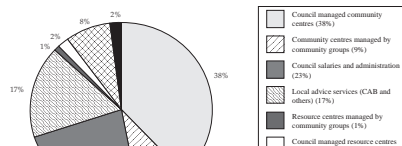


Beyond the Centre

A Consultation Document on the District Councils' Community Services Programme



October 1999

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Executive Summary

1. The Community Services Programme is a unique, complex and collaborative initiative involving the Department of Health and Social Services ("the Department"), the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland, local community and voluntary groups and local advice organisations. The Programme has been in existence since 1975 and the scope of its influence is wide.
2. The Department provides a "rate support grant" to district councils to assist them in their community services provision. The grant accounts for approximately 19% of overall Programme expenditure with the remainder (81%) being met through local rates. Although there is widespread variation among district councils, their average contribution currently amounts to over 4p¹ on the rates. The leverage effect resulting from the Department's grant is an important and distinguishing feature of the Programme.
3. Twenty-four years have lapsed since publication of the Moyle Report set the existing parameters for the Programme. This document is designed to stimulate widespread discussion on its future. Responses will be used to help shape a new strategic framework that the Department expects to publish through the issue of a policy statement offering guidance on the implementation of a new Programme. The statement will be issued as soon as practicable after the end of the consultation period.
4. Having listened to comments and analysed a range of data the Department is now bringing forward proposals on a number of levels which involve

- updating the rationale, aims, objectives, monitoring and evaluation arrangements to secure stronger impact and closer fit between the Programme and the changing context in which it now operates;
 - agreeing a funding formula to ensure a fairer, more transparent allocation of the Department's rate support grant, in keeping with New Targeting Social Need principles;
 - connecting the Programme to the Best Value² initiative currently underway in local government in Northern Ireland and to the Local Agenda 21³ process;
 - advancing an integrated community support planning model designed to identify community strengths, resources and needs while strengthening collaboration with other agencies and other areas of council activity;
 - placing a stronger emphasis on equality of opportunity in light of the new statutory duty to be conferred on public authorities, from 1 January 2000, including district councils, to promote equality under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
5. Among the specific consultation points raised in this document, respondents are invited to comment on
- whether district councils are the appropriate lead agencies in Northern Ireland to support local community infrastructure in the terms described;
 - whether the analysis of Programme strengths and areas for improvement is complete;

- how the Department's financial support to Councils can be allocated more equitably and transparently; and
- how existing resources can most effectively and strategically be deployed to meet the practical support needs of local community groups.

1. Purpose of the consultation

- 1.1 Twenty-four years have lapsed since publication of the Moyle Report set the existing parameters for the District Councils' Community Services Programme. This consultation document is designed to stimulate discussion on its future. Responses will be used to help shape a new strategic framework which the Department expects to publish through the issue of a policy statement offering guidance on the implementation of a new Programme. The statement will be issued as soon as practicable after the end of the consultation period.
- 1.2 The outcome of this consultation will influence the work priorities of the Voluntary Activity Unit and will also be taken account of in the implementation arrangements for the Compact between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland, launched by the Secretary of State in December 1998.
- 1.3 Not surprisingly after twenty-four years, there is widespread agreement on the need to modernise. The Department plans to introduce a "new" Programme for a new period with revised aims and objectives and fresh priorities. The purpose of this consultation exercise is to ensure that the issues identified are the right issues and that the proposed action is both appropriate and agreed.
- 1.4 In recognition of the Community Services Programme's interdepartmental relevance, the proposals contained in this document have been agreed with all other Government Departments in Northern Ireland. Views are now being sought from

district councils, community groups and voluntary organisations, advice organisations, political parties and local statutory agencies.

- 1.5 The Department has had regard to the Best Value process currently underway in local government in Northern Ireland, to the Local Agenda 21 initiative and to the wider policy context.

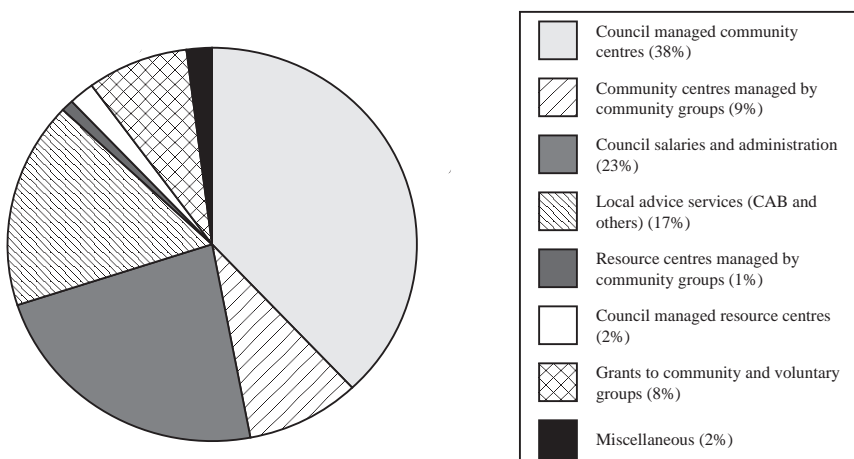
2. Background to the Programme

2.1 The Community Services Programme is a unique, complex and collaborative initiative involving the Department, all 26 district councils in Northern Ireland, community and voluntary groups and local advice organisations. It has been in existence since 1975 and the scope of its influence is wide. It supports the provision of community centres, local advice services, resource centres, grants to community groups and the employment of staff in district councils. In the 1996/7 year, it accounted for an estimated total expenditure of £11.2 million⁴.

2.2 The Department provides a "rate support grant" to district councils to assist them in their community services provision. The grant accounts for approximately 19% of overall Programme expenditure with the remainder (81%) of expenditure being met through local rates. Although there is widespread variation among district councils, their average contribution equates to 4p on the rates. The leverage effect resulting from the Department's grant is an important and distinguishing feature of the Programme.

How is the money spent?

2.3 District councils deploy expenditure on the following areas of activity⁵:



Policy Evaluation

2.4 This document comprises an important element of the formal review of the Community Services Programme being conducted by the Department as part of a rolling programme of policy evaluations operating across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The aims of the review, as identified in the terms of reference, require an assessment of whether the Programme

- has clearly defined aims and objectives;
- is delivered in an efficient, effective and equitable manner;
- contributes to strengthening communities through encouraging, promoting and supporting an independent, vigorous and cost-effective voluntary and community sector;
- enhances the provision of local advice services;
- complements broader policies, programmes and priorities for Northern Ireland and in particular is consistent with New TSN and PAFT principles; and
- to make recommendations on the future of the Programme.

2.5 As part of the review, a more formal technical evaluation report is being prepared. It contains analysis of the inputs, outputs, outcomes and processes underpinning the Community Services Programme as it currently exists. In the course of the review, a number of more detailed practical and operational issues have been identified as meriting attention. Since they do not affect the Programme at a

strategic level, they have not been included in this document. They will, however, be brought to district councils' attention in due course.

- 2.6 The evaluation report, when completed, will be made available to district councils and other interested parties who may obtain copies on request through the Voluntary Activity Unit or on the Internet at <http://www.dhssni.gov.uk>

What has already happened?

- 2.7 The proposals contained in this document are the product of detailed data gathering and widespread opinion seeking. The Department is grateful to all the district councils, community and voluntary organisations, advice organisations and other Departments for the contribution they have made to the development of these proposals.
- 2.8 The Department is only one of a wide range of stakeholders who have an interest in the Community Services Programme. Elected representatives and staff in all 26 district councils have an important stake. There are policy connections to a number of Government Departments and agencies. Interest among community and voluntary groups is widespread and growing. Ratepayers who meet the majority of Programme costs are also important stakeholders. So too are the many thousands of people whose contact with the Programme is on an individual basis, as users of community centres or local advice services. In shaping the future the Department has sought to achieve the maximum possible consensus among these various interests. In addition to the meetings with councils, 120 voluntary and community organisations attended focus groups

and discussions were held with colleagues in other Departments.

2.9 At an early point, written submissions were sought from interested organisations and political parties. Special focus groups were convened to seek views from minority ethnic groups including Travellers, from women and from people with disabilities. Additional meetings were held to gather views from community groups in rural areas and from local advice agencies.

2.10 A special advisory group was assembled to provide additional guidance. The group comprised the following people:

Aideen McGinley	Chief Executive, Fermanagh District Council and SOLACE ⁶ representative
Dave Wall	Chairperson, Advice Services Alliance (NI)
Martin Kerr	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Catherine Donnelly	Community Services Officer, Newry & Mourne Council (representing Community Service Officers)
Greg Campbell	Economics Branch, DHSS
Joe Wright	Head of Community Development Branch, VAU
Maeve Walls	Community Development Branch, VAU

The Department is grateful to members for their help and support.

3. Programme impacts⁷

3.1 The widespread impact of the Programme at local level can be summarised as follows:-

- An estimated 58,000 people use community centres supported through the Programme each week, equating to over 3% of the population in Northern Ireland with a total of 239⁸ community centres funded in whole or in part through the Programme;
- At least 1500 community groups use these community centres each week;
- The capital value of these centres is estimated at £39.1 million⁹. They constitute an important and often overlooked part of Northern Ireland's social and physical infrastructure, particularly in areas of social need;
- 6,500¹⁰ people each week use the 44 Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) and other local advice centres supported through the Programme. Collectively these centres, and the associated outreach venues, provide over 1100 advice hours each week;
- 913 grants were paid to local community groups and voluntary organisations through the Programme;
- 20 local resource centres are supported through the Programme;
- The Programme has greatest impact in areas of social need in Northern Ireland. The majority of community centres and advice services are

located in the most deprived wards¹¹. Independent research¹² found that 67% of CAB users were in receipt of social security benefits;

- The equivalent of 344¹³ full time staff are employed in district councils in various capacities relating to community services.

4. Strengths to Build On

4.1. Analysis to date has led to the following conclusions on what works well in the Community Services Programme:

- it operates across all 26 district councils in Northern Ireland and provides a practical mechanism for supporting and promoting active citizenship at local level;
- it provides strong testament to district councils' long standing support of community activity;
- it provides the springboard from which district councils can consult with local people, and determine their wishes and priorities in accordance with Best Value principles. It offers a mechanism through which the sustainable development agenda, as enshrined in Local Agenda 21, can be advanced;
- it helps the Government achieve a range of policy and programme objectives across a number of Departments;
- it is recognised as providing vital "core " support for community infrastructure at local level. Its importance is expected to increase as other, more short term funding sources come to an end;
- there is a significant "leverage" effect. Each £1 of Government grant is matched with £4 from the rates. Community groups and advice organisations in turn are able to use grants from district councils to lever other forms of assistance. It is estimated, for example, that local

advice organisations raise a further £3 for each £1 of district council grant¹⁴;

- social inclusion is promoted in a very practical way through the support of local advice provision and a more planned and targeted approach has resulted. It has also led to the emergence of service level agreements between district councils and advice providers;
- it forms a unique partnership between central and local government and local communities;
- it offers a limited but vital source of small grant support for those local groups able to access it;
- it is responsible for a high volume of community centre provision in Northern Ireland, where community centres often comprise the first point of contact between the individual and wider community involvement;
- it carries named responsibility for resource centre provision, which could have a more important strategic support role in future;
- it contains a high degree of "development potential" which, if released could result in:
 - the better positioning of district councils as catalysts for local community development;
 - more productive partnerships with education and library boards, health and social services trusts, District Partnerships, the Making Belfast Work and Londonderry initiatives, rural development interests and other funders;

- a more planned and integrated approach to community participation, bringing together community services, community economic development, community relations and local advice services, achieving what is referred to as "planning beyond the boundary";
- incorporation of the policy commitment to strengthen communities in a "core" Programme across all 26 district councils;
- "mainstreaming" the principles of partnership that underpin the District Partnerships into an existing, long term Programme; [District councils could, for example, make more use of the opportunity that exists under Section 18 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972 to include, on committees and sub-committees, persons who are not councillors providing their membership does not exceed one-third.];
- a stronger emphasis on equality of opportunity in light of the new statutory duty to be conferred on public authorities, including district councils, from 1 January 2000, to promote equality under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- a shift of emphasis from "providing" to "enabling" and "government" to "governance";
- a more objective, more equitable and more transparent grant allocation based on a funding "formula" reflecting both population levels and social need, in line with New TSN principles; and
- a more imaginative use of existing resources and in particular, of community centres.

5. Opportunities for Improvement:

5.1 Experiences of the Programme gained through the review were not all positive. Some of the concerns were as follows:

- the Programme has unclear or outdated aims and objectives according to many district councils and community groups;
- the Programme allocates funding (Government funding) to district councils inequitably having regard both to population and social need indicators;
- the Programme is widely regarded by district councils as having suffered from a lack of investment by Government and as having been "sidelined" or overlooked in favour of other funding initiatives. Comments are invited on future funding priorities as part of this consultation;
- the Programme is seen to be more about providing services (mostly buildings) than about stimulating and supporting local community activities. There are however exceptions and a growing number of district councils are credited with involving communities themselves in defining and helping to meet need;
- there is widespread variation in funding and in apparent priorities across Northern Ireland. District councils have loosely and widely interpreted the original policy intent. This was reflected in focus groups, in questionnaire returns and in council expenditure profiles;

- many community groups and voluntary organisations consider the Programme to be more "building centred", than "people centred". Returns received from district councils indicated that at least 60% of the total budget is connected to community centres, many of which were underused¹⁵. Community centres form an important part of the social and physical infrastructure of Northern Ireland. The challenge is to capitalise on their existence;
- many community groups and voluntary organisations regard the Programme as lacking in transparency and subject to political influence. Councillors were sometimes seen to have "pet" projects. The absence of grant aid policies in seven Councils and the lack of appeals procedures is seen to contribute to this lack of transparency;
- the Programme is focused on geographical communities more than communities of interest and is not seen to reflect the needs of minority ethnic groups including Travellers, women and people with disabilities particularly well;
- ten district councils indicated that relationships between community services and community relations were sometimes unclear. Fourteen indicated that relationships between community services and economic development were sometimes unclear and sixteen indicated that closer co-ordination with the activities of District Partnerships would increase Programme effectiveness;
- the Programme originated at a time before Targeting Social Need became a dimension of

Government policy and therefore it lacks a clear and articulated focus on social need. The advent of New TSN provides additional impetus for focusing on the needs of those who are most disadvantaged;

- the Programme devotes only a small (8%) of the overall budget to grants for community groups¹⁶, the majority (70%) of which are for less than £1000 and only 14% of which are for new groups. In two district councils, no grants appear to have been made. Expectations of the Programme were low for all the reasons that have been identified. Crucially, the level of grant availability was understood to be very low, non-existent or available largely for events or festivals;
- community groups and voluntary organisations feel that the Programme is comparatively bureaucratic, with many groups commenting on the formality attached to being asked to make their case in front of full council or sub-committees.

Consultation Points

1. Have the right issues been identified?
2. Have any issues been overlooked?

6. Future Strategy

6.1 The analysis of the policy context, the assessment of current practice and the views gathered during consultations have led to

- the identification of new guiding principles;
- the formulation of new overarching strategic aims and impacts;
- the production of new tools for Programme monitoring and evaluation;
- the establishment, at regional level, of a completely new mechanism to oversee the Programme and the implementation of changes resulting from this review.

Guiding Principles

6.2 The four main principles that lie at the heart of these proposals are:

- recognition that district councils in Northern Ireland have the potential to act as catalysts and facilitators, empowering communities to solve their own problems, drawing together community plans and resources and providing support and backup for local community groups;
- better positioning of district councils at the hub of local development strategies, as the lead agencies to strengthen local community infrastructure in Northern Ireland into the new millennium, in strategic alliance with the community and voluntary sector, the private sector, other funders and influencers;

- acceptance that public participation by local community and voluntary groups complements the work of democratically mandated district councillors. The Community Services Programme provides an important mechanism for bringing the two together;
- acceptance by district councils of the need for change, in culture and in practice, if community groups are to be supported more fully, and recognition of the need for greater transparency in determining priorities and allocating financial support. In turn, greater recognition on the part of community groups and voluntary organisations of the financial and other contributions being made by district councils.

Consultation Points:

- Are these the most appropriate principles to shape the future of the Programme?
- In particular, are district councils the lead agency to support local community infrastructure in Northern Ireland in the terms presented?
- If not, where should responsibility rest?

New Strategic Aim and Outcomes

6.3 The Department proposes that the revised aim of the Programme should be:

"To strengthen local communities, increase community participation and promote social inclusion through the stimulation and support of community groups, community activity and local advice services".

The Department proposes the adoption of a series of four outcomes¹⁷, or impacts that collectively are designed to capture the Programme's unique contribution to community life in Northern Ireland. It is envisaged that the Programme will contribute to the following:

- **an active and organised community**, evidenced by
the increase of public participation in civic life;
the promotion of self help and sustainability;
the strengthening of community organisations,
particularly those in disadvantaged areas;
- **an influential community**, evidenced by
the increased ability of disadvantaged
communities to articulate their interests, their
concerns and their suggestions for improvement;
improved partnership working between district
councils, other agencies and local communities
and more effective interagency work at local
level;
positive change for individuals and groups
within the community particularly those who are
excluded or marginalised;
- **an informed community**, evidenced by
community access to effective, appropriate,
approachable, timely and accurate advice and
information services; and
- **a sustainable community**, evidenced by
creation of the conditions for social and economic
development and promotion (within district
councils and outside) of a long term, integrated
systems approach to developing and achieving
vibrant communities by jointly addressing social,

health, environmental, economic and community relations issues.

Change of Name

6.4 The Department favours renaming the Programme the **Community Support Programme** to reflect this new enabling and integrated emphasis. Community support is taken to describe the processes and the activities through which district councils stimulate and enable groups of people to express their needs, support them in their collective action and assist them with projects and schemes as part of their overall objective of providing civic leadership.

Proposals for Future Monitoring and Evaluation

6.5 The Department proposes that the following indicators should be used in assessing the future impact of the Programme -

- improved orientation of district council services towards local communities in accordance with Best Value principles;
- reflection in district council policies of the role and importance of community groups and voluntary organisations and their contribution to improving the quality of community life;
- a stronger focus on equality of opportunity and evidence that the particular needs of minority ethnic groups including Travellers, women and people with disabilities have been taken into account;
- access to local advice services¹⁸;

- a planned and integrated approach to identifying community needs and resources, with clear evidence of community participation in the planning process and the production of community support plans;
- leverage of other forms of assistance into local communities and improved co-ordination of inputs from a range of funders and policy makers on the basis of these plans;
- a stronger local community sector, evidenced by the number of groups, the levels of participation within them, the range of issues addressed, the effectiveness of groups and the co-operation among them, particularly in those areas where community infrastructure is weak;
- increases in community group and advice agency access to grants and support in kind. This may involve a range of initiatives from small grants schemes to access to meeting space, fundraising advice and brokerage with other funders including the private sector, assistance with monitoring and evaluation and other professional support;
- more assets (physical assets and other resources) held by community organisations with the aim of generating revenue to help sustain long term development.

Proposals for a Programme Advisory Group

6.6 The Department proposes the establishment of a Programme Advisory Group to reflect the collaborative nature of the Programme, its interdepartmental relevance and the anticipated

challenges involved in implementing a new framework.

- 6.7 It is envisaged that the Advisory Group would form a joint sub-committee of the existing Interdepartmental Group on Voluntary Activity and Community Development (IDG) and the Interdepartmental Standing Committee on Advice Services (IDSC). Membership would be drawn from the Voluntary Activity Unit, the IDG and IDSC, district councils at both chief executive and community services officer level, community health and social services trusts, the community and voluntary sector and local advice services.

While other roles may emerge, initial responsibilities would be four fold:

- to receive and advise the Department on the integrated community support plans from district councils;
- to monitor implementation of the new strategy;
- to identify and disseminate models of good practice as they emerge under new arrangements;
- to advise the Department on issues of resource allocation as they relate to the Programme.

Consultation Points

- The Department has presented a new policy framework incorporating
 - Guiding principles
 - A revised aim
 - New outcomes
 - A new name
 - Proposals for monitoring and evaluation
 - Proposals for an advisory group.
- What positive outcomes are expected from this framework?
- How might it help other Departments and agencies achieve their objectives?
- If any obstacles are anticipated, how might they be overcome?

Funding Allocations

6.8 The Department is concerned about inequities in the existing pattern of grant allocation to district councils. In 1996/7, for example, £2.54 per capita was allocated to Belfast and 30p per capita to Magherafelt. No objective reason can be found to support such variation which has its origins in the mid 1970's. Since the existing grant allocation takes no account of social need, a "do nothing" option has to be rejected on grounds of equity.

6.9 The Department wishes to allocate resources fairly, transparently and equitably across district councils in a manner that reflects Programme objectives and

stated public expenditure priorities around New TSN's principle of targeting resources towards people, groups and areas in greatest social need¹⁹.

- 6.10 One possible mechanism is through the introduction of a funding formula. Such a formula could take account of population levels or it could take account of objectively defined levels of social need e.g. the Robson index of relative deprivation²⁰. Each approach has merit and each has limitations. An allocation based entirely on population could ensure all district councils were supported yet it would fail to address social need considerations while an allocation based entirely on social need could result in some district councils receiving no rate support grant from the Department.
- 6.11 A formula that combines both population and social need considerations may be a preferred option. If so, decisions will need to be made about the relative weightings of population and social need factors. For example, 50% of the Department's grant could be allocated on the basis of population and 50% on a social need basis. This was the basis for the funding allocation to District Partnerships. Alternatively, stronger weighting could be attached to social need. As an example, 80% of the grant could be allocated on a social need basis with the remaining 20% distributed on the basis of population.
- 6.12 Whichever mechanism is chosen will lead to change in the existing pattern of allocations to district councils. Some fare better under a formula that weights in favour of population. Others stand to gain more from an allocation that weights in favour of social need.
- 6.13 The Department invites comment on how best to strike a balance between fairness and equity and the

recognised need to protect existing services. On receipt of views on the funding formula, the Department will assess the financial implications for individual district councils. Changes to the funding allocation will be made in light of this assessment and only after further consultation with district councils.

Consultation Points

- Views are sought on a possible funding formula for the Programme designed to achieve a fairer, more transparent and equitable grant allocation to district councils.
- Views are sought on an appropriate definition and measurement of social need for the purposes of this Programme.
- Views are sought on appropriate weightings for social need and population, given Programme objectives and New TSN's principle of targeting resources towards people, groups and areas in greatest social need.
- Views are sought on how best to ensure existing services are protected given the change in allocations that could result from the introduction of a funding formula.

Proposals for Community Support Plans

6.15 The Department has come across imaginative and "joined up" approaches to community planning in a number of district councils, planning beyond

boundaries by engaging a wide range of policy makers, funders, service providers, community and voluntary groups and other influencers. These approaches are to be welcomed and built upon since they have the potential to improve the quality of community life.

6.15 The Department proposes to make "community support planning" a defining feature of the Programme in future. At present, district councils are required to submit advice services development plans to the Department, community relations strategies to the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) and local economic development plans to the Department of Economic Development to access European funding for economic development. This review presents an opportunity to promote an integrated approach to community planning, incorporating community services, community relations, community arts, community economic development and local advice services that in turn could drive the Best Value process within district councils.

6.16 The Department does not wish to appear unduly prescriptive about the scope of these community support plans, the precise content of which will require further discussion. Nine characteristics of good practice have however been identified to guide their production²¹:

1. **Comprehensive** Plans should look at the community as a totality, recognise that problems are interlinked and understand that there is a need for integration and coordination.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 2. Examine needs and resources | Plans should address not only needs but the resources available for community use, including financial resources, the skills and commitment of local people, the network of organisations that exist and other potential sources of support. |
| 3. Focus on a community | Defined in relation to a particular geographical area and for the purposes of the Programme, it will also be appropriate to include communities of interest. |
| 4. Demonstrate active community involvement | In keeping with Best Value principles, community involvement is necessary to ensure that the plans address community need and help develop community commitment and self confidence. |
| 5. Lead to action to improve the quality of community life | Plans should list necessary actions and meaningful targets and incorporate a shared commitment to implement them. |
| 6. Have influence | Plans should "aim for influence" among other funders and policymakers. |
| 7. Target | Plans should target those areas and groups objectively defined as being in greatest need. |
| 8. Respect the community | Plans should be driven by a willingness to listen to what communities have to say and should reflect their concerns and needs. |

9. **Promote partnership**

The planning process should strengthen existing relationships and build new alliances between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

Consultation Points

Views are sought on the proposal to invite district councils to submit community support plans.

- Should community support plans be a feature of the Programme in future?
- If so, what could they usefully include?
- What positive outcomes are expected?
- Are any difficulties anticipated and if so, how can they be overcome?

7. Principles into Practice

7.1 A wide spectrum of local community and voluntary organisations exist. The primary challenge is to identify strategic structures for the cultivation and support of these groups, to do so in ways that foster independence rather than dependence and to do so at a time when other funding sources are expected to decrease.

7.2 While the support needs of local groups vary, consultations with community and voluntary groups have confirmed the core practical support activities²² as follows:

- offering administrative support to groups;
- provision of advice and technical assistance on the management and maintenance of community owned/managed premises;
- linking groups to outside resources and advising them how to apply for funding;
- providing people in the community with the information they need to understand the operations of government and other agencies and helping them gain access to these structures;
- building links between organisations where this can help achieve objectives (networking);
- assisting community organisations in negotiations with service providers and in consultation and participation exercises;
- training people in the skills they need to achieve their goals;

- enabling local groups to develop expertise and skills necessary to further their own objectives, e.g. advising on staffing, constitutions, planning and evaluation;
- building up a pool of experts that the community can call on e.g. accountants, economists, architects, solicitors.

7.3 The Department accepts that these activities need to take place if community participation is to be supported in practical ways.

7.4 As part of the review, district councils were invited to indicate which if any of these activities were currently being undertaken by them and with what degree of frequency (occasionally or routinely). In response, the majority indicated that they undertook most or all of these activities regularly (more than once or twice a week).

7.5 Perceptions vary however and while their contribution in these important activities is to be welcomed, both the analysis of time utilisation²³ and discussions with community service staff confirmed that "support capacity" within district councils for such activities is low. Commonly, staff find themselves faced with heavy administrative burdens, carry wide and varied responsibilities, have received little in-service training and deploy large elements of time in the management of district council owned community centres. Although there were exceptions, the community and voluntary groups with whom we met had not experienced such practical support to any significant degree.

7.6 At the same time other agencies (notably, but not exclusively, resource centres and network

organisations) appear to provide sometimes similar services.

Consultation Point

- How can existing resources be deployed most effectively and most strategically to identify and meet these practical support needs at local level?

8. Resource Issues:

8.1 The Department has stopped short of bringing forward proposals on future funding requirements at this point. Funding is important and in the eyes of many district councils and local advice organisations, it was presented as the single most important factor limiting further development of the Programme.

8.2 In considering funding issues, the Department recognises that

- money is not the only success factor in the Programme. The district councils most widely recognised by community groups for their support of community participation are not necessarily those whose financial commitment to the Programme is greatest. The existence of a "community culture", the support of elected representatives, issues of "structure and siting" of community services and the positive endorsement of chief executives are important influencers;
- resource issues should be determined in light of a clear and proven need that cannot be met either from within existing resources or from alternative sources. The Department considers that resource issues for the Community Services Programme are most properly addressed in the context of an agreed new strategy. This consultation exercise is central to strategy formulation;
- the rate support grant to district councils has declined as a percentage of overall Programme expenditure from 75% in 1975 to 19% in 1996/97;

- strong feeling exists among local advice organisations that resources for advice services are insufficient to meet need. The view is held that the minimum grant of £6000 per district council matched by £4000 from the rates is inadequate to support a meaningful network of local advice provision. At the same time, there is positive endorsement of the importance of the current financial support provided by councils.

8.3 The Department seeks views on possible future priorities for funding as part of this consultation. Resources are scarce and collectively, there is a responsibility to ensure that they are used to best possible effect, whether they take the form of a grant from the Department or input through local rates.

Consultation Points:

The Department invites respondents to consider

- the current pattern of expenditure within the Programme;
- the strengths as identified;
- the opportunities for improvement;
- the proposals for a new framework;
- the proposals for a funding formula and in particular the effect on district councils of a redistribution of grant

and to forward views on

- Which changes can be effected within existing Programme expenditure?
- Which changes will require new resources and why?
- In the event that additional funds were to become available, how could they be most strategically deployed?

9. The Way Forward

9.1 The Department accepts that a number of the issues raised in this report are difficult ones to grapple with. It would be most grateful to receive comments on the specific consultations points raised and more generally on

- whether the right issues have been identified?
- whether the proposed actions are the right ones?
- whether any further action should be taken?

9.2 The Department will give careful consideration to the views received and it will, as soon as practicable after the end of the consultation period, issue a policy statement offering guidance on implementation of the new Programme. It is hoped that as many as possible of any revised arrangements can be introduced in the 2000/2001 financial year.

9.3 Responses to this report will be made available to the public on request unless respondents clearly indicate that they wish their responses to remain confidential.

9.4 Responses to the issues raised in this report should be sent by 29 February 2000 to

Maeve Walls
Community Development Branch
Voluntary Activity Unit
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Room C4.14
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT43PP

Or by e.mail to maeve.walls@dhssni.gov.uk

9.5 Further Copies

This report is also available on the Internet. The address is: <http://www.dhssni.gov.uk>

Further copies can be obtained from the Voluntary Activity Unit on Tel: (01232 520510). People with special needs may obtain copies in Braille, large print or audio cassette and minority ethnic groups may obtain copies in their language by contacting the above number.

10 The Consultative Process

The Department has benefited from meetings with representatives of the following community groups, voluntary organisations and advice organisations in the course of the review:

Albertbridge Community Development Project

Armagh CAB

Association of Independent Advice Centres

Ballee Community Association

Ballyholland Community Association

Ballymena CAB

Ballynafeigh Community Development Agency

Banbridge CAB

Barcroft Community Association

Belfast Group of CAB

Belfast Travellers Education and Development Group

Belfast Travellers Site Project

Bloomfield Community Association

Carrick Access Group

Carrickfergus and District Forum of People with Disabilities

Chinese Welfare Association

Chrysalis Centre, Craigavon

Claudy Rural Development Limited
Community Development Centre, North Belfast
Community Network, Portadown
Confederation of Community Groups, Newry
Cookstown and West Shores Area Network
Cookstown Womens Aid
Craigavon Asian Women's Community Association
Craigavon CAB
Craigavon Independent Advice Centre
Craigavon/Banbridge Volunteer Bureau
Creggan Community Association

Derry CAB
Derry Travellers Support Group
Derry Travellers Support Group
Disability Action
Donaghcloney Rural Needs
Dove House Community Trust
Down District CAB
Drumellan Resource Centre
Dungannon CAB

East Belfast Community Development Association
East Down Rural Community Network

Falls Community Council

Fermanagh CAB

Fermanagh Women's Network

Fintona Development Association

Gilford Together

Greater Belfast Community Network

Greater Shankill Partnership

Hilltown Community Development Association

Hollywell Trust

Indian Community Centre

Islamic Centre

Jerrettspass Community Association

Keady and District Community Initiative

Killyleagh Development Association

L'Derry CAB

Law Centre NI

Ligoniel Community Action Group

Ligoniel Family Centre

Limavady Community Development Initiative

Lisburn Welfare Rights Group

Lisburn Women's Network

Lower Antrim Road Regeneration Initiative

Lower North Belfast Community Council

Lower North Belfast Community Council

Lurgan Council for Voluntary Action

Magherafelt Women's Group

MARCIA

Meigh Community Association

Moylinn House Community Development Support
Services Agency

Moyola Valley Development Partnership

Newry and Mourne Carers Association

Newry and Mourne Forum of People with Disabilities

Newry Welfare Rights

Newry Welfare Rights Centre

Newtownabbey CAB

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

North Belfast Communities in Action

North Belfast Cultural Society

North Down CAB

North West Community Network

Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice
Bureaux

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

Northern Ireland Council for Travelling People

Northern Ireland Filipino Association

Omagh Area Women's Network

Omagh Independent Advice Services

Omawest Development Association

Rathcoole Community Forum

ROMAL (Regeneration of Mourne Area Ltd)

ROSA (Regeneration of South Armagh)

Rural Community Network

Shankill Community Projects

Short Strand Partnership

South Lough Neagh Regeneration Group

STEP

Strabane Rural Community Network

Upper Springfield Development Trust

Waterside YMCA

West Belfast Access Group

Windsor Women's Centre

Wishing Well

Women's Information Group

Women's Resource and Development Agency

Women's Support Network

Zero -8- Teen

In addition the Department received written submissions from the following organisations:

Advice Services Alliance (NI)

Association of Independent Advice Centres

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association

Help The Aged

North West Community Network

Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)

Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project

Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (Regional Community Development Demonstration Project)

Rural Area Partnership in Derry

Women In Communities Take Action

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ The amount raised by 1p on the rates across Northern Ireland amounts to £1,942,769 in 1999/2000.
- ² Launched in March 1998, all 26 district councils have committed themselves to replace the current system of Compulsory Competitive Tendering of certain services with a “Best Value” regime based on twelve principles of Best Value. The concept of Best Value is designed to promote local accountability and continuous improvement. The expectation is that district councils consult with local people to determine their wishes and priorities for service improvement.
- ³ Councils in Northern Ireland have lead responsibility for developing the Local Agenda 21 process designed to produce locally based strategies in partnership with statutory agencies and local communities to address local social, economic and environmental problems.
- ⁴ Recommendations on financial monitoring will be brought to the attention of district councils in due course. In the interim, this represents best estimates of capital and non-capital expenditure.
- ⁵ Based on questionnaire returns from all 26 district councils. Direct correlation with expenditure data cannot be assumed.
- ⁶ Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
- ⁷ Based on 96/7 data.
- ⁸ Of these centres, district councils directly provide 152. Community groups provide the remaining 87.
- ⁹ We have arrived at this figure by assuming a capital value of £200,000 for each district council owned community centre and £100,000 for each centre owned by a community group.
- ¹⁰ As with other figures cited, this has relied on returns from district councils.
- ¹¹ A mapping exercise of advice services and outreach

centres was undertaken as part of the evaluation.

- ¹² RES Research and Evaluation Services Report commissioned by the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux 1995.
- ¹³ This figure includes 244 support staff (caretakers and cleaners). Returns indicated 60 “primary” staff (ie responsibilities not combined with other work areas. 30 of these posts were in Belfast and 10 district councils had no such primary posts.)
- ¹⁴ This figure does take account of the economic value of the volunteer input generated through the Community Services Programme. It has not been possible to quantify the level of volunteer input generated as a result of the Programme as a whole.
- ¹⁵ Spare capacity was estimated to range from 59% in one district council to 4% in another and evidence of multipurpose use (shared with other agencies) was generally low.
- ¹⁶ Excluding grants made to community and voluntary organisations for community centres and resource centres.
- ¹⁷ These have drawn from the “Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Development” Report published by the Voluntary Activity Unit in October 1996.
- ¹⁸ Specific proposals for monitoring and evaluation of local advice services have been drafted for discussion with the Advice Services Alliance (NI) and with district councils.
- ¹⁹ The Targeting Social Need (TSN) initiative was originally launched in 1991. Its objective was to target resources more effectively on areas, groups and individuals in greatest need, irrespective of community background. The White Paper, “Partnership for Equality” (Cm 3890) published in March 1998 announced the Government’s plans for a reinvigorated New TSN policy.
- ²⁰ Robson B, Bradford M, Deas I. (1994) Relative Deprivation in Northern Ireland. Occasional Paper No 28, PPRU. Since 1994, Government has used indicators

of relative deprivation developed by Professor Robson of Manchester University, using results from the 1991 Census and other official sources of information.

²¹ “Community Profiling” by Hawtin, Hughes and Percy-Smith (Open University Press, 1994) has been valuable in highlighting many of these features in the context of community profiles.

²² These were first identified by Marilyn Taylor in her book “Signposts to Community Development”.

²³ The questionnaires invited Council staff to tell us how their time was allocated.