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### **Issue: Regional Economic Strategy**

The Community Relations Council (CRC) is primarily concerned with promoting Community and Good Relations and the development of a shared and peaceful future. In recent years, CRC has actively sought to bring pressure to bear on all public agencies to take seriously the implications of 'A Shared Future', which has tasked government departments and agencies to develop and implement policies that establish ***'over time of 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 people are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence'***.

Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Firstly, Council is concerned that the Strategy does not make any reference to the Government priority policy 'A Shared Future'. This strategy was launched in 2005 and its accompanying Triennial Action Plan was published last year with commitments from all government departments as to what actions they will take to deliver a shared future. Lord Rooker stated "there is no alternative to A Shared Future. Segregation and division is not an option"<sup>1</sup> and Council is disappointed the commitments of building good relations, and tackling division and segregation do not form the cornerstone of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), it should be a central theme. Lord Rooker also assured society by saying 'For the first time, in 'A Shared Future', we have in place, arguably one of the most important areas of public policy developed in the last three decades. At its core is the policy of promoting sharing rather than separation and the creation of a society where different groups live together, and not just side by side'<sup>2</sup>. This commitment must be integrated within this strategy. Council is extremely disappointed that the treasury has not adopted a similar approach to implementing ASF and we would strongly advise

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<sup>1</sup> LORD ROOKER'S SPEECH, CRC POLICY CONFERENCE "SHARING OVER SEPARATION" , APRIL 2006

<sup>2</sup> LORD ROOKER – REFORM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT OUTCOME OF RPA NOVEMBER 2005

revisiting this strategy in terms of building a shared future and the action plan for the Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP). (Annex A).

Council's main interest in the Regional Economic Strategy is to ensure government is mainstreaming ASF obligations and ensure positive and practical actions are devised to implement the goal of sharing over separation. Council acts as a watchdog for ASF and challenges government, at all levels, to fulfil their commitments through innovative and practical measures. The implementation of ASF is the responsibility of everyone, and government has identified itself as a champion of the strategy and we expect all policy to be underpinned by the strategy.

### **NI Context**

The strategy examines the global economy, developments south of the Border and the UK's influence on the local economy. It then examines Northern Ireland and the positive developments within the local economy. The 30 years conflict is brief acknowledged but almost as if it is no longer relevant. Northern Ireland has undergone a massive transformation e.g. Belfast is a massive building site and new investors are increasingly looking to NI for new opportunities in business development. However the legacy of the troubles is still glaringly obvious for various sections of our community. Areas that were hardest hit by the conflict are experiencing high levels of deprivation and unemployment. Large sections of society remain highly segregated and live alongside peacelines – this is despite ceasefires and political progress.

Council has examined how this economic strategy can benefit the whole of Northern Ireland, and in particular what actions can be taken to improve the lives of those most in need, regardless of where they live e.g. cities, towns or villages across the North. Moreover we want the treasury to explore how this strategy can deliver the Shared Future everyone wants to achieve and how current models of good practice happening at local level offer new lines of direction to be exploited.

*Legacy of the Conflict.* There have been positive developments due to the peace process, but there are large areas of deprivation and policy makers need to ensure that all public policy has a constructive impact i.e. where it is needed most and ensure it has an ASF focus. Northern Ireland policy had previously been delivered on a duplicate basis due to the segregated nature of our society. Joined up government is essential and ASF objectives need to be incorporated into actions and programmes. Projects should deliver multiple outcomes i.e. create jobs, reduce poverty, attract investors and explore how projects can deliver good relations at the same time.

*Sustainable Communities.* Sustainability is a buzz word and is used in terms of creating sustainable economies and communities. Council wants to emphasise the need to focus on both of these, but in terms of delivering ASF objectives this needs to be carried out via sharing, collaboration and partnership. Council wants to see economically vibrant communities and we want to achieve this social cohesion between co-existing communities. DFP has committed itself to ensuring 'all proposals for public expenditure include an assessment of how they will contribute to the promotion of good relations as

well as the New TSN and equality. Proposals will not be considered if this is not included<sup>3</sup>. It is crucial to ASF 'proof' proposals and explore how programmes or projects can be delivered jointly across community boundaries and how job opportunities and training become accessible to both communities. Shared sustainable communities must be the goal.

*Barriers.* The strategy identifies many barriers including a skills deficit, ill health and mobility issues. Council would welcome the broadening of this debate to consider the impact of the troubles on restricting access to employment. Access to employment can be constrained because of where you live and job location i.e. if you rely on public transport to get to your place of work and this involves traveling within an area you feel uncomfortable in e.g. paramilitary flags, painted kerbstones and other territorial markings – these will all have an impact on where you will consider seeking employment.

The University of Ulster's recent study on 'Breaking Down Barriers', examined issues around sectarianism, unemployment and the exclusion of disadvantaged young people. Council has attached the summary of the key findings and believes it is essential to take this research into consideration when devising ways to reduce social exclusion and improve economic and employment opportunities in areas of high deprivation. The researchers found evidence that:

- The main reason for not working in a politico-religious out-group area was fear.
- Neutrality in the workplace and in the local environment (i.e. no graffiti) were important in encouraging people to work in other areas.
- Sectarianism is the norm in these communities and this has been a major barrier to employment.

These are only a sample of the views held by many of the young people. Council wants DFP to further recognise the impact of the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland and acknowledge these chill factors and how they present additional barriers e.g. personal safety and issues around traveling to/access to work. The Economic Strategy has also carried out a survey in terms of where economic activity is spatially concentrated without examining contributing factors such as the conflict, peacelines and the segregated nature of that geographic area. Acknowledgement of barriers associated with the troubles will generate the opportunity to develop creative solutions to these hurdles.

*Urban and Rural Regeneration.* This is an area of particular interest to the Community Relations Council. The physical regeneration of an area is important in raising the confidence and self esteem of the local community, especially within a deprived area. Moreover the knock on effects of this regeneration can be substantial in that it attracts new businesses, investors and ultimately jobs and a growing sense of respect for the area in which people live, work and socialise.

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<sup>3</sup> A Shared Future, Triennial Action Plan Page 34.

The strategy identifies Belfast as the *'primary driver for the economic development of NI'*. Belfast City centre has changed significantly over the past number of years, and continues to develop economically - growing number of retailers and service providers etc. All cities are crucial for future growth but it is important to recognise that whilst certain areas of Belfast have changed dramatically for the better, there are large pockets of deprivation and this growth has been unbalanced. There are concerns that Belfast City has become an unequal city, and that North and West Belfast are becoming more and more detached both physically and economically from the rest. The various indicators for the areas of disadvantage show no sign of levelling and it is crucial that future economic planning bridges these gaps. A Community Attitudes survey carried out in 2001 interviewed residents in six Belfast areas: 'a mere 14.5% of those in catholic places and 11.5% in Protestant places indicated that social and economic conditions had improved'.<sup>4</sup> Moreover Morrissey examines what should be avoided when planning in contested spaces, which links directly to the issue of urban and rural regeneration. If government promotes and plans with each community separately, especially if *'in a society marked by acute sectarian geography, it may lead to an even more portioned city by offering each community the chance to ghettoise further and to press for its factional ethnic interest over the wider civic good. Such policies would end up as managerial solutions, attempting to cope with, rather than to change, the deep divisions'*.<sup>5</sup>

Belfast needs to act as a catalyst for other areas. The city has to move forward within the context of the European Union and ensure it is open and inclusive to everyone. The regeneration of the city and its communities must seek to generate something different to the sectarian territories, and must be embedded with the principles of A Shared Future.

The economic strategy must allow the growth of mixed wealth, housing and economics within an area and therefore promote a diverse mixture of citizens. This helps create balanced and diverse communities. We need to move away from the notion that communities are fixed entities and that they progress separately from each other and economic success has to enable participation from all communities and guarantee a 'common future' for all residents of the city.

At present statutory agencies, community and voluntary organisations are working together to transform former military bases e.g. Crumlin Road Gaol and Ebrington Barracks in a systematic combined programme of economic, physical and social regeneration. More of these sites are being relinquished back to the local community and regenerated for use as shared spaces. It is also important to note the work being driven by local communities e.g. Suffolk/Lenadoon Interface Group have created shared spaces in the form of local retail outlets via a cross community partnership approach. Similar groups in disadvantaged areas are beginning this process of discussing how they can develop business skills within their communities and ultimately how this can result in local employment. It is important to acknowledge that these developments are part of a

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<sup>4</sup> Mike Morrissey, Planning for Peace in a Contested Space Page 12

<sup>5</sup> Mike Morrissey, Planning for Peace in a Contested Space Page 5.

long term process and support must be available at the different and sometimes difficult stages of the project. Of course some regeneration projects will occur within one community due to the geography of the area but there are opportunities for developing negotiation skills and business skills which could be delivered on a collective basis. Approaches need to ASF proofed.

It would be valuable to scope where current regeneration has taken place in terms of economic regeneration i.e. where conglomerations of businesses exist in areas that experience deprivation and segregation: why they were attracted to the area, what enabled them to continue to operate and expand e.g. supporting one another, attracting local employment, creating a neutral environment and increasing access to the whole community.

How will this Regional Economic Strategy attract investors to these areas of need? The RES refers to a sustainable economy but there is an unsustainability in being linked to poverty and the conflict is a key factor when developing and locating business in certain areas. What can be done to offset this legacy against a growing stronger peaceful society? Are there options for financial incentives; how are these areas marketed and made attractive to potential investors and local entrepreneurs. Can the statutory and community and voluntary sector work together on a cross community basis to deliver regeneration plans to new investors – selling their product - their community? The strategy has to create an environment that encourages investment, supports cultural diversity, and develops creativity within enterprises. The strategy also refers to transport issues and Council wants to see communities better connected to shopping areas, work opportunities and more cross city routes (Belfast), all of which should be safe, welcoming and free from threatening territorial markings. This requires a holistic approach; cooperation is central to achieving strong ASF outcomes.

*Skills.* Northern Ireland needs to have a strong skills base which are crucial for the development of communities. Council wants ASF principles embedded within the delivery of a skills strategy. The European Social Fund Programme identifies the Further Education Strategy (FES) as playing an important role in ‘enhancing social cohesion and in providing opportunities for lifelong learning’. This also links into the low level of job related training in Northern Ireland and how opportunities can be generated on a cross community basis within the FE sector. Furthermore the FE sector can and already does play an important role in the delivery of ASF and the promotion of Good Relations. Council has attached a case study on ANIC and the **A.G.R.E.E Programme** (Actioning Good relations, Equality and Equity) which was delivered over a four year period and sought to ensure that equity and respect for difference were placed at the heart of day-to-day life further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland.

*Good Relations.* Building Good Relations needs to be an essential component of public policy. The strategy refers to the growing numbers of foreign labour and rightly views this as a positive development. However NI is experiencing new levels of racism and we have included some key points that need to be taken into consideration and highlights the need to cement all policy with ASF and Good Relations.

More than 2/3 of people believe there is more racial prejudice than there was 5 years ago (NILTS 2005)

- 1% of people are very prejudiced and 24% of people say they are a little prejudiced against people from minority ethnic communities (NILTS 2005).
- Racial offences increased from 322 in 2004/05 to 351 in 2005/06 (PSNI 2005/06).
- Only 17% of people agree they know quite a bit about the culture of some minority ethnic communities in NI (NILTS 2005).
- Half of the population believe minority ethnic communities are less respected than they once were (NILTS 2005).
- Fifty-four percent of students had witnessed some form of racism. This had mainly taken the form of verbal abuse (50%) or rudeness and hostility (33%), while 21% had witnessed property being damaged and a further 21% had witnessed physical violence. Of the 54% who had witnessed the acts of racism, the majority, 38% had ignored the incident, while 13% reported that they had challenged the behaviour. Only 2% had reported the incident to the PSNI and 1% had reported it to someone else. *New Migrant Communities in East Tyrone, A Report for East Tyrone College, July 2005.*
- Exploitation of the growing number of migrant workers in Northern Ireland was confirmed yesterday in a study by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). It also highlighted widespread racism and sectarianism experienced by those who have travelled to the province in search of work – suffered both in the the work place and outside. It concluded that trade unions had both a duty and the capacity to organise and represent migrant workers.

The work of trade unions is particularly important in tackling sectarianism and racism within the workplace. Trade Unions are actively involved in finding practical ways to fight prejudice and are working to ensure the gains of the peace process do not unravel. It is important to acknowledge the work undertaken by trade unions and how an equitable, diverse and interdependent society can attract foreign skilled labour.

#### *Employment Figures*

The Committee on the Administration of Justice recently carried out research into equality and employment and found that there is still significant segregation in major employment sectors. In 2005 the Chief Commissioner of the ECNI stated *'that the imbalances in employment recorded in the early 1990's have in effect disappeared. The composition of the workforce is now Protestant (P) (57.7%) and Roman Catholic (RC) (42.3%). Given that the proportion of those available for work is around Protestant (57.3%) and Roman Catholic (42.7%), the current composition is close to what might be expected'*<sup>6</sup>. Whilst the aggregate figures are quite positive, the breakdown across individual places of employment reveal widespread and significant problems. There are differentials within the public sector, District Councils (although these differ between individual councils), the Health and Education Sector. The Private sector also causes concern in that new businesses that have undergone significant expansion in recent years also exhibit significant levels of under-representation.

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<sup>6</sup> Equality in Northern Ireland: the rhetoric and the reality. 2005. Page 18.

DTZ Piedad Consulting carried out a study in 2005 and revealed that the upturn in NI's economic fortunes since the mid-90's has failed to make much impact on the poorest members of both communities. The study also found a continuing 'employment differential', with Protestants typically having employment rates about 5% above Catholic employment rates<sup>7</sup>.

It is important to note that 'people who live in workless houses, whether catholic or Protestant, have not benefited from the economic up-turn that others have experienced'<sup>8</sup>, and large numbers of Catholics and Protestants are falling outside the active labour market entirely

An economic policy that does not address these points is somehow deficient in terms of both A Shared Future and Targeting Social Need (TSN).

The knock on affects of mainstreaming ASF and Good Relations throughout public policy is enormous. Society and communities will promote and protect diversity. This in turn can benefit tourism; it could encourage the 'brain drain' to return home to a vibrant and welcoming society, and bring their skills with them which in turn attract new investors. The more diversity there is within the workforce the more opportunity there is for creativity and entrepreneurship. At present NI's communities, its corresponding workforce and potential workforce remains segregated and this acts as a barrier to innovative and creative developments. In a globalised economy regions that attract and successfully manage cultural diversity have a competitive edge. Northern Ireland requires this economic change to address its underlying problems of low employment, low productivity and low wages.

Council emphasises the need to incorporate A Shared Future into this Regional Economic Strategy and support sub strategies that create new opportunities for sharing, develop cross community ownership of spaces, employment and training opportunities. It needs to examine what incentives can be made available to target the hard to reach? Discuss what positive actions need to happen to increase sharing and interaction both between employers, employees and users? Council calls for the strengthening of DFP's commitment to ASF and insists it reconsiders this strategy in line with the government priority A Shared Future.

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<sup>7</sup> Equality in Northern Ireland: the rhetoric and the reality. 2005. Page 62

<sup>8</sup> Equality in Northern Ireland: the rhetoric and the reality. 2005. Page 64

## Annex A

### **A Shared Future – Triennial Action Plan 2006**

#### **Headline Actions for DFP**

The Department of Finance and Personnel will

- ensure that all proposals for public expenditure include an assessment of how they will contribute to the promotion of good relations as well as the New TSN and equality. Proposals will not be considered if this is not included;
- continue to ensure good and harmonious working places and relationships and that front line staff are fully trained and aware of the implications of the principles of A Shared Future for service delivery;
- identify and implement opportunities to reduce the costs of division across public spending, particularly in education and housing;
- support cross-departmental research to identify the costs of division, the baseline measure of the health of good relations and arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of A Shared Future and its impact on the health of good relations over time; and
- oversee, in collaboration with OFMDFM, the development of appropriate training support programmes and material to support good relations considerations at all levels of NICS.

Breaking Down Barriers – Professor Owen Hargie, Dr David Dickson, Dr Aodheen O'Donnell

<http://www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/research/comms/communication/report.pdf>

