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### **Issue: PSNI Diversity 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'**.

This is the first government strategy specifically tasked to solve the difficulties of sectarianism and segregation.

The PSNI have been tasked with a number of responsibilities within *A Shared Future* including:

- ensuring PSNI is delivering a policing service that takes accounts of the needs of all communities,
- building sustained confidence in the Police Service and police accountability arrangements by all sections of society,
- monitor and analyse trends in hate crime,
- promote a better understanding within PSNI internally of the socio-demographics of minority and vulnerable communities to build confidence in policing<sup>[1]</sup>.

Furthermore the PSNI is tasked with key actions within the Triennial Action Plan of ASF and the Racial Equality Strategy (RES), for example monitoring and tackling hate crime, building and sustaining confidence in the police service from all sections of our

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[1] A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland. March 2005

community and developing new partnerships with our diverse community. ASF and RES strengthened the need for a Diversity Strategy and it must contribute to and shape the overall Corporate Plan of the PSNI. CRC looks forward to reviewing the progress of the PSNI actions in the forthcoming progress reports of ASF & RES.

CRC understands the difficulties our community has had in seeking to overcome over the last 35 years, both within and between neighbouring communities and in relation to government, law and order. Our focus has been on creating opportunities to build sustainable relationships across society that are free from fear and suspicion. The results have been positive but there are no quick fixes. Without ongoing commitment, perseverance and leadership, the risks of polarisation and division remain real.

Following the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, rights based legislation was introduced which legally binds public authorities to guarantee people's human rights and promote equality in the form of Section 75 1 & 2. "Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, without prejudice to their obligations under Section 75 (1), to "have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group." In addition, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and Equality Commission Northern Ireland (ECNI) were established as monitoring and watchdog bodies of the key principles of peace building. The Community Relations Council stands as a partner alongside these bodies seeking to ensure that the future is shared, fair and open to difference and change.

Our society has made progress in many areas; we have witnessed ceasefires, a peace process, devolved government to a local assembly and its subsequent collapse. This change has encouraged economic growth, which in turn has encouraged people from all over the world, especially the European Union to work and settle in Northern Ireland; the latest census figures show that our Polish community has increased to around 30,000. Our community continues to benefit from this diversity and it is only appropriate that government and public authorities develop additional policies and strategies that will encourage respect for diversity and protect our different identities. These policies should be delivered in tandem with the legal obligations to eradicate inequalities and prejudices.

Sectarianism and racism have to be challenged in today's society. Sectarianism continues to weigh heavily on our society, and despite many positive initiatives, we regularly read about attacks on families and communities, businesses, schools and church property, simply because they belong to a different religious or political community. Government has introduced legislation to deal with inequalities and discrimination, but sectarianism is deep rooted at all levels of our societal structures i.e. sport and culture, and prejudice and intolerance have become established attitudes in Northern Ireland. It is crucial that organisations responsible for tackling these attitudes, such as the PSNI, make the elimination of sectarianism a priority.

Unfortunately, racism has become the new sectarianism in some parts of our society and in 2004 Northern Ireland was dubbed the race-hate capital of Europe due to the increase in racist incidents, the bulk of which were centred in Belfast. On a weekly basis we learn about the growing number of attacks - 46% of overseas health staff face racism (Newsletter 9-11-06) and the distribution of Nazi-style flyers in Antrim claiming people of white origin are the true ethnic minority (Newsletter 6-11-06). More importantly we read about local initiatives that are challenging these prejudices and discrimination; welcome packs were recently launched in both Belfast and Derry/Londonderry for migrant workers, and the Ulster Teachers Union has called for a united approach to this growing problem in our communities. Just this week the Chief Constable stated that 'racist attacks against immigrants are the biggest challenge to policing in the north and police statistics show racist attacks are on the rise with 936 reported racial incidents in 2005/06, a 15% increase on the previous year'<sup>1</sup>.

Our society will continue to become more diverse and it is the role of every person to challenge sectarianism and racism. Furthermore it is widely perceived that there is gross under-reporting of sectarian and racially motivated crimes (despite the official figures), due to being unfamiliar with what constitutes 'hate crime', who they can report it to; for other groups they are culturally afraid of the police and may not feel able to approach them. Progressive policing will require proper communication with our diverse society to stamp out these prejudices and promote a society and a PSNI that does not tolerate sectarianism.

The relationship between the police and parts of our community has often been difficult, and sometimes violent. Policing has been polarised by political division and there have been periods of immense hostility. This fractured relationship led to accusations that the police service in Northern Ireland served one section of the community or should not be trusted. Many lives were lost both in the police and beyond over many years.

The development of good relations, within, and between the PSNI and the community is crucial and requires commitment and leadership. The Patten Report tasked the police service with implementing a number of structural, organisational and cultural changes aimed at improving relationships both internally and externally, improving the delivery of services, modernising the service and the overall efficiency of the organisation.

CRC acknowledges the progress made by the Police Service, and the leadership given by many in the organisation. We are pleased that the PSNI has embraced the Patten recommendations and according to the most recent Oversight Commissioners Report, out of the 175 recommendations (September 1999) 114 were either concluded or sufficiently progressed so as to be considered concluded (concerns have been raised with regard to training issues). There has also been important progress on increasing the representativeness of the PSNI, and the recent progress report predicts the PSNI is on target to reach the goals set for it under Patten by 2010/11. External changes, such as the establishment of the Police Ombudsman, the Policing Board and local DPP's have

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<sup>1</sup> The Irish News, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

also had positive impacts on public confidence and have helped make policing and its operations more transparent and accountable.

However the cultural change of an organisation does not occur overnight and like community relations work, efforts must always be built upon. The Diversity Strategy is a further step in the right direction. The Diversity Strategy has been developed on the back of a number of recommendations and research projects, and it is encouraging that the PSNI acknowledges the various findings and recommendations and has committed itself to devising a diversity strategy. Building trust will play a crucial part of any strategy.

CRC is supportive of initiatives and policies that seek to build on efforts to improve good relations, both internally and externally. Within this strategy we would like to see a stronger indication as to how the strategy complements the legal requirements, as set out under Section 75 legislation, to eradicate discrimination and prejudice within all policing structures and operations.

- The Strategy details the many initiatives already delivered, both internally and externally, and indicates what the organisation intends to do. There is a lot of information within the strategy and Council would suggest the re-writing of the document to enable the reader to locate the key objectives and actions in a more user friendly format. There needs to be a clear set of aims and objectives and information as to how it will be delivered on the ground. It would be helpful if the information was disseminated in different formats for target audience's e.g. different languages and a young person's information pack etc.
- It is important to stress from the outset that the PSNI will serve all individuals and groups fairly - there should be no hierarchy of communities.
- There appears to be a real determination to build partnerships with the whole community, which will hopefully build trust, earn support and deliver policing on the ground, especially where previously the police have had strained relationships. Examples include ensuring all sections of the community are consulted, with particular attention paid to groups or individuals who are not yet represented on focus or consultative groups. Outreach work will be critical.
- There is an emphasis on ensuring the organisation is accessible and transparent to the public. CRC is supportive of these measures of engagement.
- The strategy places emphasis on supporting staff and ensuring support for them regardless of their background, and have in place relevant complaints procedures and disciplinary action for the harassment of staff. Considerable emphasis is placed on the training of officers which includes diversity training and the stand alone module taught in the Foundation course which looks at the legacy of division and preparing for the diversity of the future<sup>[3]</sup>.
- The creation of a Strategic Diversity Management Board, a Diversity Champion and the subsequent organisational structures are positive additions to the

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<sup>[3]</sup> PSNI, Diversity Strategy, P24.

Strategy, as all too often strategies can simply become a paper or a tick box exercise.

- CRC agrees with the importance of creating a good first impression and developing appropriate community impact assessments and interventions. It is crucial that the officers on the ground understand the community they are working in and the diversity within that community, and more importantly any specific problems or issues that need to be taken into consideration when policing any particular community or neighbourhood.

In suggesting additions or changes to the strategy, CRC is most concerned to ensure that the vision of the strategy is delivered in practice. Possible positive additions include:

- referral of victims to organisations that can help in the aftermath of hate crime and especially victims of sectarian incidents which appear not to be dealt with as clearly as victims of racist incidents. Again it is critical that the PSNI establish strong links with such groups and maintain an open flow of information on what is happening on the ground and the signposting of information between the different sectors and agencies.
- Apart from training and signposting it is important that victims, the public and police officers are fully aware of the conviction of tackling hate crime. There needs to be real action – there has been a huge increase in reporting this type of crime and society want to see progress. Hate Crime must be a visible priority with tangible achievements delivered via convictions.
- The broadening of the list of those to be consulted in relation to public order events to include all parade and protest organisers, rather than focussing on any specific group.
- Diversity training is a critical part of the strategy and the diversity team have committed themselves to ensuring that all officers receive this training by 2008. The content of the training is crucial. Northern Ireland is a unique society, and many have experienced first hand the harsh realities of sectarianism and racism. While there is a clear need to cover all aspects of diversity, as listed in Section 75 (1), this should not take place at the expense of a coherent and thorough examination of sectarianism and political division in Northern Ireland and their implications for policing.

We belong to an intolerant society and the PSNI as part of that society, are likely to experience intolerance and prejudice (both internally and externally). The Good Relations Duty is central to understanding the attitudes and experiences of individuals and society. It is important that *all* police officers and support staff are fully aware of what sectarianism is and the impact it will have on how they perform their duties within different communities. Difficult conversations have to take place internally, and this is done by creating a safe environment and acknowledging and respecting different perceptions. New recruits and existing officers at all levels need to engage in creative dialogue - not destructive conversations. Good Relations should be a key element of Diversity

- training and will ultimately improve relations between police colleagues and the community they serve.
- The PSNI is an increasingly diverse community as is their client base. Minority Liaison Officers have already been established within all DCU's, and this area of work could be enhanced with the creation of Good Relations Officers which would help co-ordinate anti-sectarian and anti-racism work.
  - North South – diversity training. This already occurs and we would encourage the rolling out of this cross border training to all officers as a constructive method of developing good relations and building strong partnerships.
  - Diversity training must be a requirement for all Chief and District Commanders/Departmental Heads, and those identified as having strategic responsibility for learning and development. Training and diversity has to be embedded at all levels within the police service.
  - A top-down approach is essential and the 'golden thread' must not be allowed to unravel. All staff should be aware of the importance of this training; it is a positive development for the organisation and will benefit relationships and service delivery.
  - CRC has worked with a number of public bodies to put in place Good Relations Strategies. Often, resource restrictions act as a barrier in spreading this training throughout the organisation. The PSNI will face these same obstacles and it is therefore critical that diversity training is an organisational priority, and not just that of a few. Furthermore it has been suggested that new recruits often feel isolated following their designation to different police stations, and previous learning is not implemented on the ground.
  - It is crucial that every officer understands that this training has top priority and that it is not just viewed as another training module tick box exercise. CRC is concerned with recent findings from the Oversight Commissioner's Report that 'there are still officers assigned to Neighbourhood Policing Teams who have not yet received any formalised policing with the community training on Policing with the Community training' and recommended that 'this anomaly should be addressed so that policing with the community is reinforced as the core function of the Police Service'<sup>[4]</sup>. Council is concerned that equality and diversity training may suffer the same fate.
  - Furthermore it has also been noted that the position of Director of Training has been occupied by four people since 2000. This high turnover of personnel is a worrying trend within the training department and we stress the need for continuity of personnel to ensure the delivery of high quality training.
  - Under the 'roles and responsibilities' section a number of officers from different teams have been tasked to deliver the strategy. CRC suggests the setting up of a small advisory body to enable structured dialogue and to possibly act as a small external oversight body. We acknowledge the monitoring role of the Policing Board with regards to this strategy, but the PSNI is moving into a whole new area of policy for the organisation and this would show a willingness to share ideas for improved delivery.

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<sup>[4]</sup> Report 16-June 2006, Office of the Oversight Commission. P94-95.

- There needs to be evidence of strong independent monitoring and evaluation. If the PSNI are committed to the long-term implementation of the strategy they will welcome independent input.
- Community Engagement is crucial. Drivers for change came from a number of reports, including Institute of Conflict Research's report into the attitude of young people in North Belfast. This report found that '30% of Catholics and 25% of Protestants felt that it was acceptable to attack and throw missiles at the police, and only 23% felt that the police provided a good service, as compared to 70% for the ambulance service and 69% for the fire service'<sup>[5]</sup>.

Engagement with young people needs significant work. One such initiative was the Pilot Police Cadet Scheme due to start in 2005, but unfortunately this has now been postponed until 2008. Another programme is the Liaison with Schools. This has been difficult in the past as some schools did not choose to be involved, but there have been some positive results such as the work experience project which was took to a number of Protestant, Catholic and non-designated schools. However, more worryingly, in 2003 those officers who acted as Career Advisors within schools were transferred to operational duties as part of the overall Human Resources Planning Strategy<sup>[6]</sup>.

It was also noted by the commissioner that the present success of the recruitment programme has diminished the importance of school programmes to generate interest among young people. We agree that 'this perspective appears somewhat short-sighted as there is value to having police personnel move freely among young people from all communities, discussing issues of mutual importance, that extends beyond future police recruitment needs'<sup>[7]</sup>. This change of direction is worrying, especially when it is obvious serious commitment is required in these areas. Again, CRC is concerned at this trend of disengagement.

### *Conclusion*

CRC are pleased the PSNI have taken the next step in the change process and developed a diversity strategy. It is an important development, and the strategy could have a positive impact on how the PSNI operates as an organisation and in developing co-operation with the community.

In responding to this consultation our primary concerns are:

- a. That due weight is placed on the issues of sectarianism, political divisions and racism in police training.

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<sup>[5]</sup> Report 16-June 2006, Office of the Oversight Commission. P81.

<sup>[6]</sup> Report 16-June 2006, Office of the Oversight Commission. P80-81.

<sup>[7]</sup> Report 16-June 2006, Office of the Oversight Commission. P80.

- b. That attention is paid to the question of continuity in professional training and in the evidenced qualifications in terms of knowledge and background of anyone responsible for Diversity training.
- c. That the pre-College course is used to underpin the training strategy on these core themes.
- d. That diversity training and support is delivered to serving officers at DCU level.
- e. That the diversity strategy is directly engaged with communities, so that knowledge is developed from real life rather than simply from theoretical perspectives.
- f. Our primary concern now is to ensure that the strategy is properly implemented, and intrinsically linked to the PSNI's obligations under Section 75.
- g. It was noted that initiatives were devised to encourage and increase engagement, in particular with young people, but were not fully implemented due to the re-direction of staff, changes in priorities and thinking enough was being achieved in another area e.g. recruitment. Re-engagement with sections of our community will take time and requires a long-term strategy.
- h. CRC is concerned that the Diversity Strategy will be subject to changing priorities, time constraints and staff commitment. It is a strategy that needs to be leadership driven and requires commitment from all officers to carry it forward.
- i. Senior officers need to buy into the strategy, instead of becoming part of the 'canteen culture' and being brushed aside
- j. The Diversity Strategy has the potential to provide a better understanding of our community and help deliver policing to all the community and over time play its part in helping to deliver a 'normal, civic society.....where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence'.

Diversity is integral to modern policing, but the PSNI need to be aware that diversity is not a dilution of addressing equality. CRC looks forward to building its relationship with the PSNI and is willing to assist with this important work.

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