

Summary Record

Together: Building a United Community Engagement Forum

Tuesday 22nd May 2018

On 22nd May, The Executive Office (TEO) and over 150 community practitioners, policy makers and academics gathered in Girdwood Community Hub Belfast for the sixth meeting of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Engagement Forum. The event focused on a T:BUC core value; Collaboration and its impact, with a strong emphasis on what central government and practitioners can do to develop and enhance collaborative working.

Dr Mark Browne, Deputy Secretary - Strategic Policy, Equality & Good Relations

Mark welcomed delegates to the Engagement Forum. He highlighted the previous T:BUC Engagement Forum with young people held in Cookstown in March 2018. The event was delivered in collaboration with Education Authority (EA) and Community Relations Council (CRC). It was designed to provide an update on the T:BUC headline actions and current grant schemes. Mark outlined the development of the Summer camps programme explaining how participants from different camps meet to engage in community activities. He outlined the Urban Villages programme and showed a video clip of the recent Urban Villages awards night. Mark underlined the importance of the Engagement Forums with the event focussing on collaborative working. Mark illustrated a further example of existing collaborative working within the T:BUC programme outlining the work within the Shared Housing scheme. The collaborative process provided an opportunity to communicate key political or policy messages and information. It also gave the sector an opportunity to reflect on the environment on the ground and to be a critical friend to government.

Donna Blaney – Head of Programme for Peace IV and T:BUC

Donna outlined the T:BUC Summer Camps programme and highlighted the work that has taken place so far. Donna outlined Ministers' expectations in the development of the programme and how this related to planning and delivery. Donna continued by outlining the key elements of the programme including measuring the impact and success of the camps. Identification for the need to engage with partners was highlighted from within the youth sector. Donna then outlined the associated risks with working collaboratively and the need to have a clear vision. Donna noted that the positive advantages to working collaboratively far outweighed the risks and difficulties experienced. Donna pointed out the need for continual improvement and review. For the Summer Camps programme this included greater flexibility for delivery of cultural activities within both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Donna illustrated the positive outcomes using a range of quantitative and impact results.

Claire Heaney, The Derry Playhouse

Claire gave a history of The Playhouse and its work within the local community. Claire highlighting the collaborative work between Holywell Trust and The Junction, in the development and delivery of the ground breaking programme "Theatre of Witness". Theatre of Witness is a series of theatre pieces created and performed by victims and survivors of the troubles. Following Claire's introduction she showed a video of one of the performances pieces entitled "I once knew a girl".

Gerard Deane, Holywell Trust

Gerard outlined the history of Holywell Trust and the wide range of activities and projects that they have delivered. He went on to outline the range of partnership working that they have been involved in within the Holywell Trust. He outlined the need to work collaboratively to achieve greater impacts in delivering Good Relations activity. He explained that collaborative working enabled partner groups to both be more efficient in the use of resources but also with better engagement and results. Gerard

illustrated his points by making direct reference to some of the groups and activities being delivered. This included The Diverse City Community Partnership, Garden of Reflection and Theatre of Witness. He explained how collaborative working was achieved and expanded on his points further by stressing that collaborative working is a process of trust and sharing. Whilst not shying away from difficult conversations. Equally too, partners within the collaboration must all hold the same vision of what is trying to be achieved and sharing the risk is also as important.

Gerard commented that delivery on the ground is impacted negatively especially when funding is tight as competition increases between groups for the ever decreasing pot of funds. Gerard went on to say that as greater emphasis is now being placed on collaborative working, funders need to be aware and account for greater lead-in times and prep work required to deliver collaboratively.

In thanking Gerard, Mark Browne remarked that while collaboration is a word often used it is difficult to deliver because of all the factors outlined by Gerard.

Break and Workshop session

After a short break delegates took part in discussion groups in a workshop format to discuss the following questions, “Where is greater collaboration needed most and why?” and “What can be done to increase collaboration, by local and central government and the voluntary/ community sector.

Plenary

Dr Mark Browne introduced the people to report the feedback and comments from the workshop participants. Grainne Killen and Jacqueline Irwin reporting back the comments made by delegates on the first set of questions while Donna Blaney and Lynsey Farrell would be reporting back the comments from the floor on the second set of questions.

Grainne Killen, Director Good Relations and T:BUC

Grainne outlined a number of points that arose from the group discussions, around the question “where is greatest collaboration needed most and why?”

- The need for greater participation from BME groups was identified. It was felt that TBUC focused too heavily on the two main communities within NI.
- Greater leadership was a point also raised repeatedly. Grainne pointed out that David Sterling, head of civil service, had, at a previous engagement forum, outlined that collaborative working was the direction of travel that government wanted to take.
- The need for greater interdepartmental communication was also highlighted with Grainne illustrating what is currently being done with the Programme for Government and the interdepartmental programme board.
- Grainne referred to a comment that the engagement forum was an excellent way for groups and individuals to engage with each other and finding out what’s happening across the sector.
- Further comment was made about lack of leadership.
- Also too was the concern of there being inequality across the sector where groups with professional staff have greater opportunities to access funding. This reflects the need for greater capacity at local level.
- There is a recognition that the arts, music, drama and sport are very important areas of work in which to encourage participants to engage with Good Relations work.
- The issue of multi-year funding was raised highlighting the fact that limited one year funding didn’t provide any opportunity for collaborative work to be developed.

Jacqueline Irwin, CEO, Community Relations Council

Delegates raised the point that there appeared to be a disconnect between rural and urban and a large number of references were made to the difficulty of collaboration across larger geographical

Council areas. Concerns were raised about Brexit and how it will impact on cross border collaboration. Equally too there was reference to the sharing of staff and resources across groups and it was noted that this is becoming more common within the voluntary and community sector. Delegates also noted a lack of participation from members of the ethnic minority community. It was also noted that several funders have similar outcomes and targeted the same voluntary /community groups on the ground and there was merit in funding bodies collaborating to make the funding process for group's on the ground more efficient and focused. An issue repeatedly mentioned was the need to use collaboration from the outset in project planning and delivery.

Linsey Farrell – Director of Urban Villages, Racial Equality & Communities in Transition

Linsey reported that other comments from the 2nd question, “What can be done to increase collaboration” that focused on saying there needed to be support provided for the community to enable the promotion of partnerships, developing collaborative working arrangements and also supporting bids from collaborative programmes. The point was made that the responsibility didn't just sit within the community sector but it had to be driven by local and central government. It was accepted across all the responses that collaborative working was positive but there was a need to identify and develop new models of working. This would include the need to bring funders together in some sort of forum to share information. Important too was the early release of funding and the use of developmental approaches to the work with development staff to support and build capacity.

Donna Blaney highlighted the point raised by delegates of the need for some form of civic forum to collaborate with both local and central government. This would also enable the sharing of best practise. There was a feeling that the reform of public administration had a negative impact on the ability of local government to engage with one another. There is a clear need for trust, good communications, sharing and transparency.

Dr Mark Browne thanked the rapporteurs for feeding back the points raised by delegates. Mark asked Linsey Farrell to outline the work being done to engage with and support BME groups as part of the wider racial equality work.

Linsey Farrell outlined the existing Racial Equality Strategy that was launched in 2015. The strategy sets out a number of high level commitments including the review of Racial Equality legislation in Northern Ireland. Another element of the strategy is ethnic monitoring and identifying the number of minority people and their specific needs. The Department has also established a Racial Equality sub group that was set up to be the voice of minority ethnic people within government. Part of the sub group's role is to work with the Racial Equality Champions network. Lindsey went on to outline the racial equality champion programme which included the involvement of a senior civil servant from each department, taking forward issues relating to minority ethnic people, in the design and delivery of services across departments. Lindsey stressed the need to ensure that the actions being delivered had an impact and made a difference to BME groups living in NI. Lindsey also pointed out that a “Refugee Integration” strategy was also being developed taking on board the learning from the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS).

Questions from delegates:

Delegate 1, from the floor asked for a list of the different Racial Equality champions, Children and Young People champions and gender champions to be included on the TEO website. Both Linsey Farrell and Dr Mark Browne responded to say that they were only aware of the Racial Equality champions and would endeavour to have the names made available.

Delegate 2, reiterated the usefulness of having the champions contacts being made available and so too the BME groups who are active and have gained support from the MEDF fund. Linsey Farrell concurred and expressed the view that the sub-group and champions need to further increase communicate between themselves.

Jacqueline Irwin pointed out that the Local Government Staff Commission have been working on the delivery of champions within Local Government and these champions have been working for some time now on different training programmes within local government.

Closing Remarks:

Dr Mark Browne pointed out that short term funding has been a common theme within all of the Engagement Forums and that a move to multi annual funding would be helpful but that there is some difficulty as the department is currently only allocated annual budgets. He acknowledged that the issue of the funding being essentially competitive has a negative impact on the development of collaborative working. He also reflected on the need to develop further capacity building opportunities at local level and potentially utilising the Central GR fund to assist in that process. He acknowledged that collaborative working does take time and whilst the Department do work with other Departments, it does require effort and time as well as making connections with the voluntary community sector. He addressed the issue of lack of leadership and suggested that while the Assembly isn't sitting that we should all play a part and be leaders within our communities to reinforce the building of good relations.

Dr Mark Browne reminded the Forum that the forthcoming "Community Relations and Cultural Awareness Week" will be held during the week of 17th September 2018 and the next Engagement Forum will be held in the Lisburn Island Centre on the 18th September 2018. Dr Mark Browne also indicated that there was a need to change the current name of the "Community Relations and Cultural Awareness Week" and that people had the opportunity to engage with that process by use of the interactive questionnaire in the room. The Community Relations Council will be providing a summary report for distribution to all participants and publication on The Executive Office and Community Relations Council websites. Mark extended an invitation to complete the evaluation forms and thanked all for participating.