seen as a liability as some young people are involved in public disorder. The youth-related problems of North Belfast in many cases arise because of scarcity of resources and facilities and the resultant boredom, rather than any inherent malice on the part of the young people. Although there are great differences in the abilities of young people it is evident that all are affected by a lack of opportunity. The problem locally referred to as ‘recreational rioting’ located around interface areas, needs to be addressed.

There is a need to convince young people that they have a future in the area. Positive influences and role models are needed to inspire and motivate young people so that they can channel their energies away from anti-social behaviour and develop self-esteem. We have often been told of the desire for parenting classes and Parent/ Teacher Liaison Officers.

The Churches have a long history of sustained work in North Belfast, and that work has largely gone unrecognised. Many Churches have maintained a high standard of community work, particularly through the provision of youth organisations, often without interruption throughout the years of the ‘Troubles’. To continue this community work these Churches need appropriate funding to be made available and also help in discovering and accessing funding.

The six members of the local Assembly belong to six different political parties, which illustrates the diverse character of party political support. Dialogue between the communities and political leaders is vital for the future stability of North Belfast.

Paramilitaries exert influence (and in parts, control) over some areas in North Belfast. They are regarded by some people as protectors of their communities.

North Belfast Community Action Project

Full
46/2001

Launch of the Report of the North Belfast Community Action Project

Press Statement by Rev Dr John Dunlop

28 May 2002

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. the three of us, Monsignor Tom Toner, Roy Adams and I, were called together last December by the First and Deputy First Minister, Mr Trimble and Mr Durkan and the Minister for Social Development, Mr Dodds, with the support of the six North Belfast Members of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Frazer Agnew, Mr Fred Cobain, Mr Nigel Dodds, Mr Billy Hutchinson, Mr Gerry Kelly and Mr Alban Maginness. Our remit was to examine the whole Westminster parliamentary constituency which stretches from the Shankill to Rathcoole.
2. We were given a task which we have found demanding from beginning to end. But we are conscious that however demanding we have found the challenge it pales into insignificance compared with the problems which many people face on a day-to-day basis in North Belfast.
3. While statistics are illuminating, there is no substitute for visiting some of the most troubled areas and hearing and seeing at first hand what it is like to live there. We have been touched and moved by what we have heard.
4. In some of the interface areas there is not only physical dereliction, there is social decay, ill health, uncertainty, violence, and a considerable amount of fear. The stories which we have listened to tell of conflict, anger and stress.
5. The benefit to us of visiting sixteen different areas, listening to students from eight different schools, church representatives and the Members of the Legislative Assembly, was to hear at first hand some of the stories people wanted us to hear and to pay attention to what at times verged on despair and their yearning for a different future.
6. Yet it must also be said that North Belfast includes some of the most pleasant and convenient parts of Belfast in which to live as well as some of the best schools and social amenities in Northern Ireland.

North Belfast Community Action Project

7. What we were asked to do was to put in place a plan of short, medium and long-term actions to address social and community issues in North Belfast. **In particular we were asked to focus our attention on building community capacity in those areas where it is weak and in addition to maintaining community activity where it is working well.**
8. We want to acknowledge the importance of representative democracy and the work of the MP for the constituency, Members of the Legislative Assembly and the Councillors who, we are convinced, work hard in the interests of the people they represent.
9. Many people give voluntarily of their time to help in many community projects in order to improve the quality of life of people of all ages who live in their neighbourhoods. In the course of our consultations we met many people who, within days, were on the point of losing their jobs when the funding finished. Sustainability of funding is therefore a key issue.
10. What we were not asked, and did not attempt to do, was to act as mediators during disturbances in interface areas. As we are all aware there are a number of interfaces which have been the scenes of serious rioting over the last number of years including during the six months of our Project. While we have tried to understand the dynamics which operate in those areas, and listened to people who live there, we did not attempt to be the mediators of those particular conflicts. However the recommendations we make in this Report are intended to equip communities to build up their capability and self-confidence to be able to deal with interface crises.
11. During the course of our Project we have engaged positively with the North Belfast community on a wide range of practical actions that gave us valuable, first-hand experience of the key issues of the area. We have committed almost £100,000 to early action projects. In encouraging new approaches by the communities, we endeavoured to ensure that they fully understood the need for cooperation, acceptance of responsibility and accountability.

So what are our findings?
12. **We believe sectarianism is widespread in Northern Ireland crossing social, religious and political barriers. It diminishes all of us who are affected by it and makes us less than we ought to be.**

North Belfast Community Action Project

13. Nowhere are its debilitating effects more keenly felt than in the sharp verbal and physical exchanges which are so characteristic of the interface areas. Those who have not lived in these areas need to be careful about rushing to judgment in condemnation of their fellow citizens who have lived through the worst effects of the 'Troubles' and currently have to endure what is unacceptable. Major attitudinal change is essential if there is going to be a future different from the past.
14. We have found that North Belfast is a patchwork of small communities in which people have an intense sense of belonging. In a peaceful world such diversity could be a cause of enrichment. The trouble is there is such suspicion and fear that this patchwork quilt is not stitched together but is constantly being torn apart.
15. Territoriality is arguably the most contentious issue in North Belfast and reflects itself in overcrowding in Catholic/Nationalist areas and vacant spaces in some Protestant/Unionist areas. The rapidly changing population profile of the area, with a young and growing Catholic population, compared to an ageing and declining Protestant population, is a source of concern to Protestants, who see themselves being 'squeezed out' of the area. Housing conditions in the Protestant communities of North Belfast are substantially worse than those in Catholic areas. The Catholic community, on the other hand, feel that their need for housing is not being taken seriously and that they are trapped behind 'walls of fear' even though there may be available space within Protestant areas. The North Belfast Housing Strategy is based upon the premise that the demands of both communities can be met within the timescale of the Strategy without any territorial shift. The only way to peacefully overcome the preoccupation of territoriality is to build understanding and trust.
16. There is a high degree of anti-social behaviour and of criminality particularly associated with protection rackets, substance abuse and drug dealing. This depletes the financial, social and human assets of the community, impairs the quality of life and destroys the spirit of enterprise. There is a need for everyone with influence to redouble their efforts to convince communities, including paramilitaries on all sides, that violence, division, conflict and instability are seriously inhibiting progress in North Belfast.
17. **It cannot be the case that extensive rioting, intimidation, drug dealing, violence, attacks on the Police and social instability have any acceptable place in a peaceful present or a decent future.**

18. **Everyone has a responsibility to play a constructive part in this matter. Co-operation and the building of trust are essential otherwise the additional assistance we are calling for will be wasted. People in North Belfast owe it to themselves, to one another, to their children and to the rest of us to patiently construct a future in which the diverse peoples of North Belfast can get up and walk into the future together. We owe it to the people of North Belfast to help them in this difficult mission. There is great potential among the people of North Belfast particularly the young, but help is required to realise that potential.**
19. People in Government and people in other parts of Northern Ireland will ask, "Why should North Belfast receive this special treatment?"
20. A special case for North Belfast can be made because of its special nature - it has suffered more intensely through the troubles than any other part of Northern Ireland - it is an unique patchwork of small communities separated by interfaces, which are areas of intense mistrust and bitterness - in many places people's normal daily mobility is marked and restricted by fear - and, both communities suffer from high levels of multiple deprivation.
21. We cannot overstate the significance of the problems of the area or their potential to destabilise other parts of Belfast and Northern Ireland. North Belfast has the capacity to absorb resources, destroy people, impoverish children and destabilise other parts of Northern Ireland. The price of failure to address and resolve the issues is high and is made up of direct and indirect costs.
22. The direct costs include: the enormous cost of policing, the high cost of caring for an increasingly unhealthy population and the costs of intensive social support across several agencies.
23. The indirect costs include: a diminished sense of self-worth, sapping of confidence, lost opportunities, resistance to economic development, recurring cycles of violence and disorder, the waste of human potential and damage to the image of Belfast and Northern Ireland.
24. **The decline in North Belfast cannot be arrested unless it is considered a priority case for intensive care over a number of years.**

Now I will turn to our recommendations for action.

North Belfast Community Action Project

25. We are not suggesting that North Belfast be provided with an expensive life-support machine forever but it does need intensive attention so that it can get up on its feet and walk with confidence into the future.
26. We know that there can be no quick fix for North Belfast. The problems are too deep seated. It is, however, very important that the communities can see that action is planned as a result of the Report and that the capacity of malign influences to continue to promote hopelessness is curbed, by Government's clear determination to act.
27. To that end the Team would like to see Government agree the following:
 - a. *a commitment to recognise that North Belfast needs urgent special treatment;*
 - b. *a recognition that improvement must be based on sustainability, partnership and a joined-up approach by Government and others;*
 - c. *a commitment to create a dedicated unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister working, through a Departmental Steering Group, with the Department for Social Development to lead a plan of action aimed at improving life for the communities in North Belfast;*
 - d. *additional ear-marked funding of £3million per year ideally for a 5 year period (or at minimum a 3 year period with a review before the end of 3 years) to facilitate community capacity building and to encourage communities to engage in partnership working with agencies and one another;*
 - e. *the creation, through this dedicated unit, of arrangements to facilitate a greater degree of integration in Government and Agency work in North Belfast;*
 - f. *the preparation of a vision or strategy for North Belfast;*
 - g. *this unit to take the lead in co-ordinating a Government response to interface issues;*
 - h. *additional resources to address health and education issues;*
 - i. *support for projects to lift the spirit and morale of communities in North Belfast; and*

North Belfast Community Action Project

- j. support in principle for major physical redevelopment projects.

Thank you for coming and we thank you in anticipation, for your help in getting the details of this Report out into the public domain.

END//..

For further information or to arrange an interview please contact Nick Carson of Carmah Communications Ltd 028 9127 5965 or mobile 07711 482807.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Report was released today of the North Belfast Community Action Project a joint initiative established in December 2001 by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the Department for Social Development with the support of the six North Belfast Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The Report is the result of six months intensive work led by a independent Project Team comprising Rev Dr John Dunlop (Chairman), Monsignor Tom Toner and Mr Roy Adams and addresses the social and community issues in North Belfast focusing particularly on building community capacity in those areas where it is weak and in addition to maintaining community activity where it is working well.

The Project Team consulted extensively with community groups throughout North Belfast, with Government Departments and other public agencies, with interest groups, church leaders, schools and individuals.

The Report highlights the area's potential to destabilise other parts of Belfast and of Northern Ireland. It states forcefully that extensive rioting, intimidation, drug dealing, violence, attacks on the police and social instability do not have any acceptable place in a peaceful present or a decent future.

The Project Team concludes that social and economic decline in North Belfast cannot be arrested unless it is considered a priority case for intensive care over a number of years.

The Project Team call for Government and public agencies, local politicians, local communities, churches, schools and individuals living in North Belfast to take collective action to promote stability.

North Belfast Community Action Project

The Report highlights the special responsibility of Government in leading the way and ensuring that measures are in place to improve the situation.

The Project Team's Recommendations are set out in Part IV of the Report and are summarised on the attached page.

Copies of the Report can be obtained from the North Belfast Community Action Project Secretariat by contacting 9072 6014 or from the website www.northbelfastcommunityactionproject.org.

North Belfast Community Action Project

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Need for an overall vision or **strategy for North Belfast.**

Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister to take a lead in developing an effective and sustained response to the problems of the area, working closely with **Department for Social Development.**

Dedicated high level Unit to be established with four main functions:

Community Capacity Building.
Strategic role.
Building Partnerships
Addressing Interface Issues.

Team recommends a unique **Community Capacity Building Programme** for North Belfast.

This Programme to be delivered through a new concept of **Community Empowerment Partnerships.**

Community Empowerment Partnerships core funding through a £3 million per annum **Community Empowerment Fund.**

Government encouraged to **develop a major site** in North Belfast to serve as a symbol of hope and economic regeneration for North Belfast.

Recommends establishment of a **Centre for Citizenship.**

Supports the North & West Belfast Health & Social Services Trust's bid for **new Health and Well-being centres** for North Belfast.

Additional resources recommended for **schools and youth work** in the area.

Recommends **new approaches** including:

E-technology Community Based Network Facility
Music Action Zone.
