Good Relations Unit
Belfast City Council
All Over Now?
What’s the problem?
Managing the problem

- **Antagonism and Separation** became the dominant experience of public life.

- **Violence** reinforced division: History was a litany of grievance and resistance.

- **Suspicion and fear** seem rational. They define where we live, who we trust and who we vote for.
Managing the problem

We agreed on the problem:
- THEM
We developed a system of THEM and US
- Residence and territory
- Friendship and marriage
- Employment
- Cultural and Political Self Identity
- Interpretations of ‘History’
- Justice and Grievance
- Culture and Sport
- Politics and institutional identity (Policing, Justice, Courts)
- Housing
- Schools
• The Past!
The past
Waterfront Hall
Laganside

Clarendon Docks

Lanyon Place

Cathedral Quarter

Donegall Quay

Mays Meadow
Victoria Square
The New Political Dispensation
Belfast – the City

- More than 1,500 (48% of total deaths) killed since 1969
- Minority ethnic groups comprise roughly 15,000
- Over two thirds of the population live in segregated housing (over 90% majority of one identity) while nearly all public sector housing is segregated
- Little change in patterns of segregation.
Divided by interfaces
Territory

Peace lines
Territory
A Changing City

- Substantial rise in inward investment
  - Victoria Square
  - Titanic Quarter
  - Sirocco Quays, etc…
  - Community infrastructure

- Migrant population since EU expansion
- 15,000 new migrants into Belfast – 70,000 in NI as a whole. 10% ROI workers are migrant
- Emerging racism – a new ‘them’
Costs of Division – legacies of conflict

- Poverty and violence (the most deprived areas are in interface areas)
- Safety of citizens
- Territorialism and subsequent duplication of services
- Poor image as a location for investment and regeneration
- Migration of young people and entrepreneurial talent
- Distorted labour markets
- Disruption of tourism
- Lack of shared sense of citizenship
- Civil unrest
- Contested decision-making
Belfast City Council

- 51 elected Members
  - 6 political party groups - no overall control
  - proportionality
  - d’Hondt power-sharing arrangements
- 6 Departments – 2500+ staff
- Review of Public Administration (2011)
  Additional powers such as housing
Good Relations: Framework

- Northern Ireland Act 1998, Section 75 (2)
- BCC Corporate Strategic Objective – 2001
  - Consistently identified as a top priority in the public survey
- BCC Good Relations Strategy – Jan 2003
- Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland – April 2005
- Belfast City Council Good Relations Plan
Good Relations – a mechanism for City Diplomacy

• A mechanism for the local authority to promote inter-community dialogue, social cohesion, conflict prevention, conflict resolution
• An effective mechanism to promote dialogue, cooperation and coordination in local peace building
• Council’s Good Relations programme helps create a stable environment in which people can live together peacefully in a climate of democracy, progress and prosperity
• Corporate objective of Council, underpinning policy
• Enabled the council deliver services and promote shared spaces/initiatives
Good Relations Structures

- **Good Relations Partnership**
  - cross-party and external representatives
    - unique within Council decision-making processes

- **Good Relations Working Group**
  - cross-departmental staff grouping,
    - oversees ‘mainstreaming’ of good relations into organisation
    - regular reports to Chief Officers’ Management Team

- **Good Relations Unit**
  - within the Chief Executive’s Department
    - Good Relations Manager, 4 x Good Relations Officers, Equality Officer, Good Relations Assistant and administration
Good Relations Themes

• Transforming Contested Space
  – Supporting locally based interface work (GR Fund)
  – Addressing duplicated service delivery (cost and access)

• Securing Shared City Space
  – City centre as integrated space
  – Consolidating shared spaces/neighborhoods

• Building Shared Organisational Space
  – Learning and Development Strategy
  – Commemoration and memorabilia projects

• Developing Shared Cultural Space
  – Murals and bonfires projects
  – Civic events for all – e.g. Holocaust Memorial Day/ St. Patrick’s Day, Bonfire Management Programme
Engagement Processes

- Dispelling of myths and stereotypes
- Break down of prejudices
- Promote and encourage dialogue
- Learn about others
- Develop friendships
- Allows for the exploration of shared values
- Address issues of mutual interest or concern
- Heal painful memories
- Be an inspiration to others
- Improve civic life
On the up......

- Vibrant Projects
- Community networks established
- Willingness to address racism
- Interfaces on the agenda
- Bonfires and Cultural Celebration
- Re-Imagining Communities
- Sports Initiatives- GAA, IFA, Crusaders
- City Council Priority
- More visitors
- Decommissioning
- Leaders unite against hate
All over now?

• 1500 sectarian incidents per year (5 per day)
• 88 Peace Walls
• 65,000 extra journeys
• Duplication of provision
• 1/10 Tourism
• Deprivation, Division and Regeneration
• Community Safety – Keeping Dangerous People out
All over now?

- Massareene
- Lurgan
- Rasharkin
- Coleraine
- Meigh
- Ardoyne
- Short Strand
- Homecoming Parade
- Eames Bradley Launch
- 100 Roma
- 40 Polish Families
- Hungarian nationals
The challenges ahead

- A society for all now requires a common set of values for inter-community and inter-cultural work and distinctive policies to address both
- Need to find a way to overcome the tendency to avoid dealing with sectarianism. We deal instead with those issues which do not expose structural complicity
- Simultaneous tendency to downplay both the local and global significance of inter-cultural work
- Peace must be more than the absence of violence
- Structural Division and the tendency to cultural apartheid - requires systematic attention
- The emergence of sustainable equality requires relationships of real solidarity
- Community Relations is not putting a sticking plaster on this issue, but insisting on a future inclusive of THEM and working through the consequences.
- Reconciliation is not an event
- Good work in this area has remained experimental and has never become systemic
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