

**Local partnership working on policing and community safety;  
a way forward**

**A consultation response by Belfast City Council**

**May 2009**

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## **1. Introduction**

Belfast City Council is pleased to respond to this consultation given its lead role in the management and administration of the Belfast Community Safety Partnership and the District Policing Partnership.

The Council has for some time expressed concerns that there is too much duplication between the two partnerships and a lack of integration is apparent.

The Council has already provided an interim response outlining that it is in agreement with the principle of creating fully integrated partnerships in the longer term and on taking steps as soon as possible to more closely align the work and approaches of CSPs and DPPs.

At a recent workshop held for Elected Representatives on the Safer City Agenda, Members expressed the view that the current separation between the two partnerships is far from ideal and there are definite advantages in bringing the two partnerships together in the longer term. In addition, they emphasised that the independent monitoring function currently provided by the DPP needs to be maintained, as this is a statutory function. They also felt that the political primacy provided by the DPP was extremely important. However, whilst it was recognised that the DPP delivers its services under statutory authority which restricts the scope of its operations, it was considered that DPPs needed to change in that their inability at present to deliver interventions and programmes at community level, was causing serious frustration among both Members and the Public.

The Council has not been overly prescriptive in its response at this point in time as it considers that specific models will evolve as the scope and functions of the new integrated partnership develop, the community planning framework is progressed and devolution of criminal justice takes place which could result in some further alterations to what is proposed in the consultation document. The Council would therefore request that there is a process of continuous dialogue with it as the proposals progress.

The following more detailed comments are made in response to the questions posed in the consultation document.

## **2. Response**

### **Q 1. Should we be planning for the creation of fully integrated local partnerships to coincide with the move to 11 council areas in 2011?**

Belfast City Council has already responded on this issue, stating that it is in agreement with the principle of creating fully integrated partnerships in the longer term and on taking steps as soon as possible to more closely align the work and approaches of CSPs and DPPs

The Council however recommends that significant time is invested through meaningful and proactive consultations with elected members,

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stakeholders, partners and community networks to agree the scope, functions and structure of the new partnership. Clarity of roles and responsibilities is essential.

It is important to note that councils will also, between now and 2011, be identifying their approach to community planning and the new 'safety' partnership arrangements would support and complement this new way of working.

The Council's view is that both the accountability and delivery roles of the existing partnerships must be maintained and where possible combined in a pragmatic way. There still exists a political imperative to monitor the performance of the PSNI against the policing plan. There is also a need to demonstrate that issues raised through community engagement can be supported by direct intervention programmes and that planning on 'safety' for each area is much better integrated.

**Q2. Provided sufficient consensus exists on the principle of new integrated partnerships, should the working group, which would include the main stakeholder organisations, be invited to agree outline proposals that could be presented to an incoming devolved minister?**

Once the function of the new partnership is agreed and a clear understanding of what is or is not included is reached; it makes sense that the working group would develop outline proposals to be presented to an incoming Minister for Justice. However it is imperative that such proposals are developed in consultation with councils and other stakeholders.

**Q3. Are the timescales proposed for achieving the new partnerships realistic (annex A)? If not, when should we be aiming to have them in place?**

Annex A refers to a number of steps which culminate in *membership and governance of new partnerships being confirmed in advance of local government reforms* which are scheduled for 2011. This would appear to be a logical timeframe given that the number of partnerships will be reduced to 11 at that time. However it should be borne in mind that the DPPs were reconstituted in April, 2008 for a four year term. Steps would need to be taken to dissolve the DPPs before their term expires if we are to be ready to start the new arrangements in 2011.

As mentioned previously Belfast City Council recommends that the working group invests its energy in ensuring the functions and scope are correct at this stage so that the structural proposals are well thought through in advance of 2011.

**Q 4 Should all of the current community safety partnership and district policing partnership functions be maintained?**

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The Council considers that the functions of both partnerships should be maintained. In particular the monitoring role of the DPP in respect of the PSNI and the annual and local policing plans is considered vital as is the delivery role of the existing community safety partnership. However it is considered that in bringing the two partnerships together there is an opportunity to streamline and clarify the functions of:

- engagement
- planning
- delivery
- monitoring and review.

This review should take account of the changes taking place through the review of public administration where the new partnership is likely to form a sub partnership of the community planning structure for the area.

It is important that elected representatives have a pivotal role to play, not only in monitoring the performance of the PSNI, but in oversight of service delivery by public bodies through community planning; this should include the need for elected members to influence the allocation of resources to help deliver a safer Belfast.

The specific functions the new safer area partnership (e.g. the Safer Belfast Partnership) should include:

- To regularly consult and engage with the public to identify local priorities for action by the Safer Area Partnership, including the PSNI. This engagement should also ensure that local communities are involved in identifying and resolving these local community safety and policing issues.
  - To develop a three – four year Safer Area Plan which includes goals, high level intervention programmes and services as well as performance targets and measures.
  - To produce annual Safer Area Action Plans to meet the three year targets. The plan should include a mechanism to respond to emerging issues on an ongoing basis, as well as medium and long term projects.
  - To inform the formation of local and annual policing plans and to monitor performance against these. However consideration should be given over time to the policing plan becoming part of the overall Safer Area Plan. It is appreciated that the current approach to monitoring of PSNI involves public meetings and there would appear to be a desire to continue with this transparent approach.
  - To produce regular assessments of relevant data for monitoring performance against the annual action plans in the context of the longer term 3 – 4 year plan. This should also include specific details on the performance of the PSNI against the agreed action plan.
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The assessment should also inform annual priorities for action by the Safer Area Partnership.

- To develop an evidence base of what programmes and interventions are the most effective. This should include evaluating the Safer Area projects and sharing good practice.

Belfast City Council believes that any functional framework which is developed should allow for a level of local flexibility.

**Q 5 Are there additional functions that could be performed by a new local partnership?**

- These are outlined in the answer to four above.
- In addition, the new partnership needs to work closely with any Good Relations Partnership structures already established (as is the case in Belfast). Mechanisms could be put in place to enable the business of the Safety Belfast Partnership to be influenced by the Good Relations Partnership, particularly where the manifestation of poor community cohesion results in problems which are seen by the public as community safety issues e.g. rioting at interfaces, problems at bonfire sites, etc.

**Q 6. What should be the membership of the new integrated partnership?**

The membership of the new integrated partnership should include Elected Representatives at all levels and it should be recognised that they hold a democratic mandate to influence priorities, investment and delivery of services and to monitor performance on behalf of the communities they represent. In determining how Elected Members should be selected, the principle of proportionality should be given primacy over any other consideration. Elected Members should be involved in both the monitoring and delivery groups.

Statutory organisations should also be represented where they have a core function that can impact on community safety. However, it is important that these organisations bring much more than a delivery mechanism to the new integrated partnership. There needs to be a clear mechanism for passing the information that flows from the communities they work with on an area basis up to the partnership which will in turn allow for better planning, appreciation of the impact of projects and programmes as well as an understanding of local tensions and conflicts. They should also be required to align their individual corporate plans with the safer area priorities and should align resources around these priorities. This is something that the Council would wish to see addressed through the community planning framework.

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The following statutory partners should comprise the core membership of all the new integrated partnerships; police, council, Housing Executive, Youth Justice Agency, Probation Board, Health and Social Services Trust (drug and alcohol services, older people, children/teenager services), Ambulance Service, Fire and Rescue Service, Education (youth services and education welfare).

Community sector partners are also crucial, but it is recognised that it is not easy to achieve a truly representative approach and yet keep the membership of the partnership of a manageable size. Belfast Community Safety Partnership is working with the Belfast Area Partnership Boards to achieve a mechanism to access the wider community sector in the area.

The current DPP membership model includes membership of Independent Members who can also represent communities. There is considered to be merit in continuing this approach. However, again it is appreciated that the size of the partnership must also be manageable.

There are a number of voluntary organisations which should be considered when deciding on the membership of the new partnerships, for example Victim Support, Women's Aid, an older people's representative group and a young people's representative group as they can help the partnership keep a balanced approach. Participation of Extern and NIACRO are also considered important due to their knowledge and expertise in preventing re-offending and supporting people at risk of offending. Co-opting may be an option for some of these organisations as and when the agenda warrants it so as to keep the partnership to a manageable size. However, thought would need to be given to voting and decision making rights.

The participation of trade unions seems inappropriate for the new partnership. Similarly the participation of business representatives should be proportional to the needs identified in the regular assessment of community needs. In Belfast, these assessments seldom identify business crime as a key concern for the public and it may be more appropriate to co-opt members on as and when the agenda would warrant it.

### **Q 7 What would be the optimum size and combination?**

The size and structure of the partnership should ideally ensure that no more than 25 people should be around the table at any one time. This is considered to be the maximum number that would still enable effective discussions and decision making. However it is appreciated that this is not likely to be possible given the number of elected representatives, independent members and partner organisations that need to have representation. Perhaps the tiered approach suggested could assist with managing numbers.

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### **Q8 Who should chair the partnership?**

It is the Council's view that the principle of political primacy is reinforced through the appointment of an Elected Representative as chair. The appointment could be accommodated within the Council's annual allocations under the proportionality mechanisms or a system similar to the DPP could be adopted where the Chairmanship is rotated annually between the 4 largest parties on the Council over a 4-year term. However further consideration will need to be given as to the preferred model once the proposals for overall governance arrangements post 2011 have been finalised by the Policy Development Panel 'A' and the Strategic Leadership Board.

### **Q 9 What do consultees think of the potential model set out in Appendix C?**

Given the current arrangements and the political reasons behind a number of the functions, the development of any new model is going to be a significant challenge.

The model described in Appendix C sets out to combine two partnerships and their functions but uses two substructures to continue most of the existing current roles of the community safety partnership and district policing partnerships. This model does not on the face of it seem ideal. However, Belfast City Council appreciates the constraints that the NIO is attempting to take a pragmatic approach.

The proposed membership of the monitoring board in the new partnership arrangement is the same as the current membership of the district policing partnership. Consideration should be given to whether this is the most appropriate form to take. In particular the number and role of the Independent Members should be examined, particularly in light of the fact that there will be a wide range of sectors represented on the overall partnership.

The proposed membership of the delivery group should also include elected representatives as they have the political mandate to challenge delivery organisations.

There is some ambiguity and contradiction in the document as to whether the scope of the review should consider whether the monitoring role should be restricted to the PSNI and the policing plan or to the entire community safety agenda. Although in principle, all organisations should be held to account for their part in delivering the agreed area safety plan, Belfast Council is not currently in a position to give specific comments on this given the stage that RPA is at. However it is important to consider the role of the future community planning partnerships in these deliberations and it is suggested that input on the proposed changes to DPPs and CSPs should be sought from the appropriate bodies involved in driving the RPA process.

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Although the community planning framework for Northern Ireland has not yet been agreed, local community planning partnerships, and accountability arrangements introduced alongside them, are likely to present an opportunity to better monitor the performance of a wide range of partners. It is likely that many of the organisations involved in the Safer Belfast Partnership will have senior/chief officers represented on the community planning partnership, so it is hoped priorities will become embedded in member organisations in a much more connected and sustainable way.

The question of oversight on how police performance is monitored at a local level is a matter for political debate at a high level. The issue of the accountability at a regional level complicates the picture as Community Safety Partnerships and District Policing Partnerships are responsible to different bodies, namely the Community Safety Unit and the Northern Ireland Policing Board. The model described on page 33, although complicated envisages that these two accountability channels are maintained. Again the Council appreciates that the NIO is attempting to be pragmatic in the circumstances. However this is an area that a new devolved justice department should review as a matter of urgency when it is established.

In this proposed model the elected members involved in the monitoring of police should be the same elected members involved in the Safer Belfast Partnership so that the work done with local communities could provide additional information to councillors to assist in their role in monitoring the police. This monitoring role should continue to be carried out in public.

In addition, although the separation of Tiers within the partnership is again not ideal, this is considered to be pragmatic at this point in time and should also be subjected to a review by the new Department of Justice.

**Q 10 To whom should an integrated partnership be accountable for each of its functions?**

See comments to Question 9 above.

The model set out on page 33 describes a number of accountability arrangements which have the potential to lead to confusion and duplication of effort.

The Council considers that these structures and arrangements will be a matter for the new Department for Justice to consider once established. In addition, as the community planning framework develops over the next few months, the question of scrutiny over the delivery of the community plan will be tested and new arrangements may emerge.

Whatever arrangements are put in place, there is a political aspiration that elected members are involved in determining the allocation of resources in pursuit of a safer area and also in monitoring the performance of the police service and other agencies at a local level. Thinking around this proposal

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needs to be developed further with local councillors and MLAs through the appropriate political systems.

**Q 11. How should an integrated partnership be resourced?**

Resources should be coordinated through the local council, with the council contributing a capped percentage to the administration of the partnership. The remaining costs should be met by the Department of Justice.

**It is vital that the resources currently allocated to both DPPs and CSPs from the Policing Board and CSU are not reduced even if savings are made by reducing the number of partnerships. There is currently significant under investment in community safety work and Belfast City Council believes that any savings should be re-invested in programmes to improve safety.**

It is also important to emphasise that DPP's are currently funded only to undertake monitoring and a degree of public consultation. They have little or no operational capacity and this gap needs to be addressed in the new arrangements.

**Q 12. How much is needed in the future for administration?**

Until the function and structure of an integrated partnership is finalised it is impossible to estimate the cost of future administration.

It is clear that there will be efficiency savings by reducing the number of partnerships. However this money should be re-invested in programme work. There will be considerable expectations from the community when the two partnerships are brought together and if there is not more money to invest in interventions, there could be considerable frustration.

**Q 13. What would an integrated partnership plan look like?**

It should be formatted to include medium (1 year) and longer term aspirations and projects (3 -4 years) as well as requiring a mechanism to respond to emerging issues on an ongoing basis. This is in line with the development of annual and 3 – 4 year Safer Belfast Plan.

The plan should eventually align to the strategic framework set by the Community Planning Partnership.

An integrated plan means that it will include actions around all of the functions agreed for the partnership, including consultation and monitoring of the policing plan. Eventually the local policing plan could potentially form a section of the integrated plan.

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There should be clear actions and targets. A public version of the plan would be helpful to help communicate a joined up approach to the safety agenda.

**Q 14. What should the new partnership be called?**

The new name of the partnership should reflect a change from what currently exists and should not imply that one partnership is 'taking over' the other. The suggestion in this response is 'Safer <<area name>> Partnership', e.g. Safer Belfast Partnership.

**Q 15. What measures could be taken to bring community safety partnerships and district policing partnerships closer together, short of integration into a single partnership?**

Belfast City Council recommends that area specific measures are developed locally and agreed with the Policing Board and the NIO, Community Safety Unit.

In addition, the Council considers that better integration could be achieved by:

- One senior manager should ideally have responsibility for the safety agenda within each council and ideally the staff teams should be brought together. It is important to recognise that the aspiration of better joint working may require some changes to the roles of both teams; this will have to be agreed with Belfast City Council, the staff and with the Policing Board and the Community Safety Unit.
  - The meetings in public and forums for discussion should be scheduled to inform the wider community safety planning and ongoing tasking process. To succeed in this, agreement should be reached about the format of these meetings to make them meaningful, to show action and to allow for the District Policing Partnership to meet its statutory requirements. This will require the co-operation of the NIPB and changes will be required to the Code of Practice and, potentially, to legislation.
  - Both partnerships should share information about the groups they are working with across the area, and any opportunities to rationalise this work should be pursued.
  - There should be joint agenda setting for the two partnerships.
  - The DPP and CSP should be involved in any community engagement planning undertaken by the other partnership or other parts of the Council (for example area based delivery in Belfast) so that a more joined up approach can be developed.
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- The public consultation due in 2010 should be commissioned jointly by both partnerships (this happened in Belfast in 2007).
- The planning cycles of both the DPP and the CSP need to be synchronised.

It should be noted that many of the above suggestions will require agreement between the Policing Board and the CSU. It is also vital that the review group be tasked with identifying what legislative change will be necessary to enable an integrated partnership in the longer term and that steps are taken to move this forward.

**Q 16. Should the working group be tasked with agreeing these measures and overseeing their implementation, as an early priority?**

Belfast City Council agrees that the working group should be tasked with taking this forward as soon as possible. However, as the situation with RPA and the devolution of criminal justice will continue to change and take shape in the coming months, it is considered vital that an ongoing dialogue is maintained with councils as the proposals progress.

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