

Response to Draft CSI Document

From: Roy Crowe and Martin Murray, (co-chairs)
Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum
(a cross community inter-church body, affiliated with the Carrickfergus Community Forum)

To whom it may concern,

We welcome the long overdue Draft CSI Document and appreciate much in it that seeks to promote important steps forward to a better future for all.

While welcoming the report, a concern would be that it appears to reflect, more what is possible within our present divided community, rather than what we as a 'sharing and integrating' community should aspire to in the future. We feel it should take the lead more, in calling the community beyond the current (largely false) peaceful 'apartheid' co-existence (which is widely recognised to be a drain on our limited financial resources), and on to the challenge and hard work of reaching for a more integrated, shared future.

We also feel the document should put more emphasis on the good work that key community workers (many voluntary), are currently doing through Good Relations, 'Peace' funded and CRC administered grant aided projects. We feel more should be done to encourage, support, resource and drive this work forward, rather than attempt to reinvent the wheel.

We recognise that efforts to promote community cohesion need to address both the sectarian and the racial problems which emerge out of the same issues of insecurity and fears and from the same issues of identity. The CSI document needs to tackle the high levels of individual and communal denial. (No one is sectarian/racist; its always someone else). It also needs to stress the importance of engaging with both issues with equal determination. We cannot wish sectarianism/racism away. It will require our whole community to acknowledge the unfortunate legacy that history has left us. We all, individuals, communities and institutions, have our ongoing work to do. In that regard, we recognise that as religion is a recognised component in the accepted definitions of sectarianism, the Churches have a particular role to play in address the issue. However, the reality is that it does not rank highly in the list of priorities for most of our churches, particularly at local community level. **We would therefore ask that this report takes the opportunity to highlight the role churches can play and to encourage the whole church community to prioritise this issue and engage more proactively in the work of understanding (90% of the cure) and moving beyond sectarianism and racism and in building community cohesion.**

In regard to government policy, we acknowledge the efforts in providing pilot schemes for shared housing and we believe, (while some question his motives), the recent comments on education by First Minister Peter Robinson should be given a fair wind and be used as a starting point for a mature, continuing public discussion/debate exploring new imaginative possibilities for shared education. We realise this is not just a challenge for government, but for the whole education sector and the churches. All have a role to play in facilitation of the religious and cultural mixing of our children at an earlier age. This is something we feel, cannot and should not be imposed. However we do recognise that a dynamic is required to progress a debate that should not be abandoned until new pilot schemes are in place that demonstrate more than the paying of lip-service by the main stakeholders and decision makers.

We feel strongly that the current Community Relations Council has in the past and is currently serving the community well by:

- Keeping Community and Good Relations to the fore both in government and community in a fair and impartial way, free from the influence of party politics.
- Providing analysis and education on matters relating to community relations and reconciliation.
- Tackling sectarianism and racism at every opportunity.
- Its efficiently operated role in distribution of funding for community projects.

For these reasons and based on our personal experience, we believe the Community Relations Council works and should continue in its current role. Put simply – if it's not broken, don't fix it!

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our feedback to this document, the importance of which, cannot be overstated, in terms of quality of life for current and future generations and if the likelihood of future conflict is to be avoided.

Sincerely,

Martin Murray.
Roy Crowe.
Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum