

19 October 1998

David Trimble MP
First Minister Designate
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3ST



Dear Mr Trimble

CIVIC FORUM

Please find enclosed a paper which contains the findings of consultations carried out in the voluntary and community sector by NICVA during the summer on the Civic Forum.

If you have any queries on the paper, please do not hesitate to contact me or Liz Law, Millennium Debate Co-Ordinator, at NICVA.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Seamus McAleavey

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DIRECTOR

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CIVIC FORUM

(1) INTRODUCTION

1.1 NICVA, along with the voluntary and community sector, welcomed paragraph 34 in the Good Friday Agreement establishing the Civic Forum.

1.2 In the summer of 1998 NICVA encouraged and supported discussion and debate across the sector about the Civic Forum idea. This led to a process between July and September which has achieved some consensus, developed new ideas and highlighted outstanding issues in relation to the Civic Forum:

- (i) A discussion paper was written.
- (ii) Written comments were invited (see annexe 1).
- (iii) Meetings were organised across Northern Ireland.
- (iv) Invitations from individual groups to discuss the Civic Forum were taken up.
- (v) The developing consensus was presented on 7 September 1998.

1.3 NICVA is now:

- Presenting the results of contributions by 200 individuals/groups.
- Developing continued discussion in particular areas.

1.4 The discussions overall were lively, positive and creative, with a strong welcome for the Civic Forum and willingness to contribute new thinking about new mechanisms and structures.

(2) "*A consultative forum will be established.*"

2.1 The voluntary and community sector embraced the Civic Forum idea with customary energy.

2.2 Participants described how they had experienced a real notion of democracy through the Referendum process. There is a sense of ownership of the Assembly. This allowed for clear thinking about the other mechanisms of government - working committees, departments - and a will to maximise the contribution of the voluntary and community sector, complementary to the new, democratically elected, structures.

2.3 This served to clarify the notion of a complementary and consultative body - neither a second chamber nor a rubber stamp. The Civic Forum in its creation must not be confused with a senate. Rather, it should be an

collaborative body able to offer dialogue, experience and advice prior to decisions being made by the elected representatives.

(3) *"It will comprise representatives of the business, trade union and voluntary sectors, and other such sectors as agreed by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister."*

- 3.1 The sector welcomed reference to the potential contribution of voluntary and community groups to the future in Northern Ireland.
- 3.2 The NICVA discussions welcomed contributions on inclusion of the churches or faith communities as a sector represented at the Civic Forum. The full debate of this issue is being held elsewhere, but NICVA welcomed recognition of Northern Ireland as a pluralist society in discussions.
- 3.3 Similarly, the matter of inclusion of farmers as a separate entity is being debated elsewhere. However, NICVA is committed to ensuring that rural development issues are reflected in the voluntary and community sector. The Rural Community Network was one of the supporting bodies in the summer discussions.
- 3.4 The meetings discussed the experience of the District Partnerships and the extent to which they had demonstrated how different sectors could learn from each other and develop collective working. The experience was that this was most effective when it was most directly linked to the issues tackled.

(4) *"It will act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues."*

- 4.1 The understanding of voluntary and community groups is that as a consultative mechanism, the Civic Forum would be able to place issues on the agenda and to offer its reflection, experience and knowledge.
- 4.2 Participants in the debate believed that the Civic Forum could be truly cross-cutting in its way of doing business.
- 4.3 In bringing together the methods of working within the business, trade union and voluntary and community sectors, it could proof by issue - environment, culture.
- 4.4 Participants believed that perhaps the matters faced and dealt with by the Civic Forum might more accurately be called themes, rather than issues.

For example, the Civic Forum might advise on health concerns shared by the population as a whole, not specific provisions.

(5) *"The First Minister and Deputy First Minister will, by agreement, provide administrative support for the Civic Forum."*

- 5.1 The voluntary and community sector has discussed the methods by which the Civic Forum should engage with society at large. How most effectively can reporting be done, participation ensured and a mandate or position received? Existing networks which are organised by theme, by geography and in a number of cross-cutting ways, can be used to support this, but it would be important that all members of the Civic Forum engaged with wider society. This relationship should not be seen as the responsibility solely of the voluntary and community sector.
- 5.2 Voluntary and community groups are anxious that the role of the Civic Forum is effective. This will demand sufficient secretariat to allow the Civic Forum to identify issues, find solutions and practical suggestions, and offer them for consideration by the Assembly.
- 5.3 Participants in the discussions were interested in a model for a secretariat drawn not alone from the civil service, but also from the business, trade union and voluntary sectors. This could be done through secondment possibilities.

(6) *"... and establish guidelines for the selection of representatives to the Forum."*

- 6.1 Much attention has been paid during the discussions to ideas of representation and delegation in respect of the selection of representatives. While a larger Civic Forum may appear more representative, the weight of opinion was that the Civic Forum comprise of, say, 50 to 60 members supported by the networks of engagement considered in 5.3 above.
- 6.2 The complex arguments around election, selection or appointment were considered. The weight of opinion was seen to support selection as the optimum method of establishing the Forum. Consideration was given to how the strength of selection can be protected and developed.
- 6.3 One selection process referred to during the debate is that used by NICVA to nominate to the District Partnerships established under the European Union Peace and Reconciliation Programme (for details, see annexe 2). This process could be reviewed, developed and established, giving:
 - Clear guidelines for the role of Civic Forum members.

- Clear guidelines for selection.
 - Task description for effective identification of potential contribution.
 - A selection process which is transparent.
 - Support in identifying potential Civic Forum members.
- 6.4 In addition to the experience of the District Partnerships, the ideas in the Nolan principles, new TSN and PAFT guidelines, exist to inform and to develop any selection process.
- 6.5 These mechanisms can further underpin the advisory and complementary nature of the Civic Forum, distinguishing it from any elected mechanism.
- 6.6 It is suggested that the period of tenure of Civic Forum seats would mirror that of the Assembly, that it be for four years, but on the intervening two years.

(7) OTHER POINTS

- 7.1 There were firm calls for support and training for Civic Forum members and also for those people who may one day identify themselves as potential Civic Forum members.
- 7.2 It was noted that young people were not adequately or meaningfully represented in the discussions and debates about these mechanisms. NICVA and the voluntary and community sector in general are committed to examining and developing new ways by which young people may be engaged.
- 7.3 While participants believed that the secretariat should be located close to the Assembly and that the Civic Forum, too, would need to work closely with Assembly members, there was a strong voice for having the public business of the Civic Forum conducted across Northern Ireland, given especially the many fine facilities for such meetings, which now exist. These plenary sessions might take place once every six weeks, or eight times per year.
- 7.4 The voluntary and community sector is committed to offering its best experience and reflection to the establishment and development of the Civic Forum. It will be important, however, that the Civic Forum is seen as something which is growing and developing, and should be reviewed in order that new experiences and learning can be built on.

ANNEXE 1

THE CIVIC FORUM
DISCUSSIONS, SUMMER 1998

- (1) NICVA prepared a paper, *The Civic Forum, a Consultation Paper*, in July 1998. The paper was distributed widely across the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, inviting groups to:
 - (i) Comment in writing.
 - (ii) Join in a series of 14 local meetings.
 - (iii) Organise their own opportunities to discuss the Civic Forum ideas.
- (2) NICVA provided a number of suggested areas for comment and 25 groups responded in writing.
- (3) Local meetings were held in Belfast (4), Kesh, Derry, Ballymena, Cookstown, Craigavon, Armagh, Portaferry, Omagh, Castlewellan, Enniskillen and Newry.
- (4) Additional invitations to meet with other groups were received.
- (5) In all, 174 groups were involved in the process (see list attached).

GROUPS WHICH PARTICIPATED IN CIVIC FORUM DISCUSSIONS

123 House

Accord NI
Action for Dysphasic Adults
ADOPT
Aghagallon/Aghalee Partnership
Alzheimers Disease Society
Antrim Borough Council
Ardoyne Association

Ballybeen Women's Centre
Ballymoney Borough Council
Bannside Community Groups
Blackmountain Action Group
Bloomfield Community Association
Bloomfield Women's Group
British Red Cross
Bryson House

Canal Street Regeneration Group
Carrick Together Project
Cause for Mental Health
Cavan Development Association
Caw 2000
Centre for Voluntary Action Studies
Chapel Road Community Playgroup
Child Accident Prevention Trust
Churchtown Community Association
Cliftonville Joint Development Group
Coleraine Standing Conference of Women's Organisations
Colin Glen Trust
Committee on the Administration of Justice
Community Arts Forum
Community Development Services Ltd
Community Network
Community Relations in Schools
Community Transport Association
Community Work Education and Training Network
Conservation Volunteers NI
Co-operation Ireland
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside
Craigavon Borough Council
Craigavon and Banbridge Community Health and Social Services Trust

Craigavon Volunteer Bureau
Creggan Community Care
Crescent Arts Centre
Crossroads Caring for Carers
Culmore Residents Association
Cushendall Development Group

Democratic Dialogue
Derrychara Community Association
Derrylin Women's Group
Derry Well Women
Devenish Partnership Forum
Disability Action
Donaghcloney Rural Needs
Donegall Pass Community Group
Down District Volunteer Bureau
Drumallen Resource Centre
Drumcoo Centre
Drumcree Community Trust
Drumduff/Drumnakilly Community Association
The Dry Arch Centre
Dunmurry Development Partnership

Ederney Community Development Trust
Edward Street Hostel Ltd

Falls Women's Centre
FOCUS
Fountain Street Community Development Association
Foyle Basin Council
Foyle Friend
Foyle Women's Information Network
Futureways

Glen Parent/Youth Group
Glenshane Community Development Ltd
Glenview Community Association
Greater Shankill Partnership

Home Mission
Homestart Down District

Industrial Therapy Organisation
Institute for Counselling and Personal Development
International Voluntary Service

Killesher Community Development Association
Killesher Historical Society
Killesher and Cleenish Community Care Association
Killicomaine Care and Housing Ltd

LEA/NOW

The Link Family and Community Centre
Lisburn Prisoners Support Group
Lisnaskea Childcare
Long Tower Trust
Lurgan Council for Voluntary Action

Marie Curie Cancer Care
Market Community Association
Markethill District Enterprise
Mayfair Business Centre Ltd
MENCAP
Mid-Springfield Community Association
Mind Yourself
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre

The National Trust
National Council of YMCAs
National Schizophrenia Fellowship
Newry and Mourne Carers Association
Newry and Mourne Health Service
North Belfast Mission
North-West Forum of People with Disabilities
Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Northern Ireland Environment Link
Northern Ireland Forum on Disability
Northern Ireland Open College Network
Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project
Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment
Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
NUS-USI Student Centre

Omagh District Council
Omagh Women's Area Network
Omawest
Oxfam NI

Playboard
PRAXIS
Prince's Trust Volunteers
Prisoners Enterprise Project
Project Portadown Ltd

Randalstown Arches Association
Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre
RAPID
Rathenraw Community Development
Reach Across
Regeneration of South Armagh
The Resource Centre
ROMAL
Roslea Historical Society
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

St Louise's Comprehensive College
St Vincent de Paul (Coalisland)
Save the Children Fund
Sense
Share Centre
Skill
Soroptimist International
South Belfast Cultural Society
South Lough Neagh Regeneration
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme
Southern Travellers Early Years
Sports Council for NI
Springfarm District Community Association
Springfield Inter-Community Development Project
Stiles Community Association
Stormont Presbyterian Church
Suffolk Community Services Group

Teemore Business Complex
Triskele Community
Tullymore Tenants Association

University of Ulster at Magee
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum

Village Roundabout Caring Agency
Voluntary AIDS Forum
Voluntary Service Belfast

Voluntary Service Lisburn

Waterside Area Partnership

WAVE

West Belfast Summer School

Westcare Business Services

Whiterock Creche

Willowbank Ltd

Women for Women

Women's Aid

Women's Resource and Development Agency

Women's Support Network

Women Together

Youthlink NI

Youthnet

ANNEXE 2

EU SPECIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION - NOMINATIONS TO DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS

GUIDANCE NOTES

Under the District Partnerships Sub-Programme of the Peace and Reconciliation Initiative, partnerships were established in each of the 26 District Council areas to administer a portion of funding in that locality.

Since 1996, the partnerships have been working to formally establish themselves; develop a strategy for that area in consultation with local interest groups; process applications from organisations running projects under the auspices of the Peace Programme and administer the funds.

The partnerships are composed of between 15-30 people, of whom one third are representatives of the voluntary and community sector. The other members are Councillors, business people, and representatives of statutory bodies and trades unions.

NICVA, as the umbrella body for voluntary, community and charitable groups in Northern Ireland co-ordinates the nomination and selection of the voluntary and community sector representatives to each of the 26 District Partnerships. Representatives are currently serving on the partnership until December 1999.

In deciding which nominees will be chosen, NICVA will take into consideration the following criteria:-

1. Gender balance
The voluntary and community sector representation should have equal numbers of male and females. the representation of women should not fall below 40%.
2. Geographical Representation
Partnerships should endeavour to have representation from each 'region' of the district.
3. Social Inclusion
In line with the social inclusion theme of the Peace and Reconciliation Initiative, and in line with the commitment of the sector, representation should reflect the needs and interests of disadvantaged sections of the community.
4. Sectoral balance
The community and voluntary sector is made up of many interest groups working on different issues. As many of these as possible will be represented.

Monitoring of partnership representatives selected will be undertaken to ensure that a balance of geographical, gender, sectoral, community background, and social inclusion-focused representation is achieved.

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES ON DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND PARTNERSHIP BOARD

ROLES OF REPRESENTATIVES

1. Representatives from the voluntary and community sector, while nominated to serve on NIPB and District Partnerships by particular groups and organisations, are expected to represent the interests of the local sector as a whole, rather than only those of the particular nominating group.
2. Representatives are expected to attend meetings on a regular basis and to participate in those meetings and other activities of the partnership. If a representative expects to be unable to attend for an extended period of time, they should contact NICVA. If a representative is unable to continue their commitment, they are asked to formally resign in writing to the partnership and to NICVA, so that a replacement can be identified.
3. In the interests of accountability and inclusion, representatives are encouraged to identify appropriate opportunities to consult with and feedback to the rest of the sector in their area, or in the case of NIPB, the region, using relevant structures, networks and organisations. It is recognised that this will have to take account of issues of confidentiality and any formal procedures which may have been adopted by their partnership.
4. Representatives are encouraged to liaise with the other voluntary and community sector representatives on their partnership on a regular basis in order to facilitate discussion on issues of common concern and co-ordinate feedback to NICVA.
5. Representatives are expected to respond to occasional requests from NICVA to representatives to attend briefing sessions, prepare joint reports to the sector through NICVA etc. This participation is important to enable NICVA to effectively fulfil its role as outlined below, and will also facilitate liaison between representatives at District Partnership and NIPB levels.

ROLE OF NICVA

1. NICVA as the body responsible for appointing voluntary and community sector representatives to the District Partnerships and Northern Ireland Partnership Board, undertakes to carry out that task in an open and transparent manner according to the published guidelines.

2. NICVA will provide support and advice to sector representatives in a number of ways including:
 - organising regular briefing sessions in order to provide a flow of information and mutual feedback
 - one-to-one advice via telephone or meetings if appropriate
 - co-ordination of joint reports to facilitate feedback to the wider sector
3. When organising meetings or asking for reports, NICVA will respect limits on the amount of time representatives have available for these activities. It is expected that no more than four briefing sessions would be held within a year.
4. NICVA will make information on the work and experiences of sector representatives available to the wider sector by:
 - publishing lists of sector representatives,
 - production of reports,
 - and responding to requests for information.

NICVA
May 1998

26 August 1998

Dear Colleague

As you may be aware, under the European Union Peace and Reconciliation Programme, 26 District Partnerships have been established in every District Council Area in Northern Ireland to establish local peace and reconciliation strategies and to administer EU funding to support these strategies.

The District Partnerships comprise representatives from local councils, community and voluntary organisations, businesses, trade unions and statutory bodies. NICVA is the nominating body for the community and voluntary representatives on these partnerships. The recent resignation of one of the current voluntary/community representatives has left a vacant position on the Carrickfergus Partnership which it is NICVA's responsibility to fill. If your group or organisation would be interested putting forward a nominee to be considered as a voluntary/community partnership representative, would you please complete the enclosed nomination form, **(remembering to attach details of the nominee and evidence of their suitability to serve on the partnership)**. In appointing nominees to the District Partnerships, NICVA endeavours to achieve a balance of voluntary/community representation in terms of gender, geographical spread, and sectoral representation.

As we are keen to fill this vacant position as soon as possible, I would ask that, if interested, you complete and return the form and attached description no later than 15 September 1998. Unsuccessful nominations are held on file for consideration should future vacancies arise.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Nuttall
HEAD OF EUROPEAN UNIT, NICVA

Encls.

Nomination Form

*District Partnership
Peace and Reconciliation Initiative*

We nominate the following individual:

Name:

Contact address:

.....

..... Postcode:.....

Contact Tel: (work)..... (home).....

Organisation with which the nominee is connected:

.....

For consideration as a voluntary and community sector representative to our District Partnership (insert name of District Council area):

.....

Please attach a single page description of your nominee and the reason for wanting to join the Partnership

Name of nominating organisation:

Signed on behalf of the above organisation:

Address:

..... Postcode:

Tel: Fax:

Please return this nomination form by: Tuesday 27 October 1998

Please return to: Georgie Finlay, NICVA, 127 Ormeau Road,
Belfast, BT7 1SH, Tel: 01232 321224