A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE TO FLAGS, EMBLEMS AND SECTIONAL SYMBOLS

'A Community Perspective'

Inter Community Network

Housing Executive

The Regional Strategic Housing
Authority for Northern Ireland

Foreword:

The Inter Community Network provides the opportunity for local communities to contribute and influence the delivery of the Housing Executive's Good Relations Strategy. The Housing Executive recognises that an effective good relations strategy is best delivered through community led initiatives. This guide draws upon the experience of local communities to help the community, voluntary and statutory sectors focus on more acceptable expressions of cultural identity.

This publication has been prepared by the Inter Community Newtork. In preparing this guide the ICN has recognised that:

1. The pace of change will be determined by the local community.

2. The process is dependent on local circumstances,

3. The Inter Community Network recognises this process will require flexibility and may, from time to time, require review. The original guide was published in April 2006 and this update was produced by the ICN in June 2008.

Vision:

People have the right to live in a tolerant, diverse society where differences are recognised and respected.

Aim:

To create an environment where people feel safe to celebrate and respect culture within and between communities.

Objectives:

1. To facilitate communities to create a stable environment free from aggressive cultural displays.

2. Promote community empowerment in the management of flags.

3. Raise awareness and mutual acceptance of cultural diversity.

4. Encourage the removal of tattered and torn flags, emblems and sectional symbols.

5. To explore alternative expressions of culture.

Principles:

1. The safety of residents, staff and property is paramount.
2. All matters discussed re flags, emblems and sectional symbols will be treated in a confidential manner.

The Process

Phase 1 - Development

1. The Community recognises there are issues that need to be addressed.
2. The Community Association commences a process of documenting the flags, emblems and sectional symbols within their area.
3. The Community Association ascertains community consensus for the support of a project using a questionnaire. If required this questionaire will be dealt with in complete confidence and collated appropriately in order to ensure this.
4. Subject to the community consensus all relevant stakeholders develop and agree a community vision and plan for the removal, maintenance and management of flags, emblems and sectional symbols.
5. The Community Association nominates a Community Liaison Representative as a link between the local key influencers and stakeholders.

Phase 2 - Implementation

The implementation of a community vision will be facilitated by the relevant statutory and voluntary agencies in partnership with the local community to:

1. Develop an agreed Action Plan with achievable outcomes including acceptable expressions of cultural identity.
2. Obtain community consensus for the Action Plan through the nominated Community Liaison Representative.
3. Implement the Action Plan within an agreed timeframe to include the removal of damaged, tattered displays through a joint 'clean up'

with the statutory agencies. This collective response should instill confidence and momentum within the community.

4. To ensure continuity within the project it is recommended an agreed contractor is employed by the statutory agencies on behalf of all stakeholders.

5. Convene regular meetings to progress the action plan and ensure regular communication is maintained by the Liaison Representative and local community influencers.

6. Develop a Community Charter regarding the management of flags,emblems and sectional symbols.

Phase 3 - Monitoring and Evaluation

1. The Community Liaison Representative will maintain a register and record of the progress and outcome of the project. The register will include the numbers of flags and murals, a photographic record of before and after scenes, minutes of partnership meetings etc.

2. Projects should be evaluated on an annual basis or more frequently if required due to changes in local conditions.

3. Any evaluation of the project should acknowledge the contribution of the key influencers.

4. The Community Association should undertake a community consultation on a regular basis.

5. Members should provide where appropriate a report on the benefits to their organisation of the project to be included within the evaluation.

Phase 4 - Communication Plan

All members should consider a sensitive and inclusive communication plan to recognise the achievements of the community. The local group should agree the appropriate timing and method of the communication plan.

Suggested options include:

- local/national media articles

- sharing best practice.

Phase 5 - Funding

The cost of the project and assistance with future development will be sought by the relevant agency or agencies as identified by the members.

Phase 6 - Diversification

Local participants will be encouraged to apply the skill attained through the project to other community initiatives.

Good Practice Examples

Portadown Flag Removal

Portadown has seen the reduction of 350 proscribed flags through the facilitation of the Portadown Local Action and Community Enterprise (PLACE) group. This initiative resulted in a 90% reduction of all types of flags and agreement to fly flags for 8 weeks instead of 52 weeks. PLACE plays a significant arbitrary role within Portadown and continues to develop safer, stable neighbourhoods. They participate in an advisory capacity regarding good relations within housing policy to the Housing Executive.

Strabane (East Ward) Flag Removal and Youth Mural

The Springhill Park Community Development Association developed a process aimed at the removal of flags, graffiti and murals to make Springhill a more inviting place. This was part of a regeneration programme which resulted in the respectful flying of flags and removal of political murals. The local youth design and maintain an 'ever changing' mural with various themes. The Association subsequently developed a youth cross-community programme where the young people of Strabane can engage and realise that we all have similar life issues. They participate in an advisory capacity regarding good relations within housing policy to the Housing Executive.

Potential Support Organisations

- Community Relations Council, 6 Murray Street, Belfast BT1 6DN Tel No 90227500 web site www.community-relations.org.uk
- Department for Regional Development Roads Services, Clarence Court, 10 - 18 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8GB Tel No 90540540 email roads@drdni.gov.uk
- Groundwork Northern Ireland 67-75, Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GB (028) 90749494
- Department for Social Development Voluntary and Community Unit 3rd Floor, Lighthouse Building, 1 Cromac Place, Gasworks Business Park, Belfast, BT7 2JB Tel No 90829411 email vcu@dsdni.gov.uk
- Supporting Communities Northern Ireland 34-36 Henry Street, Ballymena, Co Antrim Tel (028) 25645676 BT42 3AH email info@supportingcommunities.org
- Mediation NI, 83 University Street Belfast BT7 1HP Tel No 90438614 email info@mediationnorthernireland.org
- Northern Ireland Office, SPOB, Stormont House Annex, Stormont, Belfast BT4 3SH Tel no 90527033 email: moria.doherty@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk
- Northern Ireland Electric, Customer Relations Manager, Carn Industrial Estate, Portadown BT63 5Ql Tel No: 0845643643 web site www.nie.co.uk
- Housing Executive, contact your local District Office
- Local Community and Voluntary Groups
- Local Councils - Good Relations Unit
- PSNI

This list is not exhaustive.

Further information can be obtained from the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Unit at Tel No. 90318829 or 90318234