

Summary Record

Together: Building a United Community Engagement Forum

Tuesday 19th September 2017

On 19th September, the Executive Office (TEO) and over 150 community practitioners, policymakers and academics gathered in Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim for the fifth meeting of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Engagement Forum. The event focused on the T:BUC priority of **Our Safe Community** with a strong emphasis on A Fresh Start and what central government and practitioners are doing to support the creation of a safe community.

Mark Browne, The Executive Office

Mark welcomed delegates to the Engagement Forum. He underlined the importance of the engagement forums providing the opportunity to communicate key political or policy messages and information, and how they gave the sector an opportunity to reflect on the environment on the ground and be the critical friend to government by advocating what needs to be developed or refined to ensure better effectiveness. He outlined the focus and format of the event and introduced the first speaker, David Sterling, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

David Sterling, Head of Northern Ireland Civil Service

David welcomed delegates to the fourth TBUC Engagement Forum. He drew attention to the timeliness of the event in that it was taking place during Community Relations & Cultural Awareness Week which offers a great opportunity to reflect on and champion good relations activity. He encouraged delegates to attend some of the events on offer.

David provided delegates with an update on TBUC activity such as the recent commencement of work on the transportation hub in Colindale as part of the Urban Village programme. David raised the importance of collaborative working within and across Executive departments and local government – he acknowledged this is something that needs to be done better.

David went on to discuss the important role played by the community and voluntary sector and how collaboration with the public sector is crucial if we are to deliver tangible outcomes emanating from the Programme for Government. He highlighted the need for productive partnerships and how the TBUC strategy is using this approach, in particular this Forum, to ensure planned activity and support is making a difference. David also spoke about the current political environment and provided reassurance that civil servants were continuing to make progress on existing priorities.

Finally David spoke of the work being carried out by delegates, the commitment and the expertise in the room and conveyed an appreciation for continuing this work during these uncertain times. He ended by encouraging the sector to be a critical friend to government, to challenge and advise and ultimately to help government achieve the change we all want to see.

Mark thanked David and went on to introduce Dr Jonny Byrne and invited him to give the key note address.

Dr Jonny Byrne, Ulster University

Jonny's presentation explored the area of defining safety within the context of the Fresh Start Agreement. By way of introduction he provided a short overview of the aims of the Agreement from November 2015 i.e. consolidate the peace, secure stability & enable progress and offer hope. He also spoke about the Independent three member panel tasked with providing recommendations to tackle issues relating to paramilitarism, and the subsequent Executive Action Plan.

He then asked delegates to consider the whole notion of different perceptions and used a number of tools to highlight how people can experience something similar but have different perceptions of reality. He drew upon statistical evidence to highlight trends in the spectrum of attitudes towards safety, as well as different perceptions as to how safe people feel and the complexities around this.

Jonny then asked forum participants to consider whether we have 'embedded a culture of violence in our communities? Have we become desensitised towards acts of violence, do we tolerate violence?

Jonny went on to talk about the particular nature of political violence, its various manifestations, and its ongoing existence despite the peace process. He spoke about how we used the mechanism of segregation to keep us safe (whether formal or self-regulated), and now we view this segregation as unhealthy. But questioned how we can we dismantle this if we don't feel safe? Will we feel safe if we share? He called on delegates to revisit the idea that we are ready to accept an acceptable level of destruction, to consider the issue of unchecked narratives and the legitimising of violence.

Jonny noted the continued use of conflict related labels when measuring safety e.g. security related deaths and bombing incidents, and drew upon data from journalistic investigations undertaken by 'The Detail' to demonstrate the full extent of paramilitarism and lawlessness (the iceberg analogy). Jonny went onto to delve into the issue of protecting the peace process e.g. has it become a dirty peace in that we can ignore the violence because it is 'geographically fixated' in certain areas? He referred to a number of experts and bodies who noted the 'devastating effect' criminality and violence were having on communities, how intimidation was being used to exercise authority, and how 'the journey towards normalisation is halting'.

He then outlined some of the pathways to violence such as carrying on traditional community/family traditions or as a way of attracting community leadership, and asked what relevance these paramilitary groupings had today for the peace process generation. He spoke about how this violence provided, among other things, a sense of belonging (identity), peer respect & authority (power), financial reward, and how it was sometimes given permission by the community (either directly or indirectly).

Finally Jonny spoke about some of the contradictions and complexities regarding the safe community debate such as only one in five people (areas closest to the

peacewalls) feeling safer because of the peace process, with the consequence that 61% talked about the conflict architecture keeping them safe, and how the policy approach to remove the walls by 2023 has caused concerns from some residents (how do we deal with these challenges?)

To conclude, Jonny asked a number of questions: are we built for conflict – physically, psychologically and emotionally; the reality of segregation remains therefore are we built for peace? Can we create safe communities that are segregated? Do we have a post-conflict dictionary? Do we need to develop a new type of language to describe what safe communities look like? Has the abnormality of violence become normal (if it doesn't directly impact on us)? He then put forward a few other ideas for delegates to consider e.g. should we start rewarding positive behaviour within funding programmes? Finally Jonny asked delegates to deliberate on the issue of whether we manage rather than resolve, and stated that we don't deal with the triggers or the fundamental issues e.g. culture, celebration, remembering, identity, and left delegates with the reality that if we don't do this then safe communities are irrelevant because they will always have the potential to be very unsafe'.

Workshop 1

Feedback from the workshops was collated Mark invited Grainne Killen and Jonny Byrne *reported back* the views and opinions of Forum delegates on the following workshop questions '*Do the issues raised in the presentation align with your experience or are there other issues to be considered?*' and '*How would you define a Safe Community?*'

The majority of opinion agreed that Jonny had captured the common issues influencing the safe community debate.

Additional matters raised by delegates included the issue of young people and the fact that inter-generational hate and inter-generational trauma continues to impact on those born after the conflict. Rural communities and their particular circumstances were highlighted and participants discussed the correlation between the conflict, working class issues, inequality and low educational attainment.

Discussions also considered the 'difference' between paramilitarism and criminality, whilst others reflected on differing realities and the sourcing of data to support a 'truth'. This was followed by comments regarding a 'false' peace e.g. have we accepted the existence of low level of violence in order to preserve a peace process – delegates stressed that eventually we would have to face the harsh realities of this fragile peace. There was a conviction that much progress had been made at this juncture but a sense that moving forward now would be difficult and would take time and a concerted effort.

Other comments focused on the role of politicians in creating division - leadership is needed to achieve reconciliation; there was also a call for media reporting that paid attention to positive community experiences; another discussion point was the type of language used i.e. sometimes punishment beatings are viewed as being justifiable – this led to calls for a new type of language to ensure this type of activity is seen as wrong and therefore not acceptable.

Social media and technology is a growing concern in that it helps spread fear and enables certain narratives to go unchecked.

In terms of defining safety delegates reported that the ability to wear various sporting tops, having personal confidence in your identity, low levels of crime, areas that attract people in, an absence of bad behaviour, and the existence of cross-community activity were all elements that helped create a sense of safety.

There was a strong message relating to balance i.e. supporting expressions of identity but at the same time ensuring people do not feel unsafe – managing and resolving issues need to be addressed.

Finally, delegates supported a targeted approach for those places that aren't safe, and in doing so to hear the views of communities – but always remembering it is difficult to have these conversations and paradoxically it is sometimes safer to say nothing in order to stay safe – a very complex issue.

Julie Harrison, Programme Director – Executive Action Plan to Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime

Julie outlined the context of the Executive's Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitary Activity and Organised Crime. She began by noting the Fresh Start Agreement and the development of the Executive's Action Plan (July 2016) as a result of the political agreement as well as the report from the three person panel (May 2016) tasked with reporting on the issue.

She provided details of the action plan in that it has 43 actions, but highlighted the importance of delivering these actions as a connected programme of work and not as fragmented individual actions. Hence there was a lot of engagement and discussion as to how these actions would be taken forward. The actions have been aligned within four delivery approaches – strategies and powers, building confidence in the justice system, long term prevention and building community capacity. These lead to four long term outcomes including 'paramilitarism has no place'. The programme of work has secured £50 million for implementation (half from the Treasury and half from the NI Executive) and full details of current spend are available on the DOJ website. There are also important levers within the draft Programme for Government that can be used – especially in relation to building community capacity to transition and in relation to the long term prevention approach.

She detailed some of the work that has been taking place over the past few months i.e. looking at what data we are collecting and what can be measured from this to understand the impact of coercive control in communities, as well as exploring other questions that would provide an understanding of the impact of individual project actions in the context of an overall focus on four outcomes. Julie also informed delegates about the establishment of the Independent Reporting Commission (four Commissioners), its membership and its role of holding the whole government accountable on its actions and pushing for transformational change. She explained that in order to encourage a joined up approach her team has been meeting with

permanent secretaries, departments and working closely with the Executive Office to ensure the correct levers are being used jointly e.g. building confidence in the justice system, educational achievement, employability, the sentencing process, FETO, re-integration for ex-prisoners, and finally building community capacity to support transition. However, Julie did touch upon the tension regarding a 'societal shrug' as noted by Paul Smyth earlier that day in relation to attacks on young people and how this could impact on the work.

Next Julie spoke briefly about the timeframe of the action plan (currently to March 2021) and how time is moving on and that there is a need to keep up the pace and ambition of the work given what the action plan is trying to achieve. She then went on to talk about the importance of considering the language used e.g. 'paramilitary style attack' and the desire to show that this action plan has made a difference in communities most impacted by paramilitary activity. This led onto a section regarding key messages, consistency in messaging and narratives.

Julie covered issues regarding governance i.e. a Programme Board including representatives from TEO, NIO and PSNI (observer status) and sub-groups including subject matter experts and community/voluntary sector groups to ensure that the response is not just from Central Government departments. She detailed the work of the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce which the PSNI, the National Crime Agency and HMRC will take forward to tackle organised criminality linked to paramilitary groups, including seizing criminal assets. Information was provided relating to the development of a Centre for Excellence for restorative justice, and commissioned work regarding its structure, accreditation, how it is financed, and the roll out of restorative approaches into other work streams.

Other issues covered included the public awareness campaign and future work on policing in the community, lawfulness, women and community development, and work within the probation system. She also mentioned how this issue intersects with local government and their community plans and community and policing safety partnerships.

She concluded by emphasising the need for this work to be taken forward collaboratively, and informed practitioners of the recently established Communities Transition and Learning sub-group, its membership and its purpose.

Linsey Farrell, The Executive Office

Linsey gave delegates an overview of the work she and her colleagues are undertaking in relation to 'building capacity in communities in transition'. Firstly, Linsey acknowledged the very important work that is already taking place within communities and emphasised the importance of connecting the work of the Executive with individuals, groups and communities on the ground.

She provided an outline of TEO's responsibility for leading the work to deliver Action B4 of the Executive's Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime and highlighted how TEO were progressing this action. Linsey explained that the first phase of the work was to procure a Strategic Partner to support TEO in the development of the area based transition plans which would set out the very specific needs of each of the eight target areas. During this phase of

the work to develop the transition plans, the Strategic Partner would be required to carry out the appropriate level of stakeholder engagement and also map out existing provision and make the relevant linkages to other programmes and/or other actions in the Executive Action Plan.

Linsey advised that it would take approximately 4 months to develop the transition plans and the accompanying evidence base for same and that following the necessary approvals, the implementation phase of the project would commence.

The agreed area based approach to Action b4 is aimed at targeting a concentrated effort in a smaller number of areas to ensure maximum impact, which will result in a focused and targeted approach of action and resources. She informed delegates that research had been carried out to identify the eight areas to be the subject of the area-based approach. Linsey explained that the other actions from the Executive Action Plan were being rolled out across all areas as well as in the eight areas, however, the aim of the targeted approach is to ensure there is a focused and targeted approach in the eight areas.

Linsey outlined some of the key issues from early discussions regarding B4 which included; the need for a balance between the policing & justice response and the Building Capacity of Communities to Support Transition approach; the need for a localised and targeted response to the issues associated with paramilitarism; and the need to have a very localised approach to language and communications. She emphasised the need to acknowledge existing good practice, to have a participatory approach, the fact that many individuals and groups are already involved in the process of transitioning and that different people/groups are at different stages and each area will need tailored support to meet their needs in terms of transitioning.

Following this, Linsey spoke about the importance of collaboration and making the linkages within and across the Executive, within and across communities, and of course between Government and the community and voluntary sector. She explained an important aspect of moving forward will be the identification of gaps and what additionality is required.

Linsey went on to outline some of the practical developments in moving forward and emphasised how encouraging it was to take this work forward within the context of the wider Executive Action Plan. She provided details in relation to the 'live' procurement exercise to appoint a Strategic Partner to support TEO to deliver Action B4 in the eight areas. She underlined how the work of the strategic partner will be supported by local delivery partners. She advised that the appointment of the strategic partner is expected to be in October/November.

Finally, Linsey concluded that TEO are keen to facilitate conversations and connections between the strategic partner and delegates over the coming months.

Practitioners

Mark then introduced a number of practitioners to speak to delegates about the work of their organisations and how it makes a contribution to the creation of a safe community.

Kathy Wolff, Community Relations Forum

Kathy Wolff from the Glengormley based Community Relations Forum spoke to delegates about her work and paid particular attention to the ongoing issue of anti-social behaviour (which has an underlying connection to sectarianism).

Kathy gave an overview of the geography of Glengormley, types of commercial services and other community facilities; she also drew attention to the dividing lines and contested spaces. She spoke about attacks on local businesses and homes and the impact this had regarding creating a sense of fear, a reluctance to use services and highlighted the danger young people were putting themselves in.

Kathy went on to discuss the need for a partnership approach, and said that it was critical to have the right people around the table i.e. community organisations, young people, women's groups, PSNI, Education Authority and local Government support. She emphasised the need to listen to everyone which would ultimately help build strong sustainable relationships.

Kathy explained how she and her organisation understood the need to solve the problem, rather than just move it on elsewhere. She also addressed the issue of volunteers and put on record the positive contribution they make, but she also argued that this work needs to be financially supported in order to maximise reach. Kathy then outlined some of the interventions undertaken by Community Relations Forum (in conjunction with other partners) e.g. sporting activities. She also highlighted the increasing number of young females involved in disturbances and said this was a worrying development.

Finally, Kathy concluded that the work her organisation leads on is helping communities build a safe community and is supporting individuals change direction (away from anti-social/sectarian activity). She again stressed the need to invest in change and help make the goal of 'transition' a reality.

Mark thanked Kathy for her input. He then welcomed Mel Corry from Trademark, another community relations practitioner whose work has a focus on working to reduce tensions and stabilise communities.

Mel Corry, Trademark

Mel provided delegates with some background information on his organisation, how its roots were embedded in the trade union movement and some examples of the range of work he and his colleagues have undertaken over the years. Firstly, Mel acknowledged the work of the delegates in the room and highlighted how this community relations infrastructure is essential to the work of Government but added that the working environment is being tested and stretched due to a number of uncertainties.

Mel drew attention to the transformation of Belfast City, but probed the reality of this change and reminded delegates to look beyond the branding exercises and what you can see are many communities that have not witnessed this redevelopment. Mel spoke about the realities for some of these more marginalised communities e.g. some communities felt confident but others felt loss and retreat. Due to the regional spread of his work he witnessed these perceptions and realities across the region,

urban and rural, e.g. shops and businesses boarded up and people feeling their community has changed for the worst.

Next Mel raised the issue of defining people, specifically those who were deemed to have disengaged from society. In particular, he spoke about the 'dissident' description and how through his work with individuals and groups he saw them as people who didn't want to wreak havoc, but rather people who didn't subscribe to the social and economic views of others (e.g. mainstream republicans). He also explained some of the issues effecting these groups and emphasised 'mistrust' as a problem that influenced engagement, but at the same time he highlighted a genuine desire from these groups to become involved in normal community politics and activities. Trademark has tried to help them navigate what is acceptable protest and what is not.

Mel then addressed issues that impact on re-integration i.e. the reaction of the community to these individuals, the mistrust towards those who have been involved in violence and how the ongoing violent acts of other 'dissidents' perpetuates this mistrust. He also touched on the diversity of views and visions within these groups and how the need from wider society to conform to one view or identity continues to isolate individuals.

Mel was very open about the role he and Trademark play - they support the groups to challenge, to organise and to collaborate, and he described how this was done e.g. use a variety of campaign tools. However, he also highlighted the difficulties that emerged when trying to convince organisations to make alliances with each other because of past activities. Mel ended his presentation by emphasising the need to build capacity within organisations to enable them to create dynamic campaigns. He said the goal of Trademark was to leave these individuals and organisations in a position whereby they were able to articulate their views without the threat of violence.

Mark thanked Mel for his input.

Workshop 2

Feedback from the workshops was collated. A panel consisting of Grainne, Jonny, Julie & Linsey reported back the views and opinions of Forum delegates on the following workshop questions '*What are the key elements required to create a culture of lawfulness? and 'What can the community and voluntary sector do to promote a culture of lawfulness?'*

Delegates emphasised the need for confidence in policing, especially policing within communities, in that people need to see the value of the law and what type of community it creates. It is important to support community infrastructure to help support good decision making. Delegates highlighted the need to have good role models – positive alternatives & young community leaders, and to recognise that not all young people 'hanging' about are bad – perceptions of young people need to be challenged, and more done to focus on the positive contribution young people are making. Also, many made the point that we need to reward 'good' behaviour. Questions were raised about the shift from paramilitarism to community leaders, and

possibly some misconceptions that everyone wanted paramilitaries to go away – differing views regarding acceptability.

Delegates discussed the transitioning process, early interventions for young people, inconsistency in sentencing, use of informers, and the need for politicians to be more proactive and show leadership. Other comments focused on how institutions had let communities down, community restorative processes and the need to develop mechanisms that reengage marginalised groups in a meaningful way. There was a big focus on collaborative working and the need to make a connection between central government and communities. Finally, some delegates wanted to see an increased understanding about laws, and what laws want to achieve – it can't just be about enforcing the law.

Delegates want to see the community and voluntary sector deliver specific lawfulness programmes, develop community charters, and incorporate lawfulness foundations into a variety of non-traditional justice programmes. Others concentrated on the complimentary approach needed between Government and the community & voluntary sector. Participants also raised concerns relating to departmental budget cuts and how this could have a negative impact on this co-operative approach.

Additional comments addressed collaborative working between the sector, the need for three year plus funding commitments and how any programme for Government needed to reflect this approach. This would enable longer-term planning and implementation. Delegates also discussed capacity building across a number of groups i.e. young people and women, the need to offer a fully inclusive approach i.e. BME participation, and ensuring the silent majority are given a voice. Further observations referred to a visioning programme that would explore and promote lawfulness as well as defining how having a lawful society/community could improve the community – this was linked to active citizenship. There was a strong view from delegates that relations need to be built with justice agencies and accountability upheld.

Practical issues raised included too much administration and the need to see tangible outputs (quantifiable impact) in order to build confidence in what is happening – create a domino effect. Finally there was a demand that the community and voluntary sector is not isolated in carrying this work forward – support is needed from agencies, central and local government to back risk-taking approaches. It is a big challenge and everyone has to play a lead role.

Closing Remarks, Mark Browne, TEO

Mark thanked David, Jonny, Julie, Linsey, Kathy & Mel for their contributions. He expressed appreciation to delegates for their continued attendance, and in particular their energy during the workshops. He advised everyone, as normal practice, that a summary report would be produced and made available on CRC's website over the coming months. Finally, he informed delegates the next Engagement Forum would take in place in March 2019. The fifth TBUC Engagement Forum ended.