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From: The Community Relations Council
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Issue: EQIA Re-imaging Communities

Thank you for your letter, enclosures and request to consult with the Community Relations Council (CRC), about the outcomes of your policy screening procedures/equality impact assessment procedures on 'Re-imaging Communities' Policy.

As you know Section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between people of different religious belief, political opinion, racial groups, age, marital status, gender, disability and dependant status. In addition Section 75 (2) of the Act obliges public authorities to have regard to the desirability of promoting 'good relations' between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

CRC's Policy Development Programme has a specific interest in assisting statutory organisations in Northern Ireland to carry out their Section 75 (2) duties. We are also keen to stress the importance of benchmarking new and developing policies against government priorities as set out in A Shared Future and the Racial Equality Strategy.

In the interest of transparency and openness CRC agrees with the decision to undertake a full EQIA. Previous publicity around the 'Re-imaging Communities' policy has caused sections of our community to conclude that the policy is only available for one section of our society. The EQIA process will enable the Re-imaging team to clarify any misunderstandings surrounding the policy - in terms of target users, communities/groups who can benefit from the funding.

CRC's primary concern is the promotion of Community and Good Relations and the development of a shared and peaceful future. The policy is designed to renew and reclaim public space and reaffirm community ownership and it has the potential to build good relations within and between communities. District Council's and constituted community/voluntary groups are required under the criteria to fulfil conditions set out within A Shared Future, improve community relations, as well as develop and strengthen community cohesion. We are pleased that A Shared Future and Community Relations are core criteria for receipt of any funding. Council notes

that each of the criteria is weighted equally against each other. However, we would like further clarification as to whether there is a threshold for each of the criteria, if not, Council suggests each criteria is given a minimum score as this would offset the danger of Community Relations or A Shared Future (ASF) scoring a low mark within a successful application. Council believe a minimum score for all the criteria would ensure the equal delivery and achievement of the core criteria; it would act as a protection clause for ASF and Community/Good Relations.

Upon reading the 'Guide' to the policy, particularly the information as to who can apply for funding, it could be interpreted that applications from District Council's are given more weight – it would be helpful to ensure that everyone understands that all applications, whether they are from district council's, community or voluntary groups, are treated equally. Furthermore, it is noted that voluntary and community applications should have the support of a public authority, which doesn't necessarily need to be a district council. What are the implications for a district council if they are unwilling to support a local project i.e. will discussions occur between the council and the Re-imaging team to determine reasons for not supporting the project and what consequences will this have for either the project group or the council.

CRC would also like to suggest the establishment of an information sharing forum, with representatives from successful applications. There is potential for some groups, regardless of their community background, to experience resistance from certain individuals or groups to change within their community. It will be important to offer guidance as to how these obstacles can be overcome, in terms of what discussions need to take place and partnerships formed. Information on models of good practice should be made widely available within the target areas/neighbourhoods. They could act as an inspiration to groups and district councils to embark on similar projects within their own community.

CRC would also like clarification if there is an opportunity for artists not already on the Arts Council Register to become registered members, and again disseminate information on the various projects they have been involved in to targeted audiences.

Council looks forward to working with the Arts Council on the delivery and implementation of this policy.

Yours sincerely

Duncan Morrow
CEO, Community Relations Council