

Interface Community Partners & Interagency Group

Annual
Conference -
December
2013



Community Relations Council





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Interface Community Partners & Interagency Group



The Annual Conference of the Interface Community Partners (ICP) and the Interagency Group (IAG) was held in the Ulster Hall on 3rd December 2013, was the setting for the launch of two significant pieces of work commissioned by the Community Relations Council:

- Interface Pack:
From Conversation to Transformation – a journey of change at the interface which tracks our model of international best practice in which practice has helped shape government policy in relation to interfaces;

- ***A Model of Consultation? Transformation and Regeneration at the Interface*** which captures some of the good practice in community engagement in interface areas and explores how we can build on this work.

The conference provided an opportunity to share and reflect on good relations building in Derry-Londonderry in 2013; and enabled further engagement between groups and individuals on the *Together: Building a United Community Strategy*, specifically the priority of a “Safe Community” which focuses on interface communities



JONNY BYRNE, CHAIR - INTERFACE COMMUNITY PARTNERS Introduction



The Interface Community Partners (ICP) and the Interagency Group (AG) (formerly the Interface Working Group) have been hosting annual events such as today's for the past seven years. Much work has been achieved through this partnership in terms of keeping interfaces as a high priority for Government and also in building good relations within and between interface workers on the ground, and with statutory agencies with responsibility for interfaces. This collaboration has helped shape the process for creating the conditions for the transformation of interface barriers and the regeneration of interface areas. And thanks for the ongoing Secretariat and facilitation provided by the Community Relations Council.

There are many good news stories about the work being done in interface communities and we should pride ourselves on the risks and hard work it has taken to get us to this point. We must also be mindful that we are still a region emerging from conflict and of how critical it is to redouble our support for the work and engage fully with interface communities to ensure that people directly affected by the interface barriers feel safe enough to consider transforming them.

Work on the ground has laid a solid foundation for the potential to make positive changes at interface areas. It is important too that the Executive redoubles its efforts to find ways to provide structured support for initiatives to regenerate interface areas, leading to the eventual creation of open and vibrant communities across the region free from fear, threat or any obstacle to interaction.

Today's agenda has been designed to allow for dialogue between delegates and you will get plenty of food for thought from our speakers:

Sharon O'Connor, Town Clerk and Chief Executive, Derry City Council will talk to us about the community relations successes in Derry and the impact of the City of Culture on the peace process.

Donna Blaney, United Community Head of Policy, OFMDFM will update us on the work of the United Communities Interface Design Group and its findings to date on engagements with community partners on the ground.

John Bell, Research Associate, Institute for Conflict Research, will present his findings on the important subject of community engagement and interfaces contained within our new publication, ***A Model of Consultation? Transformation and Regeneration at the Interface***, which we launch today.

Jacqueline Irwin, CEO, Community Relations Council, will make the conference closing remarks.

The Community Relations Council is particularly pleased to welcome **Department of Justice Minister David Ford** who has fully engaged and supported this work to ensure it was mainstreamed within Government. He has spoken at many events such as this one and joins us today to reflect on the journey taken over the past seven years that has helped shape the unfolding policy direction for the future of interfaces.



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE MINISTER, DAVID FORD Ministerial Speech



I am delighted to be able to address this joint conference this morning and to thank the Community Relations Council for their invitation. I also have the pleasure of launching the Community Relations Council interface pack. More on that later.

First I want to acknowledge the work done by everyone gathered in this room, work which I recognise has often been carried out in particularly challenging circumstances over the last twelve months. Despite the tensions, people in interface communities have continued to work together and engage in the conversations that are necessary to address the problems those communities face. That is leadership.

Indeed, all too often in Northern Ireland, leadership is shown by the community rather than to it. That's why the work you are involved in is so important. And it's that work that has allowed my Department to lead efforts on behalf of the Executive to work with you, and the organisations and communities that you represent, to make progress towards the removal of interface

structures. And, in turn, we are now exploring how to build on that work, and to make the most of the commitment made in the United Communities strategy announced by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in May.

We all acknowledge that the aim of removing all of the structures by 2023 is a demanding one, and that there are differing views on whether setting such a target is helpful or not. But if nothing else, the publication of the strategy has allowed us to open up a discussion with other departments, and to make this work a collective focus for the whole Executive.

In respect of the process, interface community partners had an opportunity at Belfast Castle recently to highlight the issues that they felt needed to be addressed and how they should be addressed. I welcome the views that were aired at that event. I can assure you that they have been listened to, and we are working to ensure that they help inform our approach.



For my part, that approach must recognise a number of key principles:

First, we need to recognise that removing physical barriers is about much more than the physical structures. Indeed, in many cases, the removal of the structures will be the last of a series of steps, incorporating a mixture of comprehensive, joined-up approach to addressing all the barriers to integration that exist at interface areas.

Second, and leading on from the first, the plans need to reflect and deliver collaborative working between Government, statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and communities.

Third, our approach needs to be underpinned by the principle of community engagement, involvement and support. This is a project that will only be successful if it is done with communities, rather than to them. We need to work with communities and support them in developing a vision and then seeing whether, and if so how, that can be delivered. That may lead to small or big steps. Whatever, all momentum which enjoys community support is positive in my view.

Fourth, our approach needs to be flexible enough to cope with inevitable changes to funding streams and community development responsibilities, for instance, local government changes.

Of course, many of these principles aren't new – if they sound familiar it's because we have been listening to what you have been saying to us. Indeed, what we have tried to do is listen to you and other partners in this field, and to build an approach that reflects successes already achieved. In that regard, I want to pay a particular tribute to the International Fund for Ireland. The eight clusters of work under the programme developed by the IFI are making progress because they reflect principles such as those I have outlined. So, too, has the peace walls project, funded through Peace III and managed by Belfast City Council.

Together - that is all of us here - we have made progress on some structures, including removal in some cases and longer opening hours of gates in others. Today is an opportunity to say thank you to all of you for that.

I also want to thank CRC for the invitation to launch this interface pack. The reports can be seen as evidence of the journey that has been, and is being made, from gaining knowledge and understanding of physical separation, through to working together in a coherent way.

I'm glad to see that the pack includes a document which covers not just Belfast, but the whole of Northern Ireland. While it's true to say that, to date, the focus of interface work has been on physical structures, the majority of which lie in Belfast, the most challenging target for us is the removal of societal and invisible barriers to a united and shared future for all of Northern Ireland. This was another pertinent point made by the participants at Belfast Castle. This pack highlights how the CRC has been at the vanguard of establishing processes to tackle both visible and invisible divisions within our community, and I want to pay tribute to the Council for its tireless work.

Turning again to the role of government, we are engaged in discussions about how best to take the words and sentiments in the United Communities paper and make them work on the ground. You will hear more in due course, but I am determined that any renewed process reflects the principles I have outlined, and is properly informed by the work that you have been doing over many years, by the evidence base that CRC has been developing, and by the views expressed at the recent Belfast Castle event.

Thank you again, and let me take this early opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous new year.



SHARON O'CONNOR, TOWN CLERK AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, DERRY CITY COUNCIL The City of Culture Experience



*So hope for a great sea change
On the far side of revenge
Believe that a farther shore
Is reachable from here
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.*

Seamus Heaney

Thanks to the Community Relations Council for the kind invitation to address you today

May I say in my introductory remarks that I feel a bit of a fraud representing the Derry-Londonderry story this morning. I am an outsider to the City in which I work and in no way would I claim to have been any part of

the success story on community relationships. What I can share is a personal perspective of an engaged observer who has led the Council during the build up to and delivery of our City of Culture 2013 year.

As some of you may know, I am a Belfast woman so I know something of interfaces. As a child I remember passing riots at the inauspiciously named Unity flats in the early 70s to get my Christmas outfit in McMurray's in North Street. I am a child and a product of the so called Troubles. For that reason it has been a privilege to be working in Derry-Londonderry at such a momentous and positive time. In many respects the troubles 'broke out' in the City; it can also be said that the first possibilities for peace also formed there.



Context

It needs to be said that Belfast and Derry are very different places. Solutions made in Derry may, or may not, fit Belfast. Derry is a border city, very much the centre of the North West, and serving people of both traditions who live and work in a border context. It is also a fact that Derry did not suffer the same levels of violent sectarian conflict as Belfast. That is not to deny the existence of sectarianism in the City. The separation and retreat of people into safe zones happened there too but in many respects the geography of the river masked this reality.

We all know the story of our so called Troubles – most here lived through it, though our lives will have formed different versions of the history. I will not dwell here. So let’s come to the recent past, it’s 2010 and the people of Derry-Londonderry decide to make a bid to be the first UK City of Culture; right there in the designation, the challenge exists. In all of the decisions which follow you will find evidence of what works in the City.

In acknowledging different affiliations via the Derry-Londonderry title for the bid, accommodation was achieved and people who found the UK badge hard to swallow looked beyond that to the celebration and potential for social and economic benefit. It was clear that the City wanted the designation, and undeniable that the City needed it.

Peace Bridge

I must confess to being one of those who was cynical about the concept of a pedestrian bridge for peace. The idea of children of different traditions dancing into the middle and embracing seemed too naïve an idea. I was wrong. What I had forgotten is something we all already know; deep within all of us is an awe of crossing a great river. Something of a joy first experienced by our ancient ancestors, bridges are magical and people love them. The bridge is a massively popular success, emblematic of our journey to peace and has been critical to the success of City of

Culture. During one of our 2012 City of Culture lead-in events, the maritime festival ‘Clipper’, I met a man from Eglinton - just up the road - who had not been on the Cityside of the river since he was four, and declared himself amazed by the new City he found.

Good relationships

In Derry-Londonderry we have had a fantastic year, largely free from tension around parades and flags and people are interested to know how this is possible. The answer is simple, no fairy dust or alchemy, just hard work. Hard work by many people on the ground over decades and certainly intensively over the last ten years. Some of those people may be here today and better qualified than I to explain it.

Unity of Purpose

There are and have been for years many groups and individuals who have, with the interests of the City at heart, taken brave steps to encounter others. There have been clear public commitments to working together to identify where accommodation was possible and then put in place clear arrangements for how difficulties will be managed.

In terms of parading, the Apprentice Boys have taken strong leadership on their own activities and have engaged to create circumstances where they have parades which are manifest in a relaxed festival atmosphere. Interface communities have leaders who work in a dedicated manner to ensure that the young people are actively attracted away from locations where conflict might occur.

This work is complex and difficult and of course similar things happen elsewhere. The Derry-Londonderry difference is the established and settled nature of the issues and protocols. Most importantly, its success lies in the widespread and dedicated support of key individuals and organizations which is vital. The people involved and all the major organizations who are engaged have an understanding - “you hurt one of us, you hurt us all”. Problems are managed collectively



with clear lines of public comment agreed. This sort of arrangement manages difficulty when it arises, and it does arise. We continue to have a dissident threat in the City and not everyone is ‘signed up’.

If the City’s experience over the last number of years tells us anything it is this. People want a normal life, they want community celebration and good memories for their children. Others may argue but I witnessed a major shift of belief in 2012 during ‘Clipper’ - citizens from both side of the river saw their City in a new way, our talk of telling a new story became real to them and they wanted more.

Throughout 2013 we have repeated that experience over and over. There were many moments around which there was concern but the parades season came and went with all of the arrangements referred to above continuing to work well.

The City of Culture programme was deliberately not about ‘orange and green’ - the cultural and arts experience of affiliations was not excluded but celebrated and embraced. This aspect of who we are, summed up as ‘one city, many voices’, was crystallised one weekend in August when the Apprentice Boys handed over the City to the Fleadh Cheoil NaEireann and the music of both traditions played on and played together, and ‘party tunes’ were played in the Culturlann. In those weeks over 430,000 people came and saw a City transformed.



Legacy

We in Derry-Londonderry have experienced arguably the happiest year in the City’s history. So, standing here today it is possible to predict great things for the City. The dedicated hard work of the people on all sides goes on. New centres for ‘telling old and new stories’, important stories, are being developed. Council is pleased to be working with the Apprentice Boys on their new interpretative facilities and the Bloody Sunday Museum is also redeveloping its facilities. Our refurbished Guildhall tells the City story in its windows and on its walls.

But in a City where 40% of our population is under 25, it is our young people who are the real legacy; it was a joy to see them experience a life that most of the ‘over forties’ in this room could only have dreamed. Cultural education programmes with a focus on music in 2014 is the key driver on the legacy programme and I hope that you come and study this success story for yourself.

“We believe that the UK City of Culture lead-in and year of celebration will be a transformational moment for the region. This is a time for Northern Ireland to show the World where it has been and where it is going.”
Extract from Bid document for the competition for City of Culture.



DONNA BLANEY, UNITED COMMUNITY HEAD OF POLICY,
OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER
Feedback from Belfast Castle Interface Community Partners event



Response to feedback from design workshops held with Interface Community Partners on 15 November 2013 in Belfast Castle

The key issues identified at the workshop on 15 November can be broadly grouped into six areas:

- Delivery mechanisms and funding
- Children and young people
- Communications
- Social & economic regeneration
- Community safety and
- Parades, flags and emblems

Delivery Mechanisms and Funding

The IFI Peace Walls model is a mechanism that could be built on to bring about community engagement and create the conditions that would allow those living in the area to feel safe if the interface is removed. It is

recognised that any structure put in place must have clear lines of communication and the authority to make decisions and take action. A lot can be learnt from the Derry/Londonderry approach - a multi-agency, joined up, community engagement, local initiatives supported by investment and the promotion of 'normality'. A financial package will be associated with this commitment and a comprehensive review of the structure, delivery and impact of existing funding delivery mechanisms will be carried out.

Children and Young People

OFMDFM recognises and encourages the inclusion of young people in consultation. Many young people living in or around interfaces have limited experience outside the environment and it is very important that their fears and expectations are listened to. Their United Youth Programme will take these points on board. Parents/grandparents will be encouraged to



become more involved in projects the young people are taking forward.

Communications

It is clearly evident that engagement with the community is paramount to achieving the removal of interfaces. There is a need for clear lines of communication between government departments and the community.

The role of District Councils and the Good Relations Officers is also an important one. The Strategy places a lot of responsibility on Councils in delivering work and projects that will achieve the shared aims for each of the four key priorities in the strategy.

Social and Economic Regeneration

The delivery of seven headline commitments on the new shared housing schemes, the four urban villages, the cross community sporting events and the shared summer schools will be taken forward quickly. The

target for removal of the interfaces is 2023 and an integrated package of social/economic and physical renewal of the community will be included.

Community Safety

It is Government's intention to create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety.

No peace walls will be removed – or reimaged - without the consent and support of the local community. A tailored, flexible, ongoing aftercare package, which includes a commitment from Government, is essential and must be in place before barriers are removed.

Legacy Issues

Dr Haass and his team are due to report to Government on the issues around flags and emblems, parades and the legacy of the Troubles by the end of December.





ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS: SUMMARY

Question/workshop 1 – Consider what needs to be done to assist in the transformation and regeneration of interfaces over the next 12 months

- Clarity needed around funding sources and management and an assurance that the appropriate resources will be in place in order to direct funding where it is required to effect physical change, eg housing, investment, regeneration.
- There is a need to focus on the 'local' with buy-in from the communities directly affected by the changes and at a pace which suits them.
- We do not want empty promises from Government or grandstanding by politicians. However, the role of ministers and their staff is key to progress both in terms of the interfaces and the wider issues such as inequality. A cohesive, clearly defined and cross departmental approach from the design teams/TBUC is vital as is the removal of red tape - a 'Community Plan' that joins up all related agencies and provides a clear strategy.
- Time now for action, or a fresh approach, rather than continual consultation.
- Voices of women and young people need to be heard, likewise other minority/ethnic communities. The flags and parades issues reflect a need within communities to be heard and are masking the real social issues affecting people.



- Politicians need to focus on the real problems. There is a big disconnect between communities and decision makers/politicians who are rarely seen or heard – only when there is trouble or an election. Leadership needs to improve.
- Private conversations that deal with the harder issues – fear/paramilitaries etc - need to start happening in the public arena to encourage commitment, openness and understanding of each other's position so that fears regarding loss of cultural identity are allayed. The challenge is to get "enemies" to participate.
- The Derry/Londonderry City of Culture experience has been instructive to see how engagement has worked; breaking down of psychological barriers and building of relationships through sustained channels of communication and investment in big projects.
- Within communities, there is growing cynicism – confidence building is needed.
- There is also a need for education and skills training around good relations; more resources devoted to neighbourhood integration and a demonstration of transformative progress at some interfaces to build on momentum.
- Need to encourage communities to look at the positive change that interface transformation can bring.
- Safety is still a big issue for many communities – how will this be guaranteed post-transformation? Tailored and flexible packages for interface areas need to address this.



Priority themes emerging from speakers

- Segregation/sectarianism needs to be addressed.
- Take ownership – agree a common purpose and create a vision.
- Local communities should be kept informed about what is happening in a language and vision that is accessible and translates at community level.
- Engage with young people
- Derry-Londonderry model - hard work, persistence and determination were key to working together. A similar cultural shift and buy in from communities in Belfast is required.



Question/workshop 2 - Consultation and engagement with interface communities – how successful has this been and how can we improve upon it?

- Consultation methodology – rethink how to engage with local communities. Need to identify stakeholders both positive and negative and those who have not or will not engage. Need a new approach in terms of engagement, collection of data, etc – people have consultation burn-out.
- Appropriate language/communication channels and increased influencing mechanisms for practitioners/community groups. Need to be creative around this.

- Transformation – is it what every community really wants? In some areas the interface is seen as a positive structure – eg creates a cul de sac therefore increasing safety for children. Creative ideas are required to ensure transformation works.
- The relationship between interface issues and socio/economic realities has to be understood and prioritised.
- Need to include areas where there are no physical barriers but where the psychological barrier is present.
- After-care packages – preservation of safety and confidence are critical to any transformation.
- Political leadership and Government have to provide visionary and practical leadership. There is a limit to what communities and their organisations can do. Only Government can provide a sustainable, structured and systemic policy for integration. Local area plans considered to be useful. Joined-up interagency approach is vital.
- Community relations work still needed in order to build relationships of trust.
- Derry-Londonderry model – pride without politicisation and respect for cultural backgrounds.





JACQUELINE IRWIN, CEO COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL Closing Remarks



The Community Relations Council is pleased to host what has now become the annual interface conference. In our development role we have supported the Interface Community Partners and the DOJ Interagency Group (formerly the Interface Working Group) in hosting events such as this for a number of years. Our aim is to keep the issues facing interfaces high on the agenda of our government and to continue building good relations within and between interface workers and statutory agencies with relevant responsibilities in this area. Thank you all for attending today. The large numbers at today's conference and at the consultation event that we hosted on behalf of OFMDFM on 15th November is testament to the level of interest there is in this aspect of our peace process.

The CRC was pleased to have the opportunity today to launch two significant documents in support of the vital work at interfaces. The Interface Pack "From Conversation to Transformation – a journey of change at the interface" records the journey from practice to public policy in relation to interfaces and physical separation across the region. We commissioned the research recorded in "A Model of Consultation? Transformation and Regeneration at the Interface" to capture examples of good practice in community engagement that are emerging at interfaces. The publication also provides recommendations for future approaches to community consultation. Thanks to the author, John Bell, for taking us through the findings of the research today.



Thanks also to Donna Blaney for sharing her early findings from the engagement event that we hosted on 15th November. We hope that the views expressed at that event can help shape the initiatives in Together: Building a United Community to ensure that they are an appropriate and effective response to community needs.

On behalf of all of us I would like to thank Minister Ford for his words of encouragement and his commitment to this work. I am also grateful to him for his kind recognition of the role of the Community Relations Council in the journey of transformation. Collaborative working across departments and agencies is essential to positive long term change at interfaces and the Department of Justice has played a leading role in helping to deliver a coordinated response across government.

The Minister is right to highlight the need for a flexible approach to cope with the many significant challenges before us now in relation to the loss of important international funding, changes in local government structures and an apparently deteriorating political environment.

For the sake of our young people we must continue, whatever the challenges, to work for a shared and better future. For this reason it was a great pleasure to listen to Sharon O'Connor today as she shared with us the impact on good relations in Derry-Londonderry of its year as the first UK City of Culture. She rightly cautions us not to expect solutions that fit in one place to necessarily work in another. However, I think there are some very important points that we can all take and adapt to our own circumstances. Firstly, there is the need to compromise and transcend our individual preferences in relation to identity and culture to achieve wider social and economic benefits for all; in other words the importance of unity of purpose - one place, many voices. Secondly, the need to transform the spaces that emphasise our physical separation as can be seen in the important place that the peace bridge now holds in the life of Derry/Londonderry. Lastly, and very importantly, the need we all have for a normal life that includes joy and community celebration to build new, good memories especially for our children.





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Community Relations Council



Community Relations Council
6 Murray Street
Belfast
BT1 6DN
Tel: 028 9022 7500
www.nicrc.org.uk