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'Moving on at the Interface?'

Belfast Interface Project First Annual Conference

Thursday 24th June, 2004

Europa Hotel, Belfast

Conference Report

Foreword:

Soon after its formation in 1995, Belfast Interface Project carried out a scoping study of key issues for the statutory and community sectors in relation to the regeneration of interface areas of Belfast. BIP's direction over the following years was largely shaped by the issues which were highlighted through this piece of work.

At this, BIP's first annual conference, it seemed timely and appropriate to revisit this theme by providing an opportunity for our membership and others to hear the findings of two new pieces of work which essentially update this information, and to discuss issues arising from these findings.

1. Welcome & Introductions

Chris O'Halloran, BIP Director, welcomed all present and introduced Pat McGinn, PMG Consulting Ltd, and Paul Donnelly, BIP Development Worker, to the audience.

Chris also mentioned that Northern Visions TV had expressed an interest in covering the conference and that, consequently, there would be an opportunity for those interested to take part in a filmed exit interview with NVTV in the foyer following the end of the conference. Chris thanked the International Fund for Ireland Community Bridges Programme for funding the

event and expressed the hope that participants would find the event stimulating, informative and a useful networking opportunity.

2. 'From There to Here': a presentation of findings following a scoping study of public sector perceptions of interface issues, by Pat McGinn

The following represents a summary of Pat's presentation. The full text of his report, approx 30 pages, is available from BIP on request and from our website at www.belfastinterfaceproject.org.

Executive Summary

Background:

In 1996, the Belfast Interface Project (BIP) carried out a scoping study of public sector agencies' perspectives that underlay their engagement with communities that live along interfaces in Belfast. BIP commissioned PMG Consulting Ltd to carry out an update of this study in 2004. This is the report on the updated study. The study involved interviews with sometimes middle and more often senior management in the public sector agencies whose work bears most directly on interface communities. The study design is 'qualitative' in the sense that we sought to develop our understanding of the general way in which the public sector understands the interface issues, rather than 'quantitative' with a careful enumeration of the numbers holding this or that opinion.

Agency Perspectives on Context

- Current demographic changes within Belfast create pressures that both communities along interfaces may experience differently;
- Catholic/nationalist communities experience increased overcrowding and/or expansion, while Protestant/unionist communities experience depopulation and/or contraction of boundaries;
- The public sector view is that it has ensured access to statutory services for interface communities by organising parallel provision for these communities and that this results in costly duplication;
- Many officials believe the community infrastructure within interface communities has grown and that there are structures in place to facilitate some limited but important communication between communities;
- Funding agencies consider that there is a continuing need for further measures to build additional capacity in the community infrastructure of interface areas;

- Funders of community-based action are likely to require greater evidence of the effectiveness of the work in relation to intra- and inter-community development outcomes and this will, in turn, buttress the claims community-based organisations wish to make for additional public investment.

Agency Perspectives on Relevance

- Staff at senior and middle management level in health and social services report that they have developed greater understanding of both the effects of communal violence on people, including on those living in interface areas, and the particular advantages of cooperating with organisations based in the communities most affected in order to deliver social care to local people;
- Agencies recognise the inadequate level of provision for young people living in interface communities and the need to develop much better strategies to support them;
- With regard to jobs, the thinking of key agencies shifted from that of unemployment (too many seeking available jobs) to worklessness (too many not seeking available jobs), the latter emphasising the identification and resolution of ‘barriers’ to available jobs through intermediaries (including organisations based in interface communities) and intermediate labour market measures (‘sheltered’ or ‘protected’ labour market schemes);
- *People and Place* offers opportunities for interface communities and groups indigenous to them to influence the spending patterns of mainstream public sector budgets and while there is much that requires clarification on how the renewal strategy is to work, it will be important for the groups to engage with the structures that emerge to oversee its implementation;
- Many agencies consider that technocratic or pragmatic responses to the issues of interface communities are the best that can be achieved and that these will emerge from the agencies’ working-out of A *Shared Future, the Policy & Strategic Framework for Good Relations in N.I.*;
- An overarching issue that organisations based in interface communities will increasingly need to address is that of enabling their own communities to articulate their own responsibility for development of interface communities.

Agency Perspectives on Challenges

- The primary challenge that the public sector is attempting to address is that of the integration of their work across organisational boundaries and this is made more difficult in NI, compared to elsewhere, due to the large range of different governmental and statutory organisations we have;
- Where there is a requirement for inter-sectoral coordination as well, the challenge increases as the competition within the community sector makes the identification of suitable partners more difficult.
- The public sector expects that government will require it to function within tight budgetary constraints over the second half of the decade and this will limit its scope for action in dealing with the issues that arise in disadvantaged communities generally but are experienced particularly in interface communities.

Conclusion

For the most part the perspectives of the public sector on the issues we explored with them are informed by local knowledge, thought through in relation to their strategies (however adequate or not these are deemed to be) and mindful that the primary challenge is coordination within and between sectors. While there is an interest and willingness to seek additional resources for investment in interface communities, it will become more difficult as budgetary pressure 'bites'. Securing additional public investment for interface communities requires both sectors to cooperate and the community sector to demonstrate its competency and effectiveness in creating opportunity structures at interfaces for intra- and inter-community development action and outcomes.

3. Summary of BIP membership survey findings, presented by Paul Donnelly

The following represents a summary of Paul's presentation. The full text of the membership survey report is available from BIP on request and from our website at www.belfastinterfaceproject.org.

Introduction:

BIP in conjunction with Community Evaluation Northern Ireland, developed and piloted a draft survey of membership needs in January 2004. In May and June the final survey was conducted with 25 respondents completing it.

Survey structure:

The survey was structured in two sections. The first, *An Audit of Interface Issues*, examines perceptions of conditions and perceptions of change over the last ten years in interface communities across Belfast.

Questions, both quantitative and qualitative, were based around the following themes:

- Physical attractiveness of the interface areas
- Levels of social vibrancy
- Levels of economic vibrancy
- How communities have come to terms with the legacies of the past
- Perceptions of freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services
- Levels of tension, intimidation and violence
- Levels of intercommunity dialogue between areas

Section Two, *Members' Needs*, contains further qualitative questions examining what support BIP can give to membership groups. Could BIP support groups to address the legacies of the past or to improve freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services in interface areas? Later questions examine the training which groups receive to develop skills for their work, their key providers, and any gaps in provision that members reported.

Key findings:

Twenty five surveys were completed with 44% identifying their community as mainly unionist/protestant, 24% as mainly nationalist/catholic and 32% as mixed. However of that 32%, all but one group said they were 'mixed but segregated' eg. Duncairn or Greater Springfield area.

Additionally, 80% of respondents said there had been an increase in ethnic minority representation within their community or across the city generally.

Examining the *Audit of Interface Issues*, consistent themes arise across the city concerning the conditions within and between interface communities. There is a strong and frequently repeated perception that statutory agencies have neglected interface communities and have failed to deliver effective services and support to these areas.

Taking Question 1a as an example:

In your view how would you rate the attractiveness of the physical environment in interface areas throughout Belfast? (Where 10 is very high and 1 is very low)

The responses resulted in an average of 3.28.

In terms of themes arising from the question, 52% of the groups cited the physical blight of the areas and 60% said that physical conditions were adversely affected by statutory 'neglect' or 'abandonment'. This criticism of the statutes was a feature in response to many questions and has been a significant outcome of the survey.

Other key findings were as follows:

- 20% identified anti-social behaviour as negatively impacting upon the social vibrancy of their communities.
- Economic vibrancy was felt to be very low in interface communities across the city, with 60% identifying lack of investment at interfaces as a major problem.
- The issue of the extent to which interface communities have come to terms with the legacies of the past proved challenging for very many groups. If there was a point of concurrence it was that all appear to find this a difficult but very important area of work.
- The main theme arising from the issue of freedom of movement in accessing services and facilities was that fear is still a dominant factor in influencing patterns of movement and access.
- In relation to levels of inter-community tension/intimidation and violence, members reported that these fluctuate depending on area, the time of year and the bigger political picture, although a consistent ongoing level of tension seems to be the norm.
- 56% of respondents cited that levels of inter-community dialogue are higher than ten years ago. However there remain areas where it is very low or non-existent.

Members' needs:

The clearest and most consistent theme arising from Section Two, whilst there is a great deal of information in this section, is that BIP's membership sees the future role of BIP as a lobbying organisation on behalf of members, providing a collective voice to government, its agencies and to the political structures.

The secondary theme is that of BIP as a facilitator, or support provider, of dialogue projects amongst interface groups both in specific geographic interface areas, or around thematic issues which may be city wide. This is an area in which BIP has a proven track record of activity and experience, as cited by the membership, and which members wish to see continued and enhanced.

4. Question & Answer session

There was a short opportunity for discussion, with a question for Pat as to whether the 'greening of the city' (growth in Catholic/nationalist residential housing) is still continuing, in the eyes of statutory agencies. Pat felt that statutory agency representatives were of the opinion that this demographic change is still underway.

Paul was asked why there was no mention of paramilitaries in his survey report – he replied that survey answers had tended not to focus on paramilitarism.

Finally, there was some discussion as to why there were so few statutory agencies represented at the conference given that many had been invited (please see Appendix 2 for conference attendance list).

5. Small group discussions

At this point those present split into small groups, each with the following topics for discussion:

'Given the presentations earlier:

- a) What are the key relationships that need to be addressed in promoting the regeneration of Belfast's interface communities?*
- b) How, in practice, can you help to progress this work?*
- c) How could others help to progress this work?'*

A record of each workshop's flipchart notes is contained within Appendix 1. Participants viewed notes of each workshop during the break before the final plenary session.

6. Plenary discussion (chaired by Deirdre MacBride)

The following represents a summary of key discussion points during the plenary session.

a) Key relationships

It was agreed that key relationships to be addressed include the following:

Community/statutory:

BELB

BRO

PSNI

Economic Development agencies

Community/Commercial

Paramilitary constituency/non-paramilitary

Intra-community (unionist, nationalist)

Intergenerational

Funders/Community sector

Community/Voluntary/Church/Statutory

b) Relationship issues:

The following points were noted:

- The need to provide support for people experiencing burnout in community organisations and in statutory agencies.
- That the involvement of paramilitaries can be positive in helping to minimise violence and build peace, but also negative in terms of acting as gatekeepers and preventing other voices from being heard.
- The need to create more effective community/statutory relationships, characterised by honesty, trust and openness, that move beyond scapegoating and blaming.
- The need to be able to measure positive outcomes of 'strong community infrastructure'.
- The need to start owning the legacies of the past and to build new relationships.
- The need for those statutory agencies which have little experience of partnership-working with the community sector to begin to change that - agencies need to take responsibility for their part in developing those relationships.
- The perception of statutory agencies that community groups, which say they want to create relationships with them, often want funding from their already-overstretched budgets.

A query from the floor to Pat McGinn: 'Which statutory agencies said that they would engage in partnership with the community sector, and which said they wouldn't?' Pat replied that while a number of agencies such as NIHE and BRO have a track-record of partnership-working with the community sector,

others don't have that experience, don't know what the community sector would bring to their endeavours, and are wary of such partnership.

Query from Deirdre MacBride: 'Is 'relationships' the key question?'

Comment from the floor: 'We know that relationships are a key element, but we don't see a structure to build those. What we do see is a haphazard approach compartmentalised into the spaces of violence. We have failed to push for an acknowledgement that coming out of violence is a massive endeavour. We need to invest in creating spaces for dialogue.

Demographics add other layers to the conflict. 'Neighbourhood renewal' doesn't mention conflict, peace-building or a shared city. We need to create structures to facilitate dialogue and then start problem-solving'.

Deirdre thanked the conference speakers Pat McGinn and Paul Donnelly, thanked all present for their attendance and participation within the workshops and plenaries, thanked BIP staff (especially Marnie Kennedy, Support Worker) for their work in organising the event and invited participants to stay on for lunch.

The conference closed.

Appendix 1: Small group discussions – flipchart notes:

➤ Blue Group

Key relationships

Statutory and community groups

PSNI, Fire, Ambulance services

NIHE

BELB, Youth Council

H&SS Trust

BCC

NIO/DOE

Funders and community groups

Providers and community groups

Funders and statutory agencies (decision-making)

Cross-community Interface (contact)

Voluntary sector groups' role:

E.g. Groundwork (mirroring work both sides of interface)

Sure Start – equal access/rep; advisory group for an area

Between groups in an area

Between political reps and people at community level

Between church leaders (inc locally) and communities they serve

Between community workers and the community

Between workers (networking opportunities are very important)

Between paramilitaries/ex-paramilitaries/combatants and workers/community (include all elements)

What can we do? – Reducing violence.

Mobile phone networks with accountability

Contact groups (quelling rumours)

Learn from good practice e.g. Springfield Rd, Interaction Belfast

By example e.g. reaching out to others

Moving forward

Working together on common issues (start small) – multi-agency approach

Learning together (getting away)

Identify local skills/resource level and utilise these before training people up

What can others do?

Resources need to be put in e.g. mini bus to get people away

We need to use existing resources (schools, halls need to belong to community)

Youth service needs to provide £/resources (esp summer)
Lobby policy makers (link to community/bottom up approach)
Inter-agency approach needs to involve people with clout
BIP has role in networking opportunities and good practice

➤ **Yellow Group**

Key relationships

Residents

Education providers/trainers/neutral support

Workers

Business

Activists

Councillors

Church

Politicians

Internally, not always getting cross-dialogue or communication

Statutories

Education/Health/Housing

Local council

Church

Government ⇒ community ⇒ government

Internal relationships

Between and within the interface areas/communities

Policy makers (investors in our interface areas) ⇒ communities, relevant to our situation

Interagency relationships need to improve

Between the community and the economy

Funders and communities

How you can help?

Need to address sustainability of community groups and their work/long-term planning/strategy

Continuing to work together and develop those relationships

Engage and support key activists/workers within those communities

Dialogue – support/resources and training in these skills

Statutories – sharing information as well as resources

Community sector challenge issues re: worklessness; signposting links to training/economic initiatives

How can others help?

Resources – long-term approach

Investment and peace-building skills – support to develop skills
Investment in dialogue
Personal capacity-building as well as group capacity-building
Investment in youth
Involvement at parents' level – not just statutory or community sector
problem
Investment
Acknowledgment of legacy – has to be built into policy and strategy
Connecting the people to the new economic opportunity
Education/training/skills development

➤ **Red Group**

Key relationships

BELB

Dept of Education

BRO

DSD

NIHE

PSNI

City Council

Health and Social Services

Paramilitaries

Local political leaders

Business community

Funders

Within community

Training and employment agency

Churches

Trust – NW, SE

Schools

Effective relationships and consultation

How can we progress this work?

Sheer frustration, can't do what we are doing due to lack of resources

We are doing what we can and what we should

We can only go so far

Join together – stop the competition

More working partnerships

Share best practice

How can others progress this work?

Not pay lip service

Hold people accountable

Education – inter–sectoral

Political leadership – not just to hype issues, articulate real issues

➤ **Green Group**

Key relationships

Paramilitaries –

Have been a positive contribution in minimising violence

Negative impact of IMC report

Wider context of moving away from paramilitarism

Dubious double role – creating violence/minimising violence

Impact of role of perceptions of PSNI

Difference relationships across different areas of Belfast ⇒ fragmentation within certain communities

Young people –

Stigmatising young people

Govt priority on young people is low

BELB – reduction in youth provision

- old models for a new context
- youth centres?, 9–5? Etc

Role models and lack of...

Intergenerational programmes/relationships

Schools are easy option – more investment in street work, working in realities of young peoples' lives

Alcohol – seen as socially acceptable – focus on drugs; alcohol is real problem

No point in running pilots if no long–term plan to sustain successful projects – repetition of pilots – why?

Policy should be needs–driven – some needs are obvious but structures and budgets prohibit change of focus

PSNI

Effective policing would minimise need for paramilitary response to anti–social behaviour.

➤ Silver Group

Key Relationships

- Statutory perspective– no surprise at Pat’s report. There is a long way to go. We make reactive, not proactive responses. We make knee-jerk reactions to the latest crisis. We respond like headless chickens. Our summer planning is always belated. We run around sticking our fingers in holes in the dyke and throwing money at individual problems.
- Key need for flexible procedures.
- Des Brown made the first serious attempt to coordinate responses between agencies re interface issues.
- The community sector doesn’t realise that the summer season is also a nightmare for statutory organisations. It is genuinely difficult to deal with and hard to know what to do. We are caught between conflicting demands and needs.
- Internal change is needed but those of us who try feel like we are banging our heads against a brick wall.
- Communities battle to engage with statutory organisations but neither communities nor statutory organisations are geared to communicate or to work effectively with each other.
- We talk about weak community infrastructure and the need for capacity building. Really this is about building leadership. Could the statutory organisations do with this too?
- Paramilitaries have had a key role in peace building and we are learning to work with them effectively.
- The absence of effective political leadership across NI is a real problem. Many politicians are only seen on the interface after the latest incident, just in time to get media airtime.
- We have differing styles of political leadership. Unionists tend to be conservative and authoritarian and about holding the line, maintaining what we have. Nationalists seem to be more consultative and concerned with bringing change.
- We need to challenge the negative media role.
- Unionist and loyalist communities need to prioritise internal relationship building above other issues because our communities are falling apart from internal conflict.

What Can You Do?

- There is significant community disengagement from the issues. It is always someone else's responsibility. People feel disempowered; they need to believe "I can bring about change", but how?
- We need innovation. We need to relate the issues to the lives of ordinary people to encourage them to engage.
- Social values are fragmenting; this is a key part of the problem. We need to place the generation of underpinning social values at the top of the agenda.
- We need to place greater emphasis on ongoing engagement and dialogue between the statutory and community sectors.
- We need to clarify and promote models of good practice. But examples of good practice can be penalised financially because they have been a success so 'the problem isn't there anymore'.
- Funding structures are obstacles to progress. The community sector dances to someone else's tune. They aren't flexible or responsive to need. They promote unhealthy competition between groups who should cooperate.
- We are seeing increasingly complex youth social problems that require a multi agency approach.

How Can Others Help?

- Statutory organisations don't know how to work with each other. We need enhanced interagency understanding of each other's ways of working, problems and constraints.
- We need better community understanding of statutory problems.
- Communities need to understand that there is a lot of burn out in statutory organisations as well. A lot of us are under impossible pressure.
- 'Neighbourhood Renewal' will help to coordinate as community voice but it needs the right people involved.
- We need more youth and school based dialogues.
- Kids are developing negative attitudes so young; we need to reinforce positive ones while they are still young.
- The need for flexible solutions must be highlighted; what works for one doesn't work for all.
- Paramilitaries may be doing good work in some areas but this can exclude the non-paramilitary voice in some communities. Some people feel that paramilitaries can't or shouldn't represent them but haven't the courage to speak out so they are voiceless. This is an issue about gate keeping.

Appendix 2: Attendance list

Present:

1.	Richard McLernon	Annadale & Haywood Residents Association
2.	Ann Scully	Ballynafeigh Community Development Assoc
3.	Tracey Nicholson	Ballynafeigh Community Development Assoc
4.	Caroline Wilson	Belfast City Council Good Relations Unit
5.	Hazel Francey	Belfast City Council Good Relations Unit
6.	Chris O'Halloran	Belfast Interface Project
7.	Paul Donnelly	Belfast Interface Project
8.	Marnie Kennedy	Belfast Interface Project
9.	Colin Robinson	Bridge Community Assoc
10.	Maxine Bray	Castlereagh LSP
11.	Irene Hull	Castlereagh LSP
12.	Kieran Walsh	Chartered Institute of Housing
13.	Malachy Mulgrew	Cliftonville Community Forum
14.	David Holloway	Community Dialogue
15.	Stephen Bloomer	Community Foundation NI
16.	Patricia O'Neill	Community Relations Council
17.	Fred Vincent	Corrymeela Community
18.	Susan McEwan	Corrymeela Community
19.	John McQuillan	Crown Project
20.	Angela Clarke	Department for Social Development (DSD)
21.	Stephanie Green	Donegall Pass Community Forum
22.	Michael Briggs	East Belfast Community Development Agency
23.	Denise Fitzpatrick	East Belfast Community Health Information Project
24.	Eddie Wallace	Forthspring
25.	Suzanne Thompson	Forthspring
26.	Bernie Laverty	Forthspring
27.	Adrian McCracken	Greater Belfast Community Network
28.	Julie Cullen	Greater Belfast Community Network
29.	Callum Webster	Groundwork N.I.
30.	Joe Hinds	International Fund for Ireland (Community Bridges Programme)
31.	Sean McMahon	Lenadoon Community Forum
32.	Una Calvert	Ligoniel Improvement Association
33.	Chris Davis	Lower North Belfast Community Council
34.	Deirdre MacBride	MacBride International
35.	Ciaran Mackel	Mackel & Doherty Associates
36.	Brigid Sloan	Markets Development Association

37. Deirdre Hargey	Markets Development Association
38. George Barr	Markets Development Association
39. Ignatius McGourty	Markets Development Association
40. Peter O'Reilly	Mediation Northern Ireland
41. Frances McCandless	NICVA
42. Dominic McCullough	North Belfast Community Action Unit
43. Tracey McCullough	North Belfast Partnership Board
44. Susan Hensel	North West Social Forum
45. Ciara McCarney	Northern Ireland Congress of Trade Unions
46. Trish Lynch	NVTV
47. Karen Jardine	Office of the First & Deputy First Minister
48. Frankie Quinn	Photographer
49. Pat McGinn	PMG Consulting
50. Peter Bryson	Save the Children
51. Frankie Brennan	Short Strand Community Forum
52. Mandy Cochrane	Skegoneil & District Residents Association
53. Yvonne Cowan	South & East Belfast Health & Social Services Trust
54. Gerry Doherty	South Belfast Partnership Board
55. Michael Burns	Star Neighbourhood Centre
56. Jean Brown	Suffolk Community Forum
57. Lisa Kelly	Tides Training
58. Muriel Bowyer	Torr Heath Community Centre
59. Suzi Swain	Worker's Educational Association