

FROM: EVELYN CUMMINS

DATE: 2 September 2002

TO: PERMANENT SECRETARIES
MR WATKINS

Issue: Response to the North Belfast Community Action Project.

Timescale: It is planned to have a paper prepared for consideration by the Executive by early October.
Response on Response by 27 September.

Recommendations: That Permanent Secretaries consider and provide comment on the key recommendations, specifically on those which have implications for their Department.

Background

1. The North Belfast Community Action Project was established in December 2001. Its brief, from First and Deputy First Ministers and the Minister for Social Development, was to put in place a plan of short, medium and long-term actions to address social and community issues in North Belfast. Particular emphasis was placed on building and strengthening community capacity.

Project Report

2. The report of the project was delivered to Ministers on 28 May 2002 and Ministers have undertaken to consider its recommendations. At this point Ministers have agreed to the establishment of a dedicated Unit for North Belfast, which was one of the key recommendations in the report. The Unit has now been established within the Equality Directorate of OFMDFM. The Unit has also a reporting line to the Minister for Social Development through a Departmental Steering Group of officials from both OFMDFM and DSD. This arrangement reflects the vital role of the Department for Social Development in social and urban development and its contribution to the recommendations in the Report regarding the development of community infrastructure.

Role of Unit

3. The primary function of the Unit (known as North Belfast Community Action Unit) are:-
- to build and strengthen community capacity (this is to be pursued in conjunction with DSD which has lead responsibility for community development).
 - to develop a long-term strategy for North Belfast
 - to encourage partnerships within and between communities and statutory agencies
 - to address issues in interface areas.

These functions arise from the Report recommendation that Government respond in a more joined-up way, including actions to improve economic, social and cultural life in North Belfast and to improve health and education in the area. The effective discharge of these functions require collaboration with Departments and Agencies across the public sector.

X

Implications for Departments

4. The report also makes a number of specific recommendations (summarised at Annex A) which have implications for Departments, in policy and resource terms, if they are to be pursued. To help consideration by Ministers (an in turn the Executive Committee) of the wide ranging recommendations contained in the report it would be very helpful to have comments from Departments both in general terms and specifically on those aspects which relate to your business areas.
5. Departments have already received copies of the Report, which is also available on the www.northbelfastcommunityactionproject.org website. I also attach as an aid to Departmental consideration a summary (Annex B) of the issues identified by the Project Team as influencing the problems experienced in North Belfast and a list (Annex C) of the key points and recommendations as they appear in the Report, with the relevant section/paragraph denoted. I further attach for each Permanent Secretary a summary of his/her Department's contribution to the Project's work in terms of services and funding provided to North Belfast (Annex D).
6. If it would be helpful towards preparing a response, I will follow up this note with meetings with your Departments. This could be done through the existing group of Departmental representatives on the Neighbourhood

during

Renewal Strategy being pursued by DSD. The list of representatives is attached (Annex E), but Permanent Secretaries may wish to ~~select~~ select on ~~different~~ alternative representative.
Summary

7. Permanent Secretaries are invited to:

- consider the recommendations in the report of the North Belfast Community Action Project.
- Nominate a Departmental representative to liaise with this Unit in the consideration of responses (if they wish to choose someone other than the person listed in Annex E).
- Provide written comment on the recommendations with specific emphasis on those which may have implications for individual Departments. Responses would be appreciated by **23 September** if possible.

27

EVELYN CUMMINS
North Belfast Community Action Unit

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.

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

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.

NORTH BELFAST – THE ISSUES

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. In North Belfast there is a real lack of understanding and consequential mistrust of "the other side". 'Segregated living' has become a 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. 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.

'Sectarianism' finds its most destructive form in interfaces particularly when the two communities are so closely jammed that avoidance is impossible and where markers of distinction in the form of flags, murals, election posters and street names become sources of conflict. It is clear, both from the experiences of people living and working in North Belfast and from the Police figures, that this issue of sectarian interface violence remains a serious and recurrent problem across the area. 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.

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 wards containing pockets of major deprivation. The area has the capacity to absorb resources, destroy people, impoverish children and destabilise other parts of Northern Ireland.

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. Substance abuse and mental health problems 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. 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.

The **youth-related** problems of North Belfast in many cases have arisen 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.

The **Churches** have a long history of sustained work in North Belfast, and that work has largely gone unnoticed. 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.

In relation to **politics**, 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. There are those 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. 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.

Way Forward

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.

NORTH BELFAST – THE ISSUES

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. In North Belfast there is a real 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. . 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.

'Sectarianism' 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. It is clear, both from the experiences of people living and working in North Belfast and from the Police figures, that this issue of sectarian interface violence remains a serious and recurrent problem across the area. 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.

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.

North Belfast has suffered from a serious **lack of investment** over recent decades. The division and polarization 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. Substance abuse and mental health problems 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. 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.

The **youth-related problems** of North Belfast in many cases have arisen 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.

The **Churches** have a long history of sustained work in North Belfast, and that work has largely gone unnoticed. 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.

In relation to **Politics**, 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. 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. 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.

Way Forward

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.

Key points	Section	Paragraph	Comment By
The Report is by an independent team that was asked to put in place a plan of short, medium and long-term actions to address social and community issues in North Belfast. Building community capacity was to be a particular focus.	Introduction	13	All Departments
The Team defined community capacity as “the ability and will of people to act collectively for their common good”.	Part 1	85	“
Quote: “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.”	Foreword	-	“
Quote: “Sectarianism is widespread in Northern Ireland... Nowhere are its debilitating effects felt more keenly 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 judgement in condemnation of their fellow citizens who have lived through the worst effects of the troubles and currently have to endure what is unacceptable.”	Foreword	-	All Departments NIO
Quote: “While some people believed that paramilitary organisations were necessary to protect their communities, they did not wish them to control their communities. Some people with paramilitary backgrounds have worked hard to improve their communities and to build relationships across the divides. Everyone with influence should redouble their efforts to convince communities, including paramilitaries on all sides that violence, division, conflict and instability are seriously inhibiting progress in North Belfast.”	Part 1	84	All Departments NIO

Key points	Section	Paragraph	Comment By
Quote: "We have found that North Belfast is a patchwork of small communities.....this patchwork quilt is not stitched together but is constantly being torn apart."	Foreword	-	All Departments NIO
Territoriality is a highly emotive subject in North Belfast.	Part 1	51	All Departments NIO
Quote: "North Belfast has the capacity to absorb resources, destroy people, impoverish children and destabilise other parts of Northern Ireland."	Foreword.	-	"
Quote: "The decline in North Belfast cannot be arrested unless it is considered a priority case for intensive care for a number of years.it does need intensive attention so that it can get up on its feet and walk with confidence into the future."	Foreword	-	"
Uniqueness of North Belfast, case for special treatment	Part 1	2-8	All Departments
Action taken by the Team is set out in the Report.	Part 3	148-150	
Project committed almost £100,000 to carry out these actions.	Part 3	151	
The Team's Recommendations are set out in Part 4.	Part 4	152 et seq.	
Key recommendations:			
Need for an overall vision or strategy for North Belfast	Part 4	157	All Departments

Key points	Section	Paragraph	Comment By
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 of Social Development .	Part 4	158	All Departments
Dedicated high level Unit to be established with four main functions: Community Capacity Building. Strategic role. Building Partnerships Addressing interface issues.	Part 4	162	“
Team recommends a unique Community Capacity Building Programme for North Belfast	Part 4	167	DSD/ OFMDFM
This Programme to be delivered through a new concept of Community Empowerment Partnerships	Part 4	168	DSD/ OFMDFM
Community Empowerment Partnerships core funding through a £3 million per annum Community Empowerment Fund .	Part 4	170	DSD/ DFP/ OFMDFM
Government encouraged to develop a major site in North Belfast to serve as a symbol of hope and economic regeneration for North Belfast.	Part 4	177-180	DETI/ DSD/ DRD/ DHSSPS/ DFP/ DOE
Recommends establishment of a Centre for Citizenship	Part 4	186	DSD/ DEL/ OFMDFM/ DFP
Supports Health trust's bid for new Health and Well-being centres for North Belfast	Part 4	190-193	DHSSPS/ DFP/ OFMDFM