BUILDING CAPACITY TO SUPPORT TRANSITION IN WEST BELFAST

FIELDWORK REPORT FROM PHASE 1 – BUILDING CAPACITY IN COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION

AUGUST 2018

The Executive Office

Foreword

In July 2016 the Northern Ireland Executive published an Action Plan setting out 38 actions it would take to address some of the most difficult issues which continue to disrupt peaceful and democratic society, in particular, the issues of continued paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime.

This plan seeks to achieve four ambitious outcomes; a society where citizens and communities feel safe and confident; where paramilitarism has no place; where the public support and have even more confidence in the justice system; and where those who wish to move away from paramilitary activity and structures are supported to do it.

The Executive Office has responsibility for delivery of Action B4 of the Executive Action plan through the Communities in Transition project, which aims to support eight areas where there has been a history of paramilitary activity and coercive control to transition into open and accessible communities where paramilitary activity no longer plays a role.

The Tackling Paramilitarism Programme Board, which oversees delivery of the Executive Action Plan, commissioned independent research which identified the eight areas of focus for this project that have been most impacted by paramilitary activity and associated criminality. The report will focus on West Belfast.

In September 2017, we appointed a Consortium, led by Co-operation Ireland in partnership with the Mitchell Institute (QUB), INCORE (Ulster University) and the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) as Strategic Partner to develop a two-phase programme to build capacity to support transition within these communities.

A partnership approach sits at the very heart of this project; we recognise that delivery on the ground needs to include those people who are most affected by these issues.

Phase 1 of the project consisted of extensive consultation with local communities and key stakeholders in each of the areas. This report provides a summary of the findings from Phase 1 and our proposed next steps as we move forward

We recognise and value the extensive range of important and often challenging work that has already been undertaken by individuals and groups at local level in tackling these issues. This project gives us the opportunity to further drive forward with a new and innovative approach to tackling paramilitary activity and we look forward to continuing to work alongside the communities involved, who are often best placed to propose and deliver solutions to the problems they face.

The Executive Office, in partnership with the Communities in Transition Consortium

Introduction

It has been twenty years since our society said YES to peace. Although much has changed, there are still many challenges as we continue to transition into a peaceful society.

The Executive's Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime recognizes the role communities must play in tackling paramilitarism by developing a culture sympathetic to the rule of law and addressing the systemic issues that these groups seek to exploit. Lawfulness is binding on all, extending across communities, the justice system and statutory agencies. Many of the actions within the plan seek to promote culture of lawfulness across society.

ACTION B4

seeks to provide programmes to build community capacity so that they can move beyond the coercive control and malign influence of groups involved in criminality. As such, Action B4 will **'Support ambitious initiatives aimed at building capacity in communities in transition, including through developing partnership across civil society and across community divisions.'**

OUR AREAS OF FOCUS:

- Antiville and Kilwaughter in Larne together with Northland and Castlemara in Carrickfergus

- Brandywell and Creggan in Derry/Londonderry

- Kilcooley (Clandeboye 2&3 SOA) and Rathgill (Conlig 3 SOA) in North Down

- Drumgask and Kilwilkie in Lurgan

- Lower Falls, Twinbrook, Poleglass, Upper Springfield, Turf Lodge and Ballymurphy in West Belfast

- New Lodge and Greater Ardoyne in North Belfast

- Shankill (upper and lower, including Woodvale) in West Belfast

- The Mount and Ballymacarrett in East Belfast

Between November 2017 and March 2018, the CIT consortium conducted an engagement process in each of the selected eight areas as part of the phase 1 of the project.

The process included a desk-based review of the locality in conjunction with interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders in each area, including services providers, community groups, faith-based groups, elected representatives, the business sector, residents and others.

THIS REPORT REFLECTS THE MAIN FINDINGS THAT EMERGED FROM THE FIELDWORK AND THE PROPOSED NEXT STEPS.

The information presented in this document represent the views and suggestions expressed by the participants in Phase 1 of the project. We are conscious that there will be other views and perspectives on the document and the purpose of the publication is to stimulate discussion and promote debate on issues that are of utmost importance to the continuing development of your community. In addition, as stakeholder conversations took place over a limited period of 3-4 months, it was not possible to speak to everyone within the community.

With this in mind, it should be noted that the suggested interventions are therefore not funding commitments but the starting point for continued dialogue on the possible options moving forward.

Outline

The first section of this report presents an outline profile of the area, the headline findings and the relevant context for successful transition in the area. The second part provides a detailed thematic description of the findings and possible solutions as suggested by various participants. Although each area is unique, seven mutual themes arose as the major issues regarding building community capacity for transition – Community safety and policing; Young people; Health and well-being; Environment and culture; Community development issues; Restorative justice and restorative practices and; Personal transition. The final section presents the next steps in the project and the timeline for their implementation.

Area Profile and Headline Findings

Area Profile of West Belfast

(Lower Falls, Ballymurphy, Turf Lodge & Upper Springfield, Poleglass & Twinbrook)

Politics

The Lower Falls, Ballymurphy, Turf Lodge & Upper Springfield, Poleglass & Twinbrook areas are within the Belfast West constituency area used for Parliamentary and Assembly elections. The constituency is represented by Paul Maskey MP (Sinn Féin) along with the four Sinn Féin and one People Before Profit MLAs elected in 2017. The areas span three District Electoral Areas (DEAs) of Belfast City Council – Black Mountain, Collin and Court. In 2014 these DEAs elected twelve councillors from Sinn Féin, two from the SDLP, two from the DUP, one each from People Before Profit and the PUP, and one Independent.

Social and Economic Issues

The statistic is based on the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures 2017.
The results are out of total of 890 Super Output Areas (SOAs) across Northern Ireland.

| Deprivation Domains	Falls 2	Falls 3	Poleglass 1	Poleglass 2	Twinbrook 1	Twinbrook 2
Overall Multiple Deprivation Measure	30	29	39	454	42	36
Income	233	88	167	584	96	64
Employment	36	30	33	282	47	26
Health Deprivation and Disability	7	11	17	333	30	28
Education, Skills & Training	9	46	40	329	70	112
Proximity to Services	875	788	491	663	621	668
Living Environment	79	258	235	515	23	59
Crime and Disorder	2	9	82	325	245	167

Social and Economic Issues

The statistic is based on the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures 2017. The results are out of total of 890 Super Output Areas (SOAs) across Northern Ireland.

Deprivation Domains	Upper Springfield 1	Upper Springfield 3	Whiterock 2	Whiterock 3
Overall Multiple Deprivation Measure	82	48	23	35
Income	538	442	306	322
Employment	34	21	8	17
Health Deprivation and Disability	25	21	1	5
Education, Skills & Training	65	23	5	29
Proximity to Services	875	788	731	872
Living Environment	79	258	130	20
Crime and Disorder	116	130	227	146

- For statistical purposes, the Lower Falls, Ballymurphy, Turf Lodge & Upper Springfield, Poleglass & Twinbrook areas are divided into a total of ten SOAs, of which nine are among the 10 percent most deprived in Northern Ireland.

- All of the ten SOAs are marked by a high proportion of population living in households whose equivalised income is below 60 per cent of the Northern Ireland median.

- All of the ten SOAs, with the exception of Poleglass 2, produce low educational outcomes and high levels of unemployment and employment deprivation.

- Whiterock 2 is the most deprived and Whiterock 3 the 5th most deprived SOA in Northern Ireland in terms of the proportion of the population whose quality of life is impaired by poor health or disability. Nine out of the ten SOAs are in the 10 percent most deprived in Northern Ireland on this measure, which translates into lower than average life expectancy and higher than average drug and alcohol related admissions and deaths across the Black Mountain, Collin and Court DEAs.

- Whiterock 2 is ranked 1st and Whiterock 3 ranked 8th in terms of combined mental health deprivation, while Falls 2 and Falls three are ranked 7th and 9th respectively. This is consistent with the persistently high crude suicide rates recorded for each of the three DEAs in which the areas are located.

- Falls 2 is the 2nd most deprived SOA in terms of crime and disorder, while Falls 3 is the 9th most deprived

Crime Statistics: REPORTED crime in September 2017
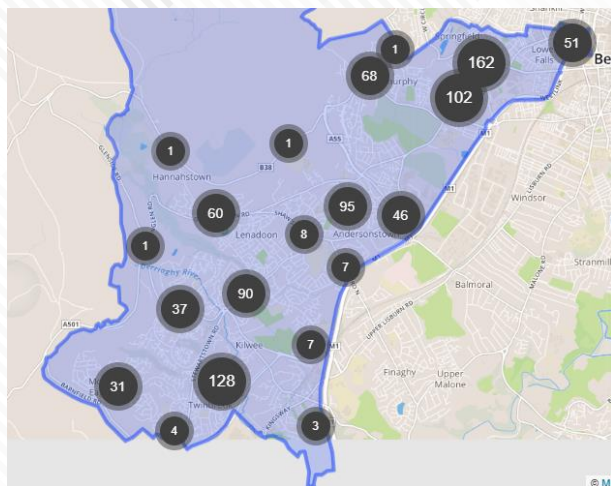
Total	903
Anti-social behaviour (ASB)	382
Theft	63
Burglary	26
Criminal damage & arson	113
Drugs	25
Possession of weapons	7
Public order	13
Robbery	8
Shoplifting	19
Vehicle crime	33
Violence & sexual offences	194
Other crime	20

Context for transition:

Transition in the West Belfast area continues to be shaped by:

- Poverty, deprivation, high levels of educational under-attainment and unemployment.
- Low levels of aspiration and a growing sense of hopelessness particularly among young people.
- A growing sense of isolation, marginalisation and abandonment across the area(s).
- A lack of confidence in government and statutory agencies to respond to and meet the needs of communities.
- Acute physical and mental health problems including high suicide rates.
- A trend of increasing substance misuse.
- High incidences of anti-social and criminal behaviour.
- The legacy of conflict and the wider political context.
- Declining levels of support, trust and confidence in the police and criminal justice agencies.

Headline Findings Arising from West Belfast

1. Across the board, it is felt that the consultation had been initiated at too late a stage to maximise buy-in and shape the programme to the specific needs of the community. Related to this, many feel that in the context of a constrained funding environment the programme may ultimately contribute to increased competition and divergence rather than collaboration between community groups. In turn this has exacerbated feelings that there is a lack of genuine partnership between state agencies and communities.

2. There is also the widespread feeling that the focus, framing and language of the programme is negative, exclusionary and therefore unhelpful to those working to bring about transition in their communities.

3. A less common criticism is that the process has been politically driven and has predetermined outcomes. Consequently, the programme is viewed by some as narrow, restrictive and designed to disproportionately benefit well-positioned community gatekeepers.

4. The target area(s) are comprised of a number of distinct communities, each with their own histories, experiences, political cultures and contemporary challenges. What they share in common is the experience of multiple deprivation whereby a number of acute social and economic problems co-exist.

5. It is widely acknowledged that the wider political context can act to restrict or harness the potential of any given community, with legacy, prison, policing and rights-based issues generating some disenchantment in the target area(s) even though the nationalist/republican community as a whole has moved into a more comfortable and confident space.

6. There is in some quarters a perception of intolerance towards political dissent, which can act to exclude those with unorthodox political views from playing an active role in the democratic political process and community life. In particular, within the dissenting, republican socialist and traditional republican constituencies exists the view that their political ideologies and aspirations are being delegitimised and criminalised, with the effect of increased marginalisation, resistance and entrenched hostility towards the post-Good Friday Agreement dispensation.

7. There appears to be a broad consensus that the numbers committed to political violence are diminishing, with several groups and individuals engaged in community dialogue and community development initiatives to take tentative first steps towards transition. However, the problem of criminal elements operating on the fringes of paramilitary republican groups remains.

8. Relationships between the community and PSNI are said to have deteriorated considerably in recent years. A lack of confidence in policing and the criminal justice system has translated into historically low levels of reporting. Common criticisms relate to the sporadic nature of police involvement in communities, the turnover and withdrawal of knowledgeable and experienced police teams and the perception that the police do not appear to act on or respond to information provided by the community.

9. Furthermore, it has been argued strongly and consistently that legacy issues coupled with the use and alleged abuse of stop and search powers are fuelling negative attitudes towards the police.

10. While there is no sense that recruitment is a major issue, the background conditions of children and young people's lives can lead them to become engaged in anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and low level criminal behaviours, with a small number at risk of 'graduating' to involvement in serious organised crime. In these circumstances, there is the risk that they will ultimately end up in the criminal justice system and/or fall victim to a paramilitary style attack.

11. In this context a small number of people suffering the effects of anti-social or criminal behaviours will turn to paramilitary groups and individuals for immediate respite or redress.

12. Community capacity varies from locality to locality, with a range of community-based programmes, services and activities being delivered in relative isolation and within an uncertain funding environment. While there are well developed community structures and a breadth of expertise across the West Belfast area, it is clear that community development could be more inclusive and collaborative in practice.

What does this mean for the Executive Action plan

SUCCESS IN THE WEST BELFAST AREA IS LARGELY DEPENDENT ON:

- A whole community approach to transition whereby government and statutory agencies (including the PSNI) are seen to be listening to and working in genuine partnership with communities, with delivery underpinned by prior engagement, consultation, co-design and a sense of community ownership.

- Improved standards of education, income and employment, physical and mental health, housing and other indicators of social wellbeing.

- Increased supports and improved outcomes for adults, children and young people at risk, particularly in the areas of education, employment, mental health, substance misuse and addiction problems.

- Progress towards a resolution of legacy, prison, policing and rights-based issues that continue to undermine community cohesion and political stability.

- The fostering of an environment that is conducive to ongoing and future efforts to persuade and build the capacity of different republican constituencies and members of paramilitary groups to take positive transitionary steps.

- The existence of mechanisms to support the transition and reintegration of current and former prisoners.

- Improved policing with the community, properly resourced and characterised by the presence of proactive, knowledgeable and experienced policing teams working in collaboration with local communities.

- The embedding of a wider understanding of justice which recognises that the best interests of those engaged in anti-social and criminal behaviours should not and do not conflict with the needs and rights of victims and communities.

- Enhanced civic engagement and increased resident and community capacity to play an active role in different facets of community life. This will necessarily include residents who for historical, political or personal reasons do not wish to work through official policing or criminal justice structures yet have a role to play in promoting community safety and wellbeing.

- Greater collaboration and inclusivity in community development, with community assets and resources used in a complementary and integrated way.

Themes for transition

Although each area is unique with its own set of circumstances, needs and challenges regarding paramilitarism and associated criminality, seven common themes have arisen out of the fieldwork.

These themes have been used to frame the findings in this next section which are based on the participants opinions and suggestions.

It is important to note that solving the issues raised by the participants will take a multi-faceted and collective response and it is beyond the scope of this project to solve on its own.

Transition will take time and cannot be achieved by communities alone. This project seeks to help build capacity within communities to forge their own pathways towards a peaceful, democratic society were paramilitarism has no place as part of a wider programme. The next section should be read within this context.

Community Safety and Policing

Key issues

There is a general sense of distrust in the PSNI and the criminal justice system and frustration with the slow pace of the criminal justice system have led to low levels of reporting and cooperation by the local community.

Relationships between the community and the PSNI are seen as deteriorating in recent years. One of the reasons for this deterioration is the perceived sporadic nature of police involvement in communities. Numerous examples have been cited as evidence of the past efficacy of a consistent, proactive policing presence working in collaboration with the local community. The withdrawal of knowledgeable and experienced policing teams from the areas is believed to have contributed to a spike in crime levels and undone the progress that had been made. There is concern that the pace of turnover of local police teams means community and political leaders constantly have to build new relationships with the police.

The lack of confidence in policing and the criminal justice system also stems from the perception that the police do not appear to act on or respond to information provided by the community. There is also a growing disillusionment with the slow pace of the criminal justice system and the perceived leniency of sentences for repeat offenders. The effect of this is that people become less likely to report criminal behaviour to the police or cooperate with the criminal justice system, with some viewing so-called punishment attacks as a form of immediate respite or redress.

A number of high level issues continue to have an adverse effect on community attitudes towards the police: delays in funding for legacy inquests and finding appropriate mechanisms for dealing with the past; collusion; the detention of senior republican figures; and the repeated concerns around the separated regime at Maghaberry Prison. These issues, coupled with the use and alleged abuse of stop and search powers, are fuelling negative attitudes towards the police.

There are a number of well-regarded community workers, youth workers, political activists and residents who for historical, political or personal reasons do not engage directly with the police yet continue to play an instrumental role in promoting community safety and wellbeing. This impacts on the breadth of resident participation in community safety structures which has, overall, declined in recent years.

Possible solutions

There is a need to improve trust, communication and collaboration between the PSNI and the local community, with community-based initiatives underpinned by wider notions of safety and wellbeing and organised in a way to promote broad-based participation.

Moving forward the evidence suggests that a transition plan should consider:

- An increased presence of proactive, knowledgeable and experienced neighbourhood policing teams working in collaboration with local communities, alongside opportunities for the most vulnerable to articulate how the police can support their needs.

- A mentoring programme or process to ensure that probationary officers are aware of the culture and dynamics of the communities that make up West Belfast, so that they can readily identify ways of working in partnership with towards a speedy and effective resolution of issues.

- A review of the use, efficacy and impact of stop and search powers in West Belfast.

- Community-led dialogue and bespoke mechanisms to develop knowledge and understanding of the role of police within the wider criminal justice system.

- Community safety structures should be resourced and recalibrated to build on previous experiences and best practice, merging these with new ideas to meet the specific challenges and needs of communities.

- A programme of engagement and training to build the capacity of residents to play an active role in existing and developing community safety initiatives.

Young People

Key findings

A number of issues are seen as affecting young people that can lead them to get involved in anti-social/criminal behaviour and become vulnerable to the influence of paramilitaries.

There are no strong indications that paramilitary groups in West Belfast are recruiting young people in significant numbers. However, it is widely acknowledged that there are a number of issues affecting young people in disadvantaged areas that can lead them to fall under the influence of paramilitary groups: social deprivation, educational under-attainment and poor employment prospects/opportunities; low aspirations and a sense of hopelessness; acute mental health issues; problems at home; inadequate family support mechanisms; isolation and exclusion from decision-making processes; the quest for identity and meaning.

The direct influence of paramilitary groups on young people can then manifest itself in two possible ways. Firstly, the background conditions of young people's lives can lead them to become engaged in anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and low level criminal behaviours, with a small number 'graduating' to involvement in serious organised crime. In these circumstances, there is the risk that they may ultimately end up in the criminal justice system and/or fall victim to a paramilitary style attack. Secondly, there is a risk that they may be drawn into paramilitary groups as willing albeit vulnerable and naïve volunteers.

It is clear from the consultation, and the work of the West Belfast Community Drugs Panel, that the trend of increasing substance misuse and addiction is having a hugely detrimental impact on young people and the wider community, exacerbating an already acute mental health crisis and contributing to the high incidence of anti-social and criminal behaviours.

Possible solutions

Improved services and support to increase resilience of those vulnerable to paramilitaries will reduce levels of coercive control and influence.

Moving forward the evidence suggests that a transition plan should include:

- An expansion of existing youth provision balancing support for diversionary and outreach programmes with that for longer term, innovative approaches to community and youth work that seek to encourage young people to play an active role in community life and the democratic political process.

- Targeted programmes of engagement, personal development and debate with a particular focus on educational and employment support for young people susceptible to paramilitary influence or attack.

- The provision of bespoke, community-based mental health and addiction support for young people.

Health and Well-being

Key findings

Poor physical and mental health, substance misuse and addictions are seen as symptoms of the conflict and the long-term deprivation suffered by communities in West Belfast which have enabled paramilitaries to exert coercive control and influence.

There is a strong sense that there is an urgent need to address these health problems, with appropriate support mechanisms put in place for the people who need them. Tackling the social determinants of these problems is considered as a priority for communities in West Belfast, with the overwhelming majority of stakeholders stating that paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime do not exist in a vacuum but in this specific context of marginalisation and social deprivation.

One near-term objective should be the provision of end-to-end, integrated services and referral pathways for vulnerable families, adults, children and young people, involving communities and statutory agencies working in closer collaboration. Integrated Services for Children & Young People had operated from four bases in neighbourhood partnership areas (Falls, Shankill, Upper Springfield and Andersonstown) across West Belfast. ISCYP provided a range of support services and programmes in partnership with various referral agencies (education, health and social care, youth justice, community, voluntary and statutory including self and/or parents) from 2009 to 2012. There is a consensus its withdrawal came as a blow to the communities which had come to rely on its services and has opened up gaps in provision that have not been replaced. Crucially, ISCYP offers one model for harnessing the capacity and expertise that exists within the community to provide immediate, joined-up interventions in collaboration with statutory providers.

Similarly, the findings and recommendations of the West Belfast Community Drugs Panel provide a strong foundation on which to explore innovative community-led pathways away from substance misuse and associated anti-social and criminal behaviours, promoting new ways of thinking about and responding to these issues in a way that supports transition away from militant, coercive responses.

Possible solutions

Improved support and services for mental and physical health, substance misuse and addictions can reduce levels of coercive control and influence.

Moving forward the evidence suggests that a transition plan should include:

- The re-establishment of the Integrated Services for Children & Young People, with an additional base in the Colin area to support the inclusion of Poleglass and Twinbrook.

- A community-based transition programme to involve focused, integrated strands of work on connected themes: community development, including interventions with paramilitary groups; community safety; family support; youth inclusion and development; drugs and alcohol support; and education, training and employment support.

- An engagement programme around the issue of substance misuse and addiction along with associated issues of anti-social behaviour, criminality and paramilitary style intimidation and attacks, involving roundtable discussions, a community conference, community fora and one-to-one meetings of key stakeholders.

Environment and culture

Key findings

Although the residual influence of paramilitarism is visible in the environment and culture, there have been initiatives to divert young people from the influence of paramilitary groups.

The local environment is marked with a large number of republican memorials and murals, in addition to a growing number of Irish historical and cultural symbols and images representing community solidarity with various international causes. With the exception of sporadic instances of graffiti, there has been no discernible proliferation of paramilitary related imagery in nationalist/republican West Belfast.

The annual Easter parades are the highlight in the republican calendar, representing the main expression of strength, resistance and continuity for the various constituencies that make up the republican movement. These parades are less contentious than in other areas and generally pass off without incident. Some have argued that the ritualistic and often militaristic nature of commemorations can act to normalise the existence and activities of paramilitary groups, however there are signs of community groups using such occasions to promote the republican values of civic virtue and active citizenship.

Townsend Street in the Divis area is the site of an annual anti-internment bonfire on the night of 8 August. While republican groups have previously attempted to use the bonfire as a tool for organising, recruitment and politicisation, in recent years it has become exclusively associated with underage drinking, drug use and anti-social behaviour.

More positively, we have seen the emergence of a growing, vibrant and youthful Irish language movement, which is arguably playing an important role in diverting young people away from paramilitary groups and towards active participation in politics and community life.

It should be noted that most stakeholders associate a transformation of the local environment with increased investment and regeneration, which they suggest would instill a greater sense of pride and hope in local communities.

Possible solutions

Continue to enhance community capacity to regenerate and invest in community appearance and in alternative forms of remembrance and commemoration promoting civic virtue and active citizenship.

Moving forward the evidence suggests that a transition plan should include:

- A reimaging programme to build on the successes of past programmes and address the issues of graffiti and murals in West Belfast, accompanied by a targeted programme of engagement around the related issues of parades, bonfires, commemorations and republican funerals.

- Support for creative forms of remembrance and commemoration that promote the universal republican values of civic virtue and active citizenship.

- Support for Irish language and cultural initiatives, particularly those focused on young people.

- Programmes to promote local economic development and investment in the community.

Community Development Issues

Key finding

There is a well-developed community infrastructure in the area, but this does not always translate into collaborative, integrative or inclusive working.

West Belfast has a long history and strong tradition of community development. This is reflected in a well-developed community infrastructure, with a number groups and partnerships operating in the area for the last decade or more. There has been a significant amount of community development work undertaken since the Good Friday Agreement and this continues with a range of community-based programmes, services and activities being delivered across the area(s). However, this well-developed community infrastructure and capacity does not always translate into collaborative, integrative or inclusive working.

Community capacity varies from locality to locality, each with its own challenges and strengths. The main challenges facing community development across the area(s) include: a reported experience of marginalisation and isolation from the policymaking and regeneration centres of (West) Belfast; a lack of capacity and opportunities for residents to play an active role in community life; a history of initiatives falling away and the need for greater coordination, collaboration and integration.

There is general agreement that paramilitary style attacks have no place in society and must be opposed at a community level. However, it is recognised that moral condemnation and a strong policing response are not sufficient to eradicate the risk of paramilitary style attacks and intimidation. There exists an impetus and appetite for community and political dialogue around paramilitary style attacks, their traumatic impact and use as a deterrent to anti-social and criminal behaviours within an overarching framework of long-term transition.

Possible solutions

Improved collaboration, coordination and integration of community-based services has the potential to promote greater community cohesion and reduce the influence of paramilitary groups.

Moving forward the evidence suggests that a transition plan should include:

- Measures to promote a collaborative, holistic approach to community development involving networking and communication, better coordination or integration of community-based services and more effective utilisation of community assets.

- Stronger protocols to promote collaborative funding bids and an inclusive framework which gives a greater role for a wider range of community groups/interests.

- Support for greater resident participation in different facets of community life, backed by the good will of established political parties and community leaders and the actions of government and statutory agencies.

- A bespoke programme to promote opportunities for individual residents to play an active role in community life and build the capacity of existing community groups.

  A programme of community-led dialogue aimed at building the capacity of communities to challenge paramilitary style attacks and the residual attitudes supporting them whilst at the same time working towards alternative, innovative community safety responses and strategies.

Restorative justice and restorative practices

Key findings

There is widespread support for restorative practices in the community. But in the context of low confidence in policing and the criminal justice system, accredited restorative schemes are limited in their capacity to engage with certain constituencies particularly those who for historical, political and personal reasons do not wish to report through official policing structures or work through criminal justice agencies.

The beneficial impact of community-based restorative practices is widely recognised. Crucially, they can offer speedy and responsive community and statutory support to the victims of anti-social or criminal behaviours without the need for a lengthy criminal justice process. Secondly, they are underpinned by a wider understanding of justice which recognises that the best interests of those involved in anti-social or criminal behaviours do not or should not conflict with the needs and rights of victims and communities. In this respect, they can help to identify support and rehabilitation pathways for offenders whilst addressing the needs of victims. Finally, they have proven to be effective in helping to build relationships between the community and the police.

There is considerable support for the further resourcing of restorative practices in order to build relationships between the community and criminal justice system in a positive context, improve the lives of young people and address the needs of victims of anti-social and criminal behaviours.

However, there is also the sense that, in the context of low confidence in policing and their formal place within the criminal justice system, accredited restorative schemes are limited in their capacity to engage certain constituencies. These challenges are particularly acute in areas where for historical, political or personal reasons a significant proportion of residents do not wish to report through official policing structures or work through criminal justice agencies.

Possible solutions

There is a need to support existing and developing community-based restorative practices to reach those sections of the community that do not access these services available in the area.

Moving forward the evidence suggests that a transition plan should include:

- Increased support for existing and developing community-based restorative practices including professional development, to ensure better and consistent standards, full accreditation and integration with other services.

- Raising and maintaining standards in relation to community restorative justice should be tackled at a regional as well as local level, to ensure consistency and support in the most difficult areas.

- To promote restorative practices as a means of resolving youth, education and community issues, particularly amongst those sections of the community that do not access the services currently available in the target area(s).

Personal Transition

Key findings

Ex-prisoners/combatants continue face various social, political and economic barriers preventing them from fully reintegrating into society.

There is a clear sense of a need for local and regional measures to support the efforts of ex-prisoners/combatants to transition and play an active role in community life.

Recent trends would appear to support claims that republican socialist, dissenting and traditional republican constituencies have made considerable progress towards the endorsement of peaceful political strategies. However, there are a number of factors which are believed to be preventing larger sections of those constituencies from moving in the same direction: the detention of senior republicans; the repeated concerns around the separated regime at Maghaberry Prison; the highly publicised activities of the Paramilitary Crime Task Force, including the remit given to the NCA; and the use and alleged abuse of stop and search powers against individuals deemed to be associated with paramilitary groups, including those who may be working to persuade and build the capacity of individual members of their constituencies to take positive transitionary steps.

It has been suggested by a range of stakeholders, including key third party actors, that successful transition will require people at all levels to take the risks and leaps of faith that have characterised past peace processes. This will involve a recognition that individuals are transitioning from different positions with different perspectives, capacity levels and efforts at transition to be found across different sections of republicanism. The Good Friday Agreement has been cited as an example of relatively successful transition delivered through a carefully and sensitively managed process of community and political dialogue, policing and prison reform, and practical support for those transitioning out of conflict.

Possible solutions

Providing support and legitimate alternatives to allow ex-prisoners/combatants to reintegrate into society and allowing them to move away from any affiliation to a paramilitary group.

Moving forward the evidence suggests that a transition plan should include:

- Dialogue programme with representatives from the dissenting, republican socialist and traditional republican constituencies, to include a number of roundtable forums at agreed neutral locations, along with a series of ongoing one-to-one discussions.

- (Ex-)prisoner engagement programme to include prison visits and work with community organisations and constituency representatives incorporating short-term education/training measures and advice clinics in the areas of: community development and mediation; leadership; welfare and employment; and communications and strategic planning.

- Training and employment support services for those with a conviction for a scheduled offence should be reviewed, and if necessary enhanced, to ensure that they are fit for purpose and support transition to lawful employment.

- Ex-prisoner employability and skills programmes to include the full range of republican constituencies.

What next for the Project

Next Steps

The Executive's Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime sets out a range of actions which will work towards an end to all forms of paramilitary activity, the use of peaceful and democratic means and the rule of law in all communities.

This is a challenge for society as a whole and we all have a part to play. Delivery of the Executive Action Plan presents a unique opportunity for new partnerships to develop both across Government and with the community sector. Through the Communities in Transition project, we want to support areas that are significantly impacted by paramilitarism and criminal activity and build capacity amongst the people who live there and the community organisations that are working extremely hard to make a difference to their neighbourhoods.

The scope of the Communities in Transition Project is to build the capacity of these communities through specific, practical interventions to enable them to affect positive change for themselves, break the grip of coercive control and transition away from paramilitary activity.

Tackling Paramilitary Programme Outcomes:

- Paramilitarism has no place

- Citizens and communities feel safe and confident

- The public support and have increasing confidence in the justice system

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

The Project will work with those local communities to put in place interventions to develop capacity and confidence through:
- building capacity to address underlying social issues and achieve improved outcomes for all;
- building capacity to transition in neighbourhoods and places and for groups of people that make up local communities;
- building capacity to proactively move towards a culture of lawfulness; and
- building capacity to become open, accessible and lawful communities.

The area-based approach being taken forward in this project enables activities to be tailored to take consideration of local contexts and for them to be designed and delivered in a way which empowers and supports citizens to continue to deliver change in their communities beyond the lifetime of the project.

Underpinning Principles:

- **Empowerment**: Empower and support citizens and communities to address the problems they face.
- **Sustainability**: Embedding capacity within communities so that change can be continued beyond the lifetime of this programme.
- **Collaboration:** Working together within communities and between communities and statutory agencies.
- **Lawfulness:** Commitment to the use of peaceful and democratic means and upholding the rule of law across all communities.
- **Inclusivity, Fairness, transparency, impartiality and democratic accountability**

Next Steps- In Your Community

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

We would like to thank everyone who was involved during the first phase of this programme, and we look forward to continuing the collaborative work achieved up until now and extending the range of voices involved in the process.

Over the next few months we will bring together individuals from West Belfast who want to see an end to paramilitarism and are willing to act to make change happen. We will work together to define priorities, activities and outcomes that will form the basis of commissioned activity in West Belfast. The activities will add value to existing provision and develop the capacity and resilience of individuals and of the local community to address issues connected with paramilitarism and organised crime. This will mean both building capacity to proactively move towards a culture of lawfulness and to address the underlying systemic issues which are exploited by paramilitary and organised criminal gangs.

ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE PARTICIPATORY DESIGN PROCESS

As part of the participatory design process and to help inform design discussions in this phase, there will be a number of supporting activities happening within your area:

- **Community Learning and Safety Dialogue activities**
  Community led events to increase knowledge and understanding of the justice system and the responsibilities of the different agencies within the system.

- **Young people activities**
  Engage in personal development and debate around vulnerability to paramilitary influence.

This document is the result of a community engagement process commissioned by TEO from the Communities in transition consortium: Co-operation Ireland in partnership with the Mitchell Institute (QUB), INCORE (Ulster University) and the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR)