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# FINAL REPORT

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SCOPING PUBLIC SECTOR PERCEPTIONS  
OF INTERFACE ISSUES - UPDATE

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## BELFAST INTERFACE PROJECT

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**Background:**

In 1996, the Belfast Interface Project (BIP) carried out a scoping study of public sector agencies' perspectives that underlay their engagement with communities that live along interfaces in Belfast. BIP commissioned PMG Consulting Ltd to carry out an update of this study in 2004. This is the report on the updated study. The study involved interviews with sometimes middle and more often senior management in the public sector agencies whose work bears most directly on interface communities. The study design is 'qualitative' in the sense that we sought to develop our understanding of the general way in which the public sector understands the interface issues, rather than 'quantitative' with a careful enumeration of the numbers holding this or that opinion.

**Agency Perspectives on Context**

- Current demographic changes within Belfast create pressures that both communities along interfaces may experience differently;
- Catholic/nationalist communities experience increased overcrowding and/or expansion, while Protestant/unionist communities experience depopulation and/or contraction of boundaries;
- The public sector view is that it has ensured access to statutory services for interface communities by organising parallel provision for these communities and that this results in costly duplication;
- Many officials believe the community infrastructure within interface communities has grown and that there are structures in place to facilitate some limited but important communication between communities;
- Funding agencies consider that there is a continuing need for further measures to build additional capacity in the community infrastructure of interface areas;
- Funders of community-based action are likely to require greater evidence of the effectiveness of the work in relation to intra- and inter-community development outcomes and this will, in turn, buttress the claims community-based organisations wish to make for additional public investment.

**Agency Perspectives on Relevance**

- Staff at senior and middle management level in health and social services report that they have developed greater understanding of both the effects of communal violence on people, including on those living in interface areas, and the particular advantages of cooperating with organisations based in the communities most affected in order to deliver social care to local people;
- Agencies recognise the inadequate level of provision for young people living in interface communities and the need to develop much better strategies to support them;
- With regard to jobs, the thinking of key agencies shifted from that of unemployment (too many seeking available jobs) to worklessness (too many not seeking available jobs), the latter emphasising the identification and resolution of 'barriers' to available jobs through intermediaries (including organisations based in interface communities) and intermediate labour market measures ('sheltered' or 'protected' labour market schemes);

- *People and Place* offers opportunities for interface communities and groups indigenous to them to influence the spending patterns of mainstream public sector budgets and while there is much that requires clarification on how the renewal strategy is to work, it will be important for the groups to engage with the structures that emerge to oversee its implementation;
- Many agencies consider that technocratic or pragmatic responses to the issues of interface communities are the best that can be achieved and that these will emerge from the agencies' working-out of *A Shared Future, the Policy & Strategic Framework for Good Relations in N.I.*;
- An overarching issue that organisations based in interface communities will increasingly need to address is that of enabling their own communities to articulate their own responsibility for development of interface communities;

### **Agency Perspectives on Challenges**

- The primary challenge that the public sector is attempting to address is that of the integration of their work across organisational boundaries and this is made more difficult in NI, compared to elsewhere, due to the large range of different governmental and statutory organisations we have;
- Where there is a requirement for inter-sectoral coordination as well, the challenge increases as the competition within the community sector makes the identification of suitable partners more difficult.
- The public sector expects that government will require it to function within tight budgetary constraints over the second half of the decade and this will limit its scope for action in dealing with the issues that arise in disadvantaged communities generally but are experienced particularly in interface communities.

### **Conclusion**

For the most part the perspectives of the public sector on the issues we explored with them are informed by local knowledge, thought through in relation to their strategies (however adequate or not these are deemed to be) and mindful that the primary challenge is coordination within and between sectors. While there is an interest and willingness to seek additional resources for investment in interface communities, it will become more difficult as budgetary pressure 'bites'. Securing additional public investment for interface communities requires both sectors to cooperate and the community sector to demonstrate its competency and effectiveness in creating opportunity structures at interfaces for intra- and inter-community development action and outcomes.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

In 1996, the Belfast Interface Project (BIP) carried out a scoping study of public sector agencies' perspectives that underlay their engagement with communities that live along interfaces in Belfast. BIP commissioned PMG Consulting Ltd to carry out an update of this study in 2004. This is the report on the updated study. The study involved interviews with sometimes middle and more often senior management in the public sector agencies whose work bears most directly on interface communities. The study design is 'qualitative' in the sense that we sought to develop our understanding of the general way in which the public sector understands the interface issues, rather than 'quantitative' with a careful enumeration of the numbers holding this or that opinion.

## 1.2 AGENCY PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEXT

- The demographic and global trends continue to create pressure that both communities along interfaces experience acutely;
- While both Catholic and Protestant communities experience pressure, the 'natural' neighbourhood cycles may exacerbate the pressure Protestant communities experience;
- The public sector view is that it has ensured access to statutory services for interface communities by organising parallel provision for these communities and that this results in costly duplication;
- Many officials believe the community infrastructure within interface communities has grown and that there are structures in place to facilitate some limited but important communication between those of different religions;
- Funding agencies consider that there is a continuing need for further measures to build additional capacity in the community infrastructure of interface areas;
- Funders of community-based action are likely to require greater evidence of the effectiveness of the work in relation to intra- and



inter-community development outcomes and this will, in turn, buttress the claims community-based organisations wish to make for additional public investment.

### 1.3 AGENCY PERSPECTIVES ON RELEVANCE

- Staff at senior and middle management level in health and social services developed greater understanding of both the effects of communal violence on people, including on those living in interface areas, and the particular advantages of cooperating with organisations based in the communities most affected in order to deliver social care to local people;
- Agencies recognise the inadequate level of provision for young people living in interface communities and the need to develop much better strategies to support them;
- With regard to jobs, the thinking of key agencies shifted from that of unemployment (too many seeking available jobs) to worklessness (too many not seeking available jobs), the latter emphasising the identification and resolution of ‘barriers’ to available jobs through intermediaries (including organisations based in interface communities) and intermediate labour market measures (‘sheltered’ or ‘protected’ labour market schemes);
- *People in Place* offers opportunities for interface communities and groups indigenous to them to influence the spending patterns of mainstream public sector budgets and while there is much that requires clarification on how the renewal strategy is to work, it will be important for the groups to engage with the structures that emerge to oversee its implementation;
- Many agencies consider that technocratic or pragmatic responses to the issues of interface communities are the best that can be achieved and that these will emerge from the agencies’ working-out of *Shared Future*;
- An overarching issue that organisations based in interface communities will increasingly need to address is that of enabling their own communities to articulate their own responsibility for development of interface communities;

## 1.4 AGENCY PERSPECTIVES ON CHALLENGES

- The primary challenge that the public sector is attempting to address is that of the integration of their work across organisational boundaries and this is made more difficult in NI, compared to elsewhere, due to the large range of different governmental and statutory organisations we have;
- Where there is a requirement for inter-sectoral coordination as well, the challenge increases as the competition within the community sector makes the identification of suitable partners more difficult and this is further compounded by the limitations on the community leadership that interface communities generate;
- The public sector expects that government will require it to function within tight budgetary constraints over the second half of the decade and this will limit its scope for action in dealing with the issues that arise in disadvantaged communities generally but are experienced particularly in interface communities.

## 1.5 CONCLUSION

For the most part the perspectives of the public sector on the issues we explored with them are nuanced by contextual knowledge, thought through in relation to their strategies (however adequate or not these are deemed to be) and mindful that the primary challenge is coordination within and between sectors. While there is an interest and willingness to seek additional resources for investment in interface communities, it will become more difficult as budgetary pressure 'bites'. Securing additional public investment for interface communities requires both sectors to cooperate and the community sector to demonstrate its competency and effectiveness in creating opportunity structures at interfaces for intra- and inter-community development action and outcomes.

Following a brief introduction to the study, we comment first, on how the managers in the agencies perceived the context within which communities live. We then describe how the interface issues are relevant to the strategies and operations of the agencies. We finish the presentation of the findings with a comment on the ways our sources perceived the issue of coordination.

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## 2 INTRODUCTION

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### 2.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference for the work were:

- a) Structured interviews with senior agency personnel from within the following agencies [as listed].*
- b) Collation of study-findings into a document clearly outlining issues and themes arising.*
- c) Incorporation of findings into a new document representing a synthesis of the above alongside updated issues and themes arising from a similar BIP in-house scoping study with interface community groups.*
- d) Preparation of a Power Point presentation outlining the above.*

### 2.2 METHODS

We carried out the following tasks:

- meeting with BIP to agree the sources and topics for the interviews;
- making contact with the sources by telephone and by e-mail (sending background material on the project and the topics in advance of the interview);
- carrying out the interviews with 19 sources who agreed to contribute to the research<sup>1</sup>;
- analysing the material to identify key points and patterns evident in the responses from different agencies alongside those from the parallel in-house study of community groups; and
- preparing this report on the material.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1 contains a list of the questions we used. Appendix 2 shows the names of our sources in different organisations. We supplied the PowerPoint presentation to BIP independently of this report.

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## 3 PERCEPTIONS OF THE INTERFACE CONTEXT

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### 3.1 DEMOGRAPHY

3.1.1 The fundamental feature of the demography is the changing balance in the ratio of Catholic to Protestant people in the city; the balance is changing with more Catholics and fewer Protestants. The differential in household size means that Catholics will continue to exert greater demand, and demonstrate greater need, for the key public resource of housing.

3.1.2 Interface communities experience the demographic trends that affect the city at large more acutely than other places. Many of those we consulted referred in different ways to the twin processes of 'hollowing' out of the inner city as the numbers of people housed there fell and the 'greening' of the south of the city, historically Protestant and increasingly Catholic. In addition, the south and west have become home to some modest numbers of people from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Against the backdrop of the global trends that produce these citywide effects, quite modest numerical changes in the composition of particular streets, generates considerable pressure on people in Protestant communities.

### 3.2 VIOLENCE

3.2.1 Most of those we interviewed referred to the fall in the level of violence combined with the uncertain political process as primary changes in the context. One noted that for communities living along interfaces the nature of the violence has changed as it has become 'more chronic, but less lethal'. This observer went on to observe that the conflict along interfaces becomes 'ossified' while elsewhere the dynamic of the wider changing context especially higher levels of employment and income facilitate greater and easier change. Another official who thought that regrettably 'peaceful coexistence' was the best on offer for the interface communities summed up the predominant view among

those we consulted.

- 3.2.2 Most of those with whom we talked about the issue believe that paramilitaries fulfil an important function in managing violence to ensure there are boundaries around its duration, intensity and incidence. The continuing mistrust, tension and political uncertainty all contribute to the vulnerability of interface communities to renewed inter-communal violence.
- 3.2.3 One of those we consulted pointed to the way in which people in interface communities have common interests in addressing the violence, but they have few resources to do so. As the political system 'fails' to produce the functioning Assembly and Executive, the systemic violence recurs at the places where the competing communities interface.

### 3.3 NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT CYCLES

- 3.3.1 Our sources among those most closely involved with housing issues referred to the changes in the context associated with the 'natural' development cycles of neighbourhoods. These refer to the changing age profiles of the people who live in neighbourhoods, most marked in the case of new developments where a particular cohort with often similar broad need characteristics, for example, 'young families' will occupy the housing. Over time, some will move out and the character of the area will change becoming more heterogeneous. These underlying and general patterns of change adopt particular forms along interfaces. Unless people are willing to move in and stay, the 'community' located in a particular neighbourhood will decline. The perception of those with whom we explored this issue referred to the different tendency among Catholics and Protestants to live in interface communities with Catholics viewed as more willing to do so.
- 3.3.2 Some of the development cycles of Protestant neighbourhoods suggest that there are greater vulnerabilities in these communities than those their Catholic neighbours face. Some Protestant communities may be in terminal decline, as people do



not want to live in them. The idea that Protestant communities experienced a greater sense of pressure was a common one among those we consulted.

3.3.3 The large majority of those with whom we talked would agree that the overarching uncertainty about the political process affects the levels of vulnerability across interface communities. One of those whose work spans numbers of sectoral boundaries acknowledges that the thinking on the pressures faced by those living in interface communities is still underdeveloped. The corollary is the adoption of pragmatic approaches by some public sector officials, 'just to keep things quiet' or 'to keep a lid on things'.

### 3.4 DUPLICATION OF PUBLIC PROVISION

3.4.1 In general, the public sector officials with whom we talked do not believe that those living in interface communities are not able to access public services. They acknowledge the effects of the fear on mobility and historically they consider they countered this through duplicating provision on both sides of the religious divide.

*The arena in which duplication is perhaps clearest is in the design of bus routes in the city. In effect, the route system is defined by the location of different religious communities in the city. As increasing demand is made for public transport to achieve profitability, Citybus may become less willing to maintain these routes with the current service frequencies. The design of school runs, following the sectarian geography requires buses to ferry 25 or fewer students to and from schools, far under their capacity.*

3.4.2 There is general agreement that those who control public budgets, and ultimately those who pay them, taxpayers, will be less willing to bear the costs of duplication in the future. As DFP (and 'behind' it, the Treasury) require efficiency savings from public agencies the desire to reduce this aspect of duplication

will become stronger.

## 3.5 INFRASTRUCTURE

3.5.1 In general, the public sector officials welcome the growth in community organisations in interface communities. They believe the partnership structures exist and that through these some at least of those living in interface communities may communicate with each other. The formation of relationships between people in the different communities that focussed on issues apart from narrowly understood political conflict was important. Often, in the view of those with whom we discussed this, these were the only forms of relationship building that could happen. This was important in itself as it helps to prevent violence ('dampening' effect) and potentially significant as a precursor of more explicitly 'political' dialogue on the development issues both communities face. The view of those with greater experience of partnership working with whom we talked is that we need more capabilities and more people in interface communities to operate outside their communities while maintaining the confidence of their communities.

## 3.6 CAPACITY BUILDING

3.6.1 Relevant parts of the public sector, including BRO, CRC and NBCAG, acknowledge the need for continuing investment in building the capacity of organisations based in interface communities. The intention is to create an opportunity structure to draw investment into the interface communities as well as to enhance the ability of those in each community to communicate across the interface. An issue for community-based organisations along interfaces is how best to demonstrate the effectiveness of the capacity building and of their own practice in dealing with the development of their communities. Despite the clear levels of investment in community capacity over numbers of years, the development outcomes are difficult for some in the public sector to identify. For example, the New Lodge ward, one of those we consulted noted, has had sustained investment in its infrastructure but remains the most deprived ward in Belfast. While a critique of the assessment is plausible, the community

sector needs to demonstrate the development outcome of the investment. The public sector needs the evidence on what is effective practice in interface communities if it is to extend that investment outside of its current boundaries, which other trends may even contract.

### 3.7 HOW SPECIAL ARE INTERFACE ISSUES?

3.7.1 A number of those we consulted expressed in different ways doubts about the specificity of interface communities; in this context how different are the issues with which interface communities deal, compared to those of other communities with similar levels of resources. For one agency, the issues of illiteracy and dysfunctional behaviour in schools are general ones to the city's school-attending population and not specific to, but just as important for, young people living in interface communities.

3.7.2 For another the issue is more fundamentally a matter of the delayed connection of Belfast with the global economy. Here the argument is that if some people in disadvantaged communities feel alienated because of some of the realities of a global society then, while there may be scope for some educational measures to enhance their understanding of these 'realities', at another level the 'urban angst' is not a deficit that public sector investment can (or should) fill. The experience of cities in GB with more people from Asia and Africa dates from the 50s. In RoI we may date it from the 90s. In addition, the city's recent economic growth has led to a predictable increase in pressure on inner-city communities for 'their' housing. The modal view among the officials we talked to was that the issues in interface communities were similar in nature to those in other disadvantaged communities but were 'magnified and focussed' as one put it, through the prism of the continuous comparison of one community with another and the attention of the media on interface issues.

3.7.3 In our view, it is important for organisations based in interface communities to clarify the specifics of the claims they wish to make for additional public investment over and above that for which they may be said to qualify as a function of their objective need.

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## 4 RELEVANCE OF INTERFACES TO STRATEGY

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### 4.1 PRIMACY OF NEED

4.1.1 In different ways, those we interviewed referred to the primacy of needs in the design of policy and delivery of services. Where interface communities were able to demonstrate needs, whether in the 'objective' sense of the Noble indicators, or in terms of the 'subjective' aspects of people's lives, then those living in the communities should articulate their need to government and lobby for government to act. The corollary of this was that where the disaffection that some may feel is not based on need but with other aspects of their lives, those living in interface communities have no claim for additional public resources.

### 4.2 HEALTH & WELLBEING

4.2.1 A professional model of practice dominated health and social care systems during 'the troubles' and while those in disadvantaged communities may not have shared the view of professionalism, those inside institutions protected themselves with this defensive self-image. The understanding of the implications of context has released those inside the agencies to become more creative in the way in which they think about their engagement with the communities that they acknowledge should benefit most from their work. The research of *Cost of the Troubles* on the effects of violence on health agency staff enabled a greater understanding to emerge within the agencies of the more profound effects of the troubles on those communities closest to the violence, including those along the interface.

4.2.2 Engagement by Health & Social Services with local community-based organisations including those in interface communities has enabled the agencies to move towards greater understanding of how people actually look after their own health and well-being in the circumstances of their lives and in the context of communal division. Services that community-based



organisations deliver are, the Trusts believe, less degraded by the stigmatisation often associated with statutory services in particular fields of health and well-being, especially mental health. A primary difference between statutory and community provision is the access the latter provides to the social support networks that they recognise increasingly as key to health gain.

4.2.3 Numbers of agencies in the public, voluntary and community sectors cooperated on emergency planning for 'displaced families'. There will be a continuing need for such planning.

4.2.4 The demand that we all take more responsibility has become more nuanced as government recognises the limits of its capacities to address the profound embedded structures of causation that determine our life-chances. This is particularly important in the field of health and well-being. Trust personnel we talked to indicated a willingness and capability within communities along interfaces to start addressing the issue of an extraordinarily high incidence of suicide among young men (In one fortnight there were 15 suicides in the N&WHS&ST area that in other years was around the NI area average).

### 4.3 YOUNG PEOPLE

4.3.1 Officials in relevant agencies recognised the collective need to achieve more for young people. The role of young people in carrying out and becoming victims of violence, the ambiguous attitude of our communities towards the violence and the punitive attitude of many in interface and other communities towards young people who offend all combine to require that appropriate strategies are carefully crafted to deal with the issues. The provision made for young people is we understand central to the concerns that led to of the formation of NBCAG.

4.3.2 Educational delinquency and difficulties in maintaining standards of 'positive behaviour' among young people in schools are perceived as profound issues for the educational system by the relevant agency.

## 4.4 WORKLESSNESS

- 4.4.1 The idea of worklessness is one that is common to much of the public policy on regeneration throughout the UK. Here the distinction is being drawn between the unemployment of the eighties and this different form of exclusion from participation in the labour market. The latter 'new' form parallels the welfare to work agenda of the UK government and its predecessors. The idea also relates to the falling numbers of people eligible for, and so able to claim, unemployment and related benefits. Some of these people, it is assumed, have moved on to disability and related benefits. The evidence cited to us included the markedly higher levels of uptake of such benefits in NI compared to other regions of the UK.
- 4.4.2 The policy response to the issue is support for labour market *intermediary* agents, including some in interface areas, for example in North Belfast, and *intermediate* labour market measures to provide 'protected' routes into employment. These actions seek to reduce the 'barriers to employment', in particular the personal circumstances that create the barriers, and the favoured process is one that allows for the formation and functioning of relatively autonomous partnership structures covering large parts of the city (north, west, Shankill, etc).
- 4.4.3 The issue is one that is generic to disadvantaged communities and there is little expectation that the issue is markedly different in interface communities. While the forerunner taskforce's report referred to lack of transport as an issue, local partners were, we were told, not reporting mobility as a barrier. This is one point of difference between the 'analysis of the problem' held by the public sector and that of BIP. The distortion of the labour market associated with the fear held by people living in interface communities of moving out of their area is not a 'problem' local partners are identifying for the public sector agency (DEL) tasked with addressing 'worklessness'. It is worth noting that the difficulty of 'travel-to-work', ie restricted movement to take advantage of job opportunities arising from the city's sectarian geography, was a problem other agencies emphasised.

## 4.5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

4.5.1 The economic development agency, Invest NI, and the relevant government department, Enterprise, Trade & Investment, seem to be 'outside the loop' in relation to interface communities. Whatever the reason for this, the community sector needs to engage them in the development process. Invest NI would appear to be under considerable media pressure to demonstrate performance and it may be opportune for them to show their engagement with these issues. DETI 'owns' Invest NI and its work on the social economy will be important for people living in interface communities.

## 4.6 REGENERATION

4.6.1 Government intends *People in Place* to be a comprehensive strategy for the whole of government in regenerating identified disadvantaged areas. Government recognises that the structural origins of disadvantage require a markedly greater degree of integration than that achieved to date, over a longer timeline, working in partnership with community and private sectors to tackle specific strategic themes. Government expects agencies to 'bend the spend' of mainstream agency budgets to address the needs underlying these themes in line with the targets set by the partnership boards for the 12-13 neighbourhood renewal areas. Objective indicators of need (Noble) determined the boundaries of most of the geographical areas on which the *People in Place* will focus. There is scope for other areas, including those in which interface communities live, that fall outside these boundaries, to qualify under *People in Place* criteria, subject to a less strict needs-level requirement and evidence of subjective need, for example high levels of fear and tension or weak community infrastructure.

4.6.2 The capability of the area boards and the management structure 'above' them to enforce a sufficient degree of financial skew towards people who are disadvantaged will be crucial to the ultimate success of *People in Place*. The success of *People in Place* will depend structurally on the extent to which the Permanent Secretaries Group is able to direct the departments



to cooperate despite the difficulties associated with 'silos and railway lines'. As far as *People in Place*'s potential effects on interface issues there is a need for the sector to articulate a coherent position on the progress being made. The arrangements for inter-departmental coordination ('above' the partnerships, 'below' the Permanent Secretaries Group), which we understand, is to oversee the working out of the strategy may be an appropriate level for the interface communities to articulate their collective voice. Whether the interface communities' representatives have 'a place at the table' depends in part on what they will bring to it.

4.6.3 One lesson that has been well learnt is the need for a longer strategic period. Helpfully *People and Place* adopt a nine-year timeline. One option that we understand government is exploring is the adoption of common objectives to which government attaches budgets which agencies may in turn access through committing credibly to deliver on some or all of these objectives. The *People and Place* relies on a variant of this approach where the budget is attached to geographical areas.

4.6.4 Some interface communities are particularly important to the strategies of those agencies charged with urban regeneration as the communities and their interfaces may define potentially important slices of development land. BRO is interested in securing land for development projects in which the community sector fulfils significant roles. There is interest in particular in the creation of facilities for children in buildings located on this land.

*The issue of land use provides a case study of the difficulties in achieving coordinated action. While those closest to regeneration may readily identify the contribution that parcels of land could contribute to the development of interface communities, another part of the governmental system perceives their role as dealing with land use in a more orthodox sense.*



## 4.7 POLICING

4.7.1 The eruption of the violence around the access of young people to school in Ardoyne, 'Holy Cross', led to the abandonment of the then current plans of the PSNI for movement towards more community-based policing. More recently, the formation of Community Safety Partnerships provides the structure within which the community and policing issues may be explored within the limits defined by the acceptability of the PSNI to the dominant political party among Catholic communities, Sinn Fein. The provision of high quality video cameras for surveillance of flashpoints at interfaces and the development of more effective police deployment procedures through the Public Order Enquiry Teams have provided the PSNI with greater capacity to police inter-communal violence. We note the technological and technocratic character of the actions.

## 4.8 PRAGMATIC MANAGEMENT

4.8.1 A theme in the way different agencies characterise the nature of their strategic response to the issues is that of technocratic managerialism. Here the hallmark of what is deemed appropriate is the 'pragmatic management' of the problems. Many of the officials we consulted doubt that the issues of interface communities are qualitatively different from those of the general sectarian division that characterise much of the life of the city. Starting from here, at best interfaces will achieve strategic significance as a subset of the wider issues of 'good relations' within the parameters set by *Shared Future*. For others the attention on inter-community tensions displaces the attention that ought to be given to issues of tension within communities.

## 4.9 COMMUNITIES' RESPONSIBILITY

4.9.1 The call for greater responsibility is a common one in current public policy. Many of those we consulted considered the issue of responsibility to be relevant to interface communities. All too easily, this can become an exercise in 'blaming the victim'. It is important that the community sector in interface communities articulate a concept of responsibility that moves us away from suggesting that communities with least resources resolve collective political failure.



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## 5 CHALLENGE OF INTERFACES FOR PUBLIC SECTOR

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### 5.1 CHALLENGE OF COORDINATION

5.1.1 It is a commonplace observation that more and better 'joined-up' government is desirable. For many of these we interviewed this was a core issue for the work in relation to interface communities. For one it relates to the wider issue of government connection to community and the definitions of the needs of the latter. The 'joining-up' must work at policy, management and operational levels. In general 'policy' terms the difficulties of joining-up are surmountable and the same is likely true at the operational levels, assuming the will to do so. For management tiers it is more difficult as those at this level are held to account for performance against plans and budgets specific to each agency. It is fair to say that the mantra of 'joined up government' is a tired one; nevertheless all of us know we need more of it.

### 5.2 PUBLIC SECTOR FRAGMENTATION

5.2.1 The desire for more joined-up government is thwarted by the sheer number of public agencies, some with large budgets and influences to match, others with few resources, which have to be part of the process. The 'institutional walls', inevitably limit the coordination despite the best of intentions. If there were larger public agencies which the Review of Public Administration will, we expect, propose then there would be greater scope, some officials believe, for more coherent statutory action.

*The research unearthed one particular example of unacceptably poor communication; schools in North Belfast decided to stagger their closing times but failed to inform Citybus of the change.*

## 5.3 COMMUNITY SECTOR COMPETITION

5.3.1 Coordination across sectors requires the statutory partners to be able to identify the appropriate community partners. Some of those we consulted were surprised at the degree to which many in the community sector competed with others, sometimes going so far as to decry the quality of their peers' work. Another pointed to how groups would cooperate on a strictly defined issue and then stop working together, often while carrying out similar activities on either side of the divide. Another official decried the minimal extent of inter-community action by the, in his view, numerous groups in North Belfast and thought that perhaps 'three-quarters [of these] we could do without'. This is an atypical voice but the sector is not without its detractors among the public agencies.

5.3.2 For greater cooperation between the statutory and community sectors, it is necessary, from the point of view of some of those with whom we discussed the issue, for community-based organisations to develop their own relationships of cooperation, through consortiums for example, to enhance the credibility of the offers they make to statutory agencies for service delivery. Such a consortium is likely to be made up of the strategic partners of the agency, groups and individuals with whom they will 'forge long-term relationships'. The implication here is that the agencies would wish to sustain these partners rather more fully than others not deemed to be 'strategic partners'. It will be important that the indigenous representative groups in interface communities have a full involvement in these favoured consortiums. We believe this will require these organisations to develop and demonstrate their competence in relation to agency policy goals. Among the competencies the strategic partners will need to demonstrate is financial management and project implementation skills. Many in the public sector share the view, some more strongly than others that 'the community sector is where the action is' as government continues to move towards 'enabling' rather than 'providing'. However, there is unease about the competencies within the sector to take on the implementation of projects with relatively large budgets. Securing these budgets will require the sector to reassure these 'investors' through continuing to enhance their financial

management capacity to take on the budgetary responsibility. In addition, the sector will have to convince the agencies of their capacity as well as to assert it.

## 5.4 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

5.4.1 Partnership across the sectors requires leadership in the communities on both sides of the interface. Those whom we interviewed were roughly split according to their perception of the quality of the leadership within interface communities. Some were of the opinion that the quality of the leadership in Protestant communities was of a lesser quality than that of the Catholic communities. Others pointed to how Protestant communities were revolving expertise between community and political spheres. Another observer pointed to the need for interface communities to develop the confidence and skills to act as their own advocates in relation to the dominant political parties in their communities, Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party. The interface communities' own leadership should communicate to the parties that it is their communities that bear the costs for the stalled process of accommodation.

## 5.5 BUDGETARY PRESSURE

5.5.1 A number of those we consulted pointed to the increasing pressure on their budgets that they expected during the second half of the decade. For some agencies, the rising level of demand for more expensive services to meet needs that are more acute will constrain their resources further. In the high spending fields of health and social services and education, the demographic trends will make the sums particularly difficult. In education the situation is further compounded by the falling numbers of young people in the Board area but rising numbers of those with greater educational needs, those most likely to leave secondary schools with no academic qualifications of any significance to the labour market. These young people will require additional resources but the capitation funding arrangements treat them, it was suggested to us, as quite similar to any other young person. An underlying theme to emerge from the discussions with the officials was the need for the institutions

to secure greater budgets if there was to be sufficient incentive for further partnership working. While one might take the view that where partnership working was not in evidence then budgets could be withdrawn, the important point is that partnership working requires incentives for institutions.



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## 6 CONCLUSIONS

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There is willingness among many of those with whom we talked to develop closer relationships of partnership with those living in and representative of interface communities. In addition to the points we made earlier in this report we note the following conclusions here:

- The existing groups of activists will need to take measures to increase the relatively few numbers of voluntary staff, local people, in the areas that are available for interface work. The agents of transformation are few in number. If the partnership relationships are to work for real in connecting agency personnel and local people, we need more local people to become active.
- Agencies require contacts in the community structures, which are willing and equipped to engage with the officials in a constructive mode to solve problems rather more than to exchange rhetoric. The community-based organisations along the interface need to foster such talent within their own communities.
- There is scope for the community sector to create more opportunities for officials in public agencies to understand how the policies of their agencies affect these communities. It seems likely that the community-based organisations may also learn much about the ways in which the decision-making process operates in public agencies. Many agencies will have various forms of in-house professional development seminars, workshops, etc. There is merit in community-based organisations developing the capability to contribute to these in a credible manner.
- Those parts of the community sector who develop the relationships with the public sector know that they require actual mandates from their communities for their work. As one of our sources suggested, the area partnerships appear as more of a 'metaphor' for their communities rather than an authentic reflection of them. The community sector in the interface communities may add to the authenticity of the area partnerships through greater involvement in them.



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## 7 APPENDICES

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### 7.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) Do you think these three elements [social- economic disadvantage, tension arising from violence and fear of it and reduced access to services arising from restricted mobility] are the primary features of the interface context or are there others?
- 2) How in your opinion has the context for interface communities changed over the last decade?
- 3) In what ways are interface issues important for the policy, the overall strategy, of your agency?
- 4) How has the strategic importance of interface issues changed for your agency?
- 5) In what ways are interface issues important for the practical work of your agency?
- 6) How has the operational importance of interface issues changed for your agency?
- 7) What is your agency particularly good at in working with people in interface communities?
- 8) What are challenges for your agency that emerge from working with interface communities?
- 9) What needs to be done to address these challenges fully (by your agency, by other agencies)?
- 10) What supports does your agency require to enable it to address these challenges fully?
- 11) What part of the public sector (if any) should fulfil a lead 'champion' role on interface issues in this sector?
- 12) What part of the voluntary & community sector (if any) should fulfil a lead 'champion' role on interface issues in this sector? Is the voluntary & community sector 'joined-up' on this? How well are they doing?
- 13) How do we move towards more coordinated, 'joined up' working on interface issues? How might this happen?
- 14) Who needs to 'come on board' in this effort?

15) What other issues are important for us in addressing the development needs of people in interface communities?

## 7.2 SOURCES

We interviewed the following individuals:

- 1) Peter McNaney, Belfast City Council
- 2) Patricia Melon, Belfast Education & Library Board
- 3) Frank Duffy, Belfast Regeneration Office
- 4) Maurice Johnson, Belfast Region, NIHE
- 5) Billy Gamble, Central Community Relations Unit
- 6) Billy Gilpin, Citybus
- 7) Duncan Morrow, Community Relations Council
- 8) Jim Wilkinson, Department of Enterprise & Learning
- 9) Will Hare, Department of Enterprise & Learning
- 10) Colm McCaughey, Directorate, NIHE
- 11) David Carroll, DOE Planning Service
- 12) Andy Kennedy, NIHE Neighbourhood Renewal
- 13) John McKeown, North & West Health & Social Services Trust
- 14) Dominic McCullough, North Belfast Community Action Team
- 15) Murdo Murray, North Belfast Partnership
- 16) Colin Taylor, Police Service of Northern Ireland
- 17) Eric Dalziell, Senior Civil Representative Northern Ireland Office
- 18) Colin Wilmont, South & East Belfast Health & Social Services Trust
- 19) Gerry Doherty, South Belfast Partnership