Belfast Interface Project

Strategic Plan

2009 - 2014

Contents

1   Introduction

The preparation of this strategic plan comes at a time of change for Belfast's interface communities. The days of armed violence and of widespread civil disturbance at interfaces appear to be over and of course the greater community is thankful for this. There is anecdotal evidence that sizeable numbers of young people, especially, have been prepared to put differences aside and are mixing in large numbers in the city centre at night.

At the same time, however, continuing and significant issues of 'anti-social behaviour' and youth-led violence at many interfaces are further evidence of the extent to which sizeable numbers within the younger generation have been socialised into conflict at interfaces, even where this is against the express wishes of local community leaders, political parties and paramilitary groups. It is difficult to overstate just how debilitating this 'low level' violence can be for interface residents who experience this.

1.1 The Legacy of Segregation

The two main communities in Belfast are still highly segregated and differentiated in terms of housing, education, workplace and many other aspects of everyday life. Within weeks of the establishment of the new Executive, for example, there was an announcement that a new interface security fence was to be installed in an area of North Belfast. In this way, there exists a time-lag in terms of the effects of the new political dispensation in helping people to feel free of the need to keep largely within their own communities for reasons of perceived safety.

Interface areas have for many years been characterised by three distinct kinds of difficulty:

Social and economic disadvantage;

Violence and its legacies; and

Perceived restrictions upon safety and freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services which require travel into or through the 'other' community.

1.2 Interfaces and Residential Segregation

Nowhere is this more evident than in the ongoing debate regarding the future provision of housing through which to meet the larger nationalist housing need, while still catering for and addressing the concerns within the unionist community that such provision will further erode their areas of traditional housing and, thereby, their sense of security. There has been in recent years an influx into the city of large numbers of members of ethnic minority communities so that civic society is dealing not just with issues relating to how members of our nationalist and unionist 'old diversity' manage to live their lives together in peace, but also how best we can accommodate and welcome these members of our 'new diversity' into our city.

Accompanying this recent demographic and political change, housing affordability has emerged as a major issue for many interface communities experiencing intensive property speculation and change as sizable proportions of, previously, public housing stock have moved into private and diverse ownership. Increasingly, young people find that local home ownership is beyond their means, while local provision of social housing is dwindling, so that many young home-makers are moving out of their areas to affordable housing elsewhere or contributing to local overcrowding by forming second households in their parents' homes.

1.3 Removal of Interfaces

The interest of the US-Ireland Alliance in investigating the possibility of the symbolic removal of an interface structure, to coincide with the marking of the 10th anniversary of the Belfast Agreement, while ultimately unsuccessful, has sparked a debate across the interface community sector in Belfast as to what, exactly, should be the future for these structures and communities. Stemming from this debate, a number of suggestions have been put forward for discussion, for example that it may be possible to replace sections of interface wall/fence with gates that could be locked at times of security concern, as a way for interface communities to ease safely towards a future without walls.

Similarly, at a statutory level, there is a growing interest in beginning to get to grips with the issue of addressing the prevalence of government-built interface security fences – as one person put it:

"We have a system for putting them up, but we don't have one for taking them down".

There is growing evidence of co-operation amongst interface community groups and activists on a wide range of issues of common benefit and concern. The increase in BIP membership from approx 30 in 2003 to 70 in 2008 indicates to us that interface communities and civil society groups within them are pressing for change.

1.4 Development of Infrastructure

Alongside this growth in capacity, in very recent years, a new infrastructure of inter-community networks and forums has emerged which provides the practical logistical support for this, including both city-wide and more localised structures, keen to engage with the statutory and voluntary sectors for the betterment of their communities. Making up an important element within this infrastructure, networks of loyalist and republican ex-combatants, working together to quell interface violence and to build new positive working relationships both amongst themselves and across their wider communities, have emerged into public visibility.

For many, this joint work began some years ago and indeed some would say that the current political settlement would not have been possible without their work behind the scenes. Many of those involved in 'fire-fighting' interface tension and violence in the past feel now that they have a right and a responsibility as well as an opportunity to take up a more visible and broader role in terms of peace-building in interface areas. Accompanying this emergence into visibility, ex-combatant groups have contended with a range of reactions including welcome, ambivalence and suspicion from amongst some more visible and long-standing groups and agencies, both locally and further afield, in terms of respective track-records and future roles and responsibilities in relation to peace-building work in interface areas.

It will be important that factionalism doesn't develop to undermine the effectiveness of development work in interface areas. BIP has an open door policy in this regard and will liaise with any group for the benefit of interface communities, as we have done in the past.

1.5 Prospects for Change

The statutory and voluntary sectors have in recent years developed a range of new government initiatives through which to promote the social and economic regeneration of the city. A number of these are at an early stage, while others are at more advanced stages. All depend for their success upon successful engagement with the communities which they are there to benefit.

At the 2008 investment conference in Belfast, Mayor of New York Michael Bloomberg outlined that "The historic cultural barriers between the two communities here are slowly coming down. And the sooner they do, and the sooner the physical barriers come down as well, the sooner the flood gates of private investment will open."

Welcoming this statement a few days later, First Minister Rev Ian Paisley clarified his position that local communities would ultimately be responsible for making decisions about their interface walls and fences: *"Outsiders pulling down walls will accomplish nothing. But when those on both sides of the wall mutually come to agreement and say we are taking down these walls, then we will have won a great victory and I look forward to that victory being sealed over and over again in these areas where there has been great trouble in the past days."* At BIP, we welcome these sentiments and look forward to their translation into concretely resourced strategies that will support interface communities in this task.

1.6 Conclusion

While fear and insecurity remain for understandable reasons given the age of our conflict, the relative youth of our power-sharing institutions, and the continuing albeit lower level interface violence, there is also a growing acknowledgement both that change is inevitable and that this can be positive and also that, perhaps for the first time, the capacity and the

will exists to create that change across a range of sectors, agencies, groups and individuals.

2   Economic and Social Context

The Programme for Government sets out the Executive's strategic priorities and key plans for 2008-2011. The Programme for Government has been used in determining the Budget and Investment Strategy within which growing the economy is the primary focus.

The Northern Ireland Programme for Government acknowledges that 'Building a strong economy requires…an inclusive and stable society' through two priorities: to grow a dynamic, innovative economy and promote tolerance, inclusion and health and well-being. Factors relevant to this context include the following:

2.1   Potential for economic growth

The restrictions upon labour mobility created by physical interface structures, together with the accompanying 'chill factors' which are sustained by segregation and fear, act as deterrents to investment and impediments to competitiveness. It was within this context that Mayor Bloomberg made the comments noted at 1.5 above.

Similarly, the duplication of limited resources in order to ensure equity of access to facilities and services 'on both sides' of the interface represents an ineffective use of resources particularly against the backdrop of the current economic downturn.

An easing of restrictions upon the mobility of the labour and consumer markets, in relation to the ease with which people feel it is safe to travel to work and to access services and facilities within space that is shared rather than 'their' space, is required in order to promote the conditions necessary for shared economic growth in the city. Otherwise, any economic growth is likely to be constrained within each community separately on a cultural apartheid basis or else it will be confined to the more neutral and accessible city centre.

2.2   Social policy context:

A range of policies and strategies have emerged within recent years which have supported the positive relationship-building work outlined earlier. Belfast City Council's Good

Relations Unit has supported local projects through small grant funding, recently supplemented with Peace III funding.

The Housing Executive's Shared Neighbourhood Programme aims to support and encouraging the development of shared neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland;

The Interface Working Group represents a further significant step forward. This high level inter-agency group has been working on sharing information about existing and prospective new interfaces and relevant policies, and the development of a strategic approach to the transformation of interface areas and physical barriers.

In short, a policy focus and interest, albeit relatively undeveloped, is emerging in relation to interfaces, shared space and demographic change;

This interest in addressing the impact of segregation and division in increasing potential for social and economic growth is likely to continue as the Reform of Public Administration (RPA) makes its recommendations in terms of maximizing efficiency and reducing unnecessary duplication of local authority facilities services.

Against this backdrop, it is useful to be reminded that Trina Vargo of the US-Ireland Alliance commissioned local surveys of residents in 3 interface areas of Belfast in January 2008.

Key findings of the poll:

81% of respondents wanted the walls to come down;

21% said now;

60% said yes, when it's safe enough, but not at present;

17% said they didn't care if the walls never come down;

There was strong agreement that the walls serve to help residents feel safer by keeping the communities separated. They also felt the walls served to stop young gang-related activity.

61% agreed that local politicians should be doing more to create conditions for the walls to come down, with only 10% disagreeing.

52% felt that the two communities are growing in their confidence in each other.

58% lacked confidence in the ability of the police to preserve peace and maintain order if the walls came down.

Encouragingly, those polled seem reluctant to simply place blame on 'the other side,' and accepted that both sides of each interface area share culpability. There was a net disagreement with the proposition that 'the other side could not be trusted."

These findings underscore the huge role that fear and concerns about safety continue to play in interface communities and the importance of the N.I. Executive's new Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) strategy, due to be published in 2009, which will aim to tackle racism, sectarianism and intolerance.

3 Key Regeneration Issues for Interface Communities

As a membership-based organisation, it is important that BIP is sensitive to the needs of member groups, agencies and individuals. With this in mind, BIP first surveyed members' perceptions of their key issues in 2004 and repeated this exercise, using an independent research agency, in 2008 in order to measure any changes over the intervening period. This section outlines some key findings of the research. In general, in interpreting the graphs, positive change is represented by columns increasing in height as they move towards the left-hand margin of the graph; conversely, negative change is noted in columns increasing in height as they move towards the right-hand margin.

3.1 Attractiveness of the Physical Environment

Chart 1: Members' perceptions of changes in level of attractiveness of the physical environment in their own interface area in: previous 10 years (1994-2004); last 4 years (2004-2008)
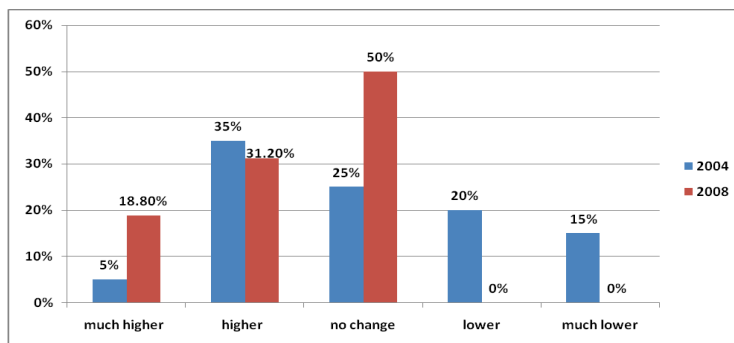

Chart 1 shows that 50% of respondents reported positive changes to levels of attractiveness of their physical environment in the 2008 survey, while a matching 50%

reported no change in this area. While there is clearly room for further development in this area, the figures show an improvement over the 2004 survey results in which 35% of respondents report that levels of attractiveness of the physical environment has actually reduced over the previous 10 years. No respondents report a reduction in the 2008 survey.

3.2 Economic Activity

Chart 2: Change in level of economic activity in members' own interface areas in: previous 10 years (1994-2004); last 4 years (1994-2008)
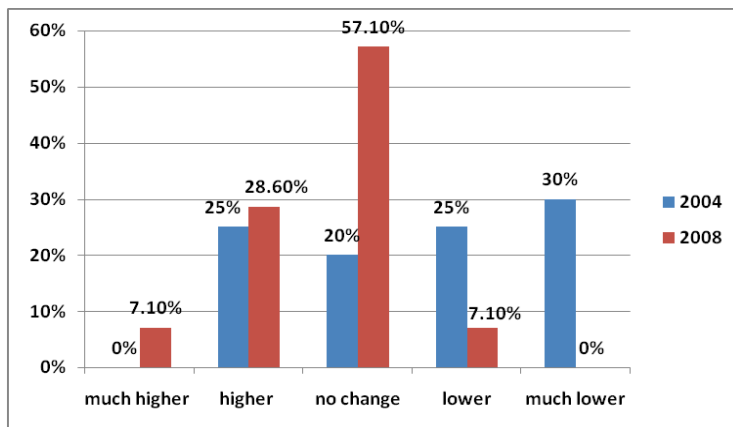
In Chart 2 the 2004 survey results show that more than half of respondents report that levels of economic activity in their communities have reduced over the previous 10 years, with 30% reporting that levels were much lower in 2004; 10% report no change over the period and only 25% report an improvement. In 2008 the proportion reporting an improvement grew to almost 36% while, significantly, the proportion reporting no change has risen from 20% to 57%.

3.3 Freedom of Movement

Chart 3: Change in the level of freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services in interface areas throughout Belfast over the previous 10 years (1994-2004); last 4 years (1994-2008)
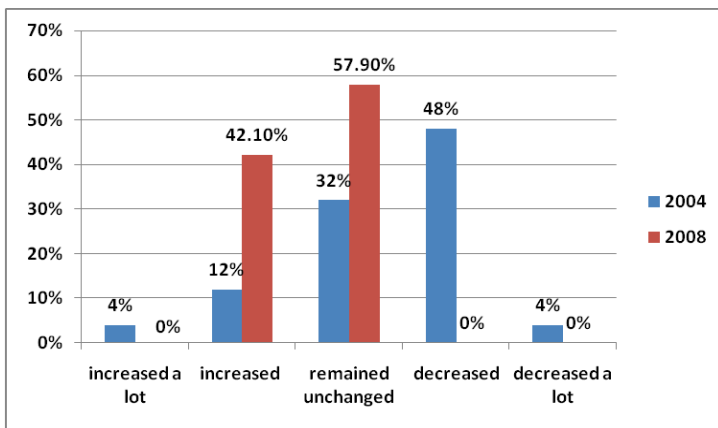
Chart 3 shows some positive movement over the period 2004 to 2008, with 42% reporting that levels of freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services has increased over this period, compared to only 18% in the 2004 survey. As with chart 2, however, chart 3 also shows that a significant majority, at 57%, report no change in this area.

3.4 Intercommunity tension/intimidation/violence

Chart 4: Changes in levels of intercommunity tension/intimidation/violence between the two main communities in Belfast over the previous 10 years (1994-2004); last 4 years (1994-2008)
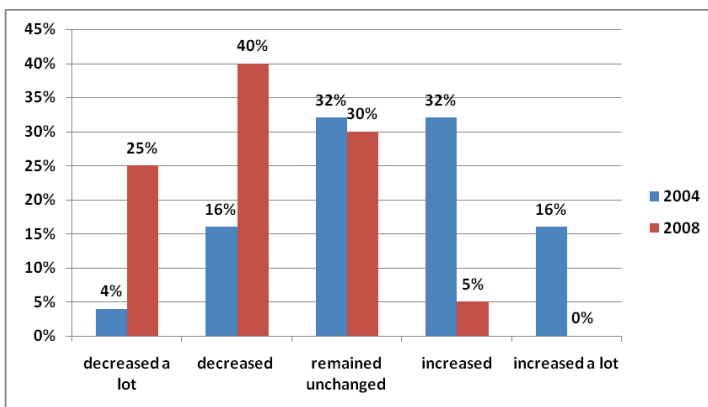
Chart 4 shows a marked shift over the period of the two surveys. In the 2004 survey 48%, almost half, of respondents reported that levels of inter-community tension and violence had increased over the period 1994 to 2004, compared with 30% who felt it remained unchanged and 20% who felt it had decreased over the period. In contrast, 65% of respondents in the 2008 survey report that levels of inter-community tension and violence has decreased, with 25% reporting that it has decreased a lot. In both surveys,

approximately 30% report no change over the period, underlining that this is still an issue in some areas.

3.5 Community dialogue

Chart 5: Changes in level of community dialogue between the two main communities in Belfast over (the last 10 years 2004) / (the last 4 years 2008)
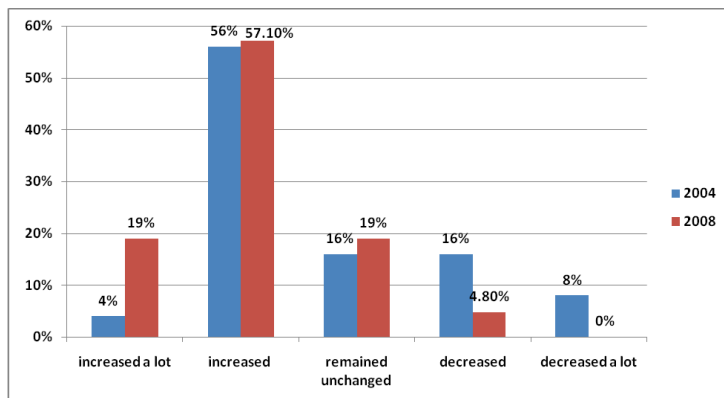
Despite the levels of intercommunity tension and violence reported over the period 1994-2004 in chart 4 above, chart 5 shows that a majority, 60%, of survey respondents indicate that levels of inter-community dialogue has increased over that period. The 2008 survey results continue this trend, with fully three quarters, 76% of respondents, reporting an increase in levels of inter-community dialogue. Despite this positive picture, a significant minority of almost 25%, however, report that levels of dialogue have remained unchanged since 2004 or have actually decreased.

3.6 Summary

This brief 'snapshot' shows clear patterns over the period1994 to 2008:

While levels of attractiveness of the physical environment in some interface areas have improved in recent years, there is clearly room for significant further improvement in this area.

Levels of inter-community tension and violence in interface areas have reduced considerably, accompanied by a growth in levels of inter-community dialogue in many interface areas.

Levels of economic activity in interface areas have been much slower to improve in interface communities, accompanied by continuing difficulties in terms of levels of freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services.

While 42% report that levels of freedom of movement have increased, a significant majority reported no change in this area.

4   Development of the Strategic Plan

The process of developing this strategic plan began with the annual forward-planning residential for members of the Board of Directors of Belfast Interface Project together with staff, held in January 2008 and facilitated by an independent external consultant, Julie Harrison. The strategic planning process, subsequently, continued beyond the residential with board meetings and smaller group discussions set aside specifically for this, so that this document represents the result of a sizeable piece of work by board members and staff over an extended period. BIP sees this plan as a 'living document' which will change over time and which will be subject to annual review and reassessment.

4.1 Reducing Interfaces

An important consideration is that BIP's aim, ultimately, is to work to build capacity which removes the case for its existence in future and so BIP needs to continue its work at policy level in the development of indicators that are acceptable, realistic and grounded in the views of local interface communities in order to monitor indicators of need that it is well-placed to address or otherwise. With this in mind BIP will continue periodically to survey views of members and non-member key-stakeholders on these issues. A priority for BIP in the future, it was felt, is that BIP should support processes of change through being more proactive, rather than reactive owing to the nature of much interface work in the past.

4.2 Conflict Resolution

BIP needs to promote and support processes of conflict transformation, rather than solely conflict management. While it is important, it is felt, BIP should be able to respond to requests for local facilitation independently and impartially where needed and appropriate, BIP needs to act as an independent referral agency wherever possible, referring requests for this work to locally appropriate agencies. In this way, it is felt, BIP needs to clearly support existing and emerging inter-community infrastructure, while at the same time retaining the capacity to deliver localised support where this is appropriate and through consultation and agreement with existing groups and agencies where possible.

Examples of this support work over the past 10 years include:

The cross community development and ownership of Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project;

The support work with interface community representatives in East Belfast in order to design and implement a conflict transformation project there following the violence of 2002; Supporting the development of Finaghy Cross Roads Group joint strategic plan; and

The development of a number of mobile phone networks now largely sustainable by organisations based in interface communities;

Supporting the development of a model of youth mediation at the Whitewell / Whitecity interface; and

Continuing to support of the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group.

4.3 BIP's Role in promoting Shared Space

Acknowledging the growing focus on sharing (shared space, 'A Shared Future', etc) as a concept which is likely to inform and drive future policy debate and development, it is noted that BIP's role will be to participate in this with both realism and vision. In relation to this issue, it is acknowledged that part of BIP's role will be to support the expression and documentation of and engagement with the range of emotions and experiences that exist within interface communities regarding the concept of sharing as well as other issues that may arise.

4.4 Visibility

Finally, it is noted that BIP has in the past generally kept a relatively low profile in terms of local media attention, although with a higher profile internationally, not out of any desire to hide activities but simply due to the sensitivity of the work and because volume of work has prevented the expenditure of energy and resources in promotion of BIP outside of our natural constituency and networks to other stakeholders. It is felt that, given the current environment, BIP needs to develop and maintain a more visible profile while maintaining our independent role.

5. Government Policy Context

BIP, although it is an independent agency, exists within a policy environment which is implemented and influenced by a range of bodies operating from within a number of geographical contexts. These include the European level, an Ireland-wide context, at regional Northern Ireland level, and the Belfast city-wide context. This policy environment includes a framework for the resourcing of interface-related work and a framework outlining the range of principles, rights and responsibilities which underpin that work. This section briefly outlines some key elements within the current policy context; each policy area is described more fully in Appendix 1.

5.1 The Programme for Government 2008 - 2011

The Programme for Government, the first produced by a devolved N.I. assembly in many years, sets out the N.I. Executive's long term aspirations as well as plans and priorities for 2008-2011 and includes two overarching cross-cutting themes of promoting a shared and better future for all and the development of new and innovative measures that will address existing patterns of socio-economic disadvantage and target resources and efforts towards those in greatest objective need.

5.2 A Shared Future Strategy - Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern   Ireland (2005)

The aim of this policy, launched by the Office of the First Minster and Deputy First Minister in March 2005, is to establish, over time, a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance: a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere and where all individuals are treated impartially; a society where there is equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence. The strategy sets out thirteen policy objectives to realise this aim.

5.3 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Corporate Plan 2006 – 2009

The role of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is to promote equality of opportunity and affirmative action, work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination, keep relevant legislation under review, promote good relations between persons of different

racial groups, and oversee the effectiveness of statutory duties on public authorities. The Commission has identified four main priority areas for its work during the period of this corporate plan: making the case for equality; building access to equality provisions and protections; delivering equality, and ensuring high quality organisational performance.

5.4 The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has four main functions: litigation, investigation, education and promotion, and advising government. Four key issues for the Commission include: advising Government on the scope for a constitutional-level Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, to include rights not protected by the European Convention; advising regarding methods of 'Dealing with the Past'; the protection of human rights within the context of combating terrorism, and the encouragement of dialogue and a human rights-based approach as the way forward in conflict intervention and resolving community tensions.

5.5 People & Place – A strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

This strategy, launched by government in June 2003, seeks to target those communities throughout Northern Ireland who are suffering the highest levels of deprivation and to bring together the work of all government departments in partnership with local people to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in all aspects of everyday life. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy details four strategic objectives: community renewal; economic renewal; social renewal, and physical renewal. A key element of the strategy's approach has been the establishment of Neighbourhood Partnerships in each Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) as vehicles for local planning and implementation.

5.6 Positive Steps (2005)

'Positive Steps', the Government's response to 'Investing Together, the report of the Task Force into the resourcing of the Voluntary and Community Sector', states Government's support for the Voluntary and Community Sector and goes on to outline a range of new government commitments in relation to supporting: funding the Voluntary and Community Sector; community development and change; service delivery; cross cutting policy areas;

internal governance, management and accountability; the relationship between the government and the voluntary and community sector; voluntary and community sector support & development services and, finally, next steps to be taken in supporting the delivery of these.

5.7   Community Relations Council (CRC) - Interim and Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010

The plan outlines the approaches that CRC will take, including: identifying and developing new and effective approaches to peace-building and reconciliation in partnership with people, organisations and government; promoting the adoption of good relations policies and practice at local, community and institutional level; assisting communities and institutions in working through and beyond the legacies of the Troubles, and the following principles on which the Council's work is founded: equity and equality; human rights; respect for diversity; interdependence; non-violence, openness, transparency and accountability.

5.8   Peace III Operational Programme. EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007 – 2013 (Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland)

The overall aim of the PEACE III Programme is to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation. The Programme has two strategic objectives: a) Reconciling communities: key activities will facilitate relationships on a cross-community and/or cross-border basis to assist in addressing issues of trust, prejudice and intolerance, and accepting commonalities and differences. In addition, key activities will seek to acknowledge and deal with the hurt, losses, trauma and suffering caused by the conflict; and b) Contributing to a shared society: key activities will address the physical segregation or polarisation of places and communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Region with a view to encouraging increased social and economic cross community and cross-border engagement.

5.9   International Fund for Ireland 2006 – 2010 Strategic Plan

The mission of the IFI, established in 1986, is to underpin efforts towards peace by promoting economic and social advance and encouraging contact, dialogue and

reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland'. Strategic Objectives include the following: helping to build and realise the vision of a shared future for the communities in Northern Ireland and both parts of the island; promoting understanding between the different communities/traditions in Ireland; working with those communities suffering the greatest economic and social deprivation, scarcity of employment and poverty of aspiration; facilitating more integration between the two communities; dealing with the problems of the economically inactive and long-term unemployed; building strong strategic alliances with other agencies and bodies active on the ground; helping ensure the long term continuation of its work in Ireland beyond the lifetime of the Fund; and sharing the expertise and learning acquired over twenty years with peace-builders in other regions.

5.10 Belfast City Council (BCC) Corporate Plan (2007 – 2008)

The Belfast City Council 2007 – 2008 Corporate Plan vision is to make Belfast a better place for everyone, a vision of Belfast as a modern and welcoming city with a quality of life to rival the best in the world - a city that is never content to stand still but improves over the years. BCC has identified four objectives to help make this vision a reality: Providing Civic Leadership; Improving Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations; Promoting Good Relations by encouraging fair treatment, understanding and respect for people of all cultures, and delivering best services by providing high quality, value for money services, when and where people need them.

5.11 Belfast City Council (BCC) 'Good Relations Strategy – Building Our Future Together' (2004)

This strategy aims to promote fair treatment, understanding and respect for people of all cultures and faiths across the city. The vision of the strategy is for a stable, tolerant, fair and pluralist society, where individuality is respected and diversity is celebrated, in an inclusive manner. The Good Relations Strategy has the following high-level objectives: promoting community relations; contribute to a more stable, tolerant society by establishing a community relations programme; celebrating cultural diversity; contributing towards an inclusive pluralist society; promoting and supporting the celebration of such diversity in an

inclusive manner which avoids offending those with different views; promoting equality through service delivery, and promoting equality through a representative workforce.

6   On Sharing and Partnership Working

To say that there has been little positive contact between interface communities over the period of 'the Troubles' would be an understatement, as interface communities have been characterised by segregation and greatly reduced communications over this period of violent conflict. Many interface communities report difficulties in terms of perceived safety in accessing facilities and services particularly where this requires travelling into or through the 'other' community.

The issue of shared housing is particularly sensitive in this early stage in our political settlement, with a need to acknowledge both the real and pressing demand which exists for housing and the security concerns which have been expressed in terms of its provision.

Given that this has been the case, it is hardly surprising that, while the concept of sharing of activities, facilities or services on an inter-community basis is generally welcomed as a positive goal, many community groups and activists feel a need to approach this complex issue carefully and incrementally.

With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that, for some unfamiliar with the concept, the prospect of sharing with members of the 'other' community can appear frightening and risky.

6.1 Exploring Sharing

Against this backdrop, it is important that the concept of sharing is explored and promoted realistically and that we develop our expertise in this area. This might include, for example, promoting progressive and incremental sharing where this is appropriate, recognising that, for some people, there may be a sharing continuum which moves from 'currently easy to

share' to 'currently difficult to share' and that this continuum might include shared services, shared activities and shared space.

It is our experience at BIP that sharing can be difficult and threatening. Notwithstanding this, however, providing risks are taken and based on a sound and people-focussed process, sharing can be enriching, sustaining communities and enabling people to work together on practical issues for their common benefit.

It is important that, wherever possible, sharing is promoted within a framework that recognises that this should be a voluntary process rather than a coercive one, and that this is not a 'quick fix' – our history of segregation and communities living virtually 'parallel lives' is such that the adoption of sharing as a natural way to view interactions between our previously-divided communities will take some time, experience and expertise to become embedded within our society.

BIP's position is that there is a need to move towards a greater degree of sharing on the part of today's interface communities and that this process should be promoted sensitively and incrementally. Positive sharing experiences, we feel, are much more likely to result where there exist a unifying goal, external support, the active involvement of local leaders which engages with negativity and apathy, and tangible mutual benefit. Through these positive experiences of sharing, it is to be hoped that interface communities will feel ever more confident in accessing shared resources.

6.2 Understanding Sharing

In summary, sharing is understood by Belfast Interface Project as:

Non-threatening;

Shared sports/health facilities/childcare and other services that sustain both communities

Not about losing culture/identity;

Based on a sound process and shared experiences;

Not a quick fix;

Focussed on people;

Working together for community benefit;

Practical and pragmatic;

For mutual benefit; and

Not coercive.

However, sharing can also be:

Unfamiliar;

Frightening;

Risky;

Easier with some things than others; and

A continuum from services to activities to space.

Sharing requires:

A unifying goal;

Good local knowledge;

Shared spaces;

Sound leadership and capability;

Tangible mutual benefit;

Mobility and confidence;

Support; and

Engaging with negativity and apathy.

6.3 The Complexity of Sharing

The development of these aims and consequent roles is predicated on an understanding that the promotion of sharing is complex. While for some the 'right to share' may be seen as natural and incontrovertible, for others the prospect of sharing can mean 'giving up what's ours' and can lead to insecurity, anger and disengagement. BIP envisages that progress across the city in addressing issues relating to sharing will not be uniform and will require engaging with residents of interface areas as citizens in shaping the future of the city and their services.

7   BIP Services 2004 – 2008

7.1   Members' Feedback

Section 2 of this document outlined some findings of a recent (2008) BIP survey of key issues for our membership. This section of the report outlines some further findings of the survey in relation to members' perceptions of the usefulness of BIP's activities and services over the period 2004 - 2008 and additional service needs identified.

Developing the Knowledge Base

Chart 6 below outlines the extent to which members found BIP's activities useful in relation to providing information and developing the knowledge base regarding interface areas.

Chart 6: Extent to which members found the services useful
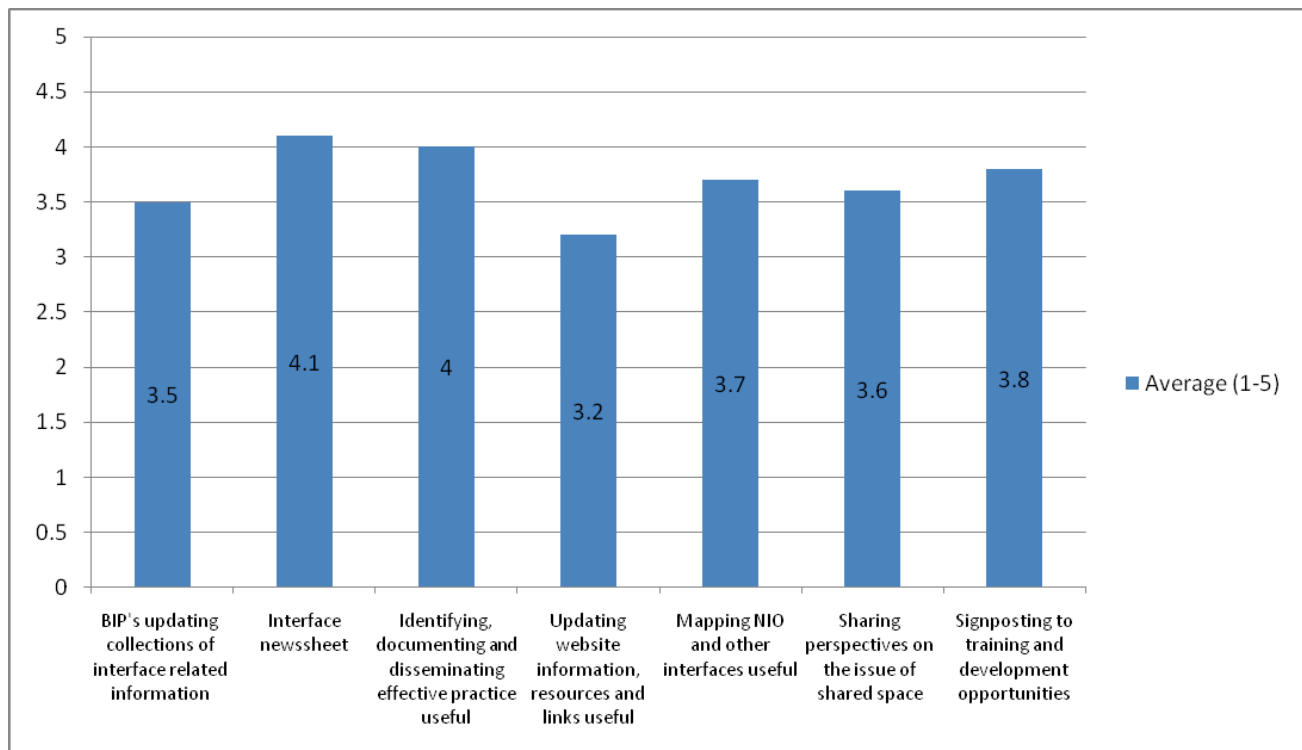
Members rate the *Interface* newssheet highly with almost four out of five rating it as a 4 or higher and with an average rating of 4.1 or 82%. Chart 6 also shows that members found BIP's activities in relation to identifying, documenting and disseminating effective practice also useful with a high average score of 4 out of 5. Members found BIP's activities in

24

relation to updating website information, resources and links useful with an average score of 3.2 or 64%. Members found BIP's activities in relation to mapping NIO and other interfaces useful and this is rated with an average score of 3.7 or 74%. Members found BIP's activities in relation to sharing perspectives on the issue of shared space useful and they rated this with an average of 3.6 or 72%. Members found BIP's activities in relation to signposting to training and development opportunities useful and this is rated with an average score of 3.8 or 76%.

Developing Positive Relationships

Chart 7 outlines the survey findings in relation to how useful members found different practices that BIP has been involved in for providing support to interface communities to develop positive relationships. These include:

• Supporting access to crisis response mechanisms;

• Providing opportunities for informed debate on conflict transformation;

• Supporting conflict management, reconciliation and transformation and;

• Providing networking opportunities.

Chart 7: Extent to which BIP members found the practices useful
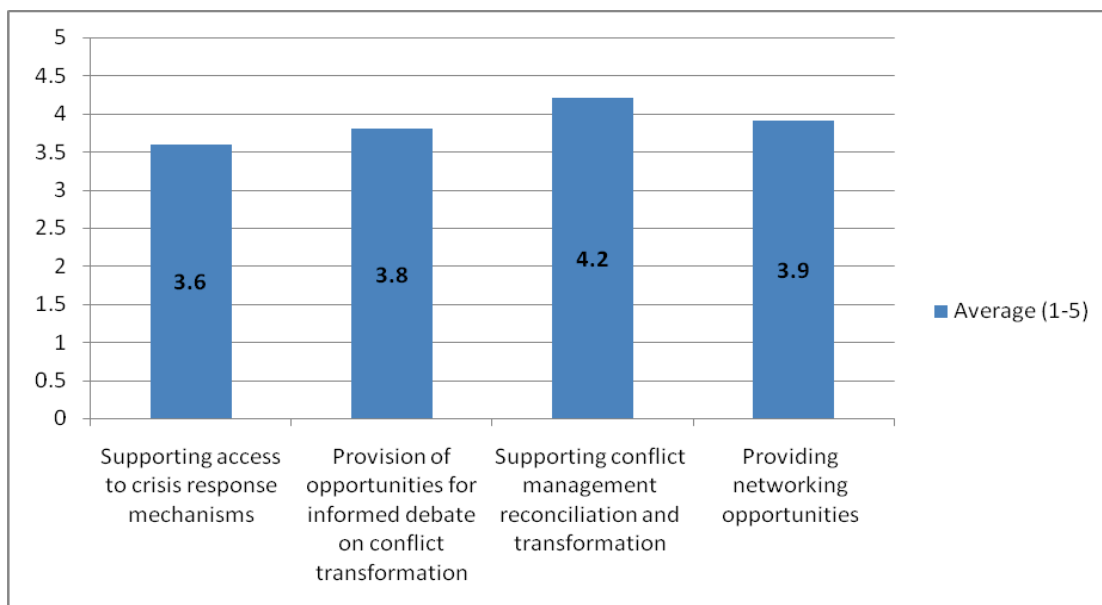
Members found BIP's activities in relation to supporting access to crisis response mechanisms useful with the most frequently occurring score 4, or 80%, representing a third of the respondents (which is high). Members found the provision of opportunities for informed debate on conflict transformation useful and rate BIP's activities in relation to this with an average score of 3.8 or 76%, leaning towards the higher points in the scale. Members rate BIP's activities highly in relation to supporting conflict management, reconciliation, and transformation, with an average score of 4.2 and almost 90 percent of respondents rating it either 4 or 5, including over a third giving it the highest rating, 5. BIP's activities in relation to providing networking opportunities are rated very close to the higher scores with an average of 3.9 or 78%.

Supporting Change

Chart 8 outlines the summary responses in relation to the usefulness of:
activities supporting interface communities to contribute to shaping changes;
activities supporting interface communities to develop shared space;
activities in relation to supporting conflict management, reconciliation and transformation; and
thematic discussions, conferences etc.
Chart 8: Extent to which members found the activities useful
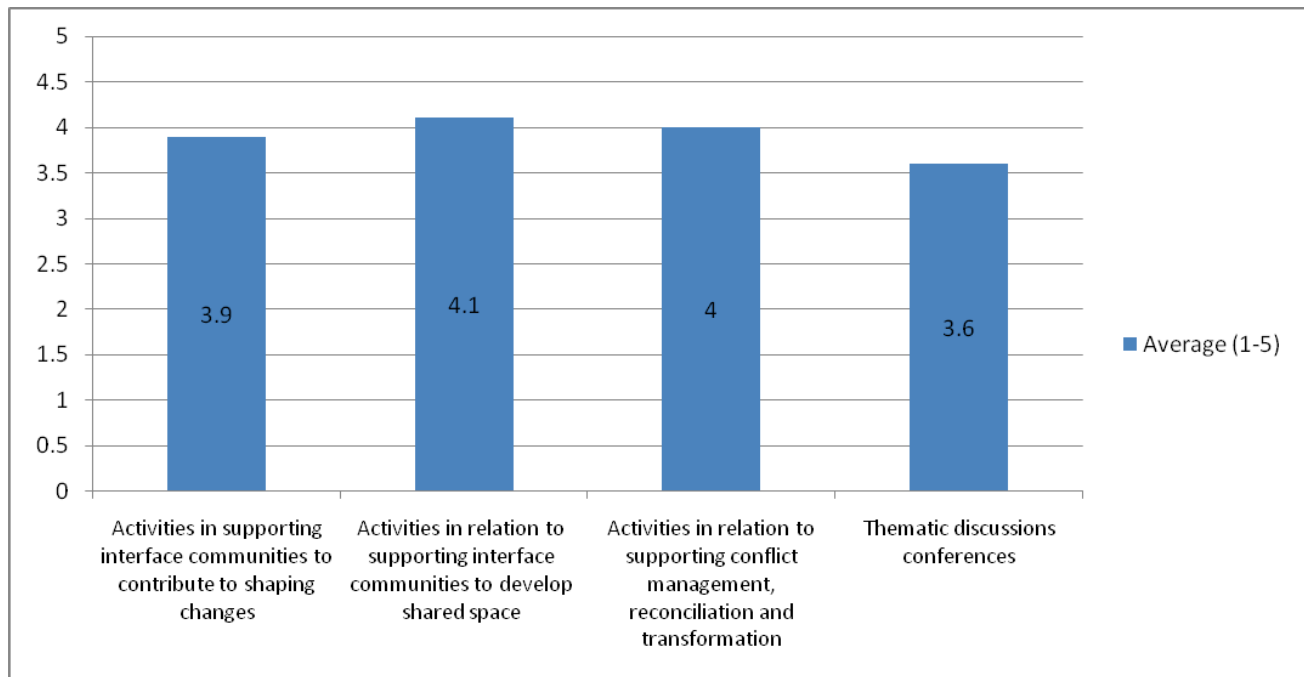
In Chart 8 members rate this very close to the higher scores on average (3.9 or 78%). Members rate the usefulness of BIP's activities in supporting interface communities to develop shared space highly, with the most frequently occurring score being 5 and nearly 80 percent of them giving this the higher scores of 4 or 5.

Members' responses indicate they rate BIP's activities in supporting conflict management, reconciliation, and transformation highly. In the context of supporting change within and between interface communities, this is also highly rated with the most frequently occurring score being 4 and over 85 percent of respondents giving scores of 4 or 5. Members rate activities such as BIP's thematic discussions and conferences between the mid and high points in the scale with an average of 3.6 or 72%.

7.2 Additional services needs

BIP's members identify some other types of support that they feel would be useful in relation to a number of issues.

Supporting local policy initiatives

This particularly refers to providing information on best practice and support on how to develop local policy initiatives. Such support may include providing access to networking opportunities and support for developing lobbying skills. Subject areas include how BIP might inform/support organisations on 'approaches to shared neighbourhoods' and 'help with Peace 3 Plans'. A view generally expressed in the semi-structured interviews, however, is that these are largely influenced by, and dependent on, city-wide policy developments.

Supporting city-wide policy change

Given the identification of local plans with the city-wide context, groups generally expressed the view that BIP's main role in relation to this should be in influencing city wide policy development on issues that effected interface areas and assisting organisations to become more actively involved in this process through providing access to appropriate information and access to lobbying skills. The provision of more networking opportunities is also identified with a view to BIP developing a focus on 'addressing' issues rather than

'managing' them. The view is expressed that BIP needs to be represented on 'bigger partnerships' in relation to this.

Supporting practice and debate in the promotion of a shared and better future

The view is expressed that there needs to be 'more discussions around this'. BIP needs to be more proactive in the debate on how a shared and better future should be promoted. This might entail tailored programmes targeted on individual communities to enable this to happen at a local level.

Improving the physical environment in interface area

The membership surveys suggests BIP needs to 'work more on the ground' with communities in relation to this, while promoting networking opportunities for members as well as lobbying for change on this issue to the appropriate agencies. The 'work more on the ground' aspect of this, it is felt, might include general advice for communities wanting information on best practice pertaining to how others (e.g. Stewartstown Road) had achieved this as well as developing a broader facilitating/mediation role including relationship building between communities. One specific response referred to providing support to enable groups to access 'funding and/or attractive creative activities to engage young people in regenerating their neighbourhood/s'.

Improving social and/or economic activity in interface areas

Related to issues mentioned in 4.5.2 to 4.5.4 above, the membership survey suggests BIP could become involved in 'presenting a positive image of interface areas as an asset in city plans etc' as well as lobbying for resources to address this issue, at a local community as well as city wide level. The need for a broader facilitating/mediation role including, relationship building is also suggested. On a more direct level it is suggested BIP might become involved in providing 'vocational training opportunities and skills based initiatives with real prospects' as well as providing support for job creation projects.

Addressing the legacies of conflict/ intercommunity division

It is suggested support is needed for more discussions around this as well as for facilitating more dialogue and joint working around common issues and, again, the need to develop a

broader facilitating/mediation role including relationship building. It is also mentioned that it is 'people living/working in interface areas (who) should be leading the agendas in discussions on living in post-conflict society'. One respondent, while noting that there are issues preventing progress in relation to this, suggested that BIP might become more involved in 'creating available space and resources to effectively address (those) issues'. It is also suggested that BIP needed to provide more sign-posting for members to training organisations involved with these issues.

Improving the freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services for people
The role of BIP in providing support to address this issue is again perceived as developing a broader facilitating/mediation role including, as one member states, 'supporting relationship-building initiatives to demonstrate the safety of using facilities in "other" areas'. Another member suggested that there needed to be more information on government policy on this issue – 'especially around planning consultation periods'. It is noted by a number of members that there was no agency that is specifically identified as a source of support in this area of work.

Addressing intercommunity tension/intimidation/violence
In general, members indicate this issue requires additional resources to support discussions and initiatives involving all of the appropriate stakeholders. It is suggested that BIP may have a role in relation to supporting different communities in 'learning about different ways to celebrate diversity' and this may entail providing support to members to enable them to 'look at what other interface groups are doing' in relation to this. There is a widely held view that this issue has increasingly become associated with 'youth led violence' and with the assistance of a Project Worker providing advice and information on how to access resources (funding) may help to address this issue. It is felt this may also be assisted by disseminating information on the roles/responsibilities of different agencies in relation to this. There is a need to focus on 'preventative' rather than 'reactive' initiatives/interventions.

Addressing youth led/anti-social interface violence

Suggestions for more support in relation to this issue closely mirror the above, only with an emphasis on youth focused activities/initiatives. In addition it is suggested perhaps more work could be developed with the PSNI on how they could 'manage their approach to this more constructively'. It is also suggested that there is a need to 'make this issue more visible' in the sense of distinguishing it from previous (politically motivated) interface violence in order to support members in accessing resources to address it.

Other forms of support

One regional organisation suggested that there might be a role for BIP in supporting work on other interfaces outside Belfast. It was also suggested that there was a need to develop practical materials with other relevant agencies for improving practice in relation to issues such as youth led/anti-social interface violence discussed above. Other practical forms of support might also include a 'comprehensive database of potential funders and other groups involved in interface work'. One member suggested 'organising seminars/workshops to talk about the experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds living/working in interface areas'.

7.3 Summary

The membership survey informs the development of BIP's plans for the period 2009-2014 through members' assessment of the usefulness of current services and their future needs. In addition, there is some indication BIP should consider developing its role to support work on other interfaces outside Belfast. BIP's interface work also needs to take into account the increasing cultural diversity of residents living interface communities. In terms of the services members, the frequently recurring themes include:

information - particularly on best practice - and research;
networking opportunities to enable members to exchange practice and develop relationships; and
'relationship building' between communities and across specific interfaces.

The more specific responses / suggestions in relation to the individual issues indicate some of the areas in which BIP might become involved. However, BIP's involvement in all or even a number of these has substantial resource implications. Although these are areas of

work BIP is already engaged in to an extent, their prevalence in the responses indicates that there is much more BIP could be doing.

Members Views on Current Services

The membership survey clearly indicates services provided by BIP - information, developing positive relationships and supporting change - are valued. Eighty-two percent value the newssheet and the dissemination of effective practice. Research such as mapping the NIO interfaces (74%) and sharing perspectives on the issue of shared space is particularly useful (72%).

In terms of building positive relationships, 89% rate supporting in conflict management, reconciliation and transformation highly; members value networking opportunities (78%) and opportunities for informed debate (76%).

When it comes to supporting change members rated highly BIP's activities in supporting conflict management, reconciliation and transformation within and between communities (85%); 80% rate BIP's supporting interface communities to develop shared space and 72% rated the thematic discussions and conference.

Members Needs for Services

In terms of the need for services in the future, members are realistic that local and city-wide policy initiatives largely influenced by, and dependent on city-wide policy developments. This requires BIP to be involved in "bigger partnerships" and to use its influence help interface communities to be actively involved in such developments. Members also indicate BIP should be more proactive in supporting practice and debate in creating a shared and better future including the development of tailored programmes targeted on individual communities to enable progress to be made. Furthermore, members indicate that BIP should play an active role in advocating for resources particularly in relation to improving the social and economic activity and addressing interface tension, intimidation and violence.

BIP's policy and advocacy role is also seen as significant in terms of achieving improved social and economic activity in interface areas by lobbying for resources. As outlined in

section two increasing freedom of movement in interface areas remains a huge challenge and members indicate that BIP should:

support efforts to demonstrate how it is safe to use facilities in "other" areas; and

address the complexities that arise from no one government agency being responsible for this matter.

There are a number of common themes emerging in relation to the types of support members indicate BIP should provide. The view was expressed that BIP needed to "work more on the ground". This included the extension of the facilitation / mediation role in order to support change in four major areas – improving the physical environment, improving social and economic activity, addressing the legacy of the conflict / inter-community division and improving freedom of movement. This would include providing general advice, facilitation including the development of relationships between specific interface communities and organising networking opportunities.

In terms of addressing interface tensions /intimidation / violence members identify particular support needs in this area. They are particularly interested in support around youth led violence citing the need to disseminate good practice currently underway in interface areas, to combine this with approaches that celebrate cultural diversity. Resourcing such work with young people (including diversionary activities) is difficult. Members highlight the need for support at the project level suggesting:

The need for a dedicated project worker to help community groups access resources; promote discussion and initiatives involving all the stakeholders;
engage a wide range of agencies (including PSNI) whose responsibilities touch on this issue; and
the need to develop practical materials with relevant agencies that would lead to improved practice in the area of youth led / anti-social violence at interfaces.

In terms of addressing the legacy of the conflict / inter-community division, members indicate the need for a broader facilitation / mediation role for BIP while making the point that discussions need to be led locally and BIP's role in supporting this may lie in helping to create the available space and in sign-posting groups to training organisations involved with

these issues. Following on the BIP's development of the Labour Mobility Project, members' suggest BIP has a role in supporting job creation projects and becoming more involved in vocational training opportunities and skills based initiatives.

8   Belfast Interface Project Aims and Objectives 2009-2014 and Indicative Actions

BIP's work in recent years has primarily been in the areas of research into interface issues, sharing information regarding effective practice, facilitation and mediation work, provision of membership support and networking opportunities, and trying to influence policy where possible.

8.1   Regeneration of Interface Areas

Regeneration in the city has focused successfully on the city centre while the regeneration of whole neighbourhoods affected by interfaces has lagged behind. Successful development of interface areas in future will require interface communities to come to mutual agreements regarding land use and the appropriate provision of facilities and services. Following this, the opportunities to develop vacant and underused land for the benefit of local communities, in order to meet social and economic needs and to promote long term stability and sustainability at interfaces, are considerable.

8.2   Aims of Belfast Interface Project 2009-2014

Within the context of the need to promote a shared and better future, and bearing in mind the range of levels of capacity across the interface community sector, BIP sees the following aims as appropriate over the period 2009 - 2014:

Policy: Providing Intermediary and Bridging functions;
Service Advocacy;
Supporting Change and Transformation; and
Managing the membership organisation efficiently and effectively.

Given the role of some young people in continuing albeit low-level violence in interface areas, and the anecdotal evidence of increasingly shared activities amongst young people in the city centre, it is anticipated that BIP will incorporate a youth 'strand' of work into each aim where practicable.

8.3 Policy: Providing Intermediary and Bridging functions

During 2005-2008, BIP has participated in a number of policy forums particularly in relation to the promotion of Good Relations. These have included:

the Interface Working Group;

the advisory group for Belfast City Council Good Relations Unit's Conflict Transformation Project; and

Community Relations Council.

In view of the political progress that has now been made and the rapid development of Belfast and other urban areas, it is critical that communities that desire change and statutory and public agencies, including the Office of First Minister & Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) that can deliver change are more closely linked than before.

This will require BIP to build on its existing networks to influence policy and implementation in order to support the development of partnerships between local communities, statutory agencies and policy makers. BIP will build on the Good Relations work with Belfast City Council and will continue to advocate for adequate resources to tackle issues in interface communities with statutory agencies and public bodies. It is anticipated that this will create linkages between community groups and agencies on the delivery of services and community transformation and change.

Work in this area will include a rights-based approach and will be based on opportunities provided by and requests from members, interface community groups and agencies. This work will also be supported by evidence from membership surveys and other research.

Aim 1:
BIP aims to be proactive in linking and involving local communities in changing policy and in advocating for change that is of practical benefit to interface communities.

Objectives:

Identify and engage with other stakeholders to identify issues, concerns and areas for cooperation.

Actions:

Develop policy networks and interest groups from our membership among the interface community sector to ground the policy work, and act as a catalyst in promoting and facilitating these to lead effective change with their neighbourhoods and residents.

Carry out a survey of issues and perceived obstacles/barriers for the private and statutory sectors in relation to the social and economic regeneration of interface communities. Hold a seminar event to discuss findings with key stakeholders and support further policy development in this area.

Disseminate information through seminars, briefings, etc.

Represent the views of BIP to influence decisions of key bodies.

Actions:

Continued membership of the inter-agency Interface Working Group and development of a process through which to plan for the eventual removal/change of existing physical interface structures through consultation with interface communities.

BIP will extend advocacy into other policy arenas with the local political institutions and agencies in order to support service advocacy, change and transformation.

Develop the knowledge base regarding key issues and effective practice in interface areas, disseminate information to members and key stakeholders, and provide opportunities for networking and discussion.

Actions:

Commission research in the area of effective practice:

Work with young people has assisted in reducing violence in interface areas;

Effective approaches to the development of sharing in interface areas.

Develop opportunities to share information and research about interface communities and issues with interface communities in urban settings throughout Northern Ireland.

Actions:

Deliver a series of seminars outlining BIP's findings and perspectives gathered to date, with opportunities for feedback and discussion, at a range of N.I. urban venues outside of Belfast.

8.4 Service Advocacy

In aiming to support improvements in provision of services to interface communities through clearly defined pieces of work, BIP recognises the potential of Community Support Plans and community involvement strategies focused on promoting dialogue and interaction and the potential to develop, for example, shared sports/health facilities/childcare/library and other services that sustain both communities. BIP recognises also that the development of community planning and the impact of the review of public administration (RPA) will affect many interface communities as area boundaries change as well as the structures of statutory and other agencies in servicing these. Interface communities face particular challenges in relation to the delivery of accessible services, the promotion of social and community cohesion, and provision of affordable housing.

Aim 2:
BIP aims to support interface communities and to advocate with agencies and others in order to address issues of safety in interface communities and safe access to work and services, through improved relationships between communities, increased labour mobility and the development of shared services.

Objectives:
Promote accessibility of local services and facilities.
Actions:
On a pilot basis, proactively identify a number of clearly defined statutory services and facilities which are associated with access difficulties and, through working with the relevant agencies, community and youth groups and individuals, promote greater access to these. Advocate the advantages of sharing through large and small group discussions and the dissemination of successful models, taking into account the realities and difficulties which may apply.

Connect people living in interface communities with opportunities and resources for training and development in order to support social and economic mobility.

Actions:

Build upon our existing labour mobility training project by providing opportunities on a cross-community basis for employment-related and inter-cultural training, education and strategic planning for adults and young people in interface areas.

Support interface communities in gaining access to crisis response mechanisms where required.

Actions:

Advocate the development of a 'key contacts' website or similar, outlining details of conflict transformation support projects, inc out-of-hours emergency contact details, across the city.

Develop, with others, good relations and other indicators with which to measure change in interface areas.

Actions:

Support the development, on a local interface community basis, of good relations indicators against which potential to remove/change interface structures can be measured, together with actions which help over time to increase measurements recorded.

8.5 Supporting Change and Transformation

The further development of leadership at local level that is both positive and capable of delivering change is seen as a critical task for interface communities. BIP can make a contribution through supporting interface communities to build networking capacity in order to address issues of contested space and to engage in the debate about the future of our city and the sharing of it. The capacity and willingness to engage is not uniform and there is often a price to be paid for each 'breakthrough' in local interface community relations, as each has the potential to create a local backlash of resistance to change. Nationalist areas have often been marked by local co-ordination of efforts whereas Unionist areas have often been marked by a history of factions and fragmentation. This paradigm is constantly shifting, however, and this work is resource intensive. BIP, as an independent organisation,

has worked successfully in these diverse situations in supporting residents to develop effective strategies.

Aim 3:

BIP aims to support interface communities to develop positive relationships by encouraging and enabling co-operation, promoting articulation and understanding of key issues involved in sharing and division, and providing support through change.

Objectives:

Support conflict transformation, reconciliation and conflict management, in communities, including through provision of opportunities for informed debate and intervention.

Actions:

Advocate the development of a city-wide dialogue initiative involving a range of different constituencies, each with a conflict transformation role/interest.

Respond to requests and provide independent facilitation, mediation and mentoring support at local interfaces on a limited basis where appropriate, to assist in reconciling local tensions and encourage the sharing of facilities and activities and the taking up of opportunities at interfaces which meet local needs.

Actively promote a youth mediation model of youth engagement in conflict transformation work with appropriate best practice projects.

To support interface communities interested in developing dialogue with 'other' communities and local residents including black and ethnic minority (BME) residents.

Actions:

Commission a piece of research with and jointly steered by BME communities to identify the needs of members of ethnic minority communities living in interface communities. Hold a seminar event to discuss findings with key stakeholders and support further policy development in this area.

8.6 Efficient and effective management of membership organisation

BIP is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status and also a membership organisation, and so this final aim incorporates the maintenance of membership functions as well as the more traditional internal governance and finance and administration mechanisms and systems.

Aim 4:

BIP aims to ensure that membership remains reflective of interface communities as changes occur and that the organisation is managed efficiently and effectively.

Objectives

Consult, support and continually develop BIP membership to reflect the changing interface communities.

Actions:

Carry out a survey of membership needs in 2011 and act on findings; continue to develop our membership and seek to provide appropriate support services.

Continue to produce our *Interface* news-sheet, outlining good practice in addressing interface community issues and promoting increased communication amongst groups across the city, and develop the website as an interactive tool.

Manage the organisation effectively and efficiently.

Actions:

Ensure efficient, accountable and transparent management of finances, commission an annual audit, and ensure that the work of BIP is independently evaluated and monitored appropriately.

Hold an annual team building and forward planning residential in order to review the Strategic Plan and develop the operational plan, and acquire the financial and human resources required to implement the strategic plan.

Hold a regular AGM.

Maintain an effective staff team supported by a system for appraisal and support and up to date policies and procedures, and provide training opportunities to Management Committee and staff as practicable.

9   Appendix

The policies relevant to Belfast Interface Project have been identified in terms of regional, agency and local arenas.

Programme for Government

The Programme for Government sets out the Executive's plans and priorities for 2008-2011 as well as some longer term aspirations which will be pursued by working with and for all the people of Northern Ireland. The Programme's overarching aim is 'to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, with respect for the rule of law and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come'.

The Programme focuses on equality as an important issue for Northern Ireland government and identifies five key strategic priorities (P: 6):

Promoting tolerance, inclusion, health and well-being;

Investing to build our infrastructure;

Protecting and enhancing our environment and natural resources;

Delivering modern, high quality and efficient public services; and

Growing a dynamic, innovative economy.

The Programme also identifies two cross-cutting themes:

A shared and better future for all: 'equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations will be watchwords for all of our policies and programmes across Government.'
And

Sustainability: 'building a sustainable future will be a key requirement for our economic, social and environmental policies and programmes … The development of new and innovative measures that will address existing patterns of socio-economic disadvantage and target resources and efforts towards those in greatest objective need is now viewed as the main challenge for all of us.'

The Programme's priorities and themes closely accord with BIP's vision for a future in which today's interface communities:

Are free from tension, intimidation and violence both within and between communities;

Have come to terms with legacies of the past;

Are socially and economically vibrant, with an attractive physical environment;

Enjoy freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services; and

Have respect for cultural difference and diversity.

A Shared Future Strategy - Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland (2005)

In March 2005 the Office of the First Minster and Deputy First Minister launched the 'A Shared Future' policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland. The strategy sets thirteen clear policy objectives to realise this aim:

Eliminate sectarianism, racism[1] and all forms of prejudice to enable people to live and work without fear or intimidation;

Reduce tension and conflict at interface areas;

Facilitate the development of a shared community where people wish to learn, live, work and play together;

Promote civic-mindedness via citizenship education through school and lifelong learning;

Protect members of minorities (whether for example by religion, race, or any other grounds) and mixed marriages from intimidation and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice;

Ensure that all public services are delivered impartially and guided by economy, efficiency and effectiveness;

Shape policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow;

Encourage understanding of the complexity of our history, through museums and a common school curriculum;

Support cultural projects which highlight the complexity and overlapping nature of identities and their wider global connections;

Support and learn from organisations working across ethnic divides for reconciliation, including those operating on a north-south basis;

Ensure voice is given to the diverse victims of violence in Northern Ireland, including via archives and victim-centred reconciliation events;

Encourage communication, tolerance and trust across Northern Ireland, but particularly in

areas where communities are living apart; and

Promote dialogue between and mutual understanding of, different faiths and cultural backgrounds, both long standing within Northern Ireland and recent arrivals to these shores, guided by overarching human rights norms.

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Corporate Plan 2006 – 2009

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an independent public body established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Relevant legislation provides that the Commission must promote equality of opportunity and affirmative action, work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination, keep relevant legislation under review, promote good relations between persons of different racial groups and oversee the effectiveness of statutory duties on public authorities. The Commission's vision is of Northern Ireland as a shared, integrated and inclusive place, a society where difference is respected and valued, based on equality and fairness for the entire community. The mission of the Commission is to advance equality, promote equality of opportunity, encourage good relations and challenge discrimination through promotion, advice and enforcement.

Four main priority areas have been identified by the Commission for its work during the period of this Corporate Plan:

Making the Case for Equality: The Commission will work to promote a greater understanding of and support for equality in Northern Ireland

Building access to equality provisions and protections: The Commission will work to facilitate greater access to equality for the whole community.

Delivering equality: The Commission will use its full range of powers to deliver equality across the range of equality strands; and

Ensuring high quality organisational performance.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is an independent public agency – it is not an NGO, and not a government body. It was established by Parliament through the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and started its work on 1 March 1999. As Human Rights and

Equality were deemed to be central to the conflict in Northern Ireland so the creation of a Human Rights Commission (and an Equality Commission) was a key outcome of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998.

Currently the only UN-recognised National Human Rights Institution in the United Kingdom, the Commission has four main functions – litigation, investigation, education and promotion, and advising government. The Commission bases all of its work on international human rights standards including those of the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

Four key issues for the Commission include:

Bill of Rights: of all the international standards, the only one enforceable in Northern Ireland courts is the European Convention on Human Rights. The Commission has the legal duty to advise Government on the scope for a constitutional-level Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, to include rights not protected by the European Convention.

Currently a Bill of Rights Forum, established by government in December 2006 and comprising representatives from local political parties and civil society, is reviewing this issue. The Commission looks forward to receiving the views of this body before submitting its advice to government on the proposed Bill.

Dealing with the past: the Commission has done a great deal of work around the investigation of deaths, particularly in the context of the 3,500 deaths from the Northern Ireland conflict. The Commission believes that any future "truth process" needs to be based on widespread consultation, in order to command the greatest possible public confidence.

It has concerns around the adequacy and independence of the inquiry system set up to investigate, in particular, cases where state collusion in killings has been alleged.

Counter-terrorism: the Commission is convinced of the need to protect human rights in the context of combating terrorism. It wants to see rapid progress towards normalisation of security and policing arrangements in Northern Ireland, including proper oversight of intelligence operations. It opposes "extraordinary rendition".

Conflict intervention: as a body created by the peace process, the Commission encourages dialogue and a human rights-based approach as the way forward in resolving

community tensions. It will seek to contribute its expertise to the range of organisations already dealing with such issues.

People & Place

In June 2003, government launched *'People and Place – A strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal'.* The strategy seeks to target those communities throughout Northern Ireland who are suffering the highest levels of deprivation and to bring together the work of all government departments in partnership with local people to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in all aspects of everyday life. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy details the four strategic objectives of People and Place:

Community Renewal - To develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving the quality of life in their area;

Economic Renewal - To develop economic activity in the most deprived neighbourhoods and connect them to the wider urban economy;

Social Renewal - To improve social conditions for the people who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods through better coordinated public services and the creation of safer environments; and

Physical Renewal - To help create attractive, safe, sustainable environments in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

A key element of the strategy's approach has been the establishment of Neighbourhood Partnerships in each Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) as vehicles for local planning and implementation. Given that 12 of the 15 NRA's in Belfast contain the total Northern Ireland Office identified Interfaces in the city, it is not surprising that BIP board members have been active stakeholders on several of the Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships since their formation and have aided the development and production of Neighbourhood Action Plans that seek to address social disadvantage and poor infrastructure.

Positive Steps (2005)

'Positive Steps' is the Government's response to 'Investing Together, the report of the Task Force into the resourcing of the Voluntary and Community Sector'. The document opens with the following statement: *'The Government values the contribution of the voluntary and community sector in addressing social need and deprivation. Effective partnership working*

with the sector can help the Government achieve its objectives. The voluntary and community sector makes a significant contribution to life in Northern Ireland and is a key social partner working with the Government to deliver social, economic, cultural and environmental change. Voluntary and community organisations have a track record of tackling social need and deprivation and are well placed to develop and deliver improved frontline services, particularly to the most disadvantaged people in society' (P: 3).

"Positive Steps" goes on to outline a range of new government commitments in relation to supporting:

Approaches to funding the Voluntary and Community Sector;

Community Development and change;

Service Delivery;

Cross Cutting Policy Areas;

Internal Governance, Management and Accountability;

Relationship between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector;

Voluntary and Community Sector Support & Development Services; and

Next steps to be taken in supporting the delivery of these.

Community Relations Council (CRC) - Interim and Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010

CRC's vision is outlined in this plan as: 'A peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society founded on the achievement of reconciliation, equality, co-operation, respect, mutual trust and good relations'.

CRC aims to lead and support change to achieve this vision by:

Identifying and developing new and effective approaches to peace-building and reconciliation in partnership with people, organisations and government;

Promoting the adoption of good relations policies and practice at local, community and institutional level;

Assisting communities and institutions in working through and beyond the legacies of the Troubles;

Managing the grant making and other services of the Council in an effective, efficient and economical way; and

Ensuring that Council members and staff have sufficient capacity to deliver the corporate

objectives.

The Council's work is founded on the following principles:

Equity and Equality:

CRC is committed to fair treatment for all, through open access to resources, structures and decision-making processes at all levels of society, as an essential basis for good community relations;

Human Rights:

The Council is committed to upholding the human rights of all as a fundamental basis for good community relations;

Diversity:

The Council is committed to the promotion of inter-cultural respect and freedom of expression and movement (whether expressed through religious, ethnic or political background) and supports the peaceful expression of variety and difference;

Interdependence:

CRC recognises and affirms the interconnectedness of the personal and community experiences of all those living and working in Northern Ireland. The Council exists to promote good relations based on trust, respect and inclusion;

Non-violence:

The Council recognises non-violence as an essential condition for the growth of trust, dialogue and conflict transformation; and

Openness, Transparency and Accountability:

As a provider of public services, the Council will uphold this principle in all its work.

BIP actively supports and has delivered upon these principles, and indeed the director of BIP has been a CRC Council member over the period 2001 – 2008.

Peace III Operational Programme. EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007 – 2013 (Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland)

In carrying forward the key objectives of the previous Programmes (PEACE I and II), the overall aim of the PEACE III Programme is:

'To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote

reconciliation' (P:37).

The PEACE III Programme has two strategic objectives (P: 37 – 38):

Reconciling communities: key activities will facilitate relationships on a cross-community and/or cross-border basis to assist in addressing issues of trust, prejudice and intolerance, and accepting commonalities and differences. In addition, key activities will seek to acknowledge and deal with the hurt, losses, trauma and suffering caused by the conflict; and

Contributing to a shared society: key activities will address the physical segregation or polarisation of places and communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Region with a view to encouraging increased social and economic cross community and cross-border engagement.

The PEACE III Programme 2007-2013 will be based on facilitating relationships, encouraging dialogue and promoting change within individuals and within/between communities. '*Given the need to focus on addressing the problems specific to Northern Ireland and the Border Region, attention is required on relationships and individual change as they are the areas in which the problems of polarisation, division, prejudice and trauma are most apparent and represent an appropriate level for changing mindsets, attitudes and behavioural patterns and addressing the hurt caused by the conflict*' (P:38).

International Fund for Ireland 2006 – 2010 Strategic Plan

Since it was established in 1986, the International Fund for Ireland has promoted economic and social advance and encouraged contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland.

The mission of the International Fund for Ireland is to: 'underpin efforts towards peace by promoting economic and social advance and encouraging contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland'.

Strategic Objectives (P: 6) include the following:

Helping to build and realise the vision of a shared future for the communities in Northern Ireland and both parts of the island;

Promoting understanding between the different communities/traditions in Ireland;

Working with those communities suffering the greatest economic and social deprivation, scarcity of employment and poverty of aspiration using shared economic concerns more systematically as a platform for stronger relations and reconciliation with their neighbours;

Facilitating more integration between the two communities;

Dealing with the problems of the economically inactive and long-term unemployed;

Building strong strategic alliances with other agencies and bodies active on the ground, ensuring that efforts are complementary, sustainable and mutually reinforcing;

Helping ensure the long term continuation of its work in Ireland beyond the lifetime of the Fund; and

Sharing the expertise and learning acquired over twenty years with peace-builders in other regions.

Belfast City Council (BCC) Corporate Plan (2007 – 2008)

Belfast City Council 2007 – 2008 Corporate Plan vision:

'We want to make Belfast a better place for everyone. We have a vision of Belfast as a modern and welcoming city with a quality of life to rival the best in the world - a city that is never content to stand still but improves over the years.

In short, **'We Believe in a Better Belfast'**. By 'better' we mean that we want to help create a city:

• Which is vibrant and prosperous;

• Which is attractive and clean;

• Which is safe and secure;

• Where there is equality of treatment and opportunity for everyone;

• With good relations between all citizens;

• Where quality of life improves continuously;

• Where the decisions that are made reflect what is best for this and future generations;

• Where customer focused council and public services are provided fairly;

• Where all organisations work in partnership for the common goal of a better society; and

• With a strong cultural life' (P:13).

BCC has identified four objectives to help make this vision a reality:

Providing Civic Leadership by highlighting the challenges that face the city and working with others to achieve co-ordinated solution;

Improving Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations by creating a cleaner, more attractive, safer and healthier city, with a strong economy;

Promoting Good Relations by encouraging fair treatment, understanding and respect for people of all cultures;

Delivering Best Services by providing high quality, value for money services, when and where people need them.

Belfast City Council (BCC) 'Good Relations Strategy – Building Our Future Together' (2004)

This strategy was drawn up by the Good Relations Steering Panel, which included councillors from all parties, council officers, church leaders, trade unions, business leaders and the Community Relations Council. The strategy aims to promote fair treatment, understanding and respect for people of all cultures and faiths across the city.

Vision (p:9).

'Our Vision in terms of this Good Relations Strategy is for a stable, tolerant, fair and pluralist society, where individuality is respected and diversity is celebrated, in an inclusive manner. Although legislation can be an important driver for change, used alone it can hinder the growth of trust and openness. We intend to go beyond compliance with the equality legislation and are determined to demonstrate our commitment to the principles of equity, diversity and interdependence in a pro-active manner, with the aim of mainstreaming these into all of our work - our policies, structures and procedures'.

The Good Relations Strategy has the following high-level objectives:

Promoting Community Relations:

To contribute to a more stable, tolerant society by establishing a community relations programme.

Celebrating Cultural Diversity:

To contribute towards an inclusive pluralist society, by establishing a cultural diversity programme, which acknowledges and respects the cultural diversity within the City, and to promote and support the celebration of such diversity in an inclusive manner which avoids offending those with different views.

Promoting Equality through Service Delivery:

To ensure equality of opportunity in the delivery of our services, in a manner which will respect and cater effectively for the needs of different users.

Promoting Equality through a Representative Workforce:

To create a welcoming and supportive employment environment that will help us to attract and retain a workforce which is broadly representative, at all levels and in all occupations, of the community we serve.