

FROM: MARY BUNTING

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NORTH BELFAST COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT

Summary

- Issue:** Response to the North Belfast Community Action Project Report.
- Timescale:** Urgent. An early substantive response to the report in order to establish and maintain momentum.
- Recommendation:** Ministers are invited to confirm their agreement to the establishment of a dedicated Unit within OFMDFM but reporting also to DSD and to consider the role, remit and accountability arrangements for the Unit.
- Ministers are also invited to note that officials will liaise with other Departments with a view to the preparation of a paper for consideration by the Executive Committee in September.

Background

1. The Report of the North Belfast Community Action Project Team was published on 28 May. On that day Ministers issued a statement welcoming the report and undertaking to consider its recommendations.
2. These include action to enable Government to respond in a more 'joined up' way to address interface issues, to boost community capacity, to improve the economic, social and cultural life in North Belfast and to improve health and education in the area. There are a number of specific recommendations (summarised at Annex A) which may require additional resources and will have

implications for Departments if implemented. This will require consideration at Executive Committee level. To that end officials from the relevant Departments will liaise with a view to preparing a paper for consideration by the First [Minister](#) and Deputy First Minister and the Minister for Social Development in September.

3. It would be helpful, however, as a first step, to have a steer from Ministers on one of the report's key recommendations namely the establishment of a dedicated Unit in OFMDFM. The report recommends that the Unit works through a Departmental Steering Group with the Department of Social Development to lead a plan of action aimed at improving life for the communities in North Belfast.
4. Ministers have already indicated support in principle for a dedicated Unit. We now need to consider further its role, remit and accountability arrangements. In addition we will need to develop arrangements whereby the Unit links with and builds on the work of other Departments and agencies, notably DSD, but at the same time delivers the additional impetus that is needed to tackle the complex and acute problems in North Belfast.
5. DSD has responsibility for a number of programmes directly relating to North Belfast. These can be summarised as follows:-
 - Physical development programmes using comprehensive development and urban development grants eg Crumlin Road Gaol, Crumlin Road Courthouse and the 11 acre Hillview Road shopping centre scheme (

the Gaol is one of the properties to be transferred to the Executive as part of the Re-investment and Reform Initiative);

- BRO North Team based in Duncairn Gardens with a £1.2m per annum budget supporting local regeneration initiatives and groups;
- District Council Community Services Programme delivered via Belfast City Council which is the key programme for supporting the local community infrastructure;

- North Belfast Housing Strategy being delivered by NIHE, spending some £9.9m in 2002/3 on capital improvements and revenue schemes;
- Urban II worth approximately £11m and targeted at Inner North Belfast with objectives to develop its physical and social resources and develop local peoples resources especially to employment;
- In addition DSD is delivering Northern Ireland wide schemes that will impact on North Belfast eg an Outreach Programme to encourage statutory organisations to engage more directly with local community, Measure 3.3 of the Building Sustainable Prosperity programme which will provide funding for strategically placed support agencies for the community and voluntary sector.

Rationale behind key recommendations in report

6. The Project Team found that the communities in North Belfast were so far behind others in terms of community capacity, dialogue and confidence levels,

whilst experiencing similar levels of deprivation, that they concluded there was a need for a powerful and practical response from Government at the highest level. This led to the recommendation for a dedicated, well-resourced Unit working with the full authority of Government, which would be derived from the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The Project Team recommended that the Unit needs to be distinctive and not replicate but rather build upon existing systems, procedures and mechanisms.

Role and remit of Unit

7. The report recommended that the Unit would have responsibility for the development of an effective and sustained response to the problems of North Belfast. In particular, the Unit should address issues around the interfaces, have a key responsibility for community outreach and initiate and facilitate the development of partnerships within and between communities and statutory agencies. The key functions of the Unit would therefore be:-

- Overall Strategy – this is based on the identified need to knit together the range of mainstream services and initiatives in the area with a view to setting an overall strategy to address the area's complex problems and involve a wide range of stakeholders. The Unit should lead in the development of such a strategy, to broker the coming together of existing strategies which are already being taken forward by various agencies in the area.
- Building Partnerships – the project team concluded that partnering has proved the only effective mechanism through which community-based

regeneration strategies can be made to work. They recommended that partnerships be built within and between communities and statutory agencies. A key function for the Unit would therefore be to address the issues for North Belfast on a multi-agency partnership basis. The perceived benefits would be improved service delivery, better relationships and increased investment in the area. The Project Team identified the need for a shared and integrated focus by Government and the community. There are a number of organisations and structures attempting to create this 'joined up' approach for example the North Belfast Partnership Board, the Belfast Local Strategy Partnership, Belfast City Council, the NIHE Interagency Group, the Groundwork/Creating Common Ground Consortium and the Health Action Zone. These require co-ordination. Particular attention should be paid to the North Belfast Partnership Board which has struggled in recent years. DSD has reviewed its work and new joint chairs have recently been appointed. The Board has been tasked with delivering the Urban II programme. The positive steps it has made over the past 6 months should be encouraged and built upon by a building partnership approach as recommended by the Project Team.

- Addressing interface issues – the report points up the need for interface issues to be addressed in a co-ordinated way to produce action to improve security and the environment as well as the promotion of cross-community dialogue. The Unit should lead in encouraging key players to work together to handle interface issues. These include PSNI, the North and West Belfast Health Trust, Belfast Education and Library Board, NIHE, Community Relations Council, community groups, churches, parents and schools as well as Government Departments. In essence this is the continuation of the

work already being undertaken for example in Ardoyne and there is a clear need for it to continue as a key function of the work of the dedicated Unit. The Report also recognises that each interface is different but that a menu of action to include cross-community dialogue, improved security and environmental features is required.

- Community Capacity Building – the report makes compelling arguments for sustained additional investment in community capacity building which engages and empowers local people in a distinctive way and which will ultimately improve Community Relations. This, they maintain, is essential for the necessary improvement in the quality of life of the people of North Belfast and for the long-term development and transformation of the area. The recommended mechanism is a new concept of Community Empowerment Partnerships whose aim is to ensure that community development work is focused on capacity building aimed at social, economic and community development, planned and implemented within and between local communities. The report recommends that the Unit should lead on this work and recommends an annual budget of £3 million to deliver this specific aspect of the Unit's work. This recommendation must build on and inter-relate with the work already in hand and drawing on existing expertise, particularly in DSD. It will require careful consideration of human resources both in terms of numbers but more importantly in relation to skills and expertise. This will include the development of a pragmatic approach to delivery which considers and utilises where possible a range of existing delivery mechanisms. Some recommendations, notably the Community Empowerment Partnership may necessitate new mechanisms for effective delivery. Since DSD is already active in developing and

delivering various community development programmes, including Urban II in North Belfast, those some elements of the Unit's work on community capacity building, which overlap with DSD's responsibilities and programmes for building community infrastructure would be sub-contracted to DSD. The Unit would focus in particular on the Community Relations dimension, notably the Community Empowerment Partnership including DSD in the latter as necessary.

Accountability

8. Arising from the identified need for a strategic and integrated approach and for the highest standard of accountability the report recommends that the Unit should derive its authority from and be accountable to the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and be located in that Department. It also recommends that, in recognition of the vital role played by the Minister for Social Development in social and urban development, the Unit should be guided by a Departmental Steering Group from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the Department for Social Development. The Report recommends that the Ministers in OFMDFM and DSD would report periodically on progress to the Executive.
9. In recognition of the roles of both OFMDFM and DSD it is recommended that Ministers endorse the approach recommended in the Report but with an additional reporting line to DSD. It is also recommended that the work of the Unit is guided by a Departmental Steering Group of officials from the 2 Departments and that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and the

Minister for Social Development would report periodically on progress to the Executive.

Conclusion and Recommendation

10. Ministers are invited to agree to the establishment of the Unit within OFMDFM reporting also to DSD and guided by a steering group of officials from OFMDFM and DSD. The Unit would have the role, accountability and reporting arrangements described above. The next step will be to develop more specific aims and objectives and working arrangements for the new Unit.
11. A parallel submission is being prepared by DSD officials for Minister Dodds.

MARY BUNTING
Director of Equality

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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.