

Summary Report

Event: T:BUC Engagement Foru

Title: "Delivering T:BUC during the pandemic"

Date and Time: 15th September 2020, 10.15am – 12.30pm

Venue: Online via Zoom

Chair: Dr Mark Browne, TEO

Presenters: Junior Minister Gordon Lyons; Junior Minister Declan Kearney;
Alfie Wong; Rumena Kostadinova; Liza Wilkinson

Registrations: 280

Participants: 203

Introduction and Welcome – Dr Mark Browne insert Marks Job Title

Mark Browne opened the event welcoming everyone to the eleventh meeting of the T:BUC Engagement Forum.

Mark noted that this is a first for the Engagement Forum, meeting online via Zoom and commented that many are now using online meeting platforms regularly. He noted a new phrase has entered our vocabulary “Zoom fatigue”. (To add to “social distancing”, “shielding”, “lockdown”, “the new normal” etc. etc. – all terms that we’ve got so used to hearing in the past 6 months. He acknowledged that it simply isn’t the same as meeting someone face to face.

Mark went on to explain that the last Engagement Forum was held in February, in the Armagh City Hotel with the focus being Sport and creativity. On that occasion, some people were unable to attend, due to adverse weather conditions, however, everyone who did manage to make it to Armagh found the event to be very worthwhile. Mark acknowledged that it was great that the Junior Ministers had attended the previous event and were also at this event today.

The theme of today’s Engagement Forum is ‘Delivering T:BUC during the Pandemic’. The pandemic has had a huge impact on how we deliver - but not on what we deliver. Mark noted that he has seen for himself many examples of how programmes and projects have adapted so that delivery continues.. Now, more than ever, the spirit of the T:BUC Strategy is clearly evident . Mark went on to highlight some of the T:BUC actions that have taken place this year including an increase in demand for Central Good Relations funding with 243 applications received and he outlined that £3m of CGRFFunding has been awarded to 85 projects in 2020/21.

Both the 2020/21 Central Good Relations and the Community Relations Council Small Grants programmes are currently open and are available for

projects that can be delivered by 31 March 2021 and officials are happy to work with applicants on delivery of successful applications. This year T:BUC Camps are being delivered between September 2020 and February 2021 and a support process is in place for groups to help them develop their capacity and deliver their projects during the pandemic. He noted that there will be a scaled back Good Relations Ambassadors Programme with the international element postponed in 2020/21. Also 120 applications were received to the Planned Interventions Programme and although a number were subsequently withdrawn 91 projects have taken place between July and September 2020. The District Council Good Relations Programme continues to deliver during this very challenging time. Local Authorities are still finding ways to deliver the PEACE IV programme.

Mark emphasised that work on the T:BUC Strategy continues and that the presentations today will provide a good insight into the level and extent of projects being delivered and a sense of the progress we can make despite the difficult times we face. The purpose of the Engagement Forum is to have a two-way conversation between government and all of you in the sector who are delivering the T:BUC Strategy on the ground across our communities. Mark commented that as in previous years, the Engagement Forum is taking place during Good Relations Week, with a whole week of activities is being conducted online. Mark thanked everyone in CRC for the fantastic programme of activities that has been put together.

Mark introduced Junior Minister Gordon Lyons MLA and Junior Minister Declan Kearney MLA.

Junior Minister Gordon Lyons MLA

Junior Minister Lyons thanked Mark for his introduction.

Jnr Minister Lyons noted that we all face difficulties with the current pandemic and that he looked forward to listening to and learning from those undertaking their projects in their community and how they have adapted to the challenges of delivery in today's world. He went on to say that he was impressed by the vast range of activities still taking place in Northern Ireland across the breadth of T:BUC. He noted one example, where he had seen a commitment and energy from groups across the five Urban Village areas to keep projects active and stay connected to help those most vulnerable in their communities. He went on to note a recent survey about how Urban Villages projects adapted during lockdown, told us that stated over 82% said that they had maintained engagement with their participants using new ways. Over 50% said that they were able to support people beyond their typical user group and almost 25% began working with different community organisations from across the Urban Village areas. He stated there have been some unexpected outcomes supporting new opportunities for good relations such as groups have reached across communities, working together to support the most vulnerable, including people not formerly connected to their service and programmes. Junior Minister Lyons went on to say that there are now 42 capital build projects completed with an investment of almost £11m to date - 6 projects are back on site, that had been paused during lockdown, including Ballymacarrett Walkway (£721,000) and the Titanic Halt (£380,000) projects in East Belfast. These are both part of a wider transformational project (of almost £3m investment) creating new connections for people and places across the heart of the EastSide Urban Village area. He also pointed out that Short Strand Community Centre Peace Tourism Project (£93,000) – will have an interpretive exhibition space and provides a space for visitors to engage with local community and learn about local culture. Similarly, too through the cross-cutting

programme the Ulster University continues to support local groups to fully harness the economic and social potential of Community Tourism in Urban Village areas. He noted through capacity building they help communities from different traditions work better together, and focus on developing the good relations/heritage impact and sustainability of capital projects. He pointed out that during GR week with partners at the Education Authority and City of Sanctuary he had the opportunity to celebrate a further 14 schools becoming Schools of Sanctuary - now 42 schools with this accreditation and also The Community Relations In Schools (CRIS) Buddy Up! scheme has 20 schools working on good relations programmes and the Creative Schools programmes is being delivered in a further 13 schools, supporting the educational and personal development of young people in the Urban Village areas. Junior Minister Lyons also took time to highlight the €6m PEACE IV 'Our Generation' programme to tackle mental health and well-being with children and young people across Urban Village areas, and noted there is a further call for a €1M EU PEACE IV Social Innovation programme, which he was fortunate to be part of launching just last week. He noted that this was just a flavour of the impacts being felt - the presentations today will provide a further insight into some of the different projects being delivered by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and by Tides Training.

Mark Browne then invited Junior Minister Kearney to comment.

Junior Minister Declan Kearney MLA

Junior Minister Kearney noted that T:BUC is the Executive's strategy to realise a fully united community and it is great to see the continuing progress being made towards this goal particularly in the current circumstances. He pointed out that today's focus is going to be on '**Delivering T:BUC during the Pandemic**'. He stated that he was very aware that delivery of some good relations projects has been impacted by

the COVID pandemic however TEO is working closely with community and voluntary groups, Community Relations Council and the District Councils to identify new ways to deliver projects and to focus support on emerging priorities. He felt it is really encouraging to see the great work that has continued during this very challenging time and how everyone is working hard to adapt their programmes to reflect the new way of working. He noted that he was particularly looking forward to hearing more from Alfie Wong, who is the new NICS Diversity Champion for Race and Ethnicity and who has recently established the race and ethnicity forum within the NICS. This Junior Minister Kearney felt would give us all a welcome insight into not only the work going on within communities to support racial equality, a key element of T:BUC but also internally within our own organisation. Today we should also reflect on wider global events – particularly the shock expressed worldwide about the death of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the 25th anniversary of the genocide at Srebrenica in Bosnia Herzegovina which resulted in more than 8,000 Bosnians, mostly men and boys being massacred. Junior Minister Kearney explained that it demonstrated to him the importance of a fully united community which we all wish to see and that the vast majority of people both here and worldwide share an abhorrence of racism, bigotry and inequality. He noted that it is only possible to look at a small number of good relations projects at the event today. However he appreciated that there is a significant breadth of work being carried out across the good relations sector. He noted that many of the Housing Associations delivering the shared housing schemes' Good Relations Plans have developed innovative good relations approaches that maintain contact while ensuring adherence to Government's social distancing guidance. A good example is Radius Housing Association's 'Adopt A Grandparent' project which pairs school pupils with elderly residents in sheltered accommodation. The project focuses on the importance of intergenerational relationships while tackling mental health issues such as loneliness. The young project participants write to their

adopted 'grandparents' asking questions that can be answered in return correspondence, and they also create artworks which are sent to the sheltered accommodation locations for display. He stated that it is anticipated that the young people will visit their newly adopted pen-pals when the (COVID) social distancing measures are relaxed. Jnr Minister Kearney also noted that it was encouraging to see the great work that has continued on the District Council Good Relations Programme during a very challenging time, and how the Councils have worked hard to adapt their programmes to reflect the new way of working. We shall hear more about this work from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council later today. He went on to say that he was delighted that even with the COVID restrictions that Local Authorities are still finding ways to deliver the PEACE IV programme. Through innovation and technology it was great that they can still commit to delivering during this difficult time. He noted his appreciation for all the community and voluntary groups who have met this challenge working with new delivery methods in order to help bring our communities together.

He stated that the Engagement Forum was the perfect opportunity for him to meet those engaged in delivery of some of the many projects on the ground and hearing about the progress and more about the fantastic work going on to deliver the T:BUC strategy and to promote and build a more united community.

Remembering Srebrenica video

Following comments by the Junior Ministers, Mark introduced the "Remembering Srebrenica" video saying that Remembering Srebrenica recognises that no society is invulnerable to prejudice and intolerance and that all must remain vigilant against these forces, and take positive action to build stronger, more resilient communities. As part of the remembrance, Ministers participated in a tree planting ceremony to mark the 25th anniversary of the genocide at Srebrenica in Bosnia on 9 July.

The planting of this tree is an important way for us to remember what happened at Srebrenica and honour all those who lost their lives. The tree will be a permanent reminder of the Srebrenica genocide for all the many visitors we have to the Stormont Estate. He noted that the Racial Equality strategy sets out a framework for addressing racial inequalities and contains key actions that can make a difference and that the Executive's Good Relations Strategy sets out our vision for a united community, where everyone can live, learn and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.

Mark Browne showed the video.

<https://www.nvtv.co.uk/shows/remembering-srebrenica-2020/>

Following the video Mark introduced speakers in the following order. ;

Alfie Wong, NICS Diversity Champion for Race and Ethnicity

Rumena Kostadinova-McCabe Good Relations Officer from Fermanagh and Omagh Council.

Liza Wilkinson of TIDES Training to present.

Mark thanked all of the presenters.

Presentation slides from each presenter are included at the end of this report.

On completion of Liza's input Mark outlined the breakout room session. He pointed out that given the numbers at the event we would not have time to go around each discussion group. A note taker from each group will be emailing key points from the discussions today to Paul Killen in Community Relations Council for collation of the post event report. The breakout room questions that should be considered by the groups and their responses are noted below:

Breakout room Questions

1. What are the unique issues that have impacted upon the delivery of your good relations work during the pandemic?
2. What additional help and support is required to deliver your good relations work during this time?
3. In light of the current restrictions around COVID 19, what actions can be taken in the future to improve good relations? What do we need to change? Who should be involved and how?

Breakout feedback from all groups collate under each question

1. What are the unique issues that have impacted upon the delivery of your good relations work during the pandemic?

- Not getting out and about in the community
- Lose of boundaries
- Relationship building a massive part of the work
- Working remotely with (housing tenants) who face social deprivation
- People don't have the technology to engage online
- Young People initially keen to engage, however as restrictions have lifted they are less willing to take part in remote meetings – they want to meet face to face – applies not just to young people
- With relaxation of restrictions there has been more of activities outdoors – street festivals where people can view from their gardens
- Cultural festival in a box – take the festival to people's homes or to their school. East Belfast festival usually held in Ormeau Park now delivered by delivery of a box containing items representing 10 different cultures – food items, tea, history pamphlets etc
- Internet in rural areas is a big issue
- Loss of contact with programme participants (at outset of lockdown)
- Things that were taken for granted before restrictions were imposed became hard to manage e.g. building trust; talking to participants;

explaining things to participants; making things meaningful – all are much easier face-to-face

- Withdrawal of groups/projects from programmes due to lack of clarity and knowledge on how to proceed (too many unknowns)
- Challenge in keeping attention of children and young people during Zoom meetings
- Gap in technical expertise between older project leaders and young participants
- Maintaining adequate safeguarding measures online
- Benefit – money saved
- Networks were already in place so transition was not as difficult as thought it would be
- The Community and Voluntary sector came into its own. Networks in place allowed work to continue and groups work to evolve into areas that they may not have already been doing. E.g GAA making food hampers etc.
- The pandemic highlighted the need for a well-connected and well-funded community sector
- Using online systems sometimes enabled more participation, diverse groups easier to access, people more likely to engage
- The pandemic demonstrated the deprivation in NI e.g material deprivation, educational deprivation. The circumstances revealed something that was already known
- Creating an environment that is similar to the original face-to-face sessions/workshops/classes/drop-in is very difficult.
- Young people are not keen to do video calls. Which is hard for the facilitators when you are unable to see their facial interactions
- Meeting outside which has currently been working although the weather is on the turn as we head towards Winter and there are now new localised restrictions on the size of groups that can meet

- Unable to currently provide childcare, this has an impact on participation
- Smaller group size now means there are waiting lists to participate
- Now needing to rebuild relationships with community member and participants due to lack of in-person interactions
- Restricted access to online platforms
- Loss of family and friend (Covid/suicide/isolations) – Organisations are unable to support in the way they would have or on the level they would like to (North Belfast)
- Showcasing project outputs (artwork, performances, exhibitions, celebrations events, awards) – all arts and community venues are closed or on restricted opening times and gatekeepers of participants (unable to reach).

2. What additional help and support is required to deliver your good relations work during this time?

- Flexible funding. The ability to adapt funding applications and postpone projects until able to carry out the work. During the pandemic groups were not able to complete their projects which they had received funding for, and some had to return the funding to the funders. The funders should have demonstrated more flexibility to groups, allowed them to adapt their projects and postpone to the next year.
- NI has not seen the worst of the consequences of the pandemic yet. Groups were able to adapt to working online, however, the circumstances in society are going to get worse. In terms of economic impact, educational impact, and mental health impact. There are worse outcomes to come.
- The Government and groups should consider where money has been wasted and what systems are no longer fit for purpose

- Quicker processing of funding. During the pandemic it has been proved that Departments *can* make funding available and process applications at pace.
- Financial savings made due to reduction in physical activities can be made available to groups/projects that might otherwise not received funding.
- Support required to maintain projects and help them to become more resilient in the current restrictions (which are likely to continue for some time)
- TEO are showing flexibility to allow funded groups to adopt to virtual delivery and that that is welcomed. Would appreciate some more support and ideas to find ways to evidence visibility a bit more – so tools to evidence the online presence that groups are developing.
- Virtual feedback is different to actually being in a room with programme participants. Whilst it's easy to provide information on what is actually being done/ delivered (outputs), it's proving much more difficult to capture the impact and outcomes and participant feedback. People are not taking the additional time required to complete online questionnaires/ evaluation forms despite requests to do so.
- SurveyMonkey was suggested as a tool however, groups would welcome more help support and information on tools to track impact.
- People working in schools have developed virtual delivery plans and programmes but found the schools are just simply not ready to engage beyond their initial tasks of getting and settling children back to school.
- Online engagement is ok but it's difficult to know what the level of impact is, particularly with people that you've never met or worked with before.

- Digital gap – there are access issues for people. Lack of technology/ rural internet connections difficult/ people who simply don't want to engage virtually (some older people were mentioned here). The lack of social interaction is making the programmes unattractive for some.
- Questions for funders was raised and included:
 - I. Can additional costs associated with PPE or care packages be built into the cost of running programmes?
 - II. Can funders allow organisers to sign in participants rather than passing around sheets?
 - III. Can funders support additional costs associated with social distancing – additional room/ gazebos/ multiple transport vehicles for example?
 - IV. Can funders acknowledge that this is a fluid situation meaning that plans change, sometimes long term planning is impossible.

Q3 In light of the current restrictions around COVID 19, what actions can be taken in the future to improve good relations? What do we need to change? Who should be involved and how?

- Increasing face-to-face contact by combining online and physical interaction e.g. activity carried out in a hall with a large screen and Zoom – some participants present (socially distanced) and others join online
- This is an ideal opportunity to bring about fundamental changes in education, to look at the traditional differences (CNR/PUL) in education and to dismantle and re-set the education system
- Funding models need to change to ensure worthwhile projects do not miss out on funding
- The mobilisation and connected work that the voluntary and community sector did during the pandemic was very positive, and

showed that these groups are miles ahead of politicians. Politicians should catch up.

- Not getting out and about in the community
- Relationship building a massive part of the work
- Working remotely with (housing tenants) who face social deprivation
- People don't have the technology to engage online
- Young people initially keen to engage however as restrictions have lifted they are less willing to take part in remote meetings – they want to meet face to face.
- With relaxation of restrictions there has been more of activities outdoors – street festival where people can view from their gardens
- This leads to lots of health and safety considerations and risk assessments
- Cultural festival in a box – take the festival to people's homes or to their school. East Belfast festival usually held in Ormeau Park now delivered by delivery of a box containing items representing 10 different cultures – food items, tea, history pamphlets etc
- Internet in rural areas is a big issue
- People keen to engage on line at the beginning however we have moved on and they now expect face to face engagement.
- Extend broadband in rural areas
- VENUES – lack of venues is now a real problem. Community halls, leisure centres etc not available. Need a covered space even a Gizebo set up in the grounds outside however it is difficult to get insurance and Councils are reluctant to provide facilities. Trying to find safe, secure spaces to hold activities is impossible.

Closing Remarks

Mark Browne thanked everyone for their efforts and contribution to the breakout session and proceeded to thank the Junior Ministers for

attending the event and to Alfie Wong, Rumena McCabe and Liza Wilkinson for their excellent presentations. He then thanked all of the participants for attending and thanked Community Relations Council for organising the Engagement Forum and noted how impressed he was by how much has been done to advance Good Relations in the face of the pandemic. The next Engagement Forum is planned for February 2021.