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Report of the Review Team
January 2002

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Programme for Government undertook to review community relations policy and to put in place a cross-departmental strategy for the promotion of Community Relations.
2. Section 2 describes the review process, the extent of engagement with key stakeholders undertaken and the material upon which the review is based.
3. Current policy and associated policy instruments were established at a particular period in the history of Northern Ireland between 1987 and 1990. The aims and objectives of community relations policies and actions were designed to improve relations between the two main traditions in Northern Ireland through the encouragement of greater contact and the development of mutual understanding and respect for different cultural traditions. (Sections 3 and 4)
4. Assessment of the effectiveness and impact of current programmes indicates: (Section 5)
 - major problems continue in Northern Ireland society relating to inter communal conflicts and tensions;
 - there is little evidence of significant increases in shared education and housing;
 - policies and policy instruments have had limited but positive impacts and achievements; and
 - evaluations point to the importance of the changed context in Northern Ireland and the need to re-consider current policies and programmes.

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5. There is widespread agreement that the aims of community relations policy do not remain appropriate and that changes are required to existing policy instruments. (Section 6)
6. An analysis of responses to the review identified a number of critical issues with implications for future policy. The context within which policy is being developed is outlined and a number of examples of good practice given. (Section 7)
7. The recommendations (Section 8) are based on a number of fundamental principles which emerged through the review process. These are:
 - the need for political leadership and acknowledgment of the problem;
 - a clear vision with articulated aims and outcomes;
 - the need to mainstream action;
 - building on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act;
 - a change of language to that of promoting good relations; *1? NI Act?*
 - action must involve all government departments and their associated agencies; and
 - engagement with and ownership by all sectors of society, and a long term commitment to action.

- POLICY IN CONFIDENCE -

8. The vision as articulated in the Programme for Government was overwhelmingly endorsed:

- *“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”.*

9. The aims or outcomes for policy to promote better relations in Northern Ireland proposed are:

- *to facilitate the development of integrated/shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together;*
- *to encourage communication, tolerance, and trust in areas where communities are living apart;*
- *to promote respect, encouragement and celebration of different cultures, faiths and traditions;*
- *to eliminate sectarianism and racism and to enable individuals to live and work without fear or intimidation; and*
- *to shape policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow.*

10. To achieve the main policy aims and outcomes proposals are made;

- for action at Executive and Central Government level;
- for action at regional and local levels;
- for development at community level.

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11. At **central** level the review recommends:

- there should be a named and identified designated Minister leading a cross Government group;
- this Group should develop and take responsibility for an overarching Strategic Plan for the Executive;
- there is need for a strengthened central resource within OFMDFM to support this work;
- other Departments should contribute on action within their areas to promote better relations;
- Executive Programme Funds should be made available to support joint delivery of the Strategic Plan;
- the Equality Commission should review its Guidelines to Statutory Duties to further develop, articulate and improve the effectiveness of the Good Relations actions of Public Authorities;
- consideration should be given to amending legislation to extend the Equality Commission's statutory authority to promote good relations to all groups included in Section 75(2).

Check
this ref.

12. Three models are considered for delivery of those remaining functions required at **regional** level which are outwith central government. The review recommends that the Equality Commission should be given additional responsibilities for pro-actively promoting Good Relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Legislative
vehicle?

13. At **local** level the review recommends that:

- the current District Council Community Relations Programme should be phased out over an agreed time period; and
- a new programme at local area level should be developed linking District Council Section 75 responsibilities, Local Strategy Partnerships and local integrated area plans, delivered by the District Councils.

14. The importance of community action in building better relationships at **local and interface** areas is acknowledged. The review recommends:

- formal recognition and finance should be provided by Government for the contribution being made by community and voluntary organisations to the development of better relations;
- a more integrated approach between community development and promoting better relations activities;
- the need to strengthen formal links between the work of the Voluntary Activity Unit and OFMDFM;
- all funders of the sector should examine how they might facilitate the sector in their work to promote better relations;
- the Task Force being established by the VAU should include in its remit the need to promote better relations; and
- current work on developing community infrastructure should explicitly support infrastructures to promote better relations within and between communities.

SECTION 1

15. The financial implications of the recommendations are also considered.

16. A framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of future policy is outlined. This proposes:

- a 3 level framework for monitoring and evaluating the new strategy;
- supported by a dedicated research programme; and
- following endorsement of the aims and objectives of the strategy a list of indicators linked to these aims and objectives should be developed and assessed as appropriate.

17. The review concludes that the proposals and recommendations must be seen in the broader context of the Executive's commitment to Northern Ireland growing as a community underpinned by the core principles and values of equality and human rights.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

- 1.01 The Programme for Government 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.'

- 1.02 The Programme accepted that in working together to create a new future 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.

- 1.03 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.

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

Terms of Reference

1.05 The terms of reference for the Community Relations Review are to:

- review the background to, and development of, existing community relations policy;
- identify the aims and objectives of existing community relations policy and the policy instruments used to achieve them;
- assess the impact and achievements of current policy;
- examine, in the light of relevant developments, including the recently completed evaluations of the District Council Community Relations Programme and the Community Relations Council, whether the aims of community relations policy remain appropriate and whether changes are required to existing policy instruments;
- consult with key stakeholders, particularly those working in local communities to improve community relations;
- make recommendations on further policy aims and objectives; and
- recommend a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact on community relations of future policy, to fulfil the Programme for Government intention that improvements stemming from the new strategy should be measurable.

1.06 Following the establishment of the review and clarification of its terms of reference, a small team was established to take forward the review. This paper is the outcome of the work undertaken by the review team.

SECTION 2

THE REVIEW PROCESS AND CONSULTATION WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

2.01 To meet the timescales as set out in the Programme for Government, and to ensure that key stakeholders were adequately engaged in the work:

- a working paper was prepared and widely circulated from August (Annex 1);
- over 55 individual meetings were held with central government departments (including the NIO), major statutory bodies, key voluntary and community organisations and a number of individuals with specific knowledge and expertise (Annex 2);
- twelve seminars/workshops were held with groupings of key individuals or organisations (Annex 3) along with participation in associated conferences and seminars with significant community relations implications.

2.02 This paper is based on the outcome of that work and other material commissioned or made available to the review team. This includes:

- more than 85 formal responses made to the review by Assembly Committees and other political bodies, government departments, statutory bodies, district councils, voluntary and community organisations and individuals (Annex 4);
- the records of the seminar discussions and individual meetings;

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- a research paper commissioned from INCORE to consider developments in public policy and interventions related to improving inter-community relations in other relevant jurisdictions (Executive summary included as Annex 5) and a scoping paper from government economists on the public expenditure cost of a polarised society (Annex 6);
- a paper commissioned from RES on options for locally delivered community relations programmes (Annex 7);
- the recently completed evaluations of the Community Relations Council and District Council Community Relations Programme (Executive summaries in Annex 8);
- draft chapters from a book on 'Researching the Troubles: Social Science perspectives on the conflict in Northern Ireland' (Hargie and Dickson) were also made available.

2.03 During the course of the review a number of other consultation papers, published reports or relevant draft documents became available. These included:

- the reports from the Home Office on Building Cohesive Communities;
- the consultation by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland;
- the consultation paper on a Single Equality Bill;
- the report of the Burns group on the future of post primary education in Northern Ireland;

- POLICY IN CONFIDENCE -

- the consultation on the development of a Victims Strategy and the responses to that consultation; and
- the publication of 'Partners in Change' by the Voluntary Activity Unit of DSD.

The following sections consider the specific remits of the Review in the light of the above information.