

Summary Record

Together: Building a United Community Engagement Forum

Strengthened by diversity – embracing cultural expression

21 May 2019
9.30am -1.30pm
The Guildhall, Derry/Londonderry

On 21st May 2019, The Executive Office (TEO) and over 150 community practitioners, policy makers and academics gathered in The Guildhall, Derry/Londonderry for the ninth meeting of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Engagement Forum. The event focused on T:BUC and the Cultural Expression theme. The Forum placed a strong emphasis on what central government and practitioners are doing to engage with communities and explore actions that could enable greater participation in promoting good relations.

Andy Cole Director of Good Relations and T:BUC opened the Forum highlighting the opportunities for everyone to listen and learn from each other. He informed the delegates that one of the key priorities in the T:BUC strategy is Cultural Expression. He offered his thanks and well wishes to Elaine Allen, who was moving on to a new post in the Peace 4 team. He invited the Derry City and Strabane District Council Mayor Michaela Boyle to provide a welcome to the delegates. Following Cllr Boyle's welcome Andy welcomed Dr Mark Browne to speak.

Dr Mark Browne – Strategic Director of Policy, Equality & Good Relations

Dr Browne welcomed delegates to the Engagement Forum and offered his thanks to Cllr Boyle for her input. Dr Browne commented on the participants who had previously travelled to Belfast to take part in the Engagement Forums and thanked them for their efforts stating it was now the turn of the Engagement Forum to travel further afield to Derry/Londonderry commenting that the city has a rich history of culture and cultural expression including being the City of Culture 2013. Dr Browne noted that one of the five Urban Villages set up under T:BUC was located in

Derry/Londonderry. Dr Browne went on to outline the wide range of work being delivered under the Urban Village's programme. He went on to acknowledge the tragic events of 18th April 2019 noting how important it was to continue doing good relations work. He assured the audience of the work being done by The Executive Office and others to continue to work towards positive good relations.

He outlined the purpose of the Engagement Forum and its role in the delivery of T:BUC. He stated that the Engagement Forum was a two way conversation between government and community and illustrated this point by reflecting on the conversations and information sharing that took place in the February Engagement Forum held in Enniskillen. Dr Browne highlighted the feedback from previous Engagement Forum and the actions taken to address the comments made, including the need for longer term funding and the lateness of funding allocations. Addressing this issue Dr Browne illustrated the changes being made including timings for earlier grant assessments and allocations. Another issue that has been highlighted at previous Engagement Forum has been the link between the Racial Equality Strategy and T:BUC. Dr Browne reiterated that as Northern Ireland was evolving and changing its now a much more diverse and multicultural society and as such racial equality is very much an integral part of the T:BUC strategy.

Dr Browne took time to highlight again the very good work being delivered on the ground and emphasised that this was of paramount importance and should be continued. He noted that communities are often ahead of the politicians and we should celebrate and publicise the work more. The programme on the ground continues to provide positive meaningful opportunities to promote good relations and should be celebrated at every opportunity.

Today's theme is a T:BUC key priority of cultural expression. The T:BUC vision is of a united community based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation, one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.

Dr Browne finished by outlining the agenda including the input from three projects currently being delivered in Derry/Londonderry and the North West with presentations from Derek Moore, Lilian Seenoi and Paddy Danagher.

Derek Moore - Londonderry Bands Forum

Derek's presentation title was Positive Cultural Expression; A problem or solution?

Derek provided background to the Londonderry Bands Forum (LBF) and its structure within the local marching bands. The LBF was established initially to offer a new way of thinking and an opportunity to express opinions. LBF focused on the perception that culture rather than being a major part of Northern Ireland's problems and that culture could in fact be a major part of any solution. Derek went on to say that difficulties arise however when there's an interference or suppression of culture and cultural expression, these tactics have been used extensively through history as a weapon to dominate or demonise groups within society. The attempted suppression of commemorative parading or language initiatives are perfect examples of this.

In 2013, one of the LBF's initial steps was to create a leaflet with the Derry City Council Good Relations Team that would engage groups in discussion events that were focused on the activities of marching bands. The LBF worked within the local schools system around what were felt preconceived ideas and misconceptions about marching bands. Derek highlighted that young people tend to focus on broader based social or identity issues, for example, what way marching bands deal with disability, race, gender and LGBT or BME issues and rights.

Derek went on to illustrate the range of activity the LBF was involved in. The Fleadh Cheoil na hÉirean in 2013 was one of the engagements around the City of Culture meetings. The involvement by the LBF led to a unique collaboration between the organising group of the Fleadh and the Londonderry Bands Forum. This culminated in marching band musical performances in various parts of the city during the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉirean. The success of the Derry Fleadh led to participation in two subsequent fleadh in Sligo by the LBF and also in the 2014/15 pan Celtic festivals in Derry. They were then mixed together with major international acts to create a spectacular showcase and 2013 and 2014. The Walled City Tattoo was also created as

part of the UK City of Culture and has continued despite having to change format to reflect budgetary restraints.

Derek highlighted the Maiden City Accord which is a local protocol developed by the Orange Order, Black Preceptory, Apprentice Boys of Derry, Londonderry Bands Forum and Events Safety Marshals. This document ensures that our city leads the way in the delivery of commemorative events. The Maiden City Accord seeks to outline the civic, legal and moral responsibilities of all groups involved including those not participating directly or in opposition. Presentations by LBF at the Sinn Fein and DUP Party Conferences happened after the Bands Forum offered to come personally to express their views and concerns directly to the major political parties. Subsequent educational and cultural programmes for the LBF and our partners resulted directly from ministerial meetings following the Ard Fheis appearance. The emergence of the North West Cultural Partnership in 2013 was a direct result of the groups who contributed together during the City of Culture year and the willingness of members who gave their time and skills freely despite other demands has now begun to show significant dividends. The partnership represents a shift in thinking from a PUL perspective by contributing and participating fully in all aspects of city planning and development along with the Council's initiatives for cultural expression and festivals. At the same time, LBF are promoting the cultural crossover ideas around music, language, political differences and working with cross-partner groups. Along with Culture Fuse Project we've recently taken on one of our most ambitious peace projects with a target number of over 600 participants aged from 8 to 14 years. The Arch Project which stands for Arts Reconciliation Culture and Heritage will use a fusion of living history, residential and study visits to create a balanced programme that we hope will stimulate acceptance and understanding of our diverse culture between all the participants.

Derek pointed out that LBF has recently taken on a research project through Peace 4 funding to ascertain why some sections of local society both urban and rural have not engaged fully in the Peace 4 programme. The LBF educational outreach programme is one of the ongoing elements of the original LBF project and it probably has had more cross-community contact than any of our other ideas, as well as providing practical music provision to 130 children per week in schools, the Derry City and Strabane

District Council culture corner outreach programme has a wide range in effect in the other schools that are involved.

Derek went on to say that the LBF were highly active in helping the efforts of the City Council to provide top quality events and promote the city and encourage visitor numbers and that one of their big successes this year was a joint community approach during the Halloween festival which saw festival numbers in and around the Fountain approach 30,000 people.

Derek's presentation was followed by a short video.

Following Derek's presentation Dr Browne thanked him for his input and responded to his comments and invited Lilian Seenoi from the North West Migrants Forum to give her presentation.

Lilian Seenoi - North West Migrants Forum (NWMF)

Lilian outlined a project called Discover an Intercultural Northern Ireland by first challenging the audience as to what they understood intercultural means?

Lilian pointed out that we use a lot of terminologies whenever we talk about culture, we hear multicultural, we hear intercultural, we hear cross-cultural, but NWMF wanted to focus on intercultural because they believe it is the way forward for Northern Ireland and we need communities to understand each other.

The project works with eight post-primary schools and engages with young people in those schools to explore the lives of migrants and also to discuss issues of migrations, challenges faced by migrants and community relations including attitudes towards minority communities.

Lilian went on to say that the delivery model included the intercultural dialogue which brought cultural ambassadors from our communities including young people and trained them to become ambassadors for culture. There were ten different cultures represented in the programme. A series of cultural dialogue workshops in took place in participating schools and in each school the project managed to work with over 130 young people, a whole year group!

Lilian explained that they really wanted to have a core group of young people to work with. Opportunities for quality interaction assisted the young people to understand these different cultures and we needed to recruit eight from each school. These young people were involved in developing the film which is called Discover an Intercultural Northern Ireland. You can find it on YouTube if you want to watch it, and it was really bringing the cultural ambassadors together with the young people to experience those deep cultures together, understand the cultures that are in existence in Northern Ireland and also listen to the real life stories of those migrants who have come to live within their community. They are also preparing to have a debate and the debate focused on themes of hate crime and racism in school, community tension, and integration of minorities in communities and culture and welcoming communities in Northern Ireland. The final showcase of the project was the film which was amazing. And also, different cultures and people coming together to celebrate those cultures.

Now, in every project that you deliver you expect to face challenges or not to face any challenges. The challenges that we faced were at the beginning of the project. Initially, it was very difficult to engage with the schools, we had to go to social media to get some attention some time but after that, we became best friends and I'm delighted to say we are working with more young people to become ambassadors. And of course, for community groups like ours we do struggle when it comes to funding, it's great that we have the Executive Office and Community Relations Council to really support us and our programmes. Our budget last year for that project was about £36,000. The best bits for me was the level of interest and commitment that they showed throughout the project, and the most honest young people you could ever work with. I would encourage everyone who wants to work with young people to please, just hit the schools because they're absolutely brilliant, and the level of interaction that they had when we bring them together, there was no difference, there was no young person who highlighted any difference between each other when they were talking – they really engaged so well. And it was encouraging for me to see the positive mind set and the willingness to learn from the young people. There was also a high level of participation and commitment from their parents. This is crucial because we can go and work with the schools but if the parents don't want the young people to take part in those programmes you will not have them. But the young

people we worked with you can see why they are great; their parents are amazing too.

So, some of the lessons that we learned throughout the programme is that trust, acceptance and respect can be built but this requires commitment from all parties. We have learnt that our young people can make the best educators to their parents and working together is actually easy when there's commitment to do it and also getting more good teachers, I have related my favourite teachers there in front who support young people is really great and also, we have tried to educate adults in order to educate young people. So, our target now is our young people so that they can educate adults and the future is looking very bright with them. Thank you very much.

So, before I finish I mentioned about having cultural ambassadors from school, I'm delighted to say we have a few of them here and they just want to entertain you with a small dance before we finish. Thank you and enjoy.

Paddy Danagher - Urban Villages

Paddy outlines the work of the Streets Alive programme. The programme initially has been led out by the Gasyard Wall *Féile* which, over the last 26 years started a festival basically, firstly to be a diversionary tactic to the sectarian bonfires that happened down in the Bogside area. And from that festival the idea was to bring the streets alive so that the community themselves could come together to enjoy their culture and to celebrate the diversity of culture but also within the community to create good relations within the community itself. The groups created a steering group to deliver the programme through Urban Villages with an investment of £160,000 though this doesn't reflect the true cost of the project because it doesn't include staff time and goodwill and volunteer time. The project works very closely with the Youth Service and the youth leaders in the area. The Streets Alive programme has grown and also works closely with all the other festivals in the area. The project has encouraged a lot of people to come into the Fountain for the first time.

The project focuses on youth, the festival and events and also training and the promotion of digital literacy and digital technologies. Paddy went on to say that people who have seen the bonfires have perceived them as negative and that they are actually adverse to community. And from that, the programme created a Festival of Fire. The Festival of Fire is community participation where young people, community artists and professional artists are brought together to do a procession.

Paddy noted that 86% of people were opposed to fires in close proximity to their houses in an urban area and 64% didn't want bonfires at all. So, this year we're moving away from the idea of even burning a sculpture and to have a lot of smaller sculptures throughout the embankment at the walls. The first one was a digital technology festival with young people. And the second one was a huge festival in itself.

Paddy noted that they had 6,000 participants in the last quarter of the financial year and of them 5,100 participants were engaged in a variety of training programmes. Paddy finished his presentation by showing a short video clip saying that he felt it explains more what Streets Alive is and what they do on the ground.

Mark Browne then thanked Paddy for his presentation and thanked all the presenters again. Mark Browne invited the delegates to put questions to the presenters?

Presenters Questions

Mark Browne started off by asking each of the panel members to say what they think is the biggest challenge in taking forward work on cultural expression? Derek, would you like to kick off? What's the hardest bit?

Derek Moore - Well, I suppose one of the biggest challenges apart from at this moment in time of the political impasse, basically are preconceived ideas or misconceptions about culture. The biggest challenge is actually getting the message out there. Protestant cultural groups tended to be very inward looking and not outwards looking.

Lilian Seenoi - I think it's engagement sometimes is the challenge. As Derek says, the fear of the unknown and some people may not, maybe they've busy lives also, they don't have the time to come into discovering the culture that is out there or people don't like taking risks. People are very comfortable within their environment and not want to go out and find out what is going on in other places.

The next question put to the presenters was how we can promote positive aspects of cultural identity here, in the city?

Derek Moore – Derek said they already have those plans in place. It's important to find out if there's the capability of creating something like that in other areas and then looking then for the government to be back in place to try and create that. A lot of groups are not very keen to work with each other.

Lilian Seenoi - Lilian pointed out that they don't have the capacity. Funded is on a yearly basis. If we really need real change, if we really want to achieve change it's not a one-off interaction, it has to be quality and continuous interaction.

Mark Browne – Mark responded that he would like to have the Executive give a three year budget which would give a longer time-frame. And that The Executive Office are also very mindful of the need to help groups in other areas who maybe aren't as far advanced and can benefit from experience elsewhere.

Mark Browne invited the delegates to take a comfort break. Paul Killen of CRC outlined the workshops and location of each one.

Break and Workshop session

After a short break, delegates took part in discussion groups in a workshop format to discuss the following questions:

1. What are the unique issues that impact upon cultural expression outcomes in communities?
2. What additional help and support is required to improve cultural expression outcomes in communities?

3. What action can be taken now to improve cultural expression? Who should be involved and how?

Following the hour long workshops a panel consisting of Angela Askin from Derry City and Strabane District Council, Peter Osborne, Chair of Community Relations Council and William Olphert from Chinese Welfare Association took their seats and reported back from the workshops.

Mark Browne facilitated the discussion and invited the panellists to report back the key points that were highlighted from across all the workshops.

Question 1 feedback points

What are the unique issues that impact upon cultural expression outcomes in communities?

- Attitude that culture is fixed but it has the ability to be fluid and evolve
- Segregated education has a major impact
- Contentious issues aren't unique to NI
- Local solutions needed to get people engaged
- People's attitudes to language
- Media involvement and sensationalising
- Giving a global focus – best practice and experience beyond these islands – what can we learn from elsewhere?
- Confidence building
- NI focusses on two cultures but now we are increasingly multi-cultural
- How people express their culture should be a learning opportunity for everyone.
- Celebration of activity
- There needs to be a cultivation of curiosity and a desire to find out about other cultures
- Other culture should not be threatening
- The community now is much more than just green and orange
- Softer impacts and stories must be covered
- Culture used as a apolitical football which can close down conversations
- Aggressive language from politicians
- Political backdrop, no politicians
- Deprivation levels
- Sectarian society unique to NI
- Structural division in housing, education and in the places where we love to spend time
- Challenging mind-set and calling out divisive behaviours
- Helping people being confident in their own identity
- We can benefit from multiple identities – permission to define our identity and not everyone fits into boxes
- Lack of knowledge but strong negative opinions

- Political interference – disillusionment with politicians
- Need power and commitment to make changes
- People are powerless and police can't act
- Some are an issues and most are a celebration
- Current approach to cultural expression is tokenistic and a happy veneer. Need to engage with deeper issues
- Relations improving but still very divided – negative perceptions still need to be addressed

Question 2 feedback points

What additional help and support is required to improve cultural expression outcomes in communities?

- Formal government – need structures and decision makers in place to carry through real issues
- Revising the structure – not forcing participants to choose labels
- A culture of curiosity – ensuring we are confident and articulate about expressing ourselves and in supporting others to express themselves.
- People defining themselves
- Contrary views – need politicians involved except that politicians as they use division for the own political ends
- A focus on common ground issues like health for example. Help us realise what unities u rather than divides us
- Education in other cultures
- Cultural celebration events outside Belfast and Derry
- Outreach programmes
- More collaboration and working together
- Signs of progression should be shown before funding continues.
- What is share culture? What would be in it? Who would hold it? Where? When?
- Knowing what best practice is
- Research the structural issues undermining our problems with expressing identities – take away the insecurities
- Education training, more awareness of others, and communities within work places, government councils etc
- Long term funding 5 years
- Basic humanitarianism – place yourself in the shoes of others
- We all need to go on our own journey of self-discovery
- Programme focus on difference rather than similarities
- Celebrate and show case best practice

Question 3 feedback points

What action can be taken now to improve cultural expression? Who should be involved and how?

- Share knowledge and experience through good relations programmes at grass roots level
- Shared Education activities as a a means to filter info on different perspectives
- Education system needs to look at the issue of segregated schools

- Need to address issues of social deprivation
- Political leadership is a must
- Facilitate networking and sharing of information between organisations and practitioners
- Identity
- Addressing deprivation
- Addressing the underachievement issues in schools
- Disadvantage leads to people looking for someone to blame
- Parents and children need to develop the confidence they have in through own culture that they can engage with other cultures confidently and without fear
- Cultural awareness incorporated into school curriculum
- Make advantages of cultural expression - multi linguisticism, diverse communities
- Festivals, culture night, city of culture all these small things add up and chip away at prejudice and fear
- Replicate the "Derry Model" – parading issues, City of Culture, Bands Forum Churches Trust
- Keep bringing people to places they have not been
- Prioritise tackling racial inequalities by putting money and investment into BME
- Food (global food) is a soft but good approach
- Languages should be to be taught in primary schools
- Ensure groups have capacity
- Need to legitimise a broader sense of cultural expression rather than perpetuate cultural division/separation
- Better connections between departments for supporting those on the ground who cannot find or connect with each other
- Networks for groups on the ground
- Co design projects and interventions
- A Cultural Act
- Learning from good practice – local, regional, national and international
- Longer funding terms
- Share best practice

Panel Response to Workshops

Peter Osborne, Community Relations Council

The group that I was with, first of all and reading some of the notes from the other groups as well, there's a lot of similarities. I really was impressed by the participation of everybody actually within the group and also the knowledge and the passion and the commitment that people had. Whenever you engage in a group like that you realise as a sector and as a group of people we're involved here with lots of folk who do this for the love of it and because they realise the importance of the work in challenging some of the prejudices and some of the really difficult tough issues. And this is also from people in those groups who live within their own communities and within their own communities are prepared to stand up and challenge. This was one

of the themes that came out of our group and I notice some of the other groups as well. There was a theme around how do you give people space to be able to talk about what they really believe is right in terms of cultural expression, not just to promote a particular culture or expression on either side of the community but also how to challenge within that community to have better cultural expression or to have different cultural expression or to have it in a way that is less challenging of others in other communities.

We discussed and I see it in other tables as well, some of the differences between cultural expression of people and organisations that are relatively new to Northern Ireland, how that has benefitted Northern Ireland but also how that has integrated itself into cultural expression that is unique to Northern Ireland as well. I think there was a concern and fear not just about speaking out but also that particular cultures are from within one's own community, whatever side of the community their culture was under threat and how therefore could one have an honest and open conversation in that environment.

Finding a mechanism to allow people to express themselves was really important and I think there was a sense that that space to talk about cultural issues was actually being closed down rather than opened up. That within local communities there was a desire to do it, a constructive desire to do it constructively but politically and in other ways, actually the space was closed down and so, the wrong word was permission but the ability, the facilitation of people to express themselves at a local level was being closed down by the political narrative on either side of the community at a higher level.

There was some conversation as well, and I see that from all of the tables about the role of the media and the media having a real responsibility to encourage positive debate. And therefore, there was something about engaging with the media or helping the media to engage more positively in it. We had a discussion around, and I see it coming up in the other tables as well, about systemic issues that when you're talking cultural expression at a local level or when you're taking a few hours to deal with cross-community work of people on different sides of communities here, that if they went back into an area which was still segregated in terms of housing as 93% of

social housing still is in Belfast, or they went into an education system that was still segregated and they were being influenced by peers and friends and parents and friends of parents from a segregated environment then the learning and the attitudinal change would be lost. And that is therefore a hugely difficult process for actually making significant attitudinal change.

We talked also about funding, about reprioritising some of this work, there was a need for, I'm afraid Mark, more funding and longer term funding and that was pretty universally felt by those from the sector that were around the table. There was also a really significant conversation about the need to understand and target social and economic issues, not just those issues at a political level that targeting socioeconomic need was a fundamental part of building reconciliation and I suppose helping people to talk about those cultural expression issues in a more constructive way if they saw more positive things about their future within communities which had continued to suffer significant disadvantage. And I suppose to go slightly off the, well on topic but my mind as I was hearing the conversation I kept coming back, if you don't mind me saying it, to a story from about 3,000 years ago that some of you will know when there was an old Jewish philosopher called Hilal from the old Jewish tradition who was walking down the street with his colleague and somebody came up to the both of them and said, "Can you tell me what the Torah says while standing on one leg". And his colleague told this guy to get lost but Hilal stood on one leg and he said, "What is hateful to you do not do to others, the rest is explanation, go learn". And in a sense, I think that's what we're talking about here, where you have cultural expression where people are objecting to what is being done by other people, "How dare they burn our flag", while we burn their flag, "How dare they put those flags up", while we put our flags up. "How dare they do X, Y and Z", while we're doing whatever we do within our community. We're poking each other in the eye and using cultural expression as a means of doing that and yet, we don't really think about what is hateful to us and making sure that we then don't do that to other people.

And I suppose that sums up then part of the challenge in the context of when you're going back into segregated living it's very difficult to challenge that narrative of let's not poke the other in the eye because the narrative within those communities is – Look what they're doing to us.

Mark Browne, Forum Chair

Angela, do you want to pick up on question two – What additional help and support is required to improve cultural expression outcomes in communities.

Angela Askin, Derry City and Strabane District Council

I suppose the group that I was participating in was quite a diverse group again. And much of what Peter has already covered was discussed in our group around some of the issues and then what help and support can be put in place to address those issues. So, not surprisingly one of those key things that came up was the need to have proper government structures back in place here, in order to deliver on some of the key issues that were identified.

There was this whole issue raised as well around some funders tend to get participants to look at difference rather than looking at similarities. So, some projects are really reinforcing difference and there's a lot of requirements from funders in terms of making sure that you have an equal split of different community traditions within projects and that is becoming unhelpful and it's raising issues in certain areas where there isn't that natural balance. It came up again around the increased and longer term funding that's required in order to address some of the key issues. Increased education came up as well as working with schools and young people and doing a lot of work on capacity building also brought up certain things within our group that single identity work is still needed, very much still needed, that it's not always necessary to look at stuff in cross-community you need to build the capacity within your own community in order to reach out. There should be a space to express broad views and to be able to challenge people's views and we should reflect all cultures when we're doing that.

Greater support for community-led projects. The feeling in our group was certainly that a lot of the solutions to the issues come from communities, they're not going to come from politicians, they're going to come from communities and there needs to be more support for community-led projects and again, that there needs to be more

collaboration and connectivity when we're looking. We can no longer work in isolation; we need to be much more connected and much more strategic in terms of the work that we're doing in order to address the key issues that our society is facing. Also needs to be effective measure of impact. We're all very aware now of the OBA model and again, that's looking at impact and I think people are really honing in on that and they're saying if we continue to fund work that we've always done then what impact is it actually making. Also looking at global stories and perspectives. So, we're thinking much more widely about cultural expression rather than the very singular narrative that we have always had. So, looking at more global stories and perspectives in order to give us more perspective in order to challenge ourselves. That was the key things that came up.

Mark Browne, Forum Chair

Thank you. I'm now going to move to William and question three – What actions can be taken now to improve cultural expression, who should be involved and how?

William Olphert, Chinese Welfare Association and Chair of Racial Equality Subgroup

Thank you. I think it was brilliant at the very beginning that there was a definition of culture. Culture is like breathing. We all do it without thinking about it, but you think about your breathing in two ways – either when you go to a mindfulness class when someone says "Focus on your breathing" or if you've got some obstruction or some chest infection and then you become conscious of the difficulty. I think we discussed that we all do culture but there's significant challenges with it as well. What actions can be taken? It's just been said; we need to lift the idea of culture to an international dimension. Northern Ireland, even the Programme for Government talks about an outward looking Northern Ireland so we should see that being the case that the expression of culture and various cultures does have a tourist impact and by developing that peacefully and collaboratively then we can bring tourists to the province and local communities can see the benefit of having people from outside coming and looking at our cities. And in that very same vein there was a lot of comment about the Derry/Londonderry City of Culture, how that was such a big thing, no one could avoid it, everyone got involved in it to some degree, it was a high

level event and perhaps something like that could be modelled across Northern Ireland and various other cities.

I think there was some mention of the law, mention of the Irish Language Act or a larger cultural legal framework to be instigated. There was also discussion about how we've got this paradox of having policies and strategies which talk about our differences, our sectarian structures which exist in Northern Ireland and yet at the same time, how funding is rolled out on that basis, in an ideological sense that in itself is quite contradictory. We have the Department of Communities with an S and that, I suppose there's this paradox of how do we cope with that. There was mention made too that yes, of course we need to have funding, yes funding is very small, I wouldn't say insignificant but it is small compared to the whole Northern Ireland budget and yet, the very conflict and tensions that we do experience and have experienced in our shared and conflicted past had and has the impact of disturbing our daily lives and yet we only fund so much, about the elephant in the room, someone mentioned that expression, the elephant in the room. There was also two people commented on our politicians, you can probably guess what they said about our politicians. There was also a comment made about actions should be based on community need. We shouldn't really go into area and say, be nice, be good and love thy neighbour and all the rest but when communities are worried about having the next meal or bullying in their schools or very local issues. So, there was a comment made that our actions should target specific needs. There was also mention of raising the profile of culture to a larger level as well and having some media presence, maybe having a podcast or something that takes this whole thing to a higher mention.

Education was mentioned. We think that a way of getting around sometimes the institutional structures which, in some sense acknowledge and perhaps encourage division is that using the same mechanisms we can have, for example, teachers in their training being trained as I know they are being trained to be much more culturally aware. Through mainstream teacher training and then through children in schools at an early age being exposed to other cultures as part of the curriculum that eventually over time this could filter out though we did say those same children who may be very enriched by that kind of training may then go back to a home and a

community where those messages are not aligned, so we have to work on creating that intergenerational conversation as well.

Obviously we've talked often about a post-conflict Northern Ireland and about reconciliation so we've got to keep on working at that and have some larger strategy with all the players from all sections of society, from civic society, from the political arena to kind of tell us how are we going to live, why should we want to live in a multi intercultural society and I think sometimes we are the believers of that but out there, there isn't a very strong rationale of why should I live in a multilingual, multicultural, international outward looking Northern Ireland, I think we've got to keep working hard at what we're doing but we've got to get people on the outside of this conversation to align with that message.

Mark Browne, Forum Chair

This whole question about having to have people from different parts of the community on a project and the problems that can create and the need for single-identity work to give people the confidence. And then we also talk about having impact and measuring impact, how do we get round that whole issue? Is it acceptable to have single-identity work on a long-term basis, do we expect it to progress and how do we measure impact? Is it an unreasonable requirement to say that you should have participation from right across the community when you're doing a Good Relations project? Any views?

Peter Osborne, Community Relations Council

Not an easy question. I think first of all we've got to be honest about certain things. I don't particularly think the conflict here in the past was about religion, but religion was a bit of an indicator of political opinion and it was something that was and still is part and parcel of how we live. And so, to develop better relationships across the community divide you do have to be honest and say we need to do an awful lot more cross-community work. So, it is absolutely okay when you're talking about good relations work across community work to expect people to work across those communities, in fact, it's a fundamental part of it.

Is single-identity work possible or necessary? Sometimes it is, for obvious reasons about developing capacity or particular issues and particular areas where there are difficulties, but I think when you do good relations work you ultimately should be looking at developing into a place where you are working across the community divide no matter how it looks or how difficult it is. If you're not going to do that then you either are doing community development work or you're doing some other work, but good relations cross-community work should really focus on that and the single-identity being a short-term thing or else it goes into a different type of funding support.

In terms of outcome based activities, I have no issue with that, I think that's really important. I don't think the processes are terribly different to what we collectively have been doing for a long time. I think there is an aspect of faddism with parts of it and no doubt, in 5 or 10 years somebody will have a bright idea of going back to doing something the way it was done 10 years ago but it is absolutely okay to be saying to any funded project, what are you doing and what difference are you making and what change is going to be affected because of the project you're doing. And if none of us can prove that what is being funded is making any change for the good then why is that being funded in the first place, is a pretty legitimate and good question to ask. And obviously, that then goes hand in hand to the funders including CRC and including the Department that funding decisions need to be taken for legitimate good reasons based on what is the best project to achieve outcomes, not for any other reason including political rationale for who gets funded to do what. So, there's challenges on both sides to that argument.

I do think there is an argument to say we do need more funding into this and forgive me for continuing to repeat some things that you've heard me saying before. The Minority Ethnic Development fund at a time when we have as many racist incidents as sectarian incidents at about a million pounds is I think 0.005% of our total spend in Northern Ireland. Do we really prioritise that whenever that Central Government Fund, the primary fund is proportionately so little? I think that does need to have longer term funding associated with it and when you look at the CRC's core funding, the example I would use all the time, Titanic Building, 60 million pounds of public funding a few years ago, it would take the CRC 40 years to spend that on its core

funding. Is that being properly prioritised in terms of reconciliation? I would argue no. I don't think it's your fault, Mark, I don't think it's any official's fault, but it is something that politically I think we need to look at and say this is an area we're 20 years into a 50 year plus peace process, we need to continue to invest in and invest in substantially still.

Mark Browne, Forum Chair

There's always a wider debate around that, Peter and I've heard you make those points before and doubtless it will come up in the talks. In terms of what we have been able to do, actually over the last two years we have actually increased the amount of funding. Despite the fact generally budgets have been going down, we have been able because of the fact that we don't have to meet some other expenses, this may be obvious to you, we have been able to put some additional funding into the Central Good Relations Fund and to the Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF) and certainly the MEDF has gone up by 10% but I agree with your point, is there enough going in, that's still the wider question but in other cases, other budgets are being squeezed and we have managed to increase them slightly. You are raising the broader issue about the amount going into this whole area and I think that's very much a political discussion. Angela, do you want to add anything to that?

Angela Askin, Derry City and Strabane District Council

I would just say that in terms of the single-identity work, I believe you can only work with communities at the stage that they're at. So, there are certain communities who are more progressed along the road and you have to work with communities, you have to build the capacity within communities in order to be comfortable with their own cultural identity and expression in order for them to facilitate them to be able to then work on a cross-community basis. I think the funders being prescriptive about breakdown of participants on projects, while it might work well where there's an actual balance of demographics, I know certainly in this area it has proven to be quite challenging for projects to be able to attract the right people onto projects because if you're of the wrong denomination you may not be able to get onto a project because we don't have enough of the other. So, in many ways it's reinforcing division rather than actually creating peace. And I would say in terms of impact and measuring impact, it certainly is important to measure impact but a lot of the work we do

doesn't necessarily lend itself to pre and post questionnaires in order to find out how far people have come in terms of their changing of their opinions on things. So, anecdotal feedback is just as important as getting questionnaires filled out to see how much someone's attitudes have progressed during a project.

Mark Browne, Forum Chair

I think the whole question of measurement is a difficult one and it's one that we get put to us whenever we're looking for funding. How do you actually demonstrate that what you're doing is making a difference? And I've had this question put to me, sure we've been funding this sort of stuff for 30 or 40 years and we still have all these issues so it's obviously not effective and I don't agree with that. We still fund the Health Service and we haven't solved all the health problems; We still fund the education department, but we haven't solved the educational problems. There are a whole range of things that you have to keep doing and you make progress and we need to find all the different ways of measuring and getting the message out and getting the message out is a key thing.

William Olphert, Chinese Welfare Association and Chair of Racial Equality Subgroup

I'd just echo what Angela said. I'll give you a really blunt example. There are a few of these booklets which I brought out and thanks to Paul at CRC for allowing me to give them out, I thought they'd be a very practical example of this. We got a bit of funding from Belfast City Council and I was very determined to bring local indigenous people into what we might call global food stores, especially those in their local area. So, we brought people from Dee Street in, Donegal Pass, Ballynafeigh, we brought in other groups, Positive Life, Sandy Row were involved as well, and it was a great project. Now, of course I was thinking I want to measure attitudinal change here, I want to find out did these people ever when they walked past these shops did they ever go in, did they ever buy stuff, did they feel the Polish signs on the outside were scary. We did all that, we monitored, in fact you can see some of the infographics, the results of that. But three weeks ago, I got an email via the Council to say a government department that funds this project now wants, this is six weeks after the project had finished, wants to know of those people that you did how many were Catholic, how many were Protestant, how many were this and were that. And I just thought to

myself, the monitoring that we provided for the Council is what we agreed to provide and we did it and we did have a pre and post questionnaire but it's my consideration that it's rude for me to go back to those groups especially as the project worker is no longer employed in our organisation to go back and say, those people who came from Positive Life, how many of them were Catholics and Protestants.

And I think that's where monitoring is important, we have to accept that for the structuring and funding and all the rest and establishing need but that was inappropriate and beside the point, it was after the project was over and it was a one year project so I'm not going to get my worker in to have a conversation over coffee, what do you think the religions were of your participants. So, how I could quite easily monitor and say well, if they're from Ballynafeigh they're probably mixed, if they're East Belfast they're probably Protestants. And if that's what I could potentially, I haven't replied by the way but if that's what I did those statistics would go back to the funder and they would then have a skewed view of what the situation actually was.

Mark Browne, Forum Chair

So, this is a conundrum, how to demonstrate impact in this sort of complexity, are we clear what we're trying to achieve, and do we know it when we see it. Peter, I think you wanted to say something?

Peter Osborne, Community Relations Council

I want to pick up on something you said there, Mark although just on the statistics. I accept the point of it needs to be always done as constructively or as positively as possible.

I think there is a huge issue though about getting the message out which you touched on briefly there, Mark. I understand the very nature of some of the work we do means that it needs to be done quietly and if it got out then it would disturb the work that was being done but I think that's the minority of the work that goes on, I think we do really need to think about how to get the messages out about the positive work that happens, about the outcomes of that work, about the really courageous work sometimes that is being done publicly. I think it's a challenge to both organisations like the CRC as well as the Executive Office about how the

organisations support the work on the ground to get the message out because it's really important when you talk about people being frightened to raise their head about the parapet and go public or to say critical things or to challenge within communities. It's really important maybe somebody hears what Eileen Weir is doing on the Shankill, wherever you are Eileen now, around bonfires, I hope you don't mind me saying it, where a group of women came together to reclaim the bonfires. The more other people know about that in other communities the more they're likely to stand up and say well, if they can say it we can say it. And that's a really important point about inspiring this sort of work elsewhere, it's not just about promoting an organisation or the funder, it's about saying to other people in other communities across Northern Ireland – if we do it you do it and we'll support each other in doing it, let's get the message out there that there's a powerful movement of people who want to do things differently in this place because it's the right thing to do. And that means we need to get the message out publicly.

Mark Browne, Forum Chair

You're absolutely right, Peter. We need to get that message out and we need to communicate effectively in all the ways that we need to communicate, whether it's by word of mouth, whether it's by anecdote, whether we're putting stuff on social media, putting stuff on websites and I know we're all doing that. And what's very powerful quite a lot, very powerful with politicians actually, it's not necessarily the statistics although they will ask for those and then they'll say they need more than that, it's the individual stories that you can give them that tell them about somebody's journey or tell them about the work that's been done at local level which has made a real difference. That's what really has made an impact and I absolutely agree with Peter; we need to consistently get the message out to encourage each other as well as to demonstrate the important work that's being done.

Mark thanked all of the panellists – Peter Osborne, Angela Askin and William Olphert for their input. Mark Browne closed the discussion and thanked everyone for their contribution.

The next Engagement Forum will take place on the 17th September 2019 and that will be during Good Relations Week.