

To: Future Partnership Working Arrangements
Room 45
Massey House
Stoney Road
Stormont Estate
Belfast BT4 3SX
csp-dppconsultation@dojni.x.gsi.gov.uk

From: Community Relations Council
6 Murray Street
Belfast
BT1 6DN

Date: May 2010

Contact: Gemma Attwood, Policy Development Officer

Email: gattwood@nicrc.org.uk

RE: Local Partnership Working on Policing and Community Safety: A Consultation Paper

1. Introduction

- a. The Community Relations Council (CRC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above consultation.
- b. CRC's aim is to lead and support change in Northern Ireland towards reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust and promote sharing over separation. We work by promoting constructive and relevant dialogue, by actively supporting those taking real risks for relationship building, by acting as a practical bridge between groups in society and between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and by promoting wider learning through developing better practice. Our overall aim is to lead and support change towards a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society founded on the achievement of reconciliation, equality, co-operation, respect, mutual trust and good relations.

2. CRC position

- a. The reform of policing and the development of local policing accountability structures under the Patten Commission have made a huge impact on the process of conflict transformation. Interaction between communities and policing and community safety partnerships is central to the development of safe, open and shared spaces.
- b. These partnerships also play a role in encouraging engagement thereby building stronger relationships at local level. Building trust and community confidence between the PSNI and local communities can make a powerful contribution to good relations, particularly in areas where relationships are poor and which

have a legacy of conflict related issues including interfaces, paramilitary groups, flags/emblem and sectional symbols, segregated housing etc.

3. General Comments

- a. The promotion of equality and good relations is the core business of CRC and it is on this basis that we will comment. CRC has examined the proposals against the backdrop of a legacy of the conflict and would like to remark on both the opportunities and challenges of any merger. The key focus will be on communities worst affected by the conflict and usually with the weakest relationship with the police.
- b. The conflict has left behind many legacy issues. In particular, relationships between some communities and law enforcement agencies have been extremely tense which has resulted in little trust and poor co-operation. Despite the peace process and the changes implemented by the Patten reforms these tensions, many of which are legacies of the past, continue to exist in certain areas. It is therefore important that any new model proactively encourages full participation and engagement with local communities . real voices have to be heard and acted upon. Bearing this in mind, the accountability measures and procedures are an absolutely necessity if we are to build confidence between policing and communities.
- c. In principle CRC supports the need to realign the current partnership arrangements. In an environment where there is significant overlap and duplication of functions, the desire to reduce administration costs and re-direct resources to front line services, the merger between District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) seems an obvious way forward for local community safety and policing. However, it is critical that any new re-alignment does not reduce the important accountability structures delivered as part of the Patten Reform . these systems and procedures must be central to any new structure.

4. Principles

- a. The consultation document set out a list of key principles under which the partnerships should operate. Given the existence of poor relationships between communities and policing structures, CRC is disappointed that the promotion of good relations is not partnered with the principle of positively promoting equality of opportunity. CRC strongly recommends the inclusion of good relations within the set of principles guiding the new partnership, particularly its importance within the current conflict transformation process.

5. Community Voice

- a. Engagement with communities is an area of key interest for CRC. NI has a history of lack of engagement in some areas

which inhibits the creation of strong confident relationships with those responsible for law and order and community safety. Therefore it is crucial that any new model address these gaps of participation and engagement.

- b.** Reductions in the number of partnerships and the proposed mergers will result in the creation of new structures that are responsible for larger geographic areas, thereby increasing the scope of issues to be dealt with by one partnership. There will inevitably be challenges as to how issues are decided upon and prioritized.
- c.** It will therefore be crucial to create a local vision for the partnership locality and ensure that all those involved in the partnership work collectively to represent the entire community as a whole. There is little detail in the document regarding a framework for consultation, decision making and prioritization of issues. This will be key given the diverse range of needs of individual communities. The Department of Justice should examine the governance structures of the PEACE III clusters at local government level, specifically the challenges of partnership working and the development and implementation of a local vision across a number of council boundaries.
- d.** Strengthening engagement and participation at local level is critical. The partnerships should reflect on experience and best practice from the current partnerships. It is also important to make use of existing forums, questionnaires, surveys and audits. There is a wealth of good practice in relation to effectively consulting with local communities and increasing participation. These tried and tested models should be given due consideration when planning and developing engagement programmes.
- e.** The local issues forum (fora) is an important mechanism by way of providing information in relation to issues that need to be addressed, and also by way of reporting back on actions taken or not taken etc. The consultation document, however, does not provide enough detail in relation to its membership, governance, frequency of meetings, and its status. Is it purely advisory or does it possess an accountability purpose? There have been concerns under Peace III that Councils are not legally required to act upon the advice from the community and voluntary sector during advisory sessions, and this has created frustration and a sense of tokenism.
- f.** CRC would also support the development of thematic forums. This could prove to be very successful if they were able to influence local priorities in the local policing plan. Groups involved in reducing interface violence and working with young people could feed into local plans and be used as focus/advisory groups to monitor change etc. CRC currently supports a number of groups e.g. North Belfast Interface Network, which regularly meets with PSNI and Belfast City Council Community wardens to address interface and community safety issues. It is

important any new structures are aware of these interventions and promote engagement and influence. Furthermore, the Policing Board currently facilitates a number of reference groups looking at specific issues in relation to gender and sexual orientation etc. Any new structure should consider these forums as part of the wider engagement strategy. Again, terms of reference should be developed for these sub-structures.

- g. A barrier to engagement is the continuing pattern of poor relationships between communities and the PSNI. CRC's core business is to support interventions that address these legacy issues. Currently there are a number of projects which address these matters, in particular, working with young people and interface communities. CRC would welcome the opportunity to discuss the work of these groups in more detail.

6. Representation

- a. CRC supports the Patten recommendation that DPP should be broadly representative of the district in terms of religion, gender, age and cultural background¹.
- b. Downsizing partnerships will reduce the numbers of representatives from all sections. CRC would strongly advocate a strong participatory mechanism from the local community. Furthermore, it is also worth noting the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, Peace and Security that urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict²
- c. Finally, there is little information relating to the appointment process, criteria and length of time of service.

7. Policy Drivers

- a. The consultation document refers to a number of current policy developments and strategies that must and will be taken into consideration during the lifetime of the partnerships e.g. urban regeneration and community planning. The forthcoming Cohesion Sharing and Integration (CSI) Strategy is not mentioned along with the Racial Equality Strategy. This is unfortunate given the current departmental inputs in relation to current and future actions.
- b. It has also been raised during recent Assembly Question Time when the Minister of Justice stated, *'I have a number of priority areas for a shared future. I want to engage communities and statutory agencies on how to develop greater shared space at interface areas and the options for moving beyond peace walls while providing a safe environment for the communities affected.'*

¹ A New Beginning in Policing in Northern Ireland. 1999. Page 34.

http://www.nio.gov.uk/a_new_beginning_in_policing_in_northern_ireland.pdf

² UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY
<http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html>

I also intend to promote legislation to introduce crime reduction partnerships, to create offences relating to sectarian conduct by spectators at sports events and to enhance work already being done on hate crime³.

- c. The wider reforms as set out under the banner of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) are a key driver for this current consultation. It is important not to rush these reforms through to meet any other policy agenda. Policing, in particular local policing, is too important to be rushed. RPA is also facing setbacks regarding its implementation timeframe, and there is no detail how any new merger of DPPs and CSPs will exist and operate under the current 26 council model.

8. Regional priorities

- a. The consultation document refers to strategic policing priorities, and how they will influence local priorities/actions. It is important strategic objectives are reflected at local level but it is also paramount that local circumstances shape local policing plans. This could undermine the engagement process.

9. Process

- a. The document puts forward 3 potential models, but only goes into detail for model 2. CRC is concerned that model 2 has already been agreed. Effective consultation should not have a pre-determined outcome.
- b. The consultation document also refers to its pre-consultation exercise with the community and voluntary sector. This sector is extremely important and can provide a wealth of experience in relation to their groups. However, it is dangerous to limit consultation engagement to these stakeholder groups. CRC would like further detail on any public consultation exercises undertaken by the NIO during this consultation period.
- c. Finally, it is proper that communities and stakeholders are given the appropriate time to consider the proposed changes within the consultation document. It was unfortunate that the NIO has initially restricted the consultation period to 8 weeks, but CRC is pleased this has now been extended to the recommended 12 weeks, therefore allowing a more open and fitting debate.

10. Equality

- a. Due to the historical context of policing and continuing relationship difficulties with communities it is important to ensure Equality and Good Relations are given full consideration. Therefore CRC would recommend a full Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed mergers. Improved good relations should be an outcome of the partnership models. It would be extremely important to consider projects that are exploring and examining relationships between different constituents as a way

³ Assembly Written Answer Booklet. 30th April 2010.

of improving relationships, again CRC can provide information on these projects.