



SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Local Government Policy Division 1
Department of the Environment
Level 4, Causeway Exchange
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Belfast,
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Please find below our response to the Draft Statutory Guidance for the Operation of Community Planning.

South Belfast Partnership Board – A Board which brings together all sectors – community, statutory, political and private – to strengthen and better target the efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the Government to tackle the economic, social and environmental problems which affect the most disadvantaged areas of South Belfast.

General Points:

- South Belfast has a diverse demography in terms of areas of affluence and areas of need. An area based plan would need to follow an in-depth analysis of South Belfast so that services can have benefit across all communities.
- Through a spatial analysis community planning should ensure that there is equality and balance to the division of services and resources.
- There needs to be more thought on structures rather than simply engaging views from the public. It would be helpful if the demonstrated a working collaborative structure which details how services will flow and what part community organisations, statutory agents and businesses will play.
- Quite generic and reads like a community planning guidance document that could apply anywhere. It doesn't read like a document that is specific to Northern Ireland.
- Guidance is undoubtedly well intentioned, but many of guidance points set out are somewhat academic and it remains to be seen whether they will achieve what they set out to do. It is not clear what will happen if Statutory bodies fail to engage in a meaningful manner.
- Better clarity and definition needed of terminology i.e. 'community planning partnership', 'strategic partnership board', 'partnership panel', 'support partners'. A diagram would be useful in aiding understanding of process and roles.
- Would have welcomed a commitment that community planning be undertaken in practice, in so far as possible, within local communities and not as is often the case

from central Council buildings. Many sections of communities have little if any connect with formal council buildings. Placing community planning structures in a perceived neutral and/or accessible location offers an opportunity to challenge this.

- The language in parts is more appropriate for someone from a planning or academic background, for some business, community and civil servants this may not be as accessible as a document of this nature should be.

Specific sections:

- It may be helpful for the DOE to look at the existing structures of the Area Partnerships and in particular the South Belfast Partnership. Our board consists of statutory, political, community and business representatives. Our work currently permeates through Departments. (3.29, 3.31, 3.33)
- Welcome para 3.5 – potential for thematic or local area partnerships.
- Welcome potential for support partners to be involved (para's 3.31 – 3.35).
- Welcome acknowledgements on p.11/12 of benefits to using existing partnerships. However needs to be recognised that this would place additional resource demands on partnerships, and it is unclear whether the Council are offering any resources (e.g. financial, staff,).
- Para. 6.2 / 6.13-6.15 – acknowledge the importance of getting a baseline of existing conditions in an area. In this regard we would draw attention to the wealth of information available in 'grass root' community organisations and neighbourhood/area partnerships. Collating this baseline information can be resource intensive.
- Para. 6.8 – recognise the need to garner views but would stress the importance of avoiding consultation fatigue. Large scale engagement exercises should only be carried out if really needed.

General comment on questions:

The six consultation questions don't really get to the heart of the community planning process.

Question 1 Is the guidance clear, specific and proportionate ?

No. The guidance is quite generic and difficult to imagine in a specific/local context.

Question 2 Do you feel the guidance will help you implement community planning ?

Unclear. Area Partnership Boards and Neighbourhood Partnerships are already doing community planning with varying degrees of success. It remains to be seen how this experience will be utilised or replaced. There is concern that community planning may remain at too high or strategic a level such that local communities are effectively side-lined.

Question 3 Do you feel one year is a sufficient time frame to develop a community plan and if not what alternative would you suggest ?

This question needs to be better defined. It may be the case that a year is not sufficient to produce a plan of high quality that will provide a robust baseline for development. The prevailing view is that to adequately and appropriately engage the community will take time

Question 4 What would you define as a reasonable degree of consensus reached to enable decision making ?

This is a difficult issue to define. It would be useful if more information could be provided in the guidance as to how consensus is to be achieved. There is a lack of clarity in the draft in relation to achieving consensus, and we would seek detailed guidance, in particular on how to achieve consensus on the core aspects of the plan. It would have been useful had the Department included examples of how consensus is agreed in community planning processes elsewhere in the UK, and instead put forward several options as suggestions.

Question 5 Is the guidance clear in respect of equality and good relations duties?

Yes. The Race Relations Strategy could be referenced.

Question 6 Does the guidance sufficiently define partner roles and responsibilities?

More work will be required in relation to the links and relationships with the voluntary and community sector, given that community planning is intended to be a bottom-up process. The voluntary and community sector participants may require advice and support in relation to governance.