



**Diversity in Action Project  
Think Tank Series  
One World Centre, Seeds**

**Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

**ETHNIC MINORITIES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

This is the third in a series of Think Tank events and is part of the work being undertaken by INCORE's Diversity in Action project. The project commenced in December 2006 and is funded by CRC for a 16-month period. The purpose of the DiA project, which has a particular focus on the North West area, is to help build the capacity of Northern Ireland's minority ethnic sector. The Think Tank series therefore provides the opportunity for focused discussion on issues particularly relevant to the minority ethnic community sector, with a view to taking recommendations forward, generating ideas and influencing policy.

Roisin O'Hagan welcomed speakers and audience members to the Think Tank and provided a brief introduction to INCORE's Diversity in Action (DiA) project. She described the aims of the Think Tank as being firstly to provide minority ethnic groups with more information to about community safety, and secondly to identify priority issues in relation to community safety and minority ethnic communities.

Roisin introduced speakers, Milton Kerr, PSNI and Mena Heaney, Community Safety Partnership Co-ordinator, Derry City Council.

**Milton Kerr – PSNI**

Milton Kerr is responsible for community safety across the new North West District Command Unit (DCU). In particular, Milton manages the strategic direction of community safety for the district in line with the findings and recommendations of The Report Of The Independent Commission On Policing For Northern Ireland. Milton noted that in recent years there has been a significant move away from 'old style' policing to neighbourhood and community policing. He described how the PSNI are increasingly working in partnership with communities to mobilise resources and tackle crime more effectively. Milton also highlighted that two of the PSNI's key current strategic priorities are partnerships and accountability.

Milton highlighted the importance of not only reducing crime, but the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour more generally. He suggested that community police officers and consultative community forums (such as the Foyle Multi-Cultural Forum) have a critical role to play in this regard. In general, the number of groups in the North West who want to work with the police is growing.

Hate crime was discussed as being one of the biggest challenges to policing in Northern Ireland. Milton outlined the definition of a hate crime as a crime which is perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate. He also pointed out the difference between a hate incident - which may not constitute a criminal offence - and a hate crime. In relation to Foyle District Command, Milton described the PSNI's focus on: prevention, protection and prosecution; zero tolerance of hate crime; providing support to victims; working with community partners; and empowering police officers through training programmes, which often involves community partners.

Milton pointed out that unfortunately, there remains a problem of underreporting in relation to hate incidents and hate crimes in the North West as victims are often fearful of coming forward. However, Milton suggested this fear was diminishing, particularly as the profile of hate crime has been raised by both the PSNI and others. Milton presented recent figures in relation to homophobic crime in the Foyle area and concluded that it was only by the PSNI working in close partnership with a local community organisation - The Rainbow Project - that the number of homophobic incidents has been dramatically reduced. Whilst the Institute for Conflict Research has found that homophobic crime has recently increased by 172% in Northern Ireland, homophobic crimes in the Foyle area have decreased by 62%.

Milton added that the current priority area to be tackled was that of racist crime and racist incidents. He noted that the PSNI's approach would be to work with all the minority ethnic groups in the area and to focus on increasing their confidence in the police. Milton anticipates this will involve significant consultation with local minority ethnic groups and communities, in response to racist incidents/crimes, as well as the participation of minority ethnic groups in PSNI training and development. Hate crime is a PSNI priority to the extent that 28 days after the initial reporting of a hate crime, the police will conduct a review of the investigation to the same standard as that of a murder inquiry to ensure progress is being made.

Milton also raised the issue of road safety as being of particular relevance to minority ethnic groups in the Foyle area and noted that migrant workers are often unaware of local laws, especially the new legislation around mobile phones and booster seats.

### **Mena Heaney – Derry City Council Community Safety Partnership**

Mena Heaney coordinates Derry City Council's Community Safety Partnership which includes over 25 local community and voluntary, statutory and business organisations. Like the PSNI, Mena described the focus of the Partnership as being on reducing crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. The Partnership has been highly successful to date thanks to the collaboration and cooperation it has promoted. Mena noted that the Partnership was established in 2003 with an allocation of £600,000 of funding. The Partnership's first initiatives included the provision of a night bus service and the development of community safety wardens at the University of Ulster. The Partnership is now working to replicate the successful community safety warden scheme across the city.

The Partnership has also developed a neighbourhood watch scheme and has helped 8 local neighbourhood watch schemes become accredited through the Northern Ireland Office (15 additional schemes are currently in the process of accreditation). Mena

described how these schemes can vary significantly in size and largely depend on the contributions of volunteers.

Recently, the Partnership has also developed a 'message in a bottle' initiative which provides emergency services with critical information regarding an individual's medications and illnesses. This information is stored in a bottle which is kept in the individual's fridge. A sticker is then placed on the fridge to alert the emergency services to the fact this information is available. The Partnership has been targeting elderly and vulnerable groups to make use of this scheme and there is scope to enhance the initiative by also providing alarm system providers with this type of information. Mena suggested the scheme could also be used in relation to minority ethnic groups, although this may require some additional resources for translation. Finally, Mena described a recent neighbourhood renewal bid for a purpose built community safety centre in the Derry City Council area.

### **Question & Answer**

- A question was asked regarding the rates of prosecution of hate crimes in Northern Ireland?

Milton responded that approximately 45-50% of reported hate crimes are ultimately prosecuted.

- An audience member asked Mena whether any of the areas in which high numbers of minority ethnic people currently live, have neighbourhood watch schemes?

There are currently no neighbourhood watch schemes in such areas but the Partnership would be targeting such areas in the near future. Milton Kerr added this can be difficult to organise as many migrant workers tend to move frequently.

- The question was asked about what ultimately happens to the perpetrators of hate crimes?

Milton noted that the courts view hate crime seriously, but as yet there has been little effort to provide any specific form of re-education or rehabilitation for those prosecuted.

There was an audience discussion regarding how to encourage individuals to come forward to report hate crimes. It was suggested that individuals could perhaps come forward to a different agency other than the police who would then share information with them (as sometimes happens in relation to cases of domestic abuse).

Kerr noted that PSNI leaflets and information are now available in many different languages and there are now dual phones in every police station that facilitate translation into 167 different languages.

- Milton was asked whether there are any particular hot spots for hate crime in the Foyle area.

He responded that it is generally a problem right across the city.

The audience discussed some of the linkages between sectarianism and racism and whether there may be an organised element behind the perpetration of hate crimes. It was noted that there tend to be larger numbers of migrant workers in traditionally Protestant areas where there is greater availability of housing - which can make it difficult to compare across different religious groups.

### **Nuala McNally – Unlimited (Unltd)**

Roisin introduced Nuala McNally from Unlimited – a funding organisation who provide support for individuals and informal groups as social entrepreneurs and Eileen Chan-hu from Ballymena Community Forum, Ethnic Minorities Project.

Nuala described Unlimited's two levels of grant giving – Level 1 of between £500 and £5000, and Level 2 for projects that work and can be replicated. She provided a number of examples of social entrepreneurs supported by Unlimited who have come from a minority ethnic background or who have sought to address issues affecting minority ethnic communities e.g. the Welcome project which teaches English; and the Craigavon Intercultural Programme which teaches kids about racism by providing training in schools and working with local Portuguese communities.

A member of the audience asked how Unlimited is sharing best practices developed through the projects and initiatives it has supported. Nuala responded that the organisation is only just beginning to tackle this and is seeking to develop a coordinated approach in this regard.

### **Eileen Chan-hu - Ballymena Community Forum, Ethnic Minorities Project**

Eileen described the early development of the Ballymena Interethnic Forum which began as a constituted group of 26 individuals and has evolved into a company with charitable status. She described how the Forum is currently in something of a transition period as those who initially participated in the Forum are now taking on management positions. This has been a key indicator of the Forum's successful capacity building work. Eileen noted that the Forum's approach has always been to work with and mobilise statutory organisations who are obliged to fulfil specific duties in relation to minority ethnic communities and who are less vulnerable to loss of funding, as compared to community organisations. She has found it particularly important to develop strong relationships with the front line staff of statutory organisations. Generally, there is a real need to educate and train front line staff, for example, Eileen has come across cases where the problem has not been that the minority ethnic person did not speak English but that the statutory employee was simply not willing to take the time to listen to them.

The Forum has therefore worked to provide minority ethnic individuals and communities with information about local services and agencies e.g. through the development of welcome packs. Eileen described how this has been taken a step further with the development of a Liaison Officer scheme (now known as the Bilingual Advocates scheme) – in which the Liaison Officer is charged with assisting the minority ethnic person who may need help right through to the range of services, and agencies they might require. To date this scheme has assisted over 400 users.

Eileen described the expansion in the diversity and numbers of minority ethnic people in the Ballymena area, from approximately 300-500 people in 2002 to more than 3000 people representing more than 18 different nationalities, today. She described how the area has become better prepared for dealing with racial incidents and crimes, and the apparently increasing numbers of racial incidents/crimes in Ballymena is a positive indicator as it reflects greater willingness to report such incidents on the part of minority ethnic communities. Eileen also noted that she recently read that 4% of British landlords are currently reporting hate crime – which she views as being extremely positive. It has been noted by others that British landlords in the past have failed to acknowledge or consider the rights of members of minority ethnic communities.

The audience discussed a number of problems in terms of the reporting of hate crimes and incidents. A number of examples were cited of police officers not offering to report incidents as being racially motivated or failing to make victims aware of this possibility. Nevertheless, there was broad agreement that this situation is improving and developments such as the appointment of a Polish Liaison Officer within the PSNI were particularly welcomed. Finally, the audience noted that suicide and mental health issues, which can often lead to problems such as homelessness, were also highly relevant to community safety.

Roisin closed the seminar by thanking all the speakers and participants for their input.

### **Summary of issues/priorities**

- Target groups eg business people and business representatives eg Chamber of Commerce, Vintners Association should all be included into discussions regarding safety issues.
- The importance of the wider community to attend events like this.
- Civic Alcohol Forum have a Code of Practice – this should have an ethnic relations element to it. Members of the minority ethnic community should be involved in this.
- Business in the Community and the Race Relations Unit should link-up more.
- The importance of taking information back into the community.
- Who is the ethnic minority equivalent to eg Foyle Womens Aid – the ethnic minority body to provide aid?
- Minority communities and their issues/rights have to become part and parcel of all organisations – we need to find ways to encourage everyone to come forward.
- Provide a platform to share good practice.
- The Junction – drop-in centre for all community relations issues is always available/open to all members of the community
- Identify a contact via PSNI who could start to build/develop relationships with ME community
- Identify a Champion for ME issues eg an MP/Mark Durkan – this needs to be a high profile individual or members of the Churches eg Bishops – or others from a religious background
- ME individuals can bring different baggage eg bad police experiences – we need to look at confidence-building – look at specific communities to build confidence – this needs outreach work/exploration.

- Participants mentioned a Multicultural Advisory Group and that this needs more regional people to provide wider perspective.
- Groups need capacity-building to be their own champions.