



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for the Office of the First Minister  
and deputy First Minister

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Building a United Community:  
Community Relations Council, Belfast  
Interface Project and Groundwork NI

3 December 2014

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)  
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Megan Fearon  
Mr David McIlveen  
Mr Jimmy Spratt

**Witnesses:**

Mr Joe O'Donnell	Belfast Interface Project
Ms Jacqueline Irwin	Community Relations Council
Mr Peter Osborne	Community Relations Council
Ms Sylvia Gordon	Groundwork NI

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** With us today are Peter Osborne, the chairperson of the Community Relations Council (CRC); Jacqui Irwin, CRC chief executive; Sylvia Gordon, director of Groundwork NI; and Joe O'Donnell, director of the Belfast Interface Project.

You are all very welcome. Peter, I invite you to lead off with some short opening remarks.

**Mr Peter Osborne (Community Relations Council):** Chairman, thanks very much for inviting us along this afternoon. It is good to be here.

I will start by reinforcing with the Committee the importance of the work that it does and the importance of the review of Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) that it is undertaking. The various people on the delegation today will have some input into the brief introductory comments, if that is OK, and will share some of the responses to questions. I say that because the Community Relations Council, with Jacqueline and me, is doing its work at regional level, but Sylvia and Joe are from organisations that have funding from the CRC and are really very active on the ground, getting their hands dirty doing coalface work. T:BUC is the strategy that supports that sort of work.

It is important that we recognise how far we have come as a society. When we engage on some of the issues and talk about some of the good relations, reconciliation and peace-building work that we almost automatically do now as individuals in this society, that is work that we could not imagine being able to do in the 1970s, 1980s or 1990s. It is important that we recognise the achievements not just of civil society in doing that work but of politicians across all the political parties in this place and in other places. It has been very significant. We sometimes get caught up in the short term or in the issues of

the day and do not realise, or recognise sufficiently, the long-term strategic changes that have taken place in this society. This is not easy work, though. Although we have come some way in the past 20 years, there is an awful long way to go. I keep saying, and I make no apology for it, that, when we talk about getting to the sort of reconciled society that we want to see, it will take 20, 30, 40 or even 50 years to achieve that, because these are long-standing and deeply felt issues that touch the emotions as well as the everyday life of people across the community in the place in which we live. In some ways, it will be the young people — the youth — of today, who are perhaps not as caught up with the memories that we who lived through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s have, who will be able eventually to deliver that reconciled society and, if you like, carry the burden, while also enjoying the benefit and bounty of a peaceful and reconciled society.

I want to touch on two or three issues very briefly before handing over to Sylvia, Joe and Jacqueline. One is to remind the Committee of some of the things that the peace monitoring report that the Community Relations Council produced a few months ago stated. It talked about the moral basis of the Good Friday Agreement having been eroded. It talked about a lack of trust leading to a lack of progress. It talked about, in some respects in recent times, community relations having taken a backward step and the fact that we are not in a continually forward-looking, upward trajectory around some of the issues. There are ebbs and flows. I think that the responsibility on us all is to try to look strategically as well as specifically at issues and at how to get the ebb back into reconciliation and peace-building in the area.

The challenge for us is to build on the T:BUC document. T:BUC is a devolved document. That is an achievement in itself. It provides a framework. It provides some ambitious targets. We need to build on T:BUC, however. We need to take that as where we are at the minute and look even more strategically at where we need to go as a government and a civil society. We believe that reconciliation needs to be recognised as a greater priority in government and civil society, with greater ambition, more energy and vision around it that involves everybody — politicians and civil society as a whole.

We also believe that it is important to recognise the need to build rather than erode the infrastructure that is delivering some of the work on the ground. That takes us back to the need for long-term, outcome-focused resourcing. I touch on that briefly, and we may touch on it again. Resourcing also needs to be reasonably significant in the context of other things that government does, such as the targets for peace walls that the T:BUC strategy contains. If we allow the infrastructure to erode, society will pay the price for that in years to come. In some ways, that will create the context in which we could be looking at a more violent future. We need to engage the disengaged. The peace monitoring report referred to that. A report that came out today refers to it again. There are people on all sides of the community who feel detached or dislocated from, or, in some way, not enveloped by, the sort of processes that we have in this society at the minute.

We need to understand the cost of failure to address those issues. It is not just the cost — some of it physical and some of it financial — of a more segregated society now but the cost of creating the conditions in which we might go back to something that we do not want to go back to, which is a more divided society or even violence in the future.

Those are my brief comments. I will hand over to Sylvia first and then to Joe and Jacqueline, who will go into this in a little bit more detail and talk about some of the practice that there is and some of the needs in communities at the minute.

**Ms Sylvia Gordon (Groundwork NI):** I am the director of Groundwork. We are a regional organisation, but we are based in north Belfast. Whenever I became the director of Groundwork, I thought that it was very important to make a difference locally, albeit that I was working for a regional organisation.

It is important to say as a caveat that I have to reference the partnerships that I work with and the collaborations that I undertake, because this is not about just one organisation. You do not build relationships with organisations; you build relationships with people and individuals within organisations. Therefore, whenever I talk about the "work", I will be referring to the work of Duncairn Community Partnership, of which Groundwork Northern Ireland is one of a number of founding members. We are a cross-community partnership based, as I said, in north Belfast.

Over the years, there has been huge investment in relationships in north Belfast, particularly at a number of what were once very contentious interfaces, including the one between the Limestone Road and Duncairn Gardens. We have been working to build those relationships, build trust and build

respect, recognising that we have our differences. We want to achieve the same vision and get to the same place. We have been fit to do remarkable things under the radar. It is important to note that that was a local effort undertaken by local people to make a difference to their neighbourhoods.

Therefore, the challenge, not only for us at a community level but for those here on the hill at Stormont, is to start getting our stars strategically aligned. We need investment and vision from the top down and the bottom up, and we need the two to join. We need investment in relationships and in the infrastructure that Peter referred to, and we need investment in regeneration.

Yesterday, the partnership hosted Senator Hart. There was cross-community representation at that meeting, along with representation from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). Over the past three years, through IFI funding, we have been fit to engage locally about vision and what a place might look like if we came together and started looking pragmatically at interfaces. However, there have been real challenges with the capital funding and regeneration work that needs to happen. For example, there is a huge linear site opposite Groundwork where there is a green fence that is owned by the DOJ. Ongoing consultation was undertaken by local people, and there was agreement reached to take that interface down and replace it with something more pleasing and more in line with what is up and down the street. We found huge challenges in getting that small part of capital funding. I am not talking about millions but about £50,000 to £70,000.

That is where our stars are not aligned, and we are not strategically aligned when it comes to investment and the type of models that we need in Northern Ireland to make regeneration happen. It is very obvious, given the cuts in public funding, that that funding will not be sourced from the public sector. There is less resource and more competition. How do we deal with that? How do we attract inward investment into an area, and how does the voluntary sector work in partnership with the private sector to inspire and create regeneration? Those are the types of conversations that we need to start having. There has been talk about asset transfer, and we have had some models of asset transfer. In itself, asset transfer is all right, but we need large-scale investment. Through our consultation through the partnership, we know that people want to see investment in their local neighbourhoods. They want to see improvements, not only in the place itself but in the opportunities that are there. They want to traverse one area to the other, and they are doing so. However, tackling interfaces is not just about tackling the physical interface but about tackling the social issues that are on either side of those interfaces.

Duncairn Community Partnership can and will provide examples of work that we have done. The Alexandra Park gate is one such initiative. Last week, we had the removal of the barrier in Newington Street in north Belfast at the Limestone Road. What I am saying is that communities are in a certain place but that they are getting very frustrated at the lack of strategic vision coming from Stormont. We need to see confidence, we need to see strategy and we need to see a plan that is resourced in order to help us achieve. We are in a dire situation, as we can see by looking at the papers and at the news every night. What is going on is not good, and it makes people very frustrated.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Thanks, Sylvia.

Peter, you should have received a message that we allow 10 minutes for the opening remarks.

**Mr Osborne:** Yes, we did. I am not sure how much time we have taken.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Over 10 minutes. We will take Joe, and, if you do not mind, Jacqueline, we will pick up your views in the question-and-answer session.

**Mr Joe O'Donnell (Belfast Interface Project):** Thank you very much. I appreciate that and will try to keep this as brief as possible.

I am the director of the Belfast Interface Project, which is the only city-wide structure that works across Belfast and all its interfaces. We work in both communities. We are apolitical and non-aligned, and we have a membership made up of approximately 50 community organisations in the city.

I endorse what Sylvia and Peter have already said. We see ourselves, collectively and individually, as critical friends. We appreciate the opportunity to speak here today. We see the future of the work that we are trying to do. The partnership between the community sector that we represent and the politicians who are working in the Assembly is vital to the success of what we are trying to do.

We are also saying that we want to move up another gear. We want to step up the work that is already happening. We have touched on some of the very positive work that is not often seen, not often realised and certainly not often on our television screens or in the media. For example, this year and last year, we went through some pretty difficult times in the city because of different events that happened. In all that time, our work continued, although it did not always get the airtime. The work of the partnerships at interfaces continued, and people shook themselves down, got on with it and picked up the pieces when very difficult circumstances made that almost impossible.

We want to see a plan for change. However, if you were to speak to any of your constituents or to people who live at any of the interfaces in our city, or even regionally, and ask them whether they understand, see or know of the plan for change that needs to happen or whether they have a vision of a plan for that change that needs to happen, I doubt that they would be able to say yes. The people who live in those communities — in Belfast, there are 100 interface barriers — cannot say what they see as being a vision for change. That throws up the three key factors in how we move forward. First, there is the issue of policing and how that needs to happen in interface communities. The police would say that they are not in a position to deal with the problem entirely on their own. Secondly, the partnerships need to be encouraged, developed and resourced within the communities. Finally, and this is probably the most vital factor, trust needs to be encouraged within those communities.

I know that we are stuck for time, so I will finish on this point: the best way to move forward is through long-term, strategic, resourced intervention that will provide a wrap-around for communities. Take, for example, the work with young people that is needed to provide a vehicle forward. Can they be referred on to further education or employment opportunities? Can they be skilled in good citizenship? Can they be encouraged to change if they are involved or caught up in inter-community violence? The things that provide effective signage to other opportunities in those communities are probably the best ways in which to progress. I can go into that in some more detail later.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I have a couple of follow-up questions, and I will then bring in Jacqueline. Joe, you talked about there being 50 organisations. What is the split between those representing one or other traditional community, those that are cross-community and those not representing either of our traditional communities?

**Mr O'Donnell:** The whole ethos of the Belfast Interface Project has been to include that process not only in our staff and on our board but in the membership of organisations. For both main cultural traditions, it is about 50:50. We have been in existence now for approximately 20 years. We were founded out of the CRC around 1995, and we became a stand-alone organisation in 2000. I have been director for only about four or five years. The previous director, Chris O'Halloran, has been there for 15 or 20 years. The integrity of the organisation has always been to maintain that ethos. We have done that quite successfully.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Thanks. It was just for information.

Sylvia, you said that there was great frustration in the community about a lack of strategic vision coming out of Stormont. Does that mean that T:BUC is not the strategic vision?

**Ms Gordon:** We need to see things happening. We need to be able to point to stuff and say, "As a result of T:BUC, this is what we have been able to achieve". Therefore, T:BUC needs to be resourced, and it needs an implementation plan. It needs critical partners to allow its vision, aims and objectives to be achieved.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** If I were to ask what you think the budget is for T:BUC, what would you say?

**Ms Gordon:** Probably not enough.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** But, in round figures, do you know what it is?

**Ms Gordon:** I do not know. It relies on Peace IV funding quite substantially.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Although I was not here last week, as far as I understand from the briefing, it is reliant very much on —

**Mr Lyttle:** There is not one.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** — monitoring rounds. There is no budget line, as such, for T:BUC.

Peter, you said that the fact that T:BUC is a devolved document is an achievement in itself. Perhaps that is not fully endorsed by what Sylvia said from her perspective.

**Mr Osborne:** I support everything that has been said so far. You have to give credit where it is due for how far we have come so far. I am talking about everybody in the Assembly and across all political parties.

The fact that OFMDFM achieved the production of the T:BUC document, and the fact that there are certain targets in it, such as the removal of the interface barriers, are achievements, and you have to recognise that. However, you then have to dig beneath that a little bit. You, Sylvia and Joe touched on aspects of that, too. How are you going to remove interface barriers? A strategy talks about how you are going to do something; it does not just set a target. You need to address certain critical issues. You need to ensure that, on both sides of an interface, people understand what interdependence is. They need to understand that, if they are to make progress in their area, that has to be done with each other across the community divide. Issues around safety and security have to be resolved. That means that people need to feel safer about the removal of the interface barriers. There has to be an inclusive process. That means that no gatekeepers and that everybody on both sides of the barriers is involved. There has to be political stability here, and that has to work its way out on to the ground so that people understand that a better vision for the future has been bought into by everybody across the political divide. There has to be relationship building across the barriers, and there has to be regeneration.

You need to achieve that with at least two very significant things coming into play: you need structures that are able to cut through and deliver on the ground, and you need resourcing. That will not be done without money. There are difficult times for us all around this, but, if we are serious about taking down interface barriers, it needs to be resourced. There needs to be significant long-term, outcome-focused resourcing. In that way — I come back to one other thing I said — the priority in government to achieve that needs to be higher than it is. Ultimately, it needs to be about making resources available.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I want to bring Jacqueline in. Jacqueline, you have been a senior official in the CRC for a number of years. How and when did you hear about T:BUC?

**Ms Jacqueline Irwin (Community Relations Council):** The review of the policy was in gestation for very many years. It depends on whether you say "united community" or the development of a strategy. It took a long time to come to fruition. I cannot even remember. There was probably talk about it when I first started in the organisation.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** What about the actual strategy Together: Building a United Community?

**Ms J Irwin:** In 2013, just prior to the announcements that the Secretary of State made, that was the moment at which we knew that there was going to be a policy, that it would be called united communities and that it had headline actions and so on.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** What was your gut reaction?

**Ms J Irwin:** At the time, two things struck me about the policy. One was that it lacked the cross-governmental component that had been described under what was then the existing shared future policy. At least it had an implementation plan. It viewed most of what was coming through from the remainder of the Programme for Government and so on as being part of what the delivery of a peaceful society would look like.

Its other big characteristic was that it recognised that it was going to need large-scale intervention, initiatives and programmes delivered out to young people across the range of categories in united communities at the moment. That was welcome. It seemed to be saying, "We've probably reached the end of the experimental peace-building and the small programmes and so on. We need something that is more collaborative, more large scale and a wholesale change across society." That was to be welcomed.

Your review is also to be welcomed. It is a very timely moment to draw breath because, in the conditions in which the policy came forward, more resources were available at that time. There was the possibility of additional resources; it seemed to be at least spoken about that there might have been at that stage. That is not where we are at now. The domestic financial situation is as difficult as you all know it is.

As for the international resources, there is a gap between Peace III and Peace IV. Peace III is coming to an end now, but Peace IV is probably at least a year and a half from delivery on the ground. It is possibly more; you might know better than I do about that. It is likely to be a smaller fund. As grateful as we all were to receive the American resources, they are not of the same order. The planning assumptions are different from what they were.

That means that, while the collaborative approach, which has been spoken about around the room, is still absolutely vital, we are finding that most of the groups on the ground are consumed with survival questions at the moment. To a certain extent, the public sector also is; it has had to turn its attention to decreasing budgets and trying to save what can be saved. We are in a very different place from where we were even a year and a half ago. All is not lost, however. This is a good opportunity to pay even more attention to the question of collaboration. We probably need to review what can be done now and what may need to be left for a little while longer; at least until we have more resources. I absolutely agree with what Sylvia said: the vision of united communities has not communicated itself to people in their ordinary, everyday lives. That is where we will measure its success. Has it made a difference to somebody's life in the ordinary, everyday world? I do not think that they fully understand.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I would like to explore the idea of collaborative working and how we allocate resources and how that impacts on the ability to collaborate. That works at two levels: you have the need for Departments to collaborate if we are going to deliver on Together: Building a United Community, because OFMDFM really only leads on United Youth. The rest are providing a vision, a collaborative role or a coordinating role — whatever way you want to describe that. So, there is a piece for us in the Executive and Assembly to ensure that, rather than working in our vertical silos, we deliver horizontal government.

On the ground, Sylvia and Joe, there is an expectation that your organisations will all work collaboratively. Basically, we allocate funding on a competitive basis. How can you share best practice when you are a brother-and-sister organisation one day but then are competing for increasingly diminishing resources the next?

**Mr O'Donnell:** That is where we become partners in terms of government and the community together. We have shown some very good examples of how we can do that in interface communities. For example, we have, in partnership with the CRC, set up the Interface Community Partners. We are also represented on the inter-agency group here at the Assembly, which is a cross-departmental group. We are involved in those two projects to simplify the process of barrier removal, or certainly to work in partnership.

Belfast Interface Project recently set up eight cluster partnerships across the city. We have broken down Belfast into 13 clusters, which are areas where peace walls or barriers cluster together. The only caveat in each of those partnerships is that they are on a cross-community basis and that the action plan that will come out of them will be agreed through a cross-community process. We feel that that is the best way to do it.

You are absolutely right: currently, organisations like ours are being forced to compete for quite small pots of funding. Smaller community-based organisations are going into survival mode; they say, "Look, I need to think about my own community before I think about working on a cross-community basis, and I think, to try and survive, I want to compete for that pot of money." Collectively, we can come up with a better strategy than that.

**Ms Gordon:** A lot of organisations are now taking strategic pauses to look at where they are at and how they go forward. There is less funding, and it is more competitive. How do you react to that? I concur with Joe: it is about collaboration. It is about the sum of the total good out there; the sum of what, for example, Groundwork can bring in its skills and experience, and how I can collaborate with Joe and the Belfast Interface Project. It has to be about the aims and vision of any organisation. As I said, in my organisation, it is not about the people first; it is about the aims and objectives, and where we want to get to as an organisation. If we are committed to peace-building, which we are, and regeneration, we have to put the strategic vision forward, rather than being busy, busy, busy looking

for the next small pot of funding. If you are doing that, I am frantically busy; I am taking my eye off the ball when I could be doing other stuff much more effectively.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** At the risk of jumping on one of my little hobby horses, you would get funding only if you prove that there is a need that the Department or Executive accept needs to be addressed. It is probably a need that they believe can be measured and your intervention monitored. In that case, having ticked all the boxes, why is it limited to a year, or whatever? Why do we not say that it will be open-ended support, in the same way as we commit to open-ended support for the National Health Service? That would mean that the exact budget varies, but the commitment is going to be there until the need is met. That would take away the competitive nature of it, or a large degree of it, and it might open up the sharing of best practice, which, understandably, is difficult in a situation where you are looking at somebody and going, "Well, if I tell you, you could take the money off me next April".

**Ms Gordon:** Or, "What's your big idea? I'll copy that." It is very competitive. The sector has to step up to the mark in terms of the voluntary and community sector. We recognise that we need to do things differently and work differently.

**Mr O'Donnell:** Not only is that a good idea, but, to make it even better in terms of accountability, good governance and management, it could be reviewed on a two- or three-yearly basis. So, you could be open-ended funded but be subject to reviews.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Yes, continuous monitoring and targets.

**Mr O'Donnell:** That could be the way forward.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Then, if there was ever a feeling that the need was going to be met — in other words, that you had succeeded — you would give notice of three, six or nine months that the funding is to come to an end. That also means that you can retain staff and not have them worrying every year about whether the funding is coming to keep them. I am sure you lose a lot of staff to the statutory sector because people are fearful about whether they will get a second contract.

**Mr Osborne:** As I go around and talk to groups, I am genuinely amazed by the commitment of people who do this work. By and large, the people who do it could be paid better and have different job satisfaction if they went off and did something else. However, they keep at it, and they do so because of the commitment they have to the needs in the area. Many of them have been doing this for decades, sometimes in a voluntary capacity, and have been doing an awful lot of great stuff on the ground, sometimes at personal risk. So, I agree with what has been said, but the funding and chasing of the jobs is one aspect of a great number of people who are putting a huge amount of personal sacrifice into what they do; it is not all about money and it is not all about funding.

There is also a significant degree of sharing. The projects that CRC funds are brought together quarterly, and there is a huge amount of sharing between the organisations that are doing that work on the ground. That is done with willingness and in a way that enhances the work that each of those organisations does. It is quite impressive, and the Committee is very welcome to come to some of those sharing meetings to hear about the work that is happening with those funded projects.

There is an issue: there is an awful lot of work going on with a lot of different funders. There is something on a regional basis about the coordination of that work: we can do what we do with our funded projects, but we cannot do it with everybody else.

**Mr Lyttle:** Thanks for your presentation so far. What involvement has the Community Relations Council had with the ministerial panel and the project board that was established to oversee the implementation of Together: Building a United Community?

**Ms J Irwin:** None.

**Mr Lyttle:** So, you do not know what the activity of the ministerial panel has been since the publication of the strategy.

**Ms J Irwin:** I understand that it has met and that it did so relatively recently but nothing else.

**Mr Lyttle:** There could be any degree of communication between each Department on that. Given that you have said that there is a real reach for cross-departmental cooperation on the strategy, that is a bit of a concern.

**Ms J Irwin:** One of the things that I suggested to officials in the Department, to address the question of building solidarity with the policy at the community level, was the wide circulation of communiqués that came out of those meetings so that people can see that there is work going on. There is work going on behind the scenes, but the general public are relatively unaware of that. That sort of communication would be very helpful.

**Mr Lyttle:** Given the importance of investment and resources to the delivery of the strategy, what input and feedback have you had on the review of good relations funding?

**Ms J Irwin:** We had a meeting with officials earlier this week. They are not quite clear yet on the handling of the report and how that will be dealt with. In general terms, the discussion with us related to activities that they wish to see us taking forward in the next year or so. I am aware of that, and I am aware that the report has been received and that Ministers are considering it.

**Mr Lyttle:** Is there an identified timescale for publication of the report?

**Ms J Irwin:** I am not sure whether that has been decided. Officials would be better able to speak to you about that.

**Mr Lyttle:** How important is the measurement of outcomes? How effective have the good relations indicators been in monitoring and measuring progress of Together: Building a United Community? Are the indicators that have been proposed adequately linked to the Together: Building a United Community objectives?

**Ms J Irwin:** I think that everybody accepts that the indicators that are there at the moment are probably making the best of what is available and that they fall short of making a very clear and causal relationship between the information that is gathered and the impact of the implementation of the policy. So, there is work to be done.

I am also very aware of the fact that, across government, there is a greater interest in measuring outcomes as a means of being clearer about accountability and therefore focussing on the right things. That is one of the things that the Department has spoken to our organisation about.

To join the question of measuring impact with the question of what services should be delivered, the other ingredient in there is collaborative planning. So, we have an opportunity coming up in community planning processes, if we can get that right, to begin to take a much more collaborative approach, not only to assessing how far we have got and what the needs are in the local community but, very importantly, what the assets are and what is already there that could have more advantage squeezed out of it, particularly in relation to community and good relations issues, which is our area of interest. If we can get that right and get those who are bringing funding into that environment to also join up their thinking a little bit, we have a better chance of getting to the sort of vision that you are speaking of: a plan that is longer, has other contributing to it and has its outcomes measured in the round. Each contribution that has been made by my organisation or any other should be done in a rounded way that takes all into account. That is a good idea on any day, but it is an essential idea when we are moving forward with limited resources.

**Mr Lyttle:** Collaborative planning is best practice in most approaches. It is not encouraging to hear that the body charged with collaborative planning — the ministerial panel — has communicated with you in no great way. There was also to be a funders' body created in the delivery of Together: Building a United Community. Have you had any update on that?

**Ms J Irwin:** That group has met twice.

**Mr Lyttle:** Do you know who that group includes?

**Ms J Irwin:** It includes my organisation, some of the independent funders, such as Atlantic Philanthropies, the Community Foundation, the Special EU Programmes Body, departmental officials and organisations like the National Lottery.

**Mr Lyttle:** Presuming that you submitted proposals for the good relations indicators, have you had any feedback as to whether your suggestions have been adopted?

**Ms J Irwin:** Not specifically in relation to our suggestions, but the discussion has certainly started in relation to everyone improving their approach to outcomes-based accountability. That may take us somewhere else in sorts of things that we measure. That is not quite an answer to your specific question about Together: Building a United Community, but, as the resources that are specifically focused on good relations diminish, making sure that all the resources spent by Government have a benefit in terms of good relations will be an important achievement.

**Mr Lyttle:** I have a quick question for Sylvia about interfaces. You mention that there is a need for public, private and third-sector collaboration and investment in regeneration around interfaces. OFMDFM recently announced the identification of two urban villages: on the Newtownards Road and at Colin. What type of interaction did OFMDFM have with Groundwork in relation to the identification of those areas? Have you any information on how other areas may be able to be part of any other regeneration projects?

**Ms Gordon:** I did not have any direct communication with OFMDFM. I had conversations with the Strategic Investment Board. I am aware of the new town centre for Colin and have had a number of conversations with the Strategic Investment Board about how organisations such as Groundwork can benefit from social clauses in procurement, particularly in relation to large-scale regeneration programmes. I am aware of one meeting in relation to the Newtownards Road. Again, I know that that was communication from the Strategic Investment Board not OFMDFM.

**Mr Lyttle:** How does that type of regeneration facilitate cross-community relationship building?

**Ms Gordon:** It is quite difficult. If you take the new town centre for Colin in west Belfast, it is about looking at practice and assets that are already there. There are projects in that area that have a cross-community basis. Therefore, any regeneration should take into consideration those services, how they are enhanced and made better and how the diversity of the people accessing those services is increased. I could give you one very basic example of a project in Colin Glen. It is a huge allotment site on an old Invest NI site. The diversity of the people using that site is remarkable. It is cross-community and crosses all social structures as well. People with disabilities, people with learning difficulties, homeless people and indeed people from the new communities that are coming into Northern Ireland are accessing the site as well. So, in many respects, there is diversity. You have to look for those gems. They should be valued and brought into the bigger debate about regeneration. How does that project that is based on the Glen Road communicate and join with the vision for a new town centre for Colin? How does it actually connect with that?

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Is the Department asking you about that? Is it listening if you attempt to describe that?

**Ms Gordon:** I have described the plans to the Department, particularly around the site off the Glen Road. It has talked about how it appreciates the diversity of the users, the beneficiaries and the need for it to connect with the new town centre for Colin. It is pretty difficult when it actually comes down to implementation and, for example, when SIB has appointed an urban-regeneration company. So, it is up to Groundwork as well as others to step up to the mark and have that conversation with that urban-regeneration company about how we can actually make connections.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I just want to be sure that I am hearing what you are saying, because you have talked about your contact as being more with the Strategic Investment Board.

**Ms Gordon:** It has been more with the Strategic Investment Board, yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Is that the way that you would like it to be?

**Ms Gordon:** I would like to take my vision and sell it to OFMDFM.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Thank you.

**Mr D McIlveen:** Thank you for your presentation. I am in complete agreement with a lot of what I am hearing, but I suppose that what I want to encourage you to do for a minute or two is to come to this side of the table, metaphorically. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I am sorry: I cannot agree.

**Mr D McIlveen:** Joe had mentioned, very rightly, I think, that obviously the sort of long-term or, hopefully, even medium-term objective is effectively to get these communities to a place where they are standing on their own two feet, are able to get into further education and that jobs are then available as a result of that. Peter, very articulately, related that to how everything that they seek to do in the Community Relations Council is based on outcomes rather than outputs. I think that that is a really pragmatic, beneficial way to do things.

However, it may be the case that we are in a position where it is a choice of "or" rather than "and". My understanding is that, in some easements that may come as a result of the budgetary consultation, the choice will probably be to give some extra money to the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) on the basis that it suggests that it may have to cut significant places in further and higher education or not to give it to DEL and to put it somewhere else. I would appreciate your thoughts if you were in that position. You can see the garden: the money tree is not there. We are not hiding it away anywhere. We have what we have as far as the Budget is concerned. Where that very difficult choice is placed in front of us, as elected representatives we have to try to make the right decision when it comes to how that money can be spent. If your vision is an outcome-based approach to this, where jobs are created and educational opportunities are there to be had, where do you see the priority in that regard? I keep highlighting this point: we do not have a choice of both; it is one or the other.

**Mr O'Donnell:** One of the most disappointing things I have heard at this meeting is the fact that there is no money in T:BUC. I do not think that people out there in greater society realise that. They think that there is a budget that they believe is significant and available. This will come as a very big shock to quite a lot of organisations and communities out there.

I understand the point you make very clearly; that it is an either/or situation. Without directly putting the question back to you, I would say that if you look at the interface areas that we are talking about in Belfast in particular — I will speak on this and Peter might want to take a broader view of what we are talking about — you will see that they have been interface areas in our city for over 50 years; the same areas, the same communities. We have not been able to change them. We have not planned at any stage to change them. They are still in existence. They are also the same areas that are in the top 10 areas of multiple deprivation, and have been over the same period of time and maybe longer. They are also the running sore of the — hopefully — past conflict that we have unfortunately had to live through and which some might, quite rightly, argue were the origin of it.

If we are tasked with creating that change and taking on that challenge, and if we are really serious about moving our society forward, then that is a very big decision we have to make. Can we afford to do both? You are making the point that we cannot. Can we afford to change society for the future and for the better, improve it and perhaps fulfil the other side, as you said, by bringing in new ways of creating employment, opportunities and change? When I talk about interfaces and ask people whether they want the wall up or down, quite often, that is not the right question to put to them. It should be whether they want the wall up or whether they would consider something else as a better alternative. I think that we need to offer people the better alternative.

**Mr Osborne:** Can I comment as well? First of all, respectfully, David, I do not accept the premise of the question: I do not believe that this is an either/or situation. If you are asking whether we should invest in job creation or reconciliation and peace-building work, I think the answer is that we should, obviously, do both. The issue is the priority we give each of them. It is not either/or: it is about the priority or proportion of investment we give to each of them.

I apologise if I have said this to the Committee, but I do not think that I have. An example comes to my mind. I have spoken about it before, but not here, I think. Two years ago, quite rightly, £60 million of public investment was put into the Titanic building in Belfast. I have no issue with that. It would take the Community Relations Council 30 years to make that same investment in giving out awards to community organisations like Joe's and Sylvia's and the many other dozens of organisations that the CRC supports. So, that was one investment of £60 million. It would take us 30 years to match that amount of investment.

Now, there is some other investment, absolutely, in peace-building work. Even when you take the Peace money and you spend different sections of it over seven or eight years for Peace IV and the different aspects of that strategy, it is not actually a significant amount of money. Looking at interfaces or some of the other areas that it will work in, we see that it will be substantially less than that one piece of investment in the Titanic building. That building is very important and successful. But, the issue is this: if we do not invest properly in peace building and reconciliation, emotionally as well as in monetary terms, then in 30 years' time, there will be a lot fewer visitors to the Titanic building than there are now, because the children of the people who visit now will not come to Belfast to visit it then.

We run the risk of recreating the conditions that will create violence and the sort of divisions that we have seen in this society in the past. We have to reprioritise our understanding of why it is important to invest in reconciliation work. What we are doing at the minute is not investing enough in it. We need to understand the cost of not investing in it. That cost will be a future that none of us wants.

Take that part of town, at Laganside, 20 or 30 years ago. You are probably not old enough to remember what it was like. I do, and I know that Mike is old enough to remember it, anyway.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Please — this is being recorded by Hansard. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Osborne:** It was full of coal yards. In many ways, it was an unpleasant place to be. The amount of work going on in it was less than it was in the 1950s and 1960s. Government said, "Right, we are now going to sort this problem out. We are going to create structures, and we're going to put investment in. We're going to cut through the red tape, and we're going to make sure that people can deliver in this area". We now have one of the most successful regeneration models in that part of Belfast compared to anywhere else in Europe and even many parts of the world. That was a determination by, and priority for, government to do it. That is what happened at that point. We need to do the same thing with reconciliation. If we do not get the balance right, we are storing up problems for the future.

**Mr D McIlveen:** I was talking about the next fifteen-and-a-half-month budgetary period, which, really, is all we can plan for at the moment. I was not talking about broader expense or the cost of investment.

I do not mean for this to come across facetiously or anything, Peter, but from what you are telling us, we, effectively, are at ransom: if we do not invest in peace building for the future, violence will return to the streets. On the basis of a quarter of a century of the Community Relations Council being in existence, do you think that the outcome of the Community Relations Council has been effective enough if we still find ourselves in that position, 25 years after it was founded?

**Mr Osborne:** I will comment briefly, and I will then hand over to colleagues to comment; I do not want to hog all of this part of the conversation.

I do not think that I am saying anything around holding to ransom. It is a debate that we need to have in the public square. It is a debate that there has been for decades now, through the peace process and before it. There is a logic in that debate that people need to come to and answer for themselves. Peace building, reconciliation and good relations work is the work of every political party and everybody around the table. We all invest in it, and we all should be investing in it. We will all come to our separate conclusions about what priority that should have compared with other things.

You will understand what my priority is and what, I suspect, colleagues' priorities are, and those of the others around the table as well. It is an individual thing. It is not about holding to ransom; it is about how we interpret and implement public policy around this.

The £2 million a year that the CRC invests in community organisations to deliver that work, and the £2.5 million a year in the central good relations fund is, in the context of other spend here, a pretty paltry amount of money. We need to look seriously at how that investment can deliver long-term outcomes. When funding is delivered in an ad hoc, piecemeal and short-term way, you cannot talk about long-term outcomes that deal with the complexity of the issues we are dealing with. It just is not possible. We need to shift how we think about resourcing this work.

Is the 25 years of the CRC value for money? I think that that was the breadth of your question. From the 12 months I have been involved with it, I conclude that it absolutely is. For the amount of funding and resource the CRC has received over those 25 years, and given the complexities of the problems

that it and other people have faced, the public purse has got huge value for money out of what the CRC has delivered. Although I am happy to be judged on what is being delivered and the change that has taken place, you also need to judge this on what might have happened if the CRC had not been doing what it has been doing for so long.

Sylvia and Joe talked about the challenge for the voluntary and community sector. There is also a challenge for the CRC, as an arm's-length body, to do what it does better than it does at the moment and to take us into a different place as we develop and deepen the peace process. In order to do that, we need the support of government in terms of not just money but structures and the inspiration that government and others provide to the peace process.

**Mr D McIlveen:** Sylvia, I mean this in the nicest possible way: I feel terribly sorry for the people in community associations I work with in my constituency, who spend most of their working weeks talking to civil servants and having to fill in forms. They have developed the kind of lingo and speak required to fill in forms. I have heard a lot of statements today like "lack of strategic vision", "corporate governance" and "social clauses in procurement". I understand all that, but I need to hear real everyday speak. The biggest challenge you threw at our door — and you were very right to throw that challenge to us — was the fact that people are opening the newspapers and are saying that this place is just not working for them. Will you elaborate and be a little bit more specific? At a high level, I get that criticism. I know that it is out there; we discuss it day and daily with people in our constituencies. What, specifically, are the issues and challenges for the people you are engaging with? How are the lives of the people you are dealing with worse today than they were five years ago?

**Ms Gordon:** People are worried about putting food on the table; they are worried about paying bills and they are worried about paying their rent or mortgage. They see the cuts coming. They have heard about the cuts. They feel the cuts. They know that change is out there, and some people manage change more effectively than others. People are concerned about livelihoods. They are concerned about their family. They are concerned about their family's prospects, particularly those of their children and grandchildren.

When people voted yes in the referendum and signed up to the process, they believed that things would get better. I am worried that they and I do not necessarily see or feel that. They are quite stressed about that fact. I opened the 'Belfast Telegraph' last week, and the whole middle spread was about cuts to Health, Environment and the public sector. We need to build the private sector, but that needs me to spend my money; it needs me to go into town and shop. This can become very personal to me when you ask me that question, because it is about being fit to provide for your family and give them a decent standard of living in a peaceful and stable society, and with a Government who are stable, connect with their people and understand their people.

**Mr D McIlveen:** It is really helpful to hear that as you said it. One of my greatest frustrations in the work we do — and I think the media feed this to a large extent — is that there is a them-and-us mentality. That ignores the fact that I live in my constituency, go to church in my constituency and send my kids to school in my constituency. Those are the things I do. I am not detached from where I live; I am part of where I live, and I hope that I have as much interest in ensuring that this place moves forward as anyone else.

I understand that people are worried. My parents were worried about us when we were kids. I am worried for my family as they are growing up. However, I keep bringing it back to real terms. Obviously, there has been an undertaking by the Government that, to their best possible ability, front-line services will not be very adversely affected by the cutbacks that we are now having to make. There will be a voluntary exit scheme that will be launched in the Civil Service; it will not be a matter of mass redundancies or anything like that.

Where is the breakdown in the message? I am not sitting here with my head in the sand. We know that there are challenges ahead; we absolutely get that. I need to be convinced that the hurt that people feel is not manufactured in any way and is a real hurt. Once we realise where the specific targeted needs are, we, as a Government, can do something about it, but we cannot do anything with generalisations about us all being rubbish. We have to know exactly where to target. I am not sure that that always feeds back into the —

**Ms Gordon:** We need to communicate better. The media have an awful lot of responsibility in creating that feeling in people. If you are under stress, you are more vulnerable to other stresses, which can come in any shape or fashion. We hear and see all these stories, but it is important that a

balance is brought to this. It is important that facts and evidence are provided to counter some of the stories that we are hearing about the impact; the impact; the impact. The communication strategy needs to be right.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** It is not just the media, Sylvia. Joe said today that he was shocked and surprised to hear us say that there is no budget line for T:BUC. Equally, I am surprised that you, Joe, have not been made aware of that before today. I would have thought that somebody in your position needed to be aware of that. Jacqueline said, in answer to the Deputy Chair, that she is not aware of what is happening at the ministerial subgroup. Somebody in your position should be more than aware of it, so we have a bit of a challenge.

I do not want to foreclose this, but an hour is up and we have a long agenda.

**Mr D McIlveen:** I appreciate your latitude, Chair.

**Mr O'Donnell:** Can I make one final comment?

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I have another question for you, Joe, but go ahead.

**Mr O'Donnell:** It is on the basis of how people feel and their responses, particularly those living in interface areas. There is currently quite a bit of research is going on — some of you are probably aware of it — in the University of Ulster. It is being conducted by Duncan Morrow, Jonny Byrne and some of their colleagues. They are working on statistics around interface areas and how those feed into some of the challenges we face.

At this stage, I say with some considerable confidence that life expectancy is 10 years shorter if you live in an interface community. You are more liable to be open to influence by legal and illegal drugs, alcohol dependency, family breakup, difficulties in the family unit, lack of employment, lack of education and lack of opportunity. All those aspects in those areas are considerably focused by the current economic strife we are feeling and the austerity measures that are kicking in. They do not make it a pleasant situation.

A lot of people do not realise that, quite often, interface areas are the site of violence but not the source of violence. The source of violence quite often comes from outside interface areas.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Joe, you said earlier that we have had decades of conflict and division, and decades where the same areas are the ones of multiple deprivation. That league table has not really changed, although money, funding and resource has been put into it. Are we just not doing enough of what we are doing, or are we doing the wrong thing? If so, is T:BUC the answer?

**Mr O'Donnell:** To be quite honest, I am not sure whether T:BUC is the answer given some of the conversations we have had today. However, I would like to think that it is part of the answer, the solution and the process. We need a serious cross-departmental focus on these areas. With the greatest respect to the Department of Education, OFMDFM and DSD, I do not think that they can solve the problems, and I do not think that the individual parties can do so either. We really need to see change created by joined-up government, cross-party support and cross-departmental planning.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** And also, surely, by listening to people on the ground.

**Mr O'Donnell:** Of course.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Do people agree that there is best practice in tackling sectarianism, division and poor relations?

**Ms J Irwin:** Yes. We all agree that there is improving practice. Someone asked earlier whether there is collaboration across the groups, even though the funding creates a divisive model. An awful lot of collaboration goes on, and there is a great deal of interest in improving practice. There is a big appetite, despite the fact that it might mean that some groups or structures disappear, to look for a better way of getting things done.

**Mr Lyttle:** I do not normally play the role of defending OFMDFM or anybody else, but there is obviously money for shared education, the United Youth programme and urban villages. The problem

appears to be that there is no OFMDFM baseline budget or no resource-targeted action plan so that this Committee and people in the civic sector can, in a coordinated way, identify exactly how that spend is being coordinated and make sense of it.

I disassociate myself from the question about the need to be convinced that people in the community think that there are problems with regards to the delivery of the Northern Ireland Executive, particularly on this issue. The issues that Joe raised need to be tackled.

How important is tackling paramilitarism to building a united community? What do you think the T:BUC strategy is doing or could do in relation to that issue?

**Mr O'Donnell:** Quite clearly, in interface areas, for example, we are looking at clear signs now — and this is informed by some of the policing reports — that young people in republican areas can be drawn to dissident republican activity. The same thing can happen quite easily with loyalist paramilitaries in the Protestant/unionist/loyalist (PUL) community. We need to be aware of that. I am not saying that it cannot be overcome. I think that we all want to be part of the process and the solution, but let us be honest: it is there. Its potential to increase is there as well.

**Ms Gordon:** This is compounded when people and a community feel vulnerable. Exploitation and radicalisation can happen.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** One of the challenges we are having in giving shape to the inquiry is the huge number of individuals, groups and communities who are impacted by and involved in all this, so we took a look at who the CRC has funded down the years. It is extremely diverse in all sorts of measures, including the amount of money that you fund groups for. This is a serious question, because it leapt off the page at us — and you might need to get back to us, because I do not necessarily think that you will know the answer — but you once funded a group called Leadership in a Diverse Society. The narrative is as follows:

*"a project with 13 young people from all parts of Belfast".*

It ran for eight months and looked at cultural diversity. The amount of money you gave it was £62.93. That fascinates us. That may be the best £62.93 that has ever been spent.

**Ms Gordon:** That might be value for money.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** If you are not aware of it —

**Ms J Irwin:** I am not.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** We are just fascinated.

**Ms J Irwin:** I will hazard a guess at what it might be. That may not have been the level of the award that was made; it may have been what the group ended up spending. Sometimes, for a range of reasons, groups never get to expend all they intend to. For very small groups especially, it could be that someone disappeared off the agenda for some family reason, and the work was never completed. I do not know, but we will look at it.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** If you can take 13 people over eight months and it costs that little —

**Ms J Irwin:** That will be what the original application would have been for, but I will certainly look into the actual expenditure. That is baffling.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** That was the spend in the annual report.

**Mr Osborne:** Can I take that question as an opportunity to say two other things? I have no idea what that project is, either. It is quite clear, from looking at some of the projects that are funded, that a lot of activity is going on for not a lot of money. It may not be £62.93; it might be more than that. A lot of people work in this area because they are really committed to it. They will deliver, for a few thousand pounds here or there, much more in value than is very often delivered in other sectors or sections of the community. How much more transformative would it be to put that resourcing into a more

significant long-term context, where you can be outcome-focused? That is where the sector needs to go in what it delivers.

The second point is to give the Committee an invitation. The CRC would be happy to organise an evidence day or two with the organisations on the ground for the Committee to come out and meet the groups. I know that you do that individually —

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** That is something that we are doing as part of this inquiry.

Peter, Jacqueline, Joe and Sylvia, thank you very much indeed. I am sure that we could have gone on for hours.

**Mr Osborne:** We are happy to come back if you want.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** It has been valuable for us. Thank you very much.