

GOOD RELATIONS PARTNERSHIP

FRIDAY, 5th SEPTEMBER, 2008

MEETING OF THE GOOD RELATIONS PARTNERSHIP

Members present: Councillor Long (Chairman); and
Councillors Convery and C. Maskey.

External Members: Ms. J. Hawthorne, Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
Ms. E. Wilkinson, Department for Social Development;
Mr. P. Bunting, Irish Congress of Trade Unions;
Mr. P. Mackel, Belfast Trades Council;
Mr. R. Galway, CBI;
Mrs. M. Marken, Catholic Church;
Mr. P. Scott, Catholic Church;
Ms. H. Smith, Protestant Churches;
Rev. S. Watson, Protestant Churches;
Mr. M. Wardlow, Voluntary/Community Sector;
Mr. S. Brennan, Voluntary/Community Sector;
Ms. M. De Silva, Voluntary/Community Sector;
Ms. A. Chada, Minority Ethnic Groups.

Also attended: Councillor Mullaghan.

In attendance: Ms. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager;
Mr. D. Robinson, Good Relations Officer; and
Mr. J. Heaney, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Ms. L. Colts and Ms. S. Bhat.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 15th August were taken as read and signed as correct.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Shared Neighbourhood Programme

Ms. J. Hawthorne, Partnership Member and Head of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Unit, reported to the Partnership on the work of the Executive's Shared Neighbourhood Programme. She stated that the Programme, which was funded by the International Fund for Ireland, was a three year pilot scheme, the central purpose of which was to develop "shared housing" which offered people the opportunity to live in a shared neighbourhood where diversity was welcomed and people of all backgrounds could live, work, learn and play together.

She pointed out that the Programme sought to support and protect existing communities and establish a regional mechanism to provide an integrated and co-ordinated strategic approach to thirty such neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland, six of which would be within the Belfast City Council area. She outlined the main objectives of the Programme, which included the need to increase the number of shared communities, improve mutual respect and understanding within communities and to contribute towards the physical and social renewal of all neighbourhoods.

Ms. Hawthorne highlighted the role of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and, in particular, the work of the Community Cohesion Unit. She referred to the work which would be undertaken by the Cohesion Advisers who would act as catalysts and facilitators to assist the local communities to develop. She pointed out that the unit would seek to establish strong local project teams in order to assist the implementation of good relations plans in the shared communities. Ms. Hawthorne informed the Members that the first such community within Belfast would be in the Ballynafeigh area. She then outlined the rationale of the project, its main purpose and the selection criteria to be used in establishing a "Shared Neighbourhood".

The Members' attention was drawn to the need for all statutory agencies to participate in the scheme in order to ensure its long-term sustainability and to provide the necessary resources. The Members were informed also of the need to encourage political acceptance of the scheme and to develop real partnership working.

In conclusion, Ms. Hawthorne informed the Partnership that the Programme would compliment and not detract from the existing work of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which had always sought to provide housing to those in greatest need. She suggested that the programme could be viewed as forming a part of the wider Peace Process, a model for best practice and an instrument which could facilitate change in Northern Ireland.

Ms. Hawthorne answered various questions from the Members in respect of the work of the Programme, including the need to control anti-social behaviour and, in this regard, she highlighted the work which was being undertaken in relation to the flags, emblems and murals in numerous Housing Executive estates.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Hawthorne for the information which she had provided and she then reminded the Partnership that the former Good Relations Steering Panel had been considering a related issue, that of the reduction in the number of Peace Walls in the City, and she recommended that a briefing session in this regard be held during October.

The Partnership noted the information which had been provided and adopted the recommendation of the Chairman.

Good Relations Grant Aid Fund – Current Financial Position

The Partnership considered the undernoted report in respect of the current financial position regarding the distribution of funds under the Good Relations Grant Aid Fund:

“Relevant Information

The Good Relations Partnership will recall that at its last meeting it reluctantly agreed to temporarily suspend the Good Relations Grant Aid fund as it had been over-subscribed.

The Good Relations Manager was to provide an up-dated report on the financial position of the Good Relations Unit at its September meeting with a view to the possibilities of re-opening the grant aid scheme.

Background Information

The former Good Relations Steering Panel was informed by the Community Relations Unit of the Office of the First Minister/Deputy First Minister (OFM/DFM) in June 2003 that Belfast could re-join the District Council Community Relations Programme and be eligible for 75% funding for both salary costs of approved posts and programme costs, up to a total value of almost £230,000 for year 2003-04. The salary costs are capped at grade SO1, which is the grade paid in other Councils. In recognition of the complexity of the work in Belfast, our Good Relations Officers are paid at a higher grade; the difference is met by the Council.

In late 2003 the first staff were appointed; there were initially 2 Good Relations Officer posts. Over the years, the number of salaried posts funded at 75% by the Community Relations Unit has risen to 5 – i.e. 4 Good Relations Officers + 1 post of Good Relations Assistant.

The criteria used to assess applications for grant aid were substantially revised in early 2007, in line with the recommendations of a report commissioned by the Council on Community Engagement, Good Relations and Good Practice by Gráinne Kelly; the new criteria have been in use for grant assessments since 1st April 2007.

Current financial position

In examining the financial position, the Good Relations Partnership should be aware that:

- the amount approved is a maximum grant; the actual amount is based on receipted expenditure paid by the group
- there is a time lag between approval and final total expenditure, though 70% is paid in advance

- the expenditure is then re-claimed quarterly, in arrears from OFM/DFM, which results in a further time-lag and effectively means the Council covers the cost initially.

OFM/DFM process

The Good Relations Manager prepares an annual bid to OFMDFM, including a summary business plan, expected workload and anticipated outcomes for coming year. This bid is based on the needs of the area and OFM/DFM are particularly interested in innovative programmes (e.g. our bonfire management scheme). The Council has to ensure that its Good Relations Plan and proposals are complementary to, but do not duplicate or overlap with, other funded programmes (such as Peace III/EU funded). The OFM/DFM have a number of conditions which must be met to ensure continued funding; these include making detailed quarterly returns, showing allocation of grant aid, an annual report on progress etc.

The annual amounts allocated by OFM/DFM for staffing and programme costs have risen steadily over recent years:

Financial year	OFM/DFM allocation (rounded to nearest ££)
2003-04	230,000
2004-05	236,000
2005-06	260,000
2006-07	280,000
2007-08	300,000
2008-09	450,000

Key Issues

The NI Executive has substantially increased the level of funding available for good relations work in its Programme for Government 2008-2011; the year 2008-09 is to be viewed as a 'transitional year' leading to significant funding increases in future years.

The Council's allocation for 2008-09 of just over £451,000 is very generous, representing a 50% increase on the previous year and is made up of £145,000 of salaries and £306,000 of programme costs; these include £262,500 towards the Grant Aid Fund.

The OFM/DFM assumes that the Council will match the other 25% of expenditure, i.e. with a minimum of £150,500 from Council resources, of which £87,500 relates to grants.

Current financial position

The Council prepares its estimates of expenditure by January each year and the level of grant from the CRU is not known at that stage. The Council has therefore to estimate the amount of its contribution to the grants' budget based on the assumption that OFM/DFM grant will be at least the same as the current year. On this basis the Council has budgeted for a contribution of approx. £53,000 while the actual contribution it must make to maximise the OFM/DFM offer is £87,500.

I have reviewed the estimates of the Unit and expenditure to date and I am satisfied that funding for the shortfall of £34,500 can be achieved through underspending in a number of other areas:

- The move from the City Hall and the lack of a (free) central venue has meant that the Good Relations Unit has not organised as many events as usual
- The focus of the Unit on the imminent opening of the Peace III programme has meant that some projects have been deferred
- There have been savings in other areas of the Unit's budget, e.g. publications.

In view of this, I recommend that the Good Relations Partnership note that the total amount of Good Relations Grant Aid Fund in 2008-09 year is £350,000, i.e. £262,500 from OFM/DFM and £87,500 from the Council.

This is a realistic amount and compares well with the previous year 2007-08, when a total of £340,000 was approved by the Good Relations Steering Panel to almost 80 projects. The introduction of the Peace III Small Grants programme will also be of benefit as larger applications can be diverted there; this programme is funded separately from the OFM/DFM and Council funded stream.

Since March 2008, grants totalling approximately £288,000 have been approved from the budget of £350,000. This means that, while the Good Relations Grant Aid Fund can be re-opened for applications, given the limited amount which is available (around £60,000), consideration must be given to additional conditions which should be applied as to how the money is awarded. In these circumstances no applications could be processed until the Partnership has had an opportunity to consider the issues and therefore the Fund will be re-opened with awards being recommended at the November meeting of the Partnership.

A number of options for these temporary restrictions are set out in the 'Decisions required' section below, but it is also recommended that a report be brought to the Partnership by February 2009 regarding future management of the Fund. That report can take into account our experience of applying these restrictions in the short-term and the assessment of the potential impact of the Peace III Small Grants Programme on this scheme.

Decisions required:

Should the Grant Aid Fund be re-opened, the Good Relations Partnership is requested to determine which of the following options should apply for the remainder of this financial year:

1. **Revise the criteria in favour of projects scoring higher than 27 on the scoring matrix, i.e. projects demonstrating 'good' or 'excellent' adherence to criteria; these can be both inter- and intra-community projects. This will permit the more challenging projects to proceed but may have an impact on applications from smaller/newer groups.**
2. **Cap the monthly grant aid limit to £20,000 per month for the remainder of the year, commencing again in November, and take applications on a first come, first served basis. This will not distinguish applications by quality.**
3. **Provide funding only to voluntary and community groups – i.e. rule out those from statutory agencies, e.g. schools, universities.**
4. **Allow no more than 1 application per year from any group – would rule out larger organisations making applications for a number of ambitious projects, but may present problems if introduced so late in the financial year.**
5. **Cap all grants at £5,000**
6. **A combination of the above options.”**

Several Members pointed out that it was important not to put in place conditions which would result in newer groups being excluded from the grants system and, in this regard, it was suggested that officers could provide guidance to such groups to ensure that those groups were able to participate fully in the scheme.

The Good Relations Officer explained how the scoring matrix operated and he indicated that there were four bands under which funds were allocated. The most challenging projects would normally receive the highest score and therefore the greater amount of grant.

The Good Relations Manager pointed out that the Peace III Small Grants Scheme would be available within the next few months and it was anticipated that a level of grant up to £25,000 might be provided which, she suggested, might alleviate the pressure on the Council's grant scheme.

After discussion, the Partnership agreed to adopt options 1 and 5 contained within the report and agree further to advise all groups that the receipt of applications in respect of Grant Aid Fund would recommence in November.

In addition, the Partnership agreed, in principle, that a limit be set on the amount of grant aid which might be awarded to an individual group during any one financial year, the amount to be agreed at the next meeting of the Partnership.

Anti-Racism Workshop Week – Proposed Programme

The Members were advised that this year's Anti-Racist Workplace Week would take place during the period from the 3rd till 7th November. The initiative was an all-island social partnership programme organised by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Equality Authority in Ireland and key social partners North and South, including the Trades Unions. The initiative aimed to help workplaces achieve full equality in practice through the development of effective policies, practices and procedures.

The Good Relations Manager advised the Partnership further that, in order to mark the holding of the Anti-Racist Workplace Week, the Good Relations Unit had proposed hosting a number of initiatives designed to raise awareness among Council employees of issues relating to cultural and ethnic diversity. The initiatives would include training for Council employees on the prevention of hate crime and, in conjunction with South Belfast Roundtable, the holding of migrant awareness training. Cultural awareness visits for Council employees to other minority ethnic/faith-based organisations would also be organised as part of the Anti-Racist Workplace Week.

She outlined the financial implications of the awareness workshops and training, which amounted to £980 approximately.

After discussion, the Partnership approved the programme of events.

The Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan (Communication Plan)

The Good Relations Manager reminded the Partnership that, at its meeting on 15th August, it had been advised that the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) had introduced a requirement for a communications plan to be developed as a mandatory part of the Council's revised action plan.

Accordingly, she submitted the undernoted plan for the Partnership's consideration:

“Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan
Peace III – 1.1 Building Positive Relations at the Local Level

Communication Plan

1. Background

This preliminary Communication Plan summarises the expected activities. The full plan will be developed and firmed up when the full-time staff for the Peace III Programme have been recruited.

2. Key Message

The aim of the communications plan is to increase awareness among stakeholders and encourage applications for funding. The key message is that the Peace Plan funding is to promote peace and reconciliation in Belfast.

2.1. Mandatory inclusions

The contribution of the EU and the SEUPB towards the funding of the entire Programme and all its individual elements will be made clear at all times; this will be done by the inclusion of logos on all public advertisements, event publicity and all documentation.

Any project funded through the Peace III Programme will be expected, as a condition of funding, to publicly acknowledge the grant by the inclusion of logos and any other mandatory inclusions on any publicity and advertising material. Any major capital project will be required to display appropriate signage to reflect the EU / SEUPB financial contribution.

The key message will be that the funding from the EU has been vital to the establishment of the Peace Plan and that the message of peace and reconciliation runs throughout the entire Programme.

3. Target audience

The stakeholder analysis has identified the following audiences:

- The members of the Good Relations Partnership
- Elected Members of Council

- Voluntary and community groups applying to the Peace Programme, who in turn are made up of various key stakeholder groups – young people, older people, women, former prisoners, et alia
- Statutory agencies applying to the Peace Programme
- Agencies, groups and individuals participating in the Programme
- Agencies, groups and individuals benefiting from the Programme
- Local media covering the events as part of the Programme

4. Methods of Communication

Methods of communication will be tailored to the various audiences and we will identify this upfront by asking our stakeholders how they want to be communicated with.

4.1 Email marketing

Depending on the evaluation, we aim to primarily use email marketing and online methods of communication. This method may prove more popular with young people than with older people. We propose to purchase email marketing software to provide timely information and updates to our target audience, who want to be contacted in this way. This method is efficient and we can evaluate its effectiveness. The software will provide reports on how many people opened their email, when they opened it and whether or not they went on to the website for further information. The email software will be integrated with our website. It can be configured to automatically update subscribers to any changes in the funding. This method of communications also has the advantage of cutting down on printed material.

4.2 Website

We will use the web address www.belfastcity.gov.uk/goodrelations or www.belfastcity.gov.uk/peacethree to provide regular updates to our stakeholders.

The main site attracts about 200,000 unique visitors per month and we can measure the traffic to the Peace III section through reports from Corporate Communications and can provide figures on downloads. We can also use this facility to ask our audiences for feedback on the information they are receiving, to enable us to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness throughout the campaign. This will enable us to make any improvements to the site.

We will keep the website updated regularly (at least monthly), and will use this as our primary means of communication. We aim to get at least 150 unique visitors per month to these pages.

4.3. Publications

The council will promote Peace III in its own publications, including City Matters, the residents' magazine, which is delivered to over 128,000 households in Belfast. There are advertising and editorial opportunities available in this publication. We can also use our own internal staff magazine, Intercom. We can look at other publications in the council to see how we can use them to get the message out.

We hope to minimise the amount of printed material, but will allow for some promotional publications. We will also publish written reports in hard copy at intervals on appropriate items.

All publications would carry the website address.

4.4 Press

We will issue a press release to accompany the launch of the programme and of each new initiative and/or event within it. We intend having at least four press releases per year, issued around newsworthy events. These will be issued through our own Corporate Communications Unit's press office, which has permanent professional staff experienced in media issues¹. All press releases should point people to the website address. We would also try to secure media coverage of any events held.

4.5 Publicity events and activities

We would propose a launch event to inform our stakeholders and an event one year on to raise awareness and mark the project milestone. There may be a requirement for workshops or road shows throughout the period, to inform, update and encourage our stakeholders.

Depending on the uptake of stakeholders who want to receive information through email marketing, we propose a number of small training sessions to allow people to be fully confident in working online.

5. Proposed methodology

We intend to devise a questionnaire, to be tested over the summer, to identify all our various target audiences and which method of communication they prefer. This questionnaire will be drawn up to take account of data protection requirements and will be circulated to all the groups and individuals on our current mailing list, both for the Peace III Programme and our own current Good Relations work.

We will hold a workshop session to identify our principal target audiences and how best to communicate with our range of stakeholders. Our questionnaire will specifically enquire how people want to receive up-dated information and how they want to hear about or be alerted to changes or amendments in the programme.

We will ensure that any changes made to the programme, for example, to the criteria for small grants or for dates for commissioned calls, are placed on the website immediately and that stakeholders are alerted through email marketing or the press.

6. Communication lead

We have included the development and implementation of our communication plan as a key task within the responsibility of the Programme Manager; this is included as a specific task in his/her job description. The Programme Manager will be responsible for all publicity and information activities.

7. Activity plan

A full activity plan detailing what is happening when will be supplied at a later stage, as we can't be prescriptive about individual activities now. It will start with researching how our stakeholders want to be communicated with. We will then roll-out the methods of communication dependent on our

target audiences, for example for those who want to use online methods, there will be a familiarisation event, including any relevant press coverage. There will be an overall launch event with press activity, to raise awareness and signpost people to the website for more information. Evaluation will be carried out at various stages throughout.

8. Evaluation

We will ensure that an appropriate method of evaluation of the plan is developed at an early stage and that evaluation methods are built in to all activities within the programme; this will mean that any amendments required may be made as quickly as possible to ensure maximum effectiveness of the programme. We have included an amount for this in the overall budget for the communication plan.

We will:

- monitor press coverage
- analyse web statistics
- review feedback from events, workshops and online
- evaluate take-up on a quarterly basis

9. Budget

We have allocated an amount of £20,000 in our budget to cover the costs of this communication plan; this will be monitored and the effectiveness of the plan reviewed and revised where necessary. We have included in this an amount for the purchase of email marketing software as outlined above. This will also reduce the amount of paper work required and cost of printing and publishing written material, so contributing to our overall environmental policy and sustainable development aims.”

After discussion, the Partnership adopted the Communications Plan.

On Board Training: Follow-up Session

The Partnership was advised that a further session of the “On Board” training would be provided for those Members of the Good Relations Partnership who had been unable to attend on Friday, 15th August. The next session would be held in the Council Chamber, Adelaide Exchange at 4.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 23rd September.

Noted.

Claiming of Travel Costs

The Partnership agreed and adopted a policy in respect of the claiming of travel costs incurred by the Partnership Members whilst on Partnership business, the policy being based on the standard Council requirements for the submission of claims and the production of associated receipts.

Chairman

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