

GOOD RELATIONS STEERING PANEL

MINUTES OF MEETING

FRIDAY, 11th JANUARY, 2008

Members present: Councillor McCausland (Deputy Chair)
(in the Chair); and
Councillors Cunningham (nominee of Councillor
C. Maskey), Hanna and Stoker.

External Members: Mr. P. Scott, Catholic Church;
Rev. D. Baker, Presbyterian Church;
Canon B. Dodds, Church of Ireland;
Rev. S. Watson, CALEB;
Mr. R. Galway, Bombardier Aerospace; and
Mr. K. Salem, Northern Ireland Council
for Ethnic Minorities.

In attendance: Ms. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager;
Mr. D. Robinson, Good Relations Officer;
Miss E. Brough, Good Relations Officer;
Ms. C. Wilson, Project Manager; and
Mr. J. Heaney, Committee Administrator

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairman (Councillor Long), Councillor Kyle and Dr. D. Morrow.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 7th December, were taken as read and signed as correct.

Peace III – Revised Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan

The Steering Panel was reminded that the draft Peace Plan, which had been approved by the Council at its meeting on 1st October, had been issued for public consultation. The consultation document had outlined how the Council proposed to manage and deliver Peace III funding under priority 1.1 of “building positive relationships at the local level”. The Good Relations Manager pointed out that every effort had been made to ensure widespread public awareness of the Council’s proposals and she outlined the extent of the consultation process which had been undertaken.

The Steering Panel was advised that, as a result of the comments and suggestions made during the consultation process, some substantial changes had been made, which had been incorporated within the latest draft of the Plan.

The Good Relations Manager outlined the proposed composition of the Good Relations Partnership. She advised the Steering Panel that the consultation exercise had made it clear that the voluntary and community sectors wished to be treated separately and the proposed membership of the Partnership had been revised accordingly. She recommended that NICVA (the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action), the recognised umbrella body for voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland, could act as a nominating agent for both sectors. The use of an independent organisation would lend impartiality to the process and would mean that the Council could not be accused of political favouritism or partisanship in the selection of the Partnership representatives.

The Steering Panel discussed possible difficulties in relation to the nomination of a representative from the Protestant churches on the Partnership. The Good Relations Manager pointed out that it was hoped that the nominees of each of the individual Protestant Churches could meet and select an agreed representative.

After discussion, during which the Good Relations Manager answered several questions in relation to the Plan, the Steering Panel agreed to defer consideration of the Peace Plan until its February meeting in order to permit the various political groupings on the Council to give due consideration to the matter and, if required, to receive a briefing on the Plan from the Good Relations Unit.

Good Relations Grant-Aid

The Good Relations Manager submitted for the information of the Panel a report detailing a summary of applications to the Good Relations Grant-Aid Fund together with the associated recommendations.

Féile an Phobail – Spring Festival

Several Members expressed concern that it appeared that invitations to the School Choir Competition had not been issued to the maintained primary sector schools and a number of schools including Boys' and Girl's Model, Balmoral High and Dunmurry High did not appear on the list of schools invited to take part in the West Belfast Youth Talks Back Programme.

The Good Relations Officer undertook to contact Féile an Phobail and advise them of the Steering Panel's views, requesting that the schools named above receive invitations as appropriate.

Belfast Interface Project

The Steering Panel enquired as to the level and type of information which would be obtained from the proposed survey and agreed that Mr. C. O'Halloran be invited to give a presentation at a future meeting regarding the work of the Belfast Interface Project and the feedback from the research undertaken.

After discussion, the Steering Panel agreed unanimously that grant-aid be awarded, under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive, to the following organisations, subject to the issues raised above being addressed:

<u>Ref no.</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Recommendation</u> £
663/1110	Citizens' Advice Bureaux Belfast	2,950
667/1118	Community Engagement (Duncairn)	5,000
332/1108	Belfast Interface Project – members' Survey	2,223
332/1117	Belfast Interface Project – interface mapping	500
279/1119	Féile an Phobail – Spring Festival	9,900
	Provisional Total This Month	20,663

Shadow Working Group on Migrant Issues

The Steering Panel was reminded that research commissioned by the Council had been carried out by the Institute of Conflict Research on the issue of migration and migrant workers in Belfast. A report on the matter had been considered at a special meeting of the Steering Panel and the report's recommendations had been adopted by the Council at its meeting in May, 2007. Accordingly, the Chief Executive had instigated a series of meetings with the Council's public sector partners to examine the issues highlighted in the report and an action plan had been developed in line with the recommendations made. The action plan had proposed that the Council should convene a working group on migrant issues to develop a local strategic action plan. The Group should include representatives of key statutory agencies and minority community organisations. The action plan should address also the wider issues of integration, cohesion, racism and xenophobia and explore the impact of recent developments on housing and education.

The Steering Panel was reminded that, as part of the Council's Peace III bid, there was a proposal to develop a forum and support strategy for migrant workers. In advance of this, the Good Relations Manager proposed that a Shadow Migrant Working Group be established to act as a forum for consultation, informing the future direction of the proposed support strategy and seeking to encourage inter-agency co-operation within the City in relation to issues facing migrant workers. The group would be used also as a consultative forum by the Open Cities Project which was being led by the Council's European Unit. The Good Relations Manager outlined the various organisations, both statutory and voluntary, which might be involved in the Shadow Working Group.

After discussion, the Steering Panel approved the proposal to establish a Shadow Migrant Working Group for Belfast.

Conflict Transformation Project

The Steering Panel considered a report on the progress which had been achieved to date in relation to the Conflict Transformation Project.

During discussion, Members pointed out that some of the research projects completed had been carried out at an academic level and indicated that it might be appropriate if some form of seminar/conference could be organised to convey the results of that research to local communities and community relations practitioners.

The Panel noted the contents of the report, agreed that a presentation be received at a future meeting in relation to the research findings and the work of the Conflict Transformation Project in general and that a seminar/conference be organised in order to convey the results of the research to local communities.

Ongoing Issues: Updates

The Good Relations Manager reported that the Equality Commission had, in its recent Five Year Review of Equality Schemes from public authorities, commended the Council on a number of issues. The Council was specifically quoted as “an example of a public authority which has shown top-level commitment and has made significant progress in implementing the equality duties. The Council has, in particular, focused on the business case for equality of opportunity and good relations and mainstreamed equality objectives into corporate and business planning.”

The Equality Commission report had referred also to the fact that the Council's Equality Officer, being centrally located, had an overview of consultation and its effectiveness, being included in all EQIA consultations and consultation forum meetings and providing advice to individual departments and policy makers, who were responsible for pre-consultation and policy development consultation.

The Steering Panel commended the Good Relations Unit on its progress in equality issues.

Chairman