



SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Catherine Taggart
Community Development Manager
Belfast City Council
Development Department
The Cecil Ward Building
4-10 Linenhall Street
Belfast
BT2 8BP

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Dear Catherine

RE: Belfast Community Investment Programme

Further to the recent workshop you attended in South Belfast on 11 April 2013, I am pleased to enclose a copy of the report prepared by our facilitator which summarises the issues and views that were discussed as part of that meeting. Whilst we appreciate that you have already discussed some of these matters, but given the delay in the formal public consultation process, we thought there may be benefit in formally recording the feedback from South Belfast communities at this stage.

In addition to this, we have since taken forward some mapping work across South Belfast and would add to the workshop comments the following comments that we have received as part of this work:

- **Scale of Impact:** Across South Belfast we understand there are 35 individual community and voluntary sector organisations affected by the proposals, with current contracts totalling some £955k. Whilst we recognise there may be some duplication and therefore room for streamlining as part of the BCIP process, it is also clear that any uncertainty around the future funding climate and other related programmes, such as Neighbourhood Renewal, will have major implications for the sector.

There is therefore undoubtedly a need to support existing groups during the transition period and also a risk that key services could be lost if funding is not secured in a timely manner. To help illustrate the implications of this, one Housing Association noted that although not directly affected by community funding, they “are aware that withdrawal of funding for community projects may have implications for our tenants, for example by leading to a rise in ASB or vandalism.”

South Belfast Partnership

23 University Street, Belfast BT7 1FY. Tel: 028 90244070; Fax: 028 90245565; 028 90241760
email: enquiries@southbelfast.org; <http://www.southbelfast.org>
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Similarly, one local residents' association noted that if their annual revenue grant currently received from Belfast City Council were to be withdrawn, all activities held in the community house would be affected. This includes a number of projects that are directly funded by the existing grant – such as a breakfast club, a young people's club, a young Men's Club, Summer Schemes, local festivals and a Lunch Club – as well as programmes that are not funded, but that would cease if the organisations core funding was gone, such as daily housing advice, supporting residents with form filling, etc.

- **Community and Voluntary Sector:** A number of locally based voluntary organisations (as opposed to organisations representing local communities) have also noted implications. For example, one charity noted that whilst core support services which come from Belfast Trust Service Level Agreements would not be affected by the changes, funding for related education and training programmes may be. Clearly when funding decisions are being made, there needs to be recognition of a distinction between organizations that are community based and organizations, who deliver services across the province or City-wide but that are, in many cases, located within South Belfast.
- **Wider funding climate:** The BCIP proposals must also be considered alongside broader changes in funding arrangements to the sector, such as the Public Health Agency's move to commissioning rather than grant funding, or the future of Neighbourhood Renewal. Whilst, some groups welcome proposed new procurement arrangements and see this as an opportunity to work in partnership with a number of organizations to go forward with funding applications, there is also a risk that uncertainty in related funding programmes could lead to an hugely inflated demand for the proposed new BCIP funding, which would be impossible to meet. This is part of the reason that we at South Belfast Partnership Board have begun a broad community conversation in relation to future community regeneration and community planning models for South Belfast, to help ensure that the sector is prepared for the forthcoming changes. We see this process as essential and welcome the support the Council are able to offer.
- **Special Interest Groups:** A number of groups have raised queries in relation to where communities of interest sit in BCIP, as well as communities of location. Although some of the funding to the minority ethnic sector, for example, is unlikely to be directly affected by BCIP, such groups still “play a significant role in wider community development in South Belfast”. Furthermore, some minority ethnic groups are directly affected where groups are in receipt of revenue funding from the Council. The same considerations apply to other Section 75 groups, such as women, elderly, disabilities, etc.

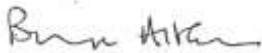
Moreover, such special interest groups are often ‘double marginalized’ as many live in areas of deprivation and also suffer from issues such as targeted anti-social behavior and crime, racism, sexism, etc. One local organization noted that “the issue of low-income and poverty also affects...ethnic minorities, particularly those who are asylum seekers or refugees, or have difficulties to recourse of public funds.”

We are therefore keen to “ensure that diversity is mainstreamed into the community¹” and that it is “taken into consideration when applying for all funding.” It is vital that the capacity of diverse communities is supported to enable communities to support each other and build capacity to empower communities. One of our members noted that “this is most needed for BME communities and the local communities” so that the geographic communities are ‘developed’ as ‘inter-cultural’ communities on the whole for South Belfast.” Therefore in practice it comprises of black, minority and ethnic individuals who live in a range of neighbourhoods across the city, as equally is true of for example, the Chinese, Polish, Roma, Filipinos or Somalis. We therefore wish to support their efforts to enhance integration across communal lines.

- **Other Sectors:** During our mapping study, we received an interesting response from one of the local school principals. In essence, although schools receive their core funding from DENI, the reduction in school budgets over the last few years looks set to continue, meaning that schools will “need to identify areas of funding that can enhance the children’s education and experiences at school.” Schools currently provide a range of services that benefit the local communities and which contribute to the community development and regeneration of our neighbourhoods, and so it is likely that some schools, which often have associated voluntary community-based charities, will continue to seek funding from sources other than DENI. Similarly, any changes in the services being provided in the communities may have implications in terms of demand for services within other sectors, such as education. Clearly these demands and relationships between sectors need to be carefully managed.

I trust this provides you with a little more information to assist in the development of the new BCIP programme. We will certainly continue this ‘conversation’ within South Belfast and we will continue to welcome the opportunity to contribute further as the new arrangements are firmed up.

Yours sincerely,



Briega Arthurs
Chief Executive Officer

¹ The ‘community’ may be taken for granted and there is an implicit assumption that it means a more or less homogeneous group of people in a particular neighbourhood. However for BCP, we wish that the ‘community’ is seen in its entirety and its broadest sense to reflect inclusivity, diversity and equality to include those that are of indigenous, traditional, cultural, ethnic and new arrived members who make up the ‘community’