

Peace III

Belfast City Council

Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan

2007-2010

**A response by Northern Ireland Council
for Ethnic Minorities**

November 2007

Introduction

NICEM is an umbrella organisation representing the interests of black and minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. Currently we have 23 affiliated black and minority ethnic groups as our full member, which represents most of the black and ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland. Our vision is of a society where differences are recognised, respected and valued, a society free from all forms of racism and discrimination, where human rights are guaranteed. NICEM works in partnership, to bring about social change, by achieving equality of outcome and full participation in society.

NICEM welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Belfast City Council Peace and Reconciliation Plan 2007-2010 which outlines how Measure 1.1 Building Positive Relations at the Local Level will be delivered within the Belfast City Council Area.

We should also not lost sight of the Peace III Programme and therefore it is imperative that the impacts of this final programme are far reaching and lasting. Moreover this final programme should builds on and takes account of the experiences of the Belfast LSP which NICEM has been involved with, in order to maximise the impacts of the Peace III Programme within the Belfast City Council area.

Do you agree with the profile of Belfast outlined in the draft Peace Plan

NICEM, in general, agrees with the profile of Belfast outlined in the draft Peace Plan. However it is important that up to date figures are used and that the findings from the city-wide survey under the Strategic Neighbourhood Action Programme are utilised fully and incorporated into the final plan.

What are the main issues to be addressed to achieve the vision?

Does the vision outlined in the Plan reflect your own vision for the city

The vision outlined within the plan is consistent with NICEM's vision of a one city - an open city for all based on equality and opportunity that requires a common vision and strategic framework for its effective development. We also agreed to embed partnership working, alongside key agencies within the city. We also need collaborative leadership in order to enabling Belfast to progress as a city and have sought to promote this throughout the city.

NICEM would have concerns, regards to the four objectives under the Plan, with the breadth of these objectives. As it stands almost any activity could potentially be funded under these headings. It is therefore essential that these objectives are clearly defined and further broken down into concise and clear call criteria. This is to ensure that potential applicants are clear as to the type of initiatives to be funded under the Plan and can therefore make an informed decision whether to complete the resource intensive application process. It will also assist council staff in the assessment of proposals and therefore reduce time spent on the appraisal process by council staff.

What needs to be changed or added to the Peace Plan

NICEM would highlight the importance of building upon existing partnerships built up by the Peace I and II programmes and also the work of the current Conflict Transformation Initiatives through the Peace II extension by Belfast LSP. Many of these partnerships and relationships have taken many years to form due to sensitive issues of mutual respect and trust.

In relation to the dates of achievement listed these are challenging as the staff recruitment process may take several months by the nature of recruitment exercises and it is doubtful that the Council be in a position to call for expressions of interest and develop procedures and operational manuals for the Programme within the given timescales. Also, the timeline highlighted within the Peace Plan does not allow scope for possible negotiations with SEUPB if changes within the action plan are to be made. Adequate time has not been given to establish the partnership, as experience has shown that the nomination process can be lengthy.

Belfast City Council needs to communicate realistic timescales with the community sector in order to manage expectations. Peace II projects will cease to operate in June 2008 and therefore there will be a gap in funding for many organisations whose activities may fit with the Peace III criteria. Will there be any interim funding opportunities for these groups?

In relation to the spend targets identified within the Plan, it must be noted that the spend profile does not take spend targets imposed by the EU and SEUPB into account. These targets are split equally for each year of the Programme.

Who should be involved in the delivery of the Peace Plan?

NICEM agrees with the proposed size of the Good Relations Partnership in order to conduct the business as efficiently and effectively as possible. However, clarification is required on how the Council will seek nominations for the Partnership and what actual decision making powers members will have.

What would happen if the full Council does not agree with the Partnership's recommendation? Would there be a review process in place?

Furthermore, the Council should seek to examine other models of good practice already in existence. Tried and tested procedures exist for the delivery of Peace monies within Belfast which have consistently complied with EU and government audits. Belfast City Council has the option to take advice from organisations who have this experience and would be encouraged to do so rather than delaying the implementation of the plan until they have developed new systems and procedures.

Do you agree with the proposed allocation?

NICEM would point out that the proposed allocation will include an amount for technical assistance and therefore the total budget will be less than the £12 million stated in the plan. What contingency plans are in place if the monies received are less than the £12 million requested? If this is the case, how will the funding be re allocated across each of the four themes? The allocation should be based on evidenced need.

We also agreed with the rationale behind the concept and need to build shared organisational space, however the budget allocation of £389,558 towards a Good Relations Learning and Development Strategy for Council elected members and employees, from the information available the proposal does not appear to represent value for money and should be scaled down in order to utilise more of this budget towards projects. At present it is difficult to ascertain the benefits of the initiative to Belfast as a whole.

In addition concerns have been raised regarding the budget allocation towards the Migrant Workers Forum and Support Network. Whilst NICEM agrees with the importance of such a network within Belfast to address issues of sectarianism and racism, we would like to see substantial support and services will be provided in which currently there is nothing on the grounds. We also see a strong need to develop the local infrastructure for the new migrant communities, as well as settled ethnic minorities. Against this

background we should use this unique opportunity to remedy the problem in order to have substantial impacts on the ground. Moreover, the Department of Employment and Learning takes the lead to set up the Migrant Thematic Sub-group under the Race Equality Forum. Whilst we support the Belfast initiative, we also suggest more co-ordination and collaboration between the two networks in order not to duplicate works and shares good practice.

From the information provided the budget of £456,815 does not appear to represent value for money with 67% of total budget allocated towards staff costs and an over emphasis on research rather than on the ground activity. As mentioned above, DEL will take the lead to develop research strategies on all migrant issues cut across all department. It is also important to note that both these proposals will be subject to external economic appraisal and this will impact on the timescales for delivery.

Conclusion

NICEM broadly agree with the content of Belfast City Council's Peace Plan and its overall aims and objectives, however as detailed above concerns exist regarding the detail of the funding objectives as well as the unrealistic timescales for delivery. This could impact on the ability of the Council to adhere to EU regulations regarding spend targets and could have an overall negative impact on the delivery of the programme. It is therefore important that these issues are dealt with first and foremost before the plan is implemented.

NICEM strongly believes that the lessons learnt throughout the delivery of Peace I and II regarding partnership working at a local level are carried forward in the delivery of the Peace III Plan and that the progress towards Peace and reconciliation already achieved through the delivery of projects under these programmes is built upon.

