

Response to the consultation on the draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Introduction

The public consultation on the Executive's draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI), was launched by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 27 July 2010. The aims of CSI are to bring about the conditions to build a shared society, where all people can enjoy peace and stability, and be free from all forms of racism, sectarianism and hate. The CSI Strategy is intended to address the issues facing our divided communities, including our disaffected youth; as well as to address those issues facing minority ethnic groups, both established and newly arrived.

Following the conclusion of the consultation the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) commissioned a comprehensive report detailing the analysis of the consultation responses, which were many (288) and varied. This report also considered the evidence and opinions gathered at the 11 public meetings, 15 sector specific meetings and the survey data from the Omnibus Survey.

It is, therefore, not the intention of this document to revisit each and every one of the consultation responses received in respect of the CSI consultation process. Rather, this response focuses on the main themes arising from the consultation and offers the department's views on how the issues raised can be addressed to move the programme towards implementation.

In the first part we look at the main themes, these are set out individually and a response follows. In the second part we look at policy implications arising from the consultation, these issues are set out individually and a response follows. Finally, we look at further issues arising which are considered to be central to Programme development. Some of these are the same or similar to issues dealt with in other sections, these issues are set out individually and a response follows.

More detail on everything contained in this document can be accessed by following the link (www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/csiconsultationanalysis/)

1. Main Themes Arising from the CSI Consultation

1.1 Structure of the Document

The document itself was subject to criticism, with respondents suggesting that it lacked coherence and portrayed some sections of society in a negative way. In particular respondents commented on the section in relation to short, medium and long term goals; and the way young people were portrayed.

Additionally there was criticism of the title “Cohesion, Sharing and Integration”. Respondents felt this was misleading, suggestive of a wider focus on social cohesion, rather than tackling racism, sectarianism and hate.

Finally, the document was seen by some to be out of touch in the language it used, which was not felt to reflect the position experienced by respondents on the ground.

Response

A) Lack of coherence

The document places the programme within the context of Section 75 (1) and (2), of the NI Act 1998. The document outlined that this policy was one of a family of policies affecting s.75 groups but that the focus was primarily on tackling sectarianism and racism (s.75:2). We will seek to make this clearer in the final draft. In relation to the section on short, medium and long term goals, we will examine these again in light of responses. We remain committed to tackling the issues identified under these headings; as we are doing with the Contested Spaces Programme. It is important to remember that we cannot address issues in the long term without taking short term actions and we will clarify this section of the document in the final draft.

B) Negativity

We accept that some respondents read the section on young people as taking a negative view of their contribution to society as a whole. We would like to

reiterate that we see young people as vital to the success of the CSI programme; they have a central role to play in helping achieve a shared and better future. We will look again at the language used in relation to this section of the document and ensure that it reflects our true feelings on young people's vital and often very positive contribution. However, tackling so-called "recreational rioting" remains a key challenge in working with communities to ensure security concerns are addressed, particularly in our aim of reducing and removing "barriers" and interfaces.

C) Misleading Title

There were several comments on the title for the programme and we will revisit this when developing a revised programme.

D) Language out of Touch

This is an important programme, about setting the tone for a more positive and engaged society in the future. We accept the need to ensure that the language used is appropriate to the difficult and often sensitive issues the document seeks to address.

1.2 Intended Focus of the Programme

Respondents reported confusion throughout the consultation process about the intended focus of the CSI programme. This confusion appears to have arisen as a result of the introductory text, where CSI was stated to aim to promote cohesion, sharing and integration for all sections of society. Others wondered whether the programme was just aimed at the Section 75(2) categories of religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

Response

The intended focus of the programme is very much in line with the approach taken in "A Shared Future", and that is to tackle racism, sectarianism and all forms of hate. So the CSI programme does follow the Section 75(2) approach of trying to improve good relations between religious belief, political opinion

and racial group. While good relations are mostly about Section 75(2), they cannot be artificially divorced from the equality duty in Section 75(1). Section 75(2) has to be placed in the context of Section 75(1); and that is what the consultation document sought to do. It is also worth pointing out that the dangers of racism, sectarianism and hate are seen in all sections of our society. We would be remiss in our duty to tackle these issues if we did not seek to see them tackled everywhere. However, if the contextualisation of good relations within the programme was not clear enough, we will revisit this and ensure the aims and scope of the programme are clear in the final policy document.

1.3 **Approach**

There was a feeling that the CSI programme was a step back from the approach taken in “A Shared Future”. Respondents also commented that the document did not address difficult issues and lacked definitions of racism and sectarianism; additionally, there was perceived to be a lack of analysis on the causes and links between racism and sectarianism.

The responses also indicated that the document seemed to “shy away” from difficult issues, and was focused on “managing, rather than addressing, division”. Respondents also commented that commonalities, rather than differences, need to be understood and celebrated.

Response

All the Executive Ministers are committed to addressing the legacy of division. Indeed the CSI programme was agreed by all Ministers. This is not to step back from “A Shared Future”; rather it is intended to develop and take ownership of a good relations programme, that has been agreed locally, and which we can take forward together.

We do not accept the charge that we are prone to shy away from difficult decisions or issues. The Executive has given strong and united leadership

through difficult recent circumstances brought about by the economic downturn and by those who would seek to undermine the peace process.

We would emphasise that the framework for government delivery of the CSI programme will be developed in our Action Plan. We would also point out that the CSI programme is about relationships between people, so there must be an element of what people can do for themselves, and alongside government actions, to improve situations; as well as what voluntary and community groups can do. The draft document was not intended to be an academic analysis but rather identified key problems and give commitments to tackling those.

We agree with respondents on the issue of commonalities and we will try to draw that issue out more successfully in our final document.

1.4 Inclusion of Specific Sectors

Respondents made much of the perceived exclusion from the CSI document of a number of specific sectors. These included victims and survivors; women; Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgendered (LGB&T) people; voluntary and community groups; business; older people; and rural communities.

This feeling of groups' exclusion seems to have arisen from an apparent lack of cross-referencing to other government documents, strategies and programmes.

For example, women's groups felt that the Gender Equality Strategy should have been cross-referenced and specific actions regarding women should have been formulated. LGB&T groups felt the programme reflected a taboo around LGB&T issues; in particular there was a complaint over the lack of reference to homophobic hate crimes.

Response

We will ensure further cross-referencing of the programmes and strategies that the Executive is pursuing to improve the life chances of its citizens. At the same time we do not wish the CSI programme to focus on what is being done as opposed to what we still need to do. We will seek to achieve this balance in the revised CSI programme and ensure that the positive work we are doing across departments, in bringing society together and addressing the legacy of division, is brought out more fully in the final document.

The introductory paragraphs of the draft document make clear this is only one of a family of policies. Some of the outlined areas are not dealt with in detail in the CSI document because there either is a specific policy/strategy and action plan for that sector; or one is currently being completed.

We have much to be proud of in the work we are doing already including the 10-year Children's Strategy; the new Victims Strategy and the soon to be established Victims and Survivors Service; the Gender Equality Strategy; the Child Poverty Strategy and the work on poverty, social inclusion and disability. In addition we will be introducing a new Strategy for Older People; a new Race Equality Strategy and the CSI programme is quite specific that we will introduce a new Sexual Orientation Strategy.

We would reiterate again that CSI cannot be seen to be the answer to every ill in society. At its core, CSI is a programme to address political, religious and racial good relations issues, but we do accept that these issues cannot be seen in isolation and the final document will ensure we interlink our current and future work more fully with the aims and objectives of a shared and better future.

1.5 Unfulfilled Potential

CSI was perceived to be a politically negotiated document, between parties whose views were opposed. As such it was thought to be unreflective of what the majority of the population actually want.

Additionally, respondents felt there was a risk of the programme not being adequately resourced, due to a perceived lack of commitment from the main political parties.

Response

It is correct to say that the CSI programme was negotiated and agreed politically taking into account policy advice. In addition, it was discussed and endorsed as a basis for consultation by the Executive as a whole. However, we also engaged with a wide range of stakeholders including CRC and the Council on Ethnic Minorities in the development of the programme.

We do not accept that the CSI goals of promoting the safety of vulnerable groups; addressing community division; promoting equality of opportunity and tackling disadvantage; providing safe and shared spaces; and building a society where cultural diversity is embraced and celebrated, are goals that the majority of our population do not want.

As mentioned above, this is our locally agreed good relations programme. We have agreed to find concessions on a revised document by way of a five party working group. We would, therefore, refute any suggestion that we do not have political commitment to adequately resource and take this work forward. It is worth highlighting that funding for good relations work has actually increased through OFMDFM since devolution.

2. Policy Implications

2.1 Leadership

The consultation shows that the public wants to see strong collaborative leadership. There was strong support for the establishment of a ministerial panel, and a clear intent that good relations policy is an Executive responsibility and at the heart of decision making.

Response

We are pleased the public supports the ministerial panel. We agree that strong, collaborative leadership is needed and we believe that has been demonstrated by the First Minister and deputy First Minister since devolution..

2.2 Implementation

The ministerial panel was well supported as a mechanism for interdepartmental cooperation, but some indicated that support was conditional on ministerial accountability in the form of a regional and independent body such as the Community Relations Council.

The district council good relations programme was also supported.

Respondents were keen to see local government tackling the hard and difficult issues without placing party political obstacles in the way.

Finally, respondents wanted to see increased engagement and communication mechanisms between civic society and local and central government. A top-down approach was not desired; rather respondents wanted to see community empowerment and structures reflecting interdependence.

Response

We suggested a number of proposals within the consultation document on methods of implementation and accountability. We note that some respondents strongly indicated the view that there was a need for an organisation like the Community Relations Council.

We accept the points made about a top-down approach versus a community empowerment model. It is our desire to see all communities engaged in good relations work and we will strive to ensure communities are able to participate in a meaningful way in achieving a shared and better future. We are committed to combining strong leadership with community empowerment and buy-in.

2.3 Acknowledging the past

Many respondents did not think the CSI programme dealt effectively with the past conflict. They wished to see the document placed in the context of a divided history and the additional complexities that brings.

Respondents drew comparison between the Peace III programme and CSI, arguing that CSI lacked contextual research, policy and legislative background – in contrast to Peace III.

Respondents considered that CSI needed an effective strategic approach to dealing with core issues and delivering good relations.

Response

We all acknowledge that the need for a programme like CSI arises out of the unique set of circumstances in which we live. We don't believe, however, that CSI needs to dwell unduly on the past in order to give shape to our future. We have had inquiries into past injustices, we are setting up a Victims and Survivors Service and an element of Peace III, namely 1.2, is all about acknowledging and dealing with the past. We believe CSI needs to take these issues into account and to look beyond them, and set out our positive vision for the future. CSI was not intended to be a lengthy piece of academic research and analysis.

We agree that CSI needs an effective strategic approach to dealing with core issues and delivering good relations. We will develop that mechanism within our action plan for delivery.

2.4 Looking forward

Despite wishing to see the document acknowledge the past, many respondents wished to see a strong positive vision for the future. Respondents want individuals to identify with, and believe in, this strong vision. They want something that is more than a legislative requirement to endorse rights, equality and respect.

Response

We agree that the programme should portray a strong positive vision for the future. We further agree that without individuals identifying and believing in the vision, legislation alone will not be enough. We will work with the five-party group, and stakeholders on refining out vision within CSI.

2.5 Prioritisation

The consultation highlights broad support for the main goals and themes of the programme. However, respondents suggested that there was the need for an additional requirement to demonstrate that good relations, in its widest sense, is at the heart of Government, interlinked through its policies and strategies, reflected in its structures, agencies and day to day business.

Response

We agree with the consultation findings on this point, which supports our earlier view that the public was not unsupportive of the main aims of the CSI programme. We agree that the aims of building a better and shared society must flow through all the work we do across government and through our structures and agencies. We will work hard to ensure that this is the case. We believe that the establishment of the five-party working group will help in this task.

2.6 Sharing in Education

Youth and education was a dominant theme of many consultation responses. Most supported the opinion that separatism in education perpetuates division, leaving inter-generational prejudice unchallenged.

Respondents were keen to see a re-examination of teacher training, good relations training for all teachers and the compulsory delivery to pupils of practical good relations modules/projects covering a range of diversity issues. They also wished to see greater collaboration between schools and the need to instil an ethos of good relations in schools.

There was strong support for good relations and appreciation of diversity to be at the heart of education policy and for the full spectrum of sharing in education to be embraced.

Response

In line with our earlier commitment that we will ensure our young people are given a proper place in shaping their communities and our shared and better future, we will ensure that the role formal education can play in this process is given careful consideration.

Our Ministers have already publicly voiced views on the need for greater integration within education. Along with the Minister for Education and the Executive, we will be working to find solutions to the issues raised in the consultation.

The document was published as a high level strategic direction and it was acknowledged that increased departmental reports were required.

We must not, however, forget that some work has already been started by schools and colleges from all sides to bridge the gap between communities and we will consider carefully what has worked well in these cases. We will ensure the final published document considers the role of education fully.

2.7 Sharing residential space

There were mixed views on the issue of shared residential space within the consultation responses. Some felt the development of shared space should include residential areas, others felt that there should be freedom to choose where to live, with a fear expressed that mixed housing was not safe and did not work.

Views were expressed that all of the country needs to be welcoming and that existing shared housing areas need to be protected. Choice is a key consideration; about where people live, go to school, work and socialise. There is a need to understand the reasons behind segregation in housing and how this might be overcome.

Response

The Department for Social Development and the Housing Executive have been working on mixed social housing areas and there is an increasing public appetite for such areas. This is being advanced through the Shared Future New-build and the Shared Neighbourhood Programmes. The Executive will continue to support such schemes.

We agree that more information and detail in relation to these and other initiatives should be included in the document.

3. Further Issues Arising

Already dealt with

3.3 Celebrating diversity or commonality

Respondents were critical of the perceived narrow approach to good relations taken by the programme, particularly the emphasis upon “mutual accommodation” and celebration of diversity. Some felt the language of integration was significantly less preferable to language of inclusion.

Response

We do not accept the programme has a narrow focus. The point of the programme is to promote good relations and end exclusion from all aspects of cultural, political, social and economic life. If that is not clear in the draft we will ensure it is addressed in the final document.

The use of integration, instead of inclusion was not designed to convey a subliminal message that the programme was not inclusive. We don't believe it is possible to have integration without inclusion. We will clarify our thinking on this in the final document.

3.4 Distilling and building on knowledge

Respondents were keen to see collation, sharing and dissemination of research and best practice about what works well in improving good relations. They felt that it was often the case that only large projects with significant funding were subject to formal evaluation, and that they would like to see more of that at the grassroots level. Additionally, respondents wished to see increased networking and sharing ideas at local community level, through the District Councils Good Relations Programme.

Response

We agree with this recommendation. We will work with projects, big and small, to improve evaluation. More evaluation is already taking place within OFMdFM, and we will ensure that evaluation features strongly in the action plan for delivery.

3.5 Exploring cultural expression and shared space

The complexities around the issues of cultural expression and shared space were highlighted by the consultation responses. Many respondents wanted to see government and local councils taking the lead to make town centres free from cultural expression. However, the need to balance respect for others' cultural identity with respect for others' views and opinions was recognised also.

Respondents were keen to see a review of the flags protocol and the progression of a framework for the regulation of public assemblies. Both should be informed by a clear understanding of localised relationships and concerns.

Response

We accept that there are issues around the flying of flags; and that a delicate balance must be struck between the rights of all our citizens to express their own cultural identity, and the need to ensure people do not feel intimidated by such expression.

Actions towards addressing these issues can be seen in the Re-imagining Communities programme, where people take ownership of how they want to present their own communities. Programmes like this provide a way to address these difficult issues positively.

Additionally, Priority 2 of the Peace III programme, “Contributing to a shared society”, is also contributing to the creation of new opportunities for shared space and addressing segregation, and will contribute to developing a shared vision of society and the changing of attitudes; and in so doing enhance reconciliation.

3.6 Tackling interfaces

Some respondents suggested that the most divided communities are targeted, with solutions focusing on regeneration of interface areas. It was also suggested that an audit of land around interface sites should be carried out, in order that potential for community partnerships and social economy businesses may be better understood.

Response

We will look again at this issue in the light of the consultation responses and suggestions put forward. We do have the ‘Contested Space Programme’, which has been established in conjunction with the Atlantic Philanthropies, which is providing new opportunities for communities to address issues prevalent to ‘contested space’ areas.

3.7 Developing Leaders

Throughout the consultation process, respondents requested strong collaborative leadership from central and local government. Additionally they wanted to see increased training and engagement opportunities for people in positions of authority focusing on increasing awareness of issues relating to equality, diversity, civic responsibility and respect for others when carrying out their duties.

Response

As mentioned earlier the First Minister and deputy First Minister are very aware of their responsibilities in this regard, and have shown strong collaborative leadership in recent months following actions designed to undermine the peace process.

The District Councils' Good Relations Programme is another example where positive leadership from councils can contribute to improving good relations at the local level.

3.8 Investigating structural capacity

Substantive numbers of respondents wanted co-ordinated working practices across central and local government and their agencies, in order that institutionalised segregation would end.

Education and housing were identified as the lead contenders for reform, although many wished to see good relations mainstreamed through each government department and it was perceived that CSI should act as the mechanism for collaborative working practice.

Respondents wished to see a review undertaken to determine the capacity and suitability of the full range of existing structures to deliver change.

Response

We agree that a co-ordinated approach is needed across all levels of government to ensure collaboration and mainstreaming of good relations in everything we do.

All structures of government are kept under review to assess their ability to deliver the PfG and priority actions.

3.9 Monitoring and Evaluation

Respondents wished to see an evaluation framework developed. The impact of the programme on attitudes, behaviour, strategic and structural change must be measured and independently evaluated.

Response

The delivery structures for CSI will contain an action plan and we will measure the achievement of that action plan against outcomes and outputs.

We also have a set of good relations indicators which has allowed us to track changes in good relations from the baseline year of 2005/2006. We will review some of these to ensure they are fully fit for purpose.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The consultation on the draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Programme is continuing to be developed following the three-month consultation which concluded last autumn. Since then the region has faced a number of challenging issues and Ministers have displayed positive, united leadership through this period.

Following the election and formation of the new Executive in May 2011, the First Minister and deputy First Minister announced the creation of a five-party working group that will seek consensus on issues that will enable the publication of a cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. That group will consider the consultation responses, and all Departments will be asked for their input. All consultation responses will be shared with the working group as well as the Committee. A road map that sets out the steps and timetable for the strategy and a robust action plan will be brought forward.

v.2 5/7/11

The tone of the consultation responses reflected the importance and challenging nature of the issues that were covered in the draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Programme. The aim is to produce a revised Strategy, after consideration of the comments received in the consultation process.

The five-party discussions agreed a timescale of autumn for the revised strategy and December for high level action plan..