

To: Community Safety Team
The Housing Centre
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From: The Community Relations Council
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Issue: Northern Ireland Housing Executive 'Statement of Policy & Procedures on Anti-Social Behaviour'

Introduction

The Community Relations Council's 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'*¹. CRC will use this occasion to look directly at the impact of the Statement of Policy & Procedures on anti social behaviour on 'community and good relations' and also examine how this strategy positions itself within 'A Shared Future' Strategy.

The Community Relations Council (CRC) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the above consultation which explores the NIHE's Policy and Procedures on Anti Social Behaviour. As we are all aware, anti social behaviour is a growing problem for our society and consequently government has devised and implemented a number of measures to tackle this growing problem. Most recently, in 2004, Anti Social Behaviour Legislation (ASBOs) came into force in Northern Ireland, and there was mixed reaction to its introduction. Many voiced deep concerns about the impact such legislation would have on young people (ASBO's can apply to any person aged ten or over), the travelling community, the cost of ASBO's and the overall effectiveness of this strategy.

Anti social behaviour covers a wide range of actions and the Housing Executive's definition covers issues such as 'hate behaviour' which targets individuals and groups because of race, religion, and political affiliation etc. Graffiti, intimidation and harassment are also included in the definitions which have a direct link to the different cultures within our society. It is obvious from the outset that this type of behaviour will have a negative impact on efforts to achieve a pluralist and inclusive society.

Comments

¹ COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN 2004-2007

As stated previously this paper will concentrate on the community relations aspect, with specific reference to A Shared Future, of which the Housing Executive is one of the key strategic partners in its implementation.

Programmes to tackle Anti Social Behaviour

We welcome the commitment from the Housing Executive to work with a number of partner agencies in trying to tackle the issue of anti social behaviour. It is a 'complex' area and it requires a number of approaches delivered through a number of agencies.

1. CRC would like more information regarding the Diversionary/Intervention Schemes:
 - a. What type of format do these schemes take i.e. is there a focus on building and developing community and good relations within their own community/other communities?
 - b. Also who can refer individuals to this scheme?
 - c. What type of evaluation has taken place with regards to this scheme?
 - d. Are there plans to have these schemes rolled out in other areas?
 - e. If so, within what timeframe?
2. NIACRO's community integration programme is another interesting scheme and we would welcome further information on:
 - a. How widely this is used?
 - b. Has the scheme been successful?
3. CRC would like to see community relations and good relations as a major aspect of all intervention and diversionary programmes. This would allow individuals to explore both intra and inter community violence and realise how damaging it is to both individuals and their communities. There needs to be an emphasis on respecting each other, acknowledging and understanding cultural diversity e.g. ethnic minorities, and finding ways in which they can support and engage with their community. Inter and Intra community work has to go hand in hand as there are "claims that young people had shifted their attention away from activities located at sectarian interfaces to disruptive activities within the residential community"²
4. Within the Statement of Policy and Procedures it would be helpful if the Community Safety Action Plan 2006 was included in the appendix. This would enable communities and users to be more acquainted with this Unit's remit and programme of work.

Sharing Information with tenants and the wider Community

5. CRC urges the formulation of strict guidelines regarding the correct procedure for the publication of information about individuals issued with an ASBO. There is concern from a community relations perspective that the 'naming and shaming' of individuals could put that person in harms ways with local paramilitary groups.

² Troubled Youth? Young People, Violence and Disorder in NI, Ulf Hansson, p98.

There is evidence that a high percentage of young people have experienced paramilitary style attacks – “overall young people under the age of 25 were the victims in 58% of paramilitary ‘punishment’ shootings over this period (2002-2005) and were victims of 50% of beatings”³. The first ASBO for Northern Ireland was issued in April 2005 and the court imposed reporting restrictions due to the age of the young person. CRC wants to see clear guidelines that all courts adhere to, instead of the flexible guidelines that the system currently has whereby publicity of cases is agreed on a ‘case by case basis’.

6. CRC is concerned at the implications of ASBO’s for other family members and acquaintances.
 - a. How will the community react to the family/friends of a young person who has been issued an ASBO - in particular local paramilitary groups?
 - b. Is there a danger that these groups will be targeted and intimidated, and worse still attacked and driven out of their homes?

This is hardly encouraging to building safe/stable communities?

Training of staff in dealing with anti-social behaviour

7. Do staff undertake training in community and good relations? CRC believes that community and good relations should be central in all training packages.

Breach of an ASBO/Court Order/Injunctions

8. Breach of an ASBO can result in the individual being evicted from their home. The Community Relations Council foresees a number of risks in relation to building a shared future. There are a number of scenarios to consider;
 - a. Perhaps the person who has breached the order still lives in the family home. Eviction from the home would see the re-location of an entire family to a different area, which may not be particularly suitable for them depending on their religious, political or racial background.
 - b. What are the implications for younger children attending local schools and also the use of social facilities? Hansson’s research among young people revealed that “ many young people ...expressed an unease about ‘crossing over’ to use facilities and amenities perceived to be ‘on the other side’difficulties of accessing ostensibly shared resources because of their religious background”⁴
 - c. Furthermore what are the consequences for the individual? Perhaps they have already left the family home and because of eviction they may have to travel through an area which they perceive to be hostile, in order to visit family or to get to work.
 - d. Injunctions may also impact on the movement of the individual as it may exclude them from a specific geographical area. Will they be at risk?

³ Troubled Youth? Young People, Violence and Disorder in NI, Ulf Hansson, p86.

⁴ Troubled Youth? Young People, Violence and Disorder in NI, Ulf Hansson, p98.

- e. Another ABSO was issued against members of the travelling community. There is a danger that this will have an adverse effect on the travelling community and damage 'good relations' with the settled community. Government needs to be careful that anti social behaviour legislation does not criminalise certain sections of our society. This goes against the spirit of A Shared Future.

Conclusion

CRC does not excuse anti social behaviour. However within the Northern Ireland context we have to examine the reasons why some individuals, particularly young people, become embroiled in this type of activity. Feelings of suspicion and fear have increased and unfortunately, for some of our younger generation, they feel abandoned and have no real sense of belonging within their community. There have been numerous studies carried out as to the cost of the troubles – it will of course be different for each individual depending on where they live, economic background, racial and religious background, but perhaps we are now living with the real cost of the trouble – a troubled society. Unfortunately for some people anti social behaviour is a starting point for a life of crime, which will ultimately shape our communities in a negative manner.

Overall CRC is pleased that a comprehensive 'statement of policy and procedures' has been formulated to deal with the issue of anti social behaviour. From a community relations aspect CRC wants to ensure that anti social behaviour is tackled by a 'multi agency' approach. ASBO's should be a last resort, only used after all other strategies have been exhausted. Investment in appropriate programmes, training of executive staff, mediation and support from various services need to be highlighted as the positive way to prevent anti social behaviour.

The Housing Executive, along with government departments and agencies, has responsibility to change our society in a *positive manner*. Partnership is central to implementing A Shared Future strategy and we urge the Housing Executive to:

- a. Maximise its alliances
- b. Focus on mediation and intervention,
- c. Continue to develop innovative programmes to tackle the expanding problem of anti social behaviour and
- d. Persist with the implementation of A Shared Future strategy, "*Developing shared communities where people of all backgrounds can live, work, learn and play together*".⁵ and

⁵ A Shared Future - Policy and Strategic framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland, P7.

- e. Continue its work in helping to build 'cohesive communities'

Finally, CRC is pleased that the Housing Executive has produced a Policy & Procedures Statement for their employees and acknowledges the effort that went into the consultation process with their workforce in order to produce the strategy. It is an essential strategy and will provide the various teams, responsible for creating safer and more stable communities, with approved and accepted directives when handling the problem of anti social behaviour. CRC hopes to continue dialogue with the Housing Executive on the issues outlined in this response and looks forward to continuing its productive working relationship.

Date 30 January 2006