

Communities In Transition

Participatory Design Process – Reporting Template

Please complete this report following each participatory design session (i.e. one per session) to record the key of the discussion. Please use the sections below to structure the report. If any area was not covered during the discussion, please note that in the relevant section.

Please return the completed report to cit@cooperationireland.org within one week of each participatory design session.

Area: West Belfast

Theme: Community Safety & Policing

Date: 30/01/19, 05/02/19

Number of attendees: 5 (30/1) and 14 (5/2)

1. Proposed interventions discussed to address the issues identified in Phase 1 fieldwork?

- Resourcing of community safety infrastructure to build on and expand existing models of best practice;
- Outreach worker for Safer Neighbourhoods Project in the Colin area;
- Additional Community Safety/Professional Witness post(s) to enhance that work across West Belfast;
- Upskilling of the community safety volunteer base.

2. Comments on current community capacity to address issues identified?

As detailed in Phase 1, the target area(s) have the experience of community safety fora (Greater Falls, Upper Springfield, Upper Falls, Colin) which participants identified as a model of best practice for addressing issues relating to community safety in the broadest sense. Again, it was noted that these structures were proving to be successful, with the Upper Springfield Community Safety Forum receiving a positive evaluation by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate. Participants put forward a number of reasons why these structures had become less active:

- A lack of resources and the absence of a dedicated coordinator for each of the areas;
- A sense that the statutory agencies had failed to give their full backing or 'cede control' to the community safety fora;
- The impact of changes in community-based policing and the environment in which the community safety fora were operating;
- A sense that the work of the community safety structures became heavily dependent on the efforts of a number of individuals, who took on increasing workloads on a voluntary basis.

It was noted that the Colin Community Safety Forum is the most well-developed and most active of the four, although it has fallen to a core group of volunteers to sustain its work and that of the Safer Neighbourhoods Project – which has one paid post to address day-to-day issues affecting a population of 30,000. The Safer Neighbourhoods Project has won numerous awards, but has struggled to sustain its on-the-ground outreach presence since losing the funding for the post dedicated to that aspect of its work. This has inhibited the capacity of the SNP to identify emerging issues and take the preventative action necessary to ensure that they do not escalate into full-blown crises.

Participants also noted the work of the Community Safety/Professional Witness Officer based in Falls Community Council, which follows on from the experience of the Divis Intervention Project. It was suggested that this work is valuable, but that the post covers the whole of West Belfast.

Finally, consistent with previous studies of policing and community safety initiatives, participants suggested that the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships were, at best, a useful accountability mechanism made workable through the participation of political and community representatives. It was agreed that PCSPs do not and could not have the same reach, community buy-in or efficacy of community-led structures.

3. Outcomes that participants suggested these interventions would achieve?

- Strengthen the capacity and coordination of community safety structures;
- Help build the volunteer base for community safety initiatives;
- Build the confidence of the community to engage with and support community-based policing;
- Provide a mechanism through which to engage with harder-to-reach groups;
- Provide mechanisms and pathways that meet the needs of victims of anti-social behaviour and low level criminality while acting in the best interests of those who are engaging in such activities;
- Serve as a link between residents and police to encourage reporting of crime;
- Relieve the pressure on neighbourhood policing teams;
- Improve collaboration between community and statutory providers.

4. How did participants suggest will we know if these projects/interventions have succeeded? (indicators/measures)

- A reduction in the incidence of anti-social behaviour and criminality;
- A reduction in the number people falling under the influence of paramilitarism;
- An increase in the number of people reporting through the community safety structures and directly through the PSNI;

- A reduction in the number of people entering the criminal justice system;
- Improved trust and confidence in policing.

Participants noted that community safety initiatives had been evaluated at different times and were found to have contributed to a decrease in the incidence of anti-social behaviour and criminality, along with an increase in reporting. It was suggested that the proposed interventions would have the same impact.

5. Target beneficiaries/participants of the suggested interventions?

- Victims of anti-social behaviour and criminality;
- Those who are liable to become engaged in anti-social behaviour, criminality and/or fall under the influence of paramilitarism;
- Marginalised groups who are reluctant, or lack the confidence, to engage directly with the police and criminal justice system;
- Residents who are currently involved in community safety structures;
- Residents who are not currently involved in community safety structures but may wish to.

6. How did participants suggest these projects/interventions will build the capacity/capability in the community?

See above.

7. How did participants suggest these projects/interventions will support the overall objectives of the Tackling Paramilitarism Executive Action Plan...?

a. Paramilitarism has no place.

The proposed intervention would seek to encourage people towards engagement with community safety structures and away from the influence of paramilitarism. Proactive intervention at an early stage can prevent issues from escalating to the point where armed groups may become involved.

b. Citizens and communities feel safe and confident.

Citizens and communities will feel safer and more confident where there are fewer incidences of anti-social behaviour and criminality, where victims feel that their needs are being addressed, and where there are constructive pathways available for those who may be liable to become engaged in anti-social behaviour and criminality. Citizens and communities will also feel safer and more confident when they have a sense of ownership over and greater input into how community safety is conceived and realised.

c. The public support and have increased confidence in the justice system.

The proposed interventions would provide a tried and tested mechanism for those who are reluctant to engage directly with the

police and criminal justice system, while simultaneously building the confidence of those people to move in that direction. At the same time, it would help to take some of the pressure off neighbourhood policing teams and the criminal justice system as a whole so that they can work more effectively. Participants made the point that investment in proactive community safety initiatives is cost-effective as they help to reduce the need for large-scale policing operations and/or the cost of people going through the criminal justice system.

d. Support is available for those who wish to move away from paramilitary activity and structures.

The proposed intervention would seek to engage in dialogue with those who are linked to armed groups or indicate support for their actions.

8. Any dependencies identified by participants?

Participants noted that the (re)building of community safety structures would depend in part on the support of the statutory sector. It was suggested that the proposed interventions should be funded by leveraging in various sources of financial support, or that a commitment for longer term funding should be forthcoming if the interventions were to prove successful within the initial two-year period.

In addition, it was suggested that capacity building training for community safety volunteers would have limited impact in the absence of fully functioning community-led structures and dedicated workers servicing the target area(s). Training is ongoing in the

9. Any risks identified by participants?

The main risk identified was that relating to the sustainability of any intervention in the absence of long-term funding.

10. Any other comments made by participants?

Much of the discussion focused on participants' concerns around the nature and direction of policing, many of which had been raised in Phase 1. Participants suggested that community-based policing is 'being done on the cheap', noting that it is common for one neighbourhood policing team (8 staff) to be designated for the whole of West Belfast. As in Phase 1, it was argued that the PSNI had undergone a shift in how it views and polices the target area(s) – 'that they've done their bit for the process and no longer have any affinity with the communities they're supposed to serve'. This was contrasted with the 2010-15 period, when community-based policing was believed to be characterised by consistency and the 'embeddedness' of knowledgeable, sympathetic policing teams in the community. Participants each spoke to incidents that they believed demonstrated that 'over-the-top political policing' had superseded community-based policing both in policy terms and in terms of the allocation of resources. It was widely acknowledged that these trends are working against the efforts of neighbourhood teams who are doing their

best to maintain relationships and meet the needs of the community in difficult circumstances.

It was noted that community and political representatives are continuing to engage with the PSNI but that they are losing people around them – even in Colin, where relationships between the community and police have historically been more positive than in some other areas. But having raised the same concerns repeatedly in recent years, community representatives are now saying that confidence in policing is close to rock bottom.

11. Is a further follow-up workshop required? Please provide details.

N/A