

Policy Secretariat
OFM/ DFM
Room E3.19
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SR

14th October 2010

HC/Consult/2010

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Thank you for allowing the Northern Ireland Housing Council the opportunity to comment on the CSI consultation document. Members have considered the document at length and, while the questionnaire was helpful in focusing discussions, Members' response will be on an exceptions basis.

On the whole the Housing Council welcomes the document which helpfully summarises much of the work already underway in this field. Members recognise that social housing networks provide ideal conduits through which this work may be promoted and indeed implemented.

Goals

Members commend the goals identified in the consultation document but are concerned that appropriate mechanisms may not be put in place to allow effective implementation of the actions essential to achieve these goals, particularly in light of the funding pressures expected in the coming years.

Particular reference has been made to the long terms goals and the need to encourage shared neighbourhoods. Members are anxious that the balance of residents in neighbourhoods defined as 'shared' is properly maintained to ensure sustainability and to protect minority groups. It is felt that the current Common Selection Scheme potentially presents barriers to the sustainability of such areas. The need for a long term approach to sensitive issues such as flags and emblems is accepted.

Good Relations and the Racial Equality Strategy

Members considered the key aims for 'People and Places' and fully accept all but the last of these. In relation to the reference to parades and public assemblies, the Housing Council considers that the aim may result in some people having their freedom of expression removed. Members are concerned that due to the vagueness of the wording objections may be permitted to events such as those of a church or community based nature. Members agreed that the aim should be to create an atmosphere of tolerance and felt that the word 'tolerance' should be inserted so that the final aim reads "Displays of flags and emblems, graffiti or murals, parades or public assemblies or festivals should be held in an environment of tolerance which respects individuals and community rights".

Empowering the Next Generation

Members agree with the aims to empower the next generation and place great emphasis on the constitution to this aim to be made by the Education sector.

A Cohesive Community

Members discussed and agreed with the aims of this chapter but commented on the potential for the difference between faith and culture to become blurred.

Options for the Delivery Funding and policy Advice

Members recommend that option 1 be pursued and that the Housing Council is permitted representation on the advisory panel.

OFM/ DFM Funding for Good Relations Work

Members agree that the over-riding consideration on funding provision should be the achievement of value for money i.e. securing delivery of the right services at the best price. Above all the full funding available should be invested in local groups for greatest impact.

General

Members are content with the aims of all other aspects of the programme and look forward to seeing the outworking of the aims identified in the consultation document.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further with the Housing Council please contact the Secretary, Carol Reynolds at 028 90 318750 or by email at info@nihousingcouncil.org.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. James Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and larger than the others.

James Brown
Chairman