

Together Building a United Community: Policy Analysis

October 2013

Purpose

In May 2013 OFMDFM published the 'Together Building a United Community' strategy. The purpose of this paper is to provide Commissioners with an analysis of the contents of that strategy alongside an analysis of how it may advance or otherwise, key Commission public policy positions.

Background

The Commission has consistently sought to advance good relations considerations via a range of our policy, advice and communications work. The attached paper adopts a public policy focus, setting out the 4 main policy themes of the 'United Community' strategy and mapping key Commission's policy positions against those areas, seeking to identify key recommendations or areas for further policy development.

Action

Commissioners are asked to offer comment, including in particular views on the scope and implementation of the 4 United Community strands

- Children and Young People (including education, volunteering, leadership and citizenship)
- Shared Community (including shared spaces, facilities and housing)
- Safe Community (including peace walls; reporting harassment; and monitoring community safety)
- Cultural Expression (including the role of District Councils; the All Party Group (parades; emblems; and the past);

Views are also welcome on the general observations and on the strategy's 'Measures to aid implementation' (including strategy delivery; advice and challenge to Government; improving funding; enhancing local council delivery; monitoring and evaluation.

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EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Commission's vision for Northern Ireland is as a shared, integrated and inclusive place, a society where difference is respected and valued, based on equality of opportunity and fairness for the entire community.¹ We consider that all people must be valued equally and believe that everyone should be allowed the opportunity to develop to their full potential.
- 1.2 The Commission has a statutory remit in the area of Good Relations derived from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and the Race Relations Order (1997). The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 bans "harassment" in the workplace on the grounds of religious belief and/or political opinion.
- 1.3 Over time, the Commission has identified a number of key good relations priorities for intervention
- Separateness and the Legacy of the past.
 - Extending a strategy for CSI beyond Sectarianism and Racism
 - Good Relations, Social Cohesion and the Economy
 - Shared Education
 - Shared Housing
 - Shared Spaces, Workplaces and Expressions of culture
 - Recognising the role of regulation and incentives to achieve change
 - Importance of clear and specific actions and targets

- 1.4 In May 2013, the Executive published the ‘Together Building a United Community’ Strategy, setting out what Government will seek to achieve change against 4 key priorities:
1. Our children and young people;
 2. Our shared community;
 3. Our safe community; and
 4. Our cultural expression.
- 1.5 In summary, the Commission welcomes the production of the ‘United Community’ Strategy, including a commitment to a framework for delivering good relations across a wide range of grounds, going beyond issues of sectarianism. It is however of paramount importance that the Strategy is subject to comprehensive equality impact assessment and considered against obligations such as those set out in the UNCRPD, CEDAW and CERD.
- 1.6 The Commission recognises that the Strategy is incomplete given the separate treatment of three so-called hard issues of Flags and Emblems, Parading and the Past. However, in general, a lack of detail regarding the implementation of the key priorities and the ‘headline actions’ makes the strategy difficult to assess, either in concrete terms or with regards to its real potential. We note the overlap and/or duplication between some of the ‘actions’ and ‘commitments’ noted in the strategy, and would encourage OFMDFM to further develop thinking to ensure appropriate and targeted actions to deliver and evaluate noted commitments.
- 1.7 Our position clearly calls for a multi faceted approach to promoting good relations. Such work must be predicated in recognising the past, but not allowing the past to dictate our future development. Public spaces, are key elements of this and recent problems in relation to flags, expressions of identity and the naming of public facilities indicate that there is a lack of understanding of the positive nature of the good relations duty.
- 1.8 Alongside this strategy, the Commission recommends that the Executive advance a comprehensive suite of targeted public policy interventions in respect of the elimination of prejudice

and the advancement of good relations across a range of equality grounds.

2 Good Relations and the Commission's priorities to date.

- 2.1 On 23 May 2013, the Executive published the 'Together Building a United Community' (hereafter 'United Community') Strategy, following the announcement of seven strategic headline actions on 9 May 2013¹.
- 2.2 The 'United Community' Strategy is the 3rd iteration of a Good Relations strategy for Northern Ireland flowing 'A Shared Future'² (2005) and the draft Strategy Cohesion Sharing and Integration³ (2010)
- 2.3 The Strategy sets out what Government will seek to achieve change against 4 key priorities:
1. Our children and young people;
 2. Our shared community;
 3. Our safe community; and
 4. Our cultural expression.
- 2.4 OFMdFM consulted on a Draft Strategy for Cohesion Sharing and Integration in 2010 and our response was issued in October 2010⁴. The foreword to 'United Community' notes that Ministers have listened to the wide range of detailed views provided in response to the 2010 consultation and that they consider that it is now time to move from policy development to implementation and action.
- 2.5 The Commission has a clear remit to promote equality of opportunity, challenge discrimination and provide advice to public authorities on their equality and good relations duties. We have expressly stated in many forums the importance of addressing equality and good relations issues – for example in

¹ Those headline actions were: The United Youth Programme, involving the creation of 10000 cross community volunteer placements; The creation of ten shared educational campuses; The creation of four urban villages; To hold 100 summer schools or camps; A Shared Neighbourhood programme in ten areas; A cross-community sports programme; The removal of interface barriers

² [A Shared Future OFMdFM 2005](#)

³ [Cohesion Sharing and Integration Strategy OFMdFM 2010](#)

⁴ [ECNI Response to CSI 2010](#)

our response to the consultative document on CSI the Commission said:

'Equality and good relations are inseparably linked. The one cannot be effectively pursued without the other and neither will find its full expression in the absence of the other'.⁵

2.6 Over the last decade, the Commission has made a series of recommendations in relation to the promotion of Good Relations between the two main communities and more widely.

2.7 In broad terms, the Commission has (through responses to documents such as the Programme for Government in 2011⁶; the Draft Programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration (2010); and the Shared Future document (2005) and others) identified a number of key priorities for intervention:

- Separateness and the Legacy of the past;
- extending a Good Relations strategy beyond Sectarianism and Racism;
- Good Relations, Social Cohesion and the Economy;
- Shared Education;
- Shared Housing;
- Shared Spaces, Workplaces and Expressions of culture
- Recognising the role of regulation and incentives to achieve change;
- Importance of clear and specific actions and targets.

2.8 The Commission has also recommended that Government addressed issues of cross-Departmental working and their approach to local communities in order to make a real and lasting difference. The Commission's response⁷ to the Department of the Environment's 2011 consultation regarding local government reform sets out our recommendations - including the importance of inclusive governance arrangements; improved engagement; implementing a Code of Conduct which extends the principles of public life; and establishing community planning arrangements which provide a sharpened focus for the delivery of public services.

⁵ [ECNI response to CSI strategy 2010](#)

⁶ Response to Programme for Government

⁷ Response to Local Government Reform: Policy Proposals, ECNI, 2011 –

<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/LocalGovernmentReformECNIresponse11March2011.doc>

- 2.9 This paper provides an analysis of the public policy positions set out in the 'United Community' document and specifically the extent to which it advances those areas identified by the Commission as priorities for intervention. Areas are identified where Commissioners may wish to further develop existing policy positions and /or provide direction. (e.g. definition of sectarianism).

3 General Observations on 'Together Building a United Community'.

- 3.1 Before considering each of the 4 main themes of 'United Community' in turn, a number of more general points are first considered.
- 3.2 The Commission has welcomed the high level messages and commitments in the Strategy. In our 2010 response to the consultation on the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy (CSI), the Commission argued the stark fact of sectarianism and the need to recognise all communities, including new ones, in removing fear and promoting *'a shared, integrated and inclusive place where difference is respected and valued, based on equality of opportunity and fairness for all'*.⁸

An incomplete strategy

- 3.3 The Commission recognises that the Strategy is incomplete given the separate treatment of three so-called hard issues of Flags and Emblems, Parading and the Past. We recognise that publication of the Strategy so far was expedited by this separate treatment and that no single area should be allowed to hold back the whole. However we look forward to being able to treat these issues in the round in order that the change in our society will be complete and transformational.
- 3.4 We also consider that there is an amount of overlap, repetition and/or ambiguity within the strategy that could usefully be reduced and/or clarified to ensure clarity with regards to implementation and action. Some of these aspects are developed later in this paper.

⁸ [ECNI Response to CSI 2010](#)

- 3.5 It is clear however that the strategy also lack clarity with regards to a range of targets. Unfortunately the general lack of detail regarding the implementation of the key priorities and the 'headline actions' makes the strategy difficult to assess, either in concrete terms or in its potential. For example, there is no detail on how the 10 shared education campuses will be selected, similarly the 4 Urban Villages, 100 summer camps, shared neighbourhoods and in particular the removal of interface barriers , are all unclear.
- 3.6 The 25 September 2013 Briefing⁹ by officials to the OFMDFM Assembly Committee made clear that since the publication of the strategy, work was now underway with Departments and then stakeholders across the range of the strategic actions and commitments to develop (and in some cases then pilot) specific delivery plans with specific actions, targets, budgets, timelines etc.
- 3.7 We note the current work by OFMDFM to develop indicators and would highlight the importance of ensuring clarity in SMART outcome targets so that delivery plans can be developed accordingly to ensure progress is made to clear targets and timelines..
- 3.8 The Commission also notes the importance of ensuring that there is alignment between the strategy and related bills, for example the Local Government Bill which was in preparation during the development of the strategy does not appear to be aligned.

Equality and Good Relations

- 3.9 There is clear reference to the importance of addressing both equality and good relations in the strategy. The document sets out that all '*policy making and legislative actions must take into account the Section 75 duties in their entirety*' [para 1.17] and '*good relations cannot and should not be built on a foundation on inequality*'. This mirrors very much the comments in our response to the Draft CSI consultation.
- 3.10 However, the Commission wishes to note that it is concerned that the strategy has not been effectively assessed for Equality Impacts. The document released by OFMDFM as an EQIA is in

⁹ [Committee of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister](#) Hansard 25 September 2013

fact an screening document. The Commission also considers that there is little evidence therein to support its contention that the Strategy should be ‘screened out’ as it is likely to have major potential impacts on several equality categories. The Commission is currently liaising with the Department further to these concerns.

Vision and leadership

- 3.11 The Commission had commented, in response to the Draft CSI Strategy, that a clear vision statement was important to underpin any strategy going forward. The ‘United Community’ strategy’s vision as set out in the Executive Summary is a vision 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 tolerance”.

- 3.12 Our CSI response had also pointed to the importance of leadership from politicians as a key driver for change in promoting good relations. There is an acknowledgment of this in the strategy,

‘we acknowledge that leadership at a political level is a vital ingredient in driving change’. [para 1.5] ‘we take this responsibility seriously and will continue to show the necessary leadership in creating a better society for everyone’.[Para 1.3]

- 3.13 The Commission supports these developments in providing clarity with regards to vision and leadership. The Commission’s Public Policy Statement on Principles for Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations in Local Government Reform¹⁰ is also of relevance in ensuring appropriate leadership. The first of these principles relates to leadership and stresses the importance of leadership in ensuring that equality of opportunity and good relations are integral to core business in the new structures.

¹⁰ [Principles for Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations in Local Government](#) 2008

- 3.14 There are also opportunities to embed equality and good relations in the revised structures of local government, including our recommendations on a Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Scope of the strategy

- 3.15 Although the specific scope of the Strategy could benefit from clarification and confirmation across the document as a whole, it seems clear that the intent is that the

“main focus of this document is on improving community relations” [page 3],

but that it will also outline a

“strategic framework that will shape action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance” [para 1.2].

- 3.16 The document notes that the *“commitment to addressing these issues is reflected in separate policies and action plans that include a focus on the specific needs of some of the most vulnerable groups in society”* [para 1.18] and notes that reconciliation will also be advanced in strategies relating to children and young people; childcare; victims and survivors; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people; gender; race; and disability.

- 3.17 Our previous responses have made it clear that the Commission wishes to see actions to address good relations across a wide range of grounds with our 2010 response to the consultation on the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy noting *“the Commission believes the final Strategy should cover the same grounds as the existing hate crime legislation”* (i.e. sectarian (perceived religion or political opinion), race, religion/faith, disability, homophobic, transphobic issues). The Commission has also previously called for its powers and duties to be expanded to include a power to promote good relations across all the grounds covered by anti-discrimination legislation.

- 3.18 The Commission supports the proposals in ‘United Community’ for a targeted strategy to address sectarianism and progress good relations on the basis of community background given the indication that the strategy will also establish a framework to

tackle other forms of intolerance and that these will be progressed via similarly targeted strategies.

- 3.19 The Commission recommends that strategies to advance good relations should cover the scope of the anti-discrimination grounds and that any associated legislation or remit applied to the new Equality and Good Relations Commission should have comparable coverage. The Commission further recommends that actions to advance good relations across all the above grounds occur without further delay.

Definitions

- 3.20 The strategy refers to finding an appropriate consensus around a definition of sectarianism, to be included in the draft legislation which will establish the Equality and Good Relations Commission. Para 1.36 provides a working definition of sectarianism, as:

“threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour or attitudes towards a person by reason of that person’s religious belief or political opinion; or to an individual as a member of such a group”.

- 3.21 The Commission recommends that an overarching definition of ‘good relations’ is also developed and that it should not be constrained to the grounds of religion / politics but more broadly applicable across the wider set of anti-discrimination grounds. This would then provide the basis for both targeted actions under the ‘United Community’ strategy and the proposed strategic framework / wider set of strategies to advance good relations on other grounds.

4 ‘United Community’: Consideration of Key priorities

- 4.1 As noted above, the strategy sets out four *key priorities* on which Government, community and individuals will work together to build a united community and achieve change:

1. Our children and young people
2. Our shared community

3. Our safe community

4. Our cultural expression

4.2 *Shared aims* have been identified for each of these four key priorities, as well as a number of concrete practical *commitments* for delivery, as well as *strategic headline actions* that will contribute to achieving the vision.

4.3 Each of the above priorities are now considered in turn.

5 Our children and young people

5.1 The 'United Community' Strategy sets out the following:

Shared Aim: to continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations.

Actions: For our children and young people, we will:

- Create 10,000 one year placements in a new "United Youth" programme;
- Develop a Summer Camps/Summer Schools pilot programme with a focus on sport and developmental activities initially consisting of 100 summer school/camp projects to be run throughout summer 2015;
- Roll out a "buddy scheme" in publicly run nursery and primary schools;
- Develop, in partnership with the relevant agencies and Departments age-appropriate primary and post-primary anti-sectarianism resources and ensure that teachers are trained, equipped and supported to deliver an effective anti-sectarianism module;
- Ensure that our approach to youth intervention becomes a year round programme.
- Create ten Shared Educational Campuses; and
- Build on the legacy of the Olympic Games, and, work across all sport to develop significant programmes of cross-

community sporting events which will focus on reconciliation through sport and be based at community level.

Commitments: For our children and young people, we will:

- Enhance the quality and extent of shared education provision, thus ensuring that sharing in education becomes a central part of every child’s educational experience;
- Develop an approach to summer interventions that fuses short and medium-term interventions with those of a longer-term, more strategic nature;
- Review practice across all strands of good relations activity, including those projects particular to young people;
- Develop an inter-community youth programme to tackle sectarianism;
- Support inter-generational approaches to building good relations;
- Establish a Good Relations Children and Young People’s Subgroup to consider the specific role of young people in building good relations; and
- Develop a youth volunteering programme that builds the capacity of our young people, prepares them for leadership and improves community relations.

5.2 In our 2010 response to the draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration¹¹ the Commission determined that *“one of the key tasks of CSI should therefore be to ensure that our children and young people grow up learning how to live, play and work together in a diverse society.”*

5.3 We also stated that *“young people need the skills and strategies to recognise and reject discriminatory, negative attitudes and influences, such as sectarianism, homophobia and racism, and ensure that the school environment tackles these issues appropriately”*.

¹¹ [Response to draft CSI Strategy 2010](#)

- 5.4 We set out actions that should be taken to prevent bullying and recommended citizenship programmes in order to promote reconciliation, understanding and respect for diversity. We also recognised the efforts that should be made to make schools attractive to all and to be a sustainable resource at the heart of communities.
- 5.5 We recognise that factors outside the school have a significant impact on children’s educational development including economic deprivation, family support and housing, and in our response to the Programme for Government¹² in 2012 (PFG), we set out how action needed to be taken across communities in order to address these issues. We noted that the draft PFG identified a clear preference by a majority of parents for children to be educated together¹³.
- 5.6 The United Community strategy recognises the scale of the challenge noting that *“the makeup and demography of our society can mean that some people, including our young people, can grow up without substantive opportunities to meet someone from a different tradition, cultural background or political opinion.”* The Strategy also notes the research evidence of a clear willingness and desire among young people to live in a more united community¹⁴.

Youth Intervention Programme

- 5.7 In addressing these issues, the strategy recommends that it establishes *“a new consolidated youth intervention programme which will bring together a range of existing programmes and specifically target young people in those areas where community tensions can be most prevalent”*(para 2.17.)
- 5.8 We note that there will be a Good Relations, Children and Young People’s subgroup under the auspices of the Ministerial Panel that will develop a youth volunteering programme that builds capacity of young people, prepares them for leadership and improves community relations, and local and international models will be used with programmes centrally delivered and year-round.

¹² [ECNI Response to PFG](#)

¹³ [ECNI response to PFG 2012](#)

¹⁴ [The Young Life and Times Survey 2009](#): Successive research reports since this date have confirmed an expressed preference by both parents and children for shared/mixed/integrated education

- 5.9 We note that the Youth Intervention programme will have two specific new elements:
- It will consider options for using sport as a good relations tool, building on the energy and focus that has been generated as a result of the Olympic Games
 - It will develop and roll out a pilot summer schools programme consisting of 100 summer school projects in summer 2015
- 5.10 The sports programme will be aimed at 11-16 year olds and will involve local sports clubs partnering up and providing cross-community sporting activities and facilities. In return for participating there will be additional funds based on the Investment Strategy NI in order to improve facilities and equipment. The strategy will ensure that contracts contain a social clause and that the guidance contained in Delivering Social Benefits through Public Procurement Toolkit 2010¹⁵ will be applied.
- 5.11 It is envisaged that the strategic approach of the programme in general will be coupled with a summer schools programme consisting of 100 summer school projects.
- 5.12 This programme collectively is intended to:
- Examine the best way to engage youth in the programme
 - Make use of sporting initiatives as a good relations tool
 - Explore possible linkages with the childcare strategy and the Executive Childcare Fund
 - Explore opportunities for parental involvement
 - Identify roles for voluntary and community sector organisations
- 5.13 We note the intention to bring together the existing programmes in a single Northern Ireland wide initiative. While the consistency and coherence that can be brought to a programme delivered across Northern Ireland is to be welcomed, a number of related public policy matters are being driven at the local level – area based schools and the completion of the reform of local government for instance. The
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models that are used as examples in the strategy have also been local responses. It will be important to look, from the Programme for Government through Delivering Social Change, at policies, strategies and actions to ensure they are fully aligned.

- 5.14 There is disappointingly also no detail within the document about the initiatives in sport and how they take account of existing access and inclusion issues in sport, either on good relations grounds or in regard to other grounds such as disability or gender¹⁶. Girls, young women and women are recognised to be underrepresented in sport as are people with disabilities and people from black and minority ethnic communities, yet there are no obvious proposals to address these underrepresented groups to ensure that the programme effectively delivers.
- 5.15 We welcome the commitment to social clauses in any improvement initiatives that will take place, and note the existing Programme for Government commitment to social clauses. We recommend that the Department includes the Commission's procurement guidance¹⁷ in the guidance documents referred to.
- 5.16 We note reference to the importance of the arts is included in other areas of the strategy and consider that this could also provide a focus for youth development.
- 5.17 We also note the linkages with the Childcare Strategy and the Executive Childcare Fund and stress that it will be important that there is full transparency in the allocation of budget to these initiatives.

United Youth

- 5.18 A key project in the children and young people priority is the creation of 10,000 places in a United Youth Programme. This programme offers young people in the NEETs (not in Employment, Education or Training) category "*structured*

¹⁶ As there are more young women than young men without employment and not in training or education and fewer take part in sport the significant dependence on sporting measures deserves closer scrutiny

¹⁷ [ECNI Guidance on Public Sector Procurement 2008](#)

employment, work experience, volunteer and leisure opportunities". (Para 2.32)

- 5.19 This will, it is envisaged, give young people opportunities and skills and make a contribution to the community. It will comprise work experience, accredited volunteering and good relations based activity within a shared environment.
- 5.20 It is encouraging that a number of elements in this strand are aimed to mainstream good relations within community, educational and labour market reinforcing initiatives.
- 5.21 It is not clear how the 10,000 places in the United Youth programme will be piloted / rolled out and so what consideration has been given to how employers or the volunteering sector will accommodate placements, and indeed how it will be ensured that good relations elements are both mainstreamed and go beyond merely facilitating contact to being effective in building community relations.
- 5.22 It also appears that Leadership and citizenship training are to be provided for the children and young people involved in United Youth but not it would appear for any other group of people engaged in the Strategy – or, indeed, for young people in employment, education and training. Opportunities must be found, or created (building on existing programmes or best practice), to ensure that all our citizens can develop leadership skills.

Shared Education - Ten shared campuses

- 5.23 The section on education commits to ‘achieving a full shared education system’ and cites area planning as a vehicle for doing this. Shared Education was one of the areas which the Commission identified as a gap in the Draft CSI Programme. Since then, the Commission has considered and published a detailed position on the issue¹⁸, in the context of the Ministerial Advisory Group established by Minister for Education¹⁹, where we highlighted

¹⁸ [ECNI submission to MAG on advancing shared Education](#)

¹⁹ The Strategy notes that the report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on shared education is with the Minister for consideration.

- That a system of shared education has a central *role to play* in advancing a shared society. The Commission recommends a move to a system of sharing across the full range of education providers at each level of provision; one which routinely teaches students together via a shared curriculum in shared classrooms.
- That sharing in education must impact meaningfully and substantively on every child and that a shared experience should be central to the education system as a whole.
- The importance of addressing wider issues linked to sharing in education – including academic selection at age 11; teacher training; the teacher’s exception under FETO; and better understanding the reasons for, and impacts of, any differential patterns of enrolment to education providers.

5.24 The Commission welcomes the commitment that *“ensuring that sharing in education becomes a central part of every child’s educational experience”* as this aligns closely with the Commission’s recommendations for shared education.

5.25 The strategy recognises that *“education undoubtedly plays a crucial role in shaping our children’s lives in the present and in equipping them for the future.”*²⁰ The strategy continues *“while there is already a significant level of collaboration and sharing within and between education sectors, the segregated nature of our education provision means that the majority of our children and young people of school age continue to be educated within a single-identity setting, thus limiting meaningful exposure to other traditions or identities within the school environment”*. The strategy also notes that the Department of Education has emphasised that in progressing shared education *“delivery of educational benefits to children and young people must be the overarching priority”*²¹.

5.26 There are also priorities in early years fulfilling the Department of Education’s Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education policy which places a requirement on statutory early years providers to contribute to improving relations between communities. In addition there is a focus on an intergenerational approach to building good relations.

²⁰ Paragraph 2.52

²¹ [United Community Strategy para 2.54](#)

- 5.27 The strategy commits that *“we will enhance the quality and extent of shared education provision, thus ensuring that sharing and education becomes a central part of every child’s educational experience. We will create ten shared educational campuses based on the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus Model²²”*. The strategy also makes additional commitments around the shared campuses. These include:
- Using area planning to provide the opportunity to consider all potential options
 - A response to the ministerial advisory group on shared education
 - More opportunities for sharing within teacher training
 - Opened up shared facilities - a working group has been established to develop guidance on making facilities available for wider community use
 - They also will ensure that there is existing and developed primary and post-primary anti-sectarianism resources and that teachers are trained, equipped and supported to deliver an effective anti-sectarianism module.
- 5.28 The strategy also addresses the needs of early years children, recognising that it is necessary to have a whole-life approach to young people. Specifically in this and in order to enhance community relations, a buddy scheme in all publically-funded nurseries and primary schools is planned²³. This will involve pairing a child from one section of the community with a child from a different Commission or ethnic background. All of these are in line with the Commissions previously developed education positions and are to be welcomed.
- 5.29 The committee briefing on 25 September 2013 explored the development of the ten shared campuses. The committee heard that the criteria for schools that wish to put themselves forward as proposed shared campuses, have not yet been prepared. As noted elsewhere in this document, the 25 September 2013 briefing²⁴ by officials to the OFMDFM Assembly Committee made clear that since the publication of the strategy, work was now underway with Departments and then stakeholders across the range of the strategic actions and

²² [UNited Community para 2.53](#)

²³ [United Community para 2.49](#)

²⁴ [Committee of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister](#) Hansard 25 September 2013

commitments to develop (and in some cases then pilot) specific delivery plans with specific actions, targets, budgets, timelines etc.

- 5.30 While the Commission recognises that a commitment to create 10 ‘Shared Education Campuses’ could represent the start of a journey, it is important that this is accompanied by a far sighted vision to advance shared education as the norm. In the 2008 publication ‘Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts (Education Challenge Paper)’ and in our submission to the Ministerial Advisory Group on shared Education in 2012²⁵, we endorsed incentivising sharing in education, through new build funding and a series of recommendations, which have not been picked up in this strategy. The role of the Education and Skills Authority will also be important in this context - to ensure that mainstreaming equality and good relations is built in at the outset.

6 Our shared community

- 6.1 The ‘United Community’ Strategy sets out the following:

Shared Aim: to create a community where division does not restrict the life opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone.

Actions: In moving from contested spaces to shared spaces, we will:

- Ensure that all government contracts for work at interface areas and areas of contested space contain a social clause that provides training and employment opportunities and that members of the local population will be able to apply for these opportunities. This social return on investment will be modelled on the Strategic Investment Board’s Social Clauses Toolkit, but will reflect the relative size and amount of the investment taking place;
- Enhance Good relations scrutiny by placing it on a statutory basis with the creation of a new “Equality and Good Relations Commission”, which will build on and incorporate

²⁵ Ibid

the existing Equality Commission and the policy and advisory work of the Community Relations Council;

- Introduce an enhanced good relations section for Equality Impact Assessments for all policies across government;
- Create 4 Urban Villages;
- Create 10 new Shared Neighbourhood Development; and
- Have an overarching review of housing to bring forward recommendations on how to enhance shared neighbourhoods.

Commitments: In moving from contested spaces to shared spaces, we will:

- Support initiatives and schemes that use sport as a tool for building good relations by opening up sporting facilities to all sections of the community;
- Work with community organisations to encourage increasing openness and accessibility with regard to community facilities and to reduce chill factors and fears preventing open access;
- ensure that District Council Good Relations Action Plans display close linkages with the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships;
- Commission more detailed research to assess the current extent of shared service delivery and identify opportunities to enhance shared provision;
- Develop an enhanced EQIA template to ensure that future policy and/or spending commitments are screened for alignment with this Strategy;
- Work with the local community to identify suitable assets within interface areas and at contested spaces to enable transformation;
- Work to ensure that good relations principles are a core component of regeneration and town/city centre management; and

- Seek to create communities of ‘good neighbours’ and ensure that there is greater choice open to those who wish to live in a mixed area.

6.2 While the discussions to come in the All Party Group will deepen the understanding of what needs to be done to create a shared community, the Strategy addresses some aspects of space and places and puts forward models of good practice to be built on and rolled out further. Specifically the Contested Spaces Programme and the Community Safety Strategy, Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities are cited as foundations for future action.

Social Clauses

6.3 We welcome the inclusion of social clauses to provide training and employment opportunities. The Commission has long promoted the use of public expenditure to mainstream equality of opportunity and good relations by public authorities – including via the use of equality budgeting and social clauses in public procurement. We believe that embedding equality of opportunity and good relations in all spending decisions is essential to creating a just and fair society where everyone can participate equally. The Commission’s guidance on procurement²⁶ will assist in spending limited resources most effectively to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Good Relations Scrutiny

6.4 We also welcome enhanced good relations scrutiny and consider that this aligns with our previous recommendations to ensure that good relations considerations inform the development of the next Programme for Government, in establishing priorities and enabling Northern Ireland to be a more cohesive and stable place, and continuing to attract investment. We will be keen to engage with the OFMDFM regarding their thinking on an enhanced EQIA template and how the Commission can make available its expertise to assist.

²⁶ Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement, ECNI, DFP, 2008 – <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECNIPublicSector0508.pdf>

Shared Spaces

- 6.5 The Commission considers it essential to recognise and address the considerable cost of separation between the two main communities. Social segregation is costly: scarce human and financial resources are duplicated, contact between communities is hampered, and misunderstanding between them is potentially engendered. Government policies need to work towards greater integration in an active way.
- 6.6 We welcome the position that the concept of shared space does not have to be ‘neutral space’ or ‘sanitised territory’²⁷ and that it must embrace schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods and leisure facilities²⁸ as well as non-physical barriers²⁹ and states of mind³⁰. We welcome the intention to open up sporting facilities to all sections of the community and to reduce chill factors and fears preventing open access. We note the consideration that recognises that there is some way to go³¹ and that it will require ‘the full and active participation of all relevant Departments and statutory agencies’³², working at government and local level³³.
- 6.7 We expect, following the work of the All Party Group, that a clearer path will be set out in delivering a shared community (including with regards to the issues of expressions of identity). We will be keen to develop and share our thinking so as to inform this process (see discussion later in this document).

Shared Housing

- 6.8 We note the commitment to have an overarching review of housing to bring forward recommendations on how to enhance shared neighbourhoods. In our 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities, we stated that ‘*Segregation in housing and communities reduces choice, represents inefficient housing allocations and a waste of public resources as it reduces the*

²⁷ 3.3 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

²⁸ 3.10 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

²⁹ 3.11 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

³⁰ 3.14 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

³¹ 3.9 - http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

³² 3.33 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

³³ 3.34 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

*resources available for affordable housing and, ultimately, it adds to polarisation between communities*³⁴.

- 6.9 The strategy *“seeks to create communities of good neighbours and ensure that there is greater choice open to those who wish to live in a mixed area”*³⁵. The strategy cites the Life and Times Surveys as demonstrating significant preferences for mixed-religion neighbourhoods. However, evidence from the Department for Social Development on preferences under the Housing Selection Scheme suggests *that “when given the choice, the vast majority of people will choose to go on a waiting list in a single-identity area”*³⁶.
- 6.10 The United Community Strategy aims to see open, accessible housing and recognises the benefit that this can have to training, employment and educational opportunities for people who live in less segregated areas³⁷. The strategy considers that such communities are more sustainable.
- 6.11 The strategy opts to build on the shared neighbourhood programme and proposes that ten new shared neighbourhood developments be brought forward in the next two months. The strategy also proposes that there be four urban villages.
- 6.12 While the strategy describes the existing shared neighbourhood programme, there is little detail as to what the planned programme might look like or further analysis as to its impact. Similarly, there is no detail in relation to the urban villages. The only light that the strategy sheds on these is that *“the aim is that each urban village will be designated a development zone and a local board created. The board will be tasked with coordinating and overseeing the planning and design of the urban village. The board will be given the powers to enable large scale urban village development in a coordinated and needs-based way. Each urban village will have a community focus”*³⁸.
- 6.13 In briefing, the committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, officials reported that the Minister had as

³⁴ Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland, page 22 (October 2007)

³⁵ [United Community Strategy](#) p71

³⁶ [United Community Para 3.62](#)

³⁷ [United Community Strategy3.64](#)

³⁸ [United Community para 3.71](#)

yet brought forward no proposal in relation to the shared neighbourhood developments or the urban villages³⁹.

- 6.14 The Commission recognises that people need to feel safe where they live. We observed that the draft strategy for cohesion and sharing and integration in 2010 did not put forward suggestions for expanding shared housing schemes in the short to medium terms. We underlined that if society is to be transformed, bold steps need to be taken to integrate communities and social housing is key to this.
- 6.15 While we would welcome that good relations principles will be a core component of regeneration and town/city centre management, we would also highlight our December 2012 response⁴⁰ to the consultation on the Northern Ireland Housing Strategy 2012- 2017 (DSD) where we recommended that the core focus of the draft Housing strategy be firmly maintained on meeting assessed housing need, having due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and having regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
- 6.16 With regards to plans to ensure greater choice for those wishing to live in a mixed area, we would reiterate our recommendation made in our response to the housing strategy that encouraged public authorities to be proactive in addressing their good relations duty and encouraged the Department to explore different and imaginative ways to promote mixed housing developments and encourage households to move into mixed housing schemes.
- 6.17 From the absence of detail in the United Community Strategy, questions remain about next steps in achieving shared space. The Strategy refers to the transfer of unused public assets to the community but is not clear on the consideration given to resource and capability for this²⁶. It is not clear how the four Urban Village Regeneration Projects or the ten new Shared Neighbourhood Developments will be chosen. The section on shared services commits only to carrying out detailed research and indentifying opportunities rather than moving to consult on and implement same.

³⁹ [Briefing to OFMdfM Committee 25th Sept 2013 Hansard](#)

⁴⁰ http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECNI_HousingStrategyResponse_v1_141212.pdf

7 Our safe community

7.1 The 'United Community' Strategy sets out the following:

Shared Aim: to create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety.

Actions: In building a safer community, we will:

- Create a 10-year Programme to reduce, and remove by 2023, all interface barriers;
- Create an Interface Barrier Support Package;
- Work to build a culture where people feel comfortable to report when they have been the victim of intimidation or harassment;
- Ensure that the monitoring of the Community Safety Strategy forms a component of the delivery and implementation architecture of this Strategy; and
- Review the Good Relations Indicators to reflect the ongoing importance of safety as an influence on good relations outcomes.

Commitments: In building a safer community, we will:

- Work to build a culture where people feel comfortable to report when they have been the victim of intimidation or harassment;
- Ensure that the monitoring of the Community Safety Strategy forms a component of the delivery and implementation architecture of this Strategy; and
- Review the Good Relations Indicators to reflect the ongoing importance of safety as an influence on good relations outcomes.

7.2 Safety is described in the Strategy as 'a primary concern for all'⁴¹ requiring strengthening of the peace⁴². This will require re-

⁴¹ 4.6 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

⁴² 4.20 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

engaging with young people⁴³ and continuing to show leadership, working strategically within government and alongside community partnerships⁴⁴.

- 7.3 There are clear overlaps between the strands on ‘shared’ and ‘safe’ communities – for example with regards to reducing chill factors and fears preventing open access. Aligned to this, our response to the Cohesion Sharing and Integration Strategy in 2010⁴⁵ noted that people need to feel safe where they live as part of moves to encourage sharing and integration.
- 7.4 The Commission remains of the view that the focus for the Strategy has to be on tackling the persistent and systemic separateness and lack of interconnection between the two main traditions. We believe that one of the key strategic outcomes of this strategy should be to reduce the ongoing and real sense of fear that exists in Northern Ireland. Failing to do so not only puts us at risk of perpetuating sectarian attitudes into future generations, but also risks developing newer fault lines, such as racism and homophobia, which are highlighted by PSNI hate crime statistics⁴⁶.
- 7.5 We welcome the commitment to reduce and remove all interface barriers and recognise the importance of combining this with actions to enhance community safety and confidence. Involving local communities will be an essential part of this process.
- 7.6 We welcome the commitment to monitor community safety and to review the good relations indicators⁴⁷ to reflect the importance of safety.
- 7.7 The Commission envisages that we will further develop our thinking on this strand as part of our plans to further consider issues associated with cultural expression (see discussion further below).
- 7.8 We note the duplication in this section between some of the ‘actions’ and ‘commitments’ noted in the ‘United Community’

⁴³ 4.18 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

⁴⁴ 4.21 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

⁴⁵ See above

⁴⁶ http://www.psnipolice.uk/hate_motivated_incidents_and_crimes_in_northern_ireland_2004-05_to_2011-12.pdf See table 1.1 The number of both homophobic and racist incidents (and crimes) has remained fairly steady since 2004 with a small decline in reported numbers (as of July 2012)

⁴⁷ 4.33 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

strategy, and would encourage the Executive to further develop thinking to ensure appropriate and targeted actions to deliver noted commitments.

8 Our cultural expression

8.1 The 'United Community' Strategy sets out the following:

Shared Aim: to create a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity, and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced.

Actions: In dealing with issues around cultural expression, we will:

- Establish an All Party Group, with an independent chair, to consider and make recommendations on matters including parades and protests; flags; symbols, emblems and related matters; and the past;
- Use the restructured District Council Good Relations Programme to examine ways in which culture can be celebrated in a shared and mutually inclusive way. Options for joint activities, shared learning and respect of diversity will be key features of district council led cultural events;
- Develop, through the Arts Council, options around a new annual shared community relations/Cultural Awareness week, to encourage cultural celebration and exploration for cultures and identities; and
- Encourage the continued use of the arts and sports as a means of improving good relations.

Commitments: In dealing with issues around cultural expression, we will:

- Work in Government and with people to achieve our objective of removing all threatening and divisive symbols that are being used in a way to cause intimidation, or to glorify violence, hate or prejudice; and
- Encourage the continued use of the arts and sports as means of improving good relations.

- 8.2 The Commission considers that if there are to be significant strides forward in terms of normalising our society, the United Community Strategy has to find ways of addressing the legacy of the past, particularly in terms of tackling sectarianism, prejudice and hate
- 8.3 We note the establishment and recent commencement of the work of the All Party Group with an independent chair and are hopeful that this will allow progress in the areas including parades and protests; flags; symbols, emblems and related matters; and the past;
- 8.4 These issues currently represent the major causes of inter (and intra) communal conflict and it will be difficult to envisage the successful implementation of the Strategy without progress in these areas. Addressing the legacy of the past and building a shared and better future must involve and engage everyone, and not just those who have suffered or inflicted that suffering. There needs to be engagement at every level of government, of public and private life, in families, schools, churches, and in voluntary and community organisations.
- 8.5 The Commission considers that a good relations strategy must go beyond the concept of 'tolerance' as set out in the Belfast Agreement. Tolerating difference may convey the message that one does not ever need to embrace or understand it; tolerance could be interpreted as merely putting up with difference. The Commission believes that the use of concepts such as '*respect for diversity*' and '*social cohesion*' are more positive, proactive and inclusive. The Commission recommends that if society is to be truly transformed, the key focus for the Strategy has to be to encourage a greater openness to embrace and accept 'otherness'.
- 8.6 The Commission's response to the 2010 consultation on a strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration stated

"We live in a society where, for some, the expression of one's culture is in many ways interpreted as a statement not of inclusion, but of exclusion from the other; a threat and something to fear... If society is to be truly transformed, the celebration of our different cultures and how this celebration

is perceived by all communities has to fundamentally change”.

- 8.7 To achieve the society envisaged by the Commission, the focus has to change from a sense of independence from those who are different, to one of interdependence and integration: where the wellbeing and success of society is contingent on a cohesive community that celebrates and respects diversity, amongst all the peoples that make up society. This may take a transitioning stage, where we move to greater openness to difference, then acceptance and finally to embracing diversity.
- 8.8 The fair employment legislation which has operated in Northern Ireland since 1976 has helped to change behaviour in the workplace. As a result, we no longer see workplaces dominated by emblems associated with either community. Employers and employees behaviour is regulated by equal opportunities and anti-harassment policies and procedures. Employers and employees are clearly aware of the behaviour expected of them, and in most cases act accordingly.
- 8.9 In October 2006, the Commission, with the Community Relations Council, recommended to the Equality, Good Relations Human Rights Advisory group to the Review of Public Administration greater regulation of the display or non-display of official flags at Council buildings, to ensure a coherent policy may be developed across all Councils.
- 8.10 The Commission guidance, ‘Promoting a Good and Harmonious Working Environment’ provides the Commission’s general advice with regard the flying of the Union Flag. It states:

“The Commission is often asked for its opinion with regard to the flying of the Union Flag at workplaces. We remain of the view that the flying of the Union Flag must be viewed within the context in which it is flown or displayed. Factors affecting the context include the manner, location and frequency with which flags are flown. The Union Flag is the national flag of the United Kingdom and, arising there from, has a particular status symbolising the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. On the other hand, the Union Flag is often used to mark sectional community allegiance. There is a world of difference between these two approaches. Thus, for

example, while it is acceptable and appropriate, in the Commission's view, for a local Council to fly the Union Flag at its Civic Headquarters, the rationale for its display at every Council location, facility and leisure centre would be questionable."

- 8.11 The Commission believes it is essential for all people to respect differences and to build a cohesive interdependent society that embraces diversity. Fairness of treatment, respect for difference and promotion of social cohesion are important components of delivering good relations.
- 8.12 The Commission considers that the United Community Strategy should provide a framework for consideration of matters such as the display of the Union flag. While this is being specifically dealt with in the Haas talks, it is one potential stumbling block that will impact on the success or failure of the strategy.
- 8.13 There are also opportunities to embed equality and good relations in the revised structures of local government and to consider leadership and cultural expression with a Code of Conduct for Councillors
- 8.14 There is an ongoing Commission advice role in respect of the existing Councils and plans by some to review existing policies in relation to the display of the Union flag. The Commission is also giving consideration to related matters in the context of developing its written submission to the Haas All party Group.
- 8.15 We expect, following the work of the All Party Group, that a clearer path will be set out in facilitating cultural expression. The Commission is working to develop further thinking on expressions of identity and culture and this has been the subject of other Commission papers and ongoing work.
- 8.16 We again note the duplication in this section between some of the 'actions' and 'commitments' noted in the 'United Community' strategy, and would encourage the Executive to further develop thinking to ensure appropriate and targeted actions to deliver noted commitments.

9 Measures to aid implementation

9.1 In order to support the achievement of the four shared aims the United Community strategy notes it will put in place a range of measures to aid implementation.

9.2 The 'United Community' Strategy sets out the following:

In Designing Strategy Implementation, we will:

- Establish a Panel comprising all Ministers from the Executive in addition to senior representatives from a range of statutory agencies and community partners;
- Ensure that each Minister reports against the actions and targets attributed to his or her department and show how and to what extent departmental policies are achieving the objectives aligned to this strategy;
- Develop detailed action plans to include key aims, targets and milestones. Resources and responsible departments/agencies will be assigned to each target;
- Establish thematic subgroups under the auspices of the Ministerial Panel to reflect the key priorities of this Strategy; and
- Ensure that the membership of both the Ministerial Panel and associated subgroups will seek to reflect the range of sectors across our community who can contribute to building good relations here.

9.3 The Commission welcomes clear measures to develop action plans, involve stakeholders and ensure Ministerial accountability to deliver on the key priorities of the strategy.

9.4 We consider that any Strategy should be coupled with an unambiguous set of policies and a framework with associated action plans that will help to achieve this vision. There need to be specific and measurable targets and a commitment by Government to make the Strategy work, to evaluate its progress regularly and to adjust it as necessary.

9.5 The Commission notes that the Strategy lists cross-departmental strategies that have a bearing on this Strategy and its purposes, including those on children and poverty, victims and survivors, older age, sexual orientation, gender and race. There is no information given as to the steps that will be

taken to ensure coherence with the 'United Community' strategy or the mainstreaming of good relations into public policy.

- 9.6 The Commission is of the view that without an integrated policy approach, it will be difficult for Together: Building a United Community to fulfil its objectives in delivering transformation across an extended timeframe. Specifically, the Programme for Government is not mentioned in the introduction or as an overarching mechanism for delivery⁴⁸, nor is it clear how good relations will be considered in developing the next Programme for Government. There is also no mention of either the Economic Strategy, or the Investment Strategy 2006-2016. Other key policies and programmes, including the Delivering Social Change Framework and Social Investment Fund, as well as others which are cited as good practice models are given limited attention in terms of implementation and evaluation.
- 9.7 In the current recession, equality of opportunity and good relations remain fundamental to securing sustainable economic prosperity. This should be a major driver for change within the 'United Community Strategy'. The continued development of Northern Ireland's economy will depend in considerable measure on the willingness of others to invest here: to see Northern Ireland as a commercially and socially attractive place where business people will want to do business, now and in the future. Ongoing social conflict provides a telling chill factor to sustained investment, and the unrest over Christmas 2012 and disputes in relation to flags, and marches have damaged the reputation of Northern Ireland as an attractive area for inward investment.⁴⁹
- 9.8 The Commission recommends a review of the strategy, following the report of the All Party Group, to incorporate a broader perspective and mechanisms for integrating good relations into public policy development more widely.
- 9.9 We would reiterate our response to the 2010 consultation on CSI where we recommended that the Executive

⁴⁸ For example, the PfG is mentioned in the section on education, including the commitment for shared education by 2015 but not in relation to social clauses in public sector contracts. (2.55 and 2.52 respectively – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf)

⁴⁹ [See Hansard 23/01/13 Col 294 to 297 for Westminster discussion of impacts of the recent disturbances.](#)

- outlines clear objectives that describe the kind of Northern Ireland that we want in the future;
- sets clear and specific goals in pursuit of those objectives and measures for success, with a timetable for action with short, medium and long-term aspects;
- sets in train the development of an associated action plan, with clear targets and measures, that is focused on outcomes;
- allocates clearly the responsibilities for which organisations will take action;
- ensures a joined-up approach and engagement across all relevant stakeholders;
- provides guidance on suitable accountability by OFMdfM, via a suitably robust monitoring framework.

The 'United Community' Strategy sets out that:

In Enhancing Policy Advice & Challenge to Government, we will:

- Amend the remit, roles and responsibilities of the existing Equality Commission into an Equality and Good Relations Commission; and
- Develop an augmented impact assessment that assesses the extent to which policies and other interventions contribute to meeting the objectives of this overarching Strategy.

In improving Funding Delivery, we will:

- Ensure that funding is directed in a way that secures sustainability of the infrastructure that has been established at a local level and that continues to develop the capacity of individuals and organisations working to build good relations across our society.

9.10 Commissioners will be aware that, at this time, issues with regards to the potential remit, roles and responsibilities of an Equality and Good Relations Commission are being dealt with via a separate strand of Commission papers. The Commission will continue to give consideration to these issues, and, as noted earlier, to the design of an augmented impact assessment.

- 9.11 With regards to providing advice and challenge to Government, and with specific relevance to the wider framework for advancing good relations across a wider range of grounds and thus society as a whole, we would note that developing laws and challenging negative behaviours, such as sectarianism, racism and hate is vital in our society.
- 9.12 Part of the wider context for good relations is the framework of the anti-discrimination legislation and also the statutory equality duties. This framework has been a significant contributor to creating the circumstances for change and may offer further potential with regards to Good Relations. A useful example for illustration is the effect that the FETO⁵⁰ legislation has had on the behaviour of employers, and whether any of this experience could, for example, be applied to shared public spaces.
- 9.13 The Commission has a core duty to keep anti-discrimination legislation under review and to recommend change. We have made a series of recommendations for urgent legislative reform of anti-discrimination law to OFMdFM⁵¹. We believe that ensuring a strong legislative framework for the anti-discrimination legislation and statutory equality duties contributes to creating the right circumstances for delivering good relations across society as a whole.
- 9.14 Our 2008 review⁵² of the effectiveness of Section 75 also recommended the extension of our duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations:

“In the context of the Commission’s statutory remit on good relations, the Commission recommends to government that, the Commission’s duties under Article 42 of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different racial groups be extended to other categories”.

⁵⁰ Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1998/3162/contents/made>

⁵¹ Including reform of the disability equality legislation in order to strengthen protection for disabled people against harassment when accessing goods and services; increased protection under the race equality legislation for Black and Minority Ethnic individuals against harassment on the grounds of colour and nationality across the full scope of legislation; ensure effective legislative protection against discrimination and harassment for LGB people; that age equality legislation is extended to give protection against harassment for people of all ages when accessing goods and services.

⁵² ECNI (2008), Section 75: Keeping it Effective p 64.
<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EffectivenessReviewFinalRpt1108.pdf>

The 'United Community' Strategy sets out that:

In Enhancing Local Council Delivery, we will:

- Use the findings and recommendations from the evaluation of the District Council Good Relations Programme to help inform an enhanced delivery model that reflects the strategic priorities of this Strategy; and
- Ensure that good relations considerations are mainstreamed into the revised arrangements under the Review of Public Administration.

9.15 The final steps are now being taken in the re-shaping of local government. Opportunities exist in the establishment of Transition Committees and their work to ensure that equality and good relations are embedded in their work.

9.16 The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its Concluding Observations in July 2013, recommended that Government 'ensure the participation of women in the post conflict process in Northern Ireland'⁵³. This is not with a view to delivering benefits for women but to make policy and decision making in themselves more representative.

9.17 There are many examples⁵⁴ of the failure to have done so to date. The Commission's shadow report⁵⁵ to CEDAW had recommended that Government introduces temporary special measures to address this. Immediate opportunities for this include 'gender proofing' how the All Party Group conducts its work, the work of the Unionist Forum and the work of the Transition Committees in recreating local government.

9.18 The Commission's Public Policy Statement on Principles for Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations in Local Government Reform is also of relevance in ensuring appropriate leadership⁵⁶. There are also opportunities to embed equality and good relations in the revised structures of local

⁵³ Concluding Observations – UK, CEDAW, July 2013 –

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fCOC%2fSRB%2f14759&Lang=en

⁵⁴ Examples include: representation of women in Statutory Transition Committees; delegation on parading to Cardiff (33 delegates of which 3 were women); apparent composition of Unionist Forum

⁵⁵ Shadow Report to CEDAW, ECNI June 2013 –

http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/CEDAW_2013.pdf

⁵⁶ Principles for Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations in Local Government Reform, ECNI, 2008

government, including our recommendations on a Code of Conduct for Councillors⁵⁷.

- 9.19 The aspects will be the subject of ongoing considerations and engagement with Government.

The 'United Community' Strategy sets out that:

In Monitoring & Evaluating Implementation, we will:

- Review and consult on the Good Relations indicators by the end 2013.

- 9.20 OFMDFM research branch is currently working to review the existing Good Relations indicators. Commission officers are engaged with the OFM review group examining the scope and effectiveness of the existing indicator framework, including ensuring that indicators and both measure the diminution of 'bad' relations, and the development of 'good' relations.

- 9.21 A first meeting of the review group was held on 14 August 2013. We have sought, inter alia, to make clear that the Good Relations indicators should:

- be based on clear definitions
- ensure indicators are sufficiently broadly based to allow the tracking of good relations generally, and not limited to any subset of issues to be taken forward in the United Community Strategy
- ensure indicators should be focussed on tracking the progress of good relations, and not simply the absence of 'bad' relations.

- 9.22 OFMDFM has also advised that the existing good relations indicators set includes indicators that will be used to monitor progress against the current Racial Equality Strategy and that these indicators will be included in the review. This gives a clear signal that good race relations will be an element of the proposed racial equality strategy.

⁵⁷ Code of Conduct

- 9.23 We welcome the commitment to monitor community safety and to review the good relations indicators⁵⁸ to reflect the importance of safety.
- 9.24 The Commission notes the investment made in good relations work to date but considers it imperative that a model is found for identifying good relations spending and monitoring the outcomes. The Strategy refers to large scale projects, such as the Peace Bridge as well as small good relations funds and also some mainstream funding (the Executive Childcare Fund – 2.23, 2.48) which may have good relations outcomes. It is essential that a clear consistent approach to monitoring spend/outcome is developed to clearly account for good relations investment. We suggest that this could be considered in the context of the review of the good relations indicators.

10 Conclusion

- 10.1 The Commission welcomes the production of the ‘United Community’ Strategy, including a commitment to a framework for delivering good relations across a wide range of grounds, going beyond issues of sectarianism.
- 10.2 The law is quite clear that equality and good relations must be central in all decision making on public policy. It is of paramount importance that the Strategy is subject to comprehensive equality impact assessment both to reflect the intent of the legislation and to avail of the contribution to decision-making that effective impact assessment provides. We also do not see evidence of the strategy being proofed against obligations such as those set out in the UNCRPD, CEDAW and CERD.
- 10.3 The document has been subject to criticism, including in the Assembly⁵⁹ for the lack of clarity on how a range of elements will be progressed. This paper has raised questions in relation to the four main themes, and until these are satisfactorily addressed, it will be difficult for the Commission to draw firm conclusions about if and how the strategy and the actions that flow from it will best advance good relations. In setting out our considerations in this paper, we would encourage OFMDFM to

⁵⁸ 4.33 – http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf

⁵⁹ [Committee of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister](#) Hansard 25 September 2013

further develop thinking to ensure appropriate and targeted actions to deliver noted commitments.

- 10.4 Our position clearly calls for a multi faceted approach to promoting good relations. Such work must be predicated in recognising the past, but not allowing the past to dictate our future development. Public spaces, are key elements of this and recent problems in relation to flags, expressions of identity and the naming of public facilities indicate that there is a lack of understanding of the positive nature of the good relations duty.
- 10.5 The Commission recommends that the Executive advance a comprehensive suite of targeted public policy interventions in respect of the elimination of prejudice and the advancement of good relations across a range of equality grounds.

11 Next Steps

- 11.1 The Commission will continue to give consideration to the detailed content of the 'United Community' strategy and to engage with stakeholders to advance matters accordingly. Any recommendations will complement those being developed by the Commission under other parallel strands of Commission work.

12 Action

- 12.1 Commissioners are asked to offer comment, including in particular views on the scope and implementation of the 4 key United Community strands

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October 2013