

22 July 2009

Mr Mervyn Cooke
Deputy Head of Human Resources
Belfast Education & Library Board
40 Academy Street
Belfast BT1 2NQ

Dear Mr Cooke

RE: Equality Consultation Questionnaire on proposal to re-locate City of Belfast School of Music to Castle High School site on or around 1st September 2009.

Thank you for your letter, enclosures and request to consult with the Community Relations Council (CRC), about the equality implications relating to the re-location of the City of Belfast School of Music.

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 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 in the Programme for Government.

Within the current policy framework of the Programme for Government one of the key priorities is promoting tolerance, inclusion and health and well being. Within the document the statement is made: "Advancing social transformation and the inclusion of all of our people is essential if we are to deliver the peaceful, prosperous, fair and healthy society we all want." Furthermore part of the current Programme for Government rightly seeks to bring forward a programme of cohesion and integration for a shared and better future to address the divisions within our society and achieve measurable reductions in sectarianism, racism and hate crime.

CRC has a keen interest in developing shared safe spaces and the re-location of the City School of Music offers the Board and the School an opportunity to enhance sharing and contribute to the promotion of good relations.

It is important to consider the new environment into which the school is moving and examine potential barriers that could prevent or minimise participation and engagement.

Opportunities

- The City School of Music could lead the way in developing music as a shared venue in the North of the City.
- Interventions and initiatives should be used to promote the new venue as shared space.
- The new site for the School of Music will provide a new focus for the residents of North Belfast, and is a perfect opportunity to address issues such as exclusion, isolation. An outreach programme with the community could contribute to community integration and cohesion.
- Outreach programmes should have tangible actions and targets to build, support and promote good relations.

In the context of these opportunities it is essential to understand the particular circumstances of North Belfast, It is one of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland¹ - according to Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) 17 of the top twenty most deprived areas in Northern Ireland are located in North or West Belfast. Some of the most deprived parts of Northern Ireland are also the most segregated, and contain the greatest number of peace walls. It is also important to consider the human cost - North and West Belfast alone accounted for 1240 (or over one third) of the 3636 fatalities in total that took place over the course of the conflict². Such statistics provide direct evidence of the disproportionate impact of the conflict on the poorest sections of our society.

CRC would like to make the following comments, observations and appeals for the Boards consideration. CRC believes this current situation offers BELB an opportunity to shape their policies within the context of sharing and good relations. CRC is primarily interested in two things:

- How will the School of Music's relocation impact positively on the local community?
- How will the facility be promoted as a shared safe space for everyone in the City of Belfast, to learn and develop their musical skills?

It is therefore necessary to consider issues such as:

¹ Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005

² CAJ Submission to Eames/Bradley, Legacy of the Past.

- Accessibility & Mobility
 - Is the site accessible by public transport/car/by foot? North Belfast is interlaced with interfaces both physical and non physical and therefore safe access to the site is essential, particularly for students and other staff who do not have private car transport. If unsafe travel is an issue it will prevent people from using the facility and therefore reduce participation.
- Connectivity.
 - The School of Music is a facility for everyone in the city, and it will be important that the re-location of the school coincides with a communication that promotes the facility and its services to the city as a whole, and ensure transport services meet the needs of users.

CRC urges the Board to examine transport routes both city wide and local and assess any possible adverse impacts.

- It is also important to examine how the various music sectors in the city are collaborating and working together to promote interest and participation in musical development.
- Engagement and Participation for the local community
 - Schools.
 - Engage with local schools and pupils who have not previously attended after school sessions, evening classes and weekend programmes. Barriers to engagement could relate to the location of the current building and transport issues but this new location should create new opportunities for engagement.
 - Community.
 - Engage with local community groups and organizations to promote the facility and the classes on offer. Local musical interest groups would be keen to avail of the facilities and it is essential an ethos of inclusion and diversity is promoted and communicated.
 - BELB should examine if access to lessons etc is restricted due to low income levels and therefore consider what mitigating measures could be used to reduce these barriers e.g. pilot programmes in disadvantaged areas.

Conclusion

CRC urges the Board to consider the particular circumstances and sensitive issues of living in an interface community and to examine how the re-location of this facility could promote and maintain good relations.

CRC believes that all vehicles should be used to promote peaceful co-existence. Sustainable, vibrant and shared communities are the goal. It would be useful for the Board to examine how the re-location of the school integrates and

compliments the objectives of Belfast City Council's Belfast Development Plan
(Appendix)

We look forward to continuing to work with the Board to deliver this.

Please feel free to contact me on 02890227500 should you require any clarification or wish to explore any of the above points further.

Best Wishes

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Appendix

3. Foster greater civic responsibility and civic pride

Actions:

Develop community capacity to shape regeneration plans and programmes.

Promote improved community relations.

Work with local communities to create diverse neighbourhoods.

Establish a champion to spearhead regeneration activity in the city based on inclusive working.

Promote a simplified governance structure within the city.

Create higher levels of joint working in regeneration between agencies and communities.

15. Re-invigorate the city's neighbourhoods

Actions:

Develop greater mobility and connectivity within and among neighbourhoods.

Protect and enhance local neighbourhood centres.

Encourage greater investment into deprived neighbourhoods.¹

¹ http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity/docs/to_do_list_final.pdf