



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY
FIRST MINISTER**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and
Integration**

10 November 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Tom Elliott (Chairperson)
Dr Stephen Farry (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Allan Bresland
Mr William Humphrey
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Ms Etain O’Kane)	Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
Mr Matthew McDermott)	The Rainbow Project
Ms Gillian Clifford)	Women’s Aid Federation
Mr Simon McClenahan)	Disability Action

The Chairperson (Mr Elliott):

Gillian, Simon, Matthew and Etain, you are all very welcome. I hope that my pronunciation is right.

Ms Etain O’Kane (Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative):

Yes, it is perfect.

The Chairperson:

We ask you to make a short presentation of about 10 minutes and to leave yourselves available for members' questions thereafter.

Mr Matthew McDermott (The Rainbow Project):

Thank you very much for taking up our request to come to the Committee. We very much appreciate it.

The Chairperson:

Before you continue, Matthew, I should say that the session is being recorded by Hansard.

Mr McDermott:

OK. I begin by congratulating you on becoming the leader of the UUP and the Chairperson of the Committee.

The Chairperson:

Thank you.

Mr McDermott:

I appreciate that you are relatively new to the Committee. We have lots of issues with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's (OFMDFM) programme for cohesion, sharing and integration, and the Committee will appreciate that, given that submissions are coming in to OFMDFM, there will be a whole raft of issues. However, for the purpose of today's presentation, we will look only at the issues in relation to people who live with disabilities, the complete gender imbalance in the document, and the exclusion of members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

Ms Gillian Clifford (Women's Aid Federation):

First, I take the opportunity on behalf of the Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland to thank the Committee for giving us the opportunity to give evidence today. We are delighted to be here and to join our colleagues who represent the LGBT community and the disability sector in Northern Ireland.

In supporting the remarks that my colleagues will make today, I will begin by stating that Women's Aid saw the publication of the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration as an important opportunity for government in Northern Ireland to clearly establish the equality principles, objectives and targets that will influence the future shape of our society. Indeed, we fully support and welcome the statement in the document about the Programme for Government, specifically the principle that:

“Promoting equality of opportunity for all our citizens is an integral aspect of building a better future for everyone and as such underpins and influences all that we do in shaping a better society.”

However, in that context, Women's Aid and the wider women's sector, which consulted widely on the programme, are extremely disappointed by the content of the consultation document. Far from promoting equality of opportunity for all our citizens, it appears to limit its scope to a discussion of race and political and religious beliefs, which, whilst very important, are by no means the only important equality considerations in our society at present and going forward. It is particularly surprising and disappointing that there appears to be no consideration of the Government's own gender equality strategy. Similarly, the women's sector notes that, in considering the good relations aspect of section 75 only, the documents fail to meet, in totality, the requirements of section 75 as a whole and of the gender equality strategy.

As time is pressing, I will not have the opportunity to cover all of the areas of our concern, so I refer the Committee to the comprehensive written response to the consultation from the women's sector, which was authored by Angela Hegarty. It reflects fully the sense of complete astonishment, frustration and, indeed, hurt at the absence of any consideration of women and gender in the consultation document, which, in addition to failing to meet a range of statutory and policy requirements, breaches UK international obligations, for example, under United Nations Security Council resolution 1325.

For example, the document contains no discussion on the diversity of women's lives; the experiences of urban and rural women; women's role in and contribution to peace building; or the importance of women's representation in political and public life here. Similarly, there is no acknowledgement of the role of women in maintaining the fabric of society in Northern Ireland during the conflict, or, indeed, as has been evidenced in research, that the effects and impact of the conflict in Northern Ireland are dissimilar on women to men and that, therefore, their corresponding needs are likely to be different. In an economic context, similarly, there is no

recognition that the labour market is highly gender-segregated, with women often concentrated in low-paid and part-time jobs.

It is astonishing and extremely disappointing to Women's Aid that a discussion around a secure community fails completely to address violence against women and girls. In the context of domestic violence in 2009-2010, Women's Aid gave refuge to 1,077 women and 854 children in Northern Ireland. The 24-hour domestic violence helpline, which is open to anyone who is affected by domestic violence, managed 32,349 calls, an increase of 17% on the previous year. We are also deeply disturbed by recent figures that state that, from April to September this year, there were 261 cases of rape and attempted rape in Northern Ireland, a rise of 10% on the same period last year.

It is our view that there should be a zero tolerance to violence against women, equal to the zero tolerance to racist, homophobic, hate and sectarian violence. We question how it is possible for a woman — young or elderly — to participate fully in a cohesive, shared and integrated society if she is being subjected to violence, sexual abuse and torture in her own home, unable to access education and employment opportunities or even to leave the house or to make a simple telephone call. Similarly, what kind of opportunity to participate in society is offered if a woman is terrified of walking the streets in her own community for fear of being the victim of crime? Those matters must be addressed in any proposals to create a more secure future society here.

Women's Aid believes that both education and health should be cross-cutting themes in the document. Our organisation is proactively engaged in preventative education work in schools throughout Northern Ireland, teaching children in an age-appropriate manner about mutual respect, tolerance and their own safety and physical and emotional integrity. That is essential work that requires long-term sustainable funding. It is precisely that kind of educational activity that can and will make a demonstrable effect and impact on attitudes and behaviour in the future and which will contribute to eliminating not only gender-based violence but prejudice and intolerance in all of its forms.

Finally, I reiterate our disappointment at fundamental aspects of the consultation document, particularly the absence of any consideration of the needs of women and the failure to recognise the complexity of need; the reality of multiple identities in society, for example ethnicity and disability, and how they can co-exist; the necessity to build the capacity of and fund adequately

the women's sector; or to take a cross-departmental, multi-agency approach, working within existing government strategies, such as the domestic and sexual violence strategy.

In any cohesive, shared and integrated society in Northern Ireland, a full and proper analysis of the position, needs, expertise, experience, diversity and, indeed, the achievements of women must be considered. Women must be fully supported and facilitated to achieve the best possible life outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities, free from violence, racism, bigotry, prejudice and intolerance.

Mr Simon McClenahan (Disability Action):

My presentation will be very short, because disability is not included in the consultation document. At the start, we had high hopes when we read the press release, in which Peter Robinson said:

“We want to build a society where everyone shares in”.

Mr McGuinness said in it:

“we will build a shared and better future for all”.

Unfortunately, this is not it.

Have you heard of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

Mrs D Kelly:

Yes.

Mr McClenahan:

I refer you to paragraph (g) of its preamble. I will hand this document to Hansard at the end of the session. It reads that it is written to emphasise:

“the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies”.

This is not it. I also refer you to article 3 of the convention, ‘General principles’, which include:

“Full and effective participation and inclusion in society”.

Again, this is not it.

The reason that it is not it is that the consultation document does not mention disability, which I find incredible. It does not mention multiple identity. For example, there is no mention of ethnic minority people with disabilities or of victims of the conflict. There is nothing at all about either. It mentions “shared space”, but there is no mention of whether shared space has to be

open to all and accessible. It does not say that. There is no mention of disability hate crime, yet, according to PSNI figures, that goes on. There is no mention of disability culture, such as deaf theatre. There is no mention of anything for disabled people who, by the UN convention, should be part of, and who are part of, society.

The Chairperson:

Simon, I assume that you have made a written submission in addition to your presentation?

Mr McClenahan:

We have indeed.

Ms Etain O’Kane (Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative):

I am the project co-ordinator of Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative (LASI). I wish to thank the Chairperson and Committee for giving us this opportunity to address you today and to allow me to present evidence on behalf of the lesbian and bisexual women’s community.

This is particularly relevant to our organisation because LASI was set up as a direct consequence of the peace process and the potential for peace and equality that the Northern Ireland Act (1998) promised. As I hope that many of you know, LASI has engaged with devolved structures over the past 10 years in the attempt to promote the positive visibility of lesbian and bisexual women and their families. I draw your attention to the word “positive” in that sentence. I use it deliberately. In the effort to get funding, too often we are required to focus on the negative aspects of being lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of evidence of those. However, today, I want to focus on the positive, because that is what the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy (CSI) is about. It is about aspiring to a more inclusive and cohesive society.

I want to draw your attention to the Ipsos MORI poll that LASI commissioned in 2006, which you can access on our website. We commissioned the poll in reaction to the campaign by some local political representatives and religious groups to stop the Equality Act from applying in Northern Ireland. Some 1,000 people were asked about their attitudes to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people. Interestingly, 59% of those polled thought that Northern Ireland was a not very or not at all accepting society towards LGB people. However, only 21% of the people asked said that they held those views themselves. What is going on here? LASI suggests that

that is one of the effects of constantly and consistently focusing on the negative. LGB people are seen as victims of hate crime or homophobic bullying in schools; as people who suffer health inequalities; as people who are discriminated against at work; as people who are at risk of suicide; or as people who are sinful, deviant or in need of a good psychiatrist.

Overall, 75% of respondents to the MORI poll said that they were either quite or very accepting of LGB people in society. That is quite positive. Even more positive is that 84% of the people who reported that they knew a lesbian, gay or bisexual person were very or quite accepting of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Of those who did not know, or thought that they did not know, someone who was LGB, only 62% were as positive in their responses. Only 14% of those who were not very or not at all accepting knew an LGB person compared with 28% who did not know an LGB person. That tells us that people who know someone who is a member of our community realise that there is so much more to LGB identity than negative statistics. That is good relations in practice. Stereotypes and myths are reduced by bringing people together and learning about differences and similarities.

I will now talk a little bit about Sappho. I do not know whether you all know who Sappho is.

The Chairperson:

I am giving some flexibility as regards the 10 minutes, but your time will run out shortly.

Mrs D Kelly:

You have to tell us who Sappho is.

Ms M Anderson:

You have to tell us who Sappho is. *[Laughter.]*

Ms O’Kane:

Sappho was born at some time between 630BC and 612BC and lived on the island of Lesbos. She was a poet who wrote poetry about her passion and love for both men and women. It is because of Sappho that lesbians all over the world are called lesbians. What if the next Sappho was born in Antrim Area Hospital? Would she leave her mark on the world in the same way that Sappho left her mark on Ancient Greece? In our current society, the answer to that question is probably not. Young lesbian and bisexual women are denied the opportunity to learn about their

history and the cultural richness that exists. They do not know about the contributions that lesbian and bisexual women have made to culture, art, sports and history.

It is unlikely that the Northern Irish Sappho would know anything about Sappho herself. It is unlikely that she would be able to go to her local library and find books by Radclyffe Hall, Emma Donoghue or Jill Johnston. It is unlikely that she would have any idea of the positive contribution that lesbian and bisexual women have made here in Northern Ireland. I will not go through everything because I am conscious of time. However, I want to suggest that that young woman would not meet other lesbian and bisexual women who are artists, poets, athletes or community activists by chance. Those opportunities are created through strengthening community relations and cultural expression.

Although lesbian, gay and bisexual people's experiences of discrimination in isolation are a reality, we have to work to enrich, encourage and inspire LGB people to take part in cultural activities and to fully engage in society. That will only come about if we concentrate on the positive contributions that the LGB community makes to Northern Irish society. We hope, therefore, that we can be included in any future drafting of the CSI.

Mr McDermott:

I will be very brief. To sum up what Etain has said, there is an issue of addressing the negative impacts on members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, such as hate crime or bullying at school, and I do not want to give the Committee a raft of statistics, because they are in our submission. I do not want to tell you that 93% of young LGB people in schools have heard homophobic language, 30% of which came from adults, or that 66% of them have suffered bullying or that they are five times more likely to be medicated for depression. That is in our submission. However, if we address those issues as well as focus on the positive contributions of members of the LGBT community, we will begin to break down barriers and to tackle those ill effects.

I want to make some general comments. We made a joint submission to OFMDFM, and I want to take members through three or four of the points. It is very short sighted of OFMDFM officials to limit the strategy to sectarianism and racism. We agree 100% that those are two blights on our society that need to be addressed, but there is no reason why they should be addressed in isolation from issues that affect other marginalised groups, particularly if the

strategy is about government efficiency. It makes more sense to deal cohesively with more issues at once rather than to segregate them. There are obligations, and Departments need to deliver on and address them. It makes more sense to do that under this umbrella.

We do not accept the argument that the strategy is limited to section 75(2), as some officials have claimed. There is absolutely no good reason why it has to be limited to section 75(2). First, the document itself contradicts that, because it covers issues that are outside the remit of section 75(2). Secondly, it is a Government strategy; it does not need to be limited by any legislation. The Government that are developing the strategy do not need to be limited by section 75(2). Thirdly, it is impossible to devise a policy in accordance with section 75(2) without paying due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in section 75(1), and section 75(2) is to be implemented without prejudice to its obligations under section 75(1).

Furthermore, and I do not make this point lightly, even if the document were to be changed to include the various issues that we have discussed here, we would still find it pretty hard to support. That is because it needs to be amended to include the areas that it excludes, but it also needs to be amended to reflect a real strategy that has target dates, mechanisms for delivery and mechanisms for oversight, so that Committees such as this can oversee its implementation. It really needs that as much as anything.

Finally, we endorse and support the Human Rights Commission's submission that the strategy is very light on international best practice and reference to that. We are happy to take the Committee's questions.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much. There are a couple of issues. Have you, as a combined group, met OFMDFM officials? First, however, are the four organisations working together on this? Obviously, you came here as a combined group, but, broadly speaking, do you work together? Clearly, each group has specific issues. How do you deal with that as a group?

Mr McDermott:

First, our joint submission is meant to complement our individual submissions. Secondly, our bottom line is very simple: where there is a need and an evidence base to back up that need, those issues should be included in the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. That is not to

say that the needs and requirements of members of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community will be, in every instance, the same as those of the disability community or of women. They will not be. However, when there is a need, it should be included. We are completely united on the issue of exclusion, but we are really working together on the principle of inclusion.

The Chairperson:

Has any meeting taken place between yourselves and OFMDFM officials? I think that you said something about that, Matthew. You must have had some communication with them.

Mr McDermott:

Too many to mention.

Ms O’Kane:

We have had quite a lot of representations.

The Chairperson:

Have they been face-to-face meetings?

Mr McDermott:

Absolutely. There were meetings even before the document was published. We put all those issues to officials before it was published, and it was still published in the way that it was. We met them consistently throughout the consultation.

I want to put on record that the consultation process from officials has been excellent. There is absolutely no doubting that officials have gone over and above that which most Departments do to engage the general public on issues. It is not the case that the Department did not engage. The case is that they did not really listen.

The Chairperson:

Have the Women’s Aid Federation and Disability Action had the same experience?

Ms Clifford:

Extensive consultation took place within the women’s sector and, in general, OFMDFM engaged very well on that, and our views had been put across. Some concern was expressed in the

women's sector around the timing of the consultation, which happened over the summer months. That can be a very difficult time, in particular for women who have caring responsibilities. During the consultation process, a lot of women said that they would have liked to engage more, but that they were unable to get to the various meetings because they were taking care of children and it was not possible to do so at that time.

The Chairperson:

Has Disability Action's experience of engagement been similar?

Mr McClenahan:

Frankly, I am not sure. Although, given that there is so little in the final document, I do not think so.

The Chairperson:

Have you had any face-to-face engagement with the Department?

Mr McClenahan:

Not personally, but I am standing in for someone today.

Ms M Anderson:

Thank you all for your presentations.

Gillian and Matthew highlighted the fact that contained within the document are references to and, as Gillian said, quotes in relation to section 75(1) and the importance of the equality of opportunity. Forgive me, but I have not managed to read all your individual submissions. I have looked through some of them. I wonder whether you have highlighted the fact that the CSI does not comply with, for instance, the equality duty around public policy obligations. For example, there was no evidence gathering for any structural assessment of the equality impact or a full EQIA. I have to say that, across Departments, most programmes and strategies that go out are still awaiting an EQIA, which either never comes or comes some time later. An EQIA is not done with the structural assessment. I wonder whether you highlighted that.

I take on board what you said about the positiveness of this, and I am a great advocate of the LGBT community. However, it has been subjected to systematic discrimination, attacks and

abuse. Given what you said in your presentations, I wonder about how you are mobilising your commentary. Section 75(2), which is perhaps a problem for some people, identifies only three sections for whom good relations must be promoted. Who would not want good relations? However, only three sections are identified. Section 75(1)(b) deals with the primary duty. The CSI is a draft document. To go back to what Gillian quoted, those are the hooks with which we must ensure that a stronger document comes out the other end. Any actions on the furtherance of the good relations duty cannot prejudice the promotion of equality of opportunity.

Ms O’Kane:

We asked for a full EQIA on the draft. In our submission, we mention the gender equality strategy. We also gave mention to UN Security Council resolution 1325, which addresses the involvement of women in peace building, and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

We made reference in our submission to the Yogyakarta principles, of which the UK is a signed up member state. Principle 26 calls on the state to:

“a) Take all necessary legislative, administrative and other measures to ensure opportunities for the participation in cultural life of all persons, regardless of, and with full respect for, their sexual orientations and gender identities;

b) Foster dialogue between, and mutual respect among, proponents of the various cultural groups present within the State, including among groups that hold different views on matters of sexual orientation and gender identity, consistently with respect for the human rights referred to in these Principles.”

Ms Clifford:

The response from the women’s sector was similarly comprehensive in that area. We raised the same issues that Etain has mentioned, and we discussed them extensively. The response includes reference to the UN Secretary General’s comments on gender equality. He observed recently that Governments must mainstream gender perspectives at every stage of conflict prevention, resolution and management, as well as in peace building. We highlighted all of those issues in our response, as well as the issue of the equality impact assessment.

Mr McClenahan:

At the start, I mentioned that with regard to what is stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 8 on awareness-raising refers to combating stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices. It also mentions respect.

Mr McDermott:

All the organisations share concerns about whether the strategy is in line with international best practice. It is flimsy in that regard. In the local context, we raised the issue of section 75(2) having to be implemented without prejudice to obligations under section 75(1). We raised that point in our LGBT engagement with officials. We also raised the point that there were no actions, targets or mechanisms in the strategy and that the fact that they had not equality-proofed any of it was a problem. It was suggested — I am open to correction; it was a public forum — that the draft of the CSI is only the bones of what will be the finalised strategy, which will put in place target dates, mechanisms and accountability measures. If that is the case, OFMDFM has a real problem because what it is consulting on is pretty much a fundamentally different document.

The Chairperson:

From what I am hearing, I believe that your argument is two-fold. One aspect of it is that there is no inclusion of what you believe to be your basic rights to integration and cohesion. The second aspect is that, even if there were that inclusion, there are still no targets. Is that reasonable?

Mr McDermott:

Yes, in a broad sense.

The Chairperson:

Yes, I am simplifying it.

Mr McDermott:

Yes. Martina Anderson raised the issue of the reasons why we oppose being excluded and those that are being put forward by officials that, frankly, do not stack up in our opinion.

Mrs D Kelly:

It comes as no surprise that the SDLP believes that the document is fundamentally flawed. It supports each sector that is represented here in its call for the document to be reworked substantially, if not actually taken back to the drawing board. The difficulty is that, although there has been good engagement with officials, the document was, as I understand it, written by special advisers to the two main parties. Therefore, while officials may well have been empathetic to your views, unfortunately, those seem to have fallen on deaf ears as they were fed into that particular food chain.

It may be useful to hear from the Ministers or departmental officials on what the situation is with regard to the EQIA. This document, which actually surrenders some equality provisions, does not include all sections of our community and does not meet the test for good relations as we move into the future. As far as the people here who have made their submissions are concerned, is there any hope for the document or the strategy as it currently sits?

Mr McDermott:

We are hopeful that the consultation process and the amount of opposition on so many levels to the document as it stands will yield results. What those results will be, we do not know. As the Chairperson summed up, our position is that the strategy needs to be amended both to include what is excluded and to be comprehensive enough to be delivered on. It is not in our gift to do that, but we are hopeful.

Mrs D Kelly:

Unfortunately, we had to wait almost two years for the document to be produced. If it had been produced to deal with sectarianism and racism, rather than its being sold as the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, you would not have felt so offended. Is that a fair comment?

Ms O’Kane:

We were engaged in the pre-consultation phase, so if they knew that the strategy would be limited strictly to sectarianism and racism, why did they have all those meetings with us and raise our expectations, when there would be no delivery on it?

Ms Clifford:

We concur with that, especially on the subject of secure communities. There is no mention of violence against women and girls, which, from our perspective in the Women’s Aid Federation, is a source of considerable concern. Frankly, the statistics are very frightening. According to PSNI figures, which are deeply disturbing, there is one incident every 21 minutes and one domestic crime every 53 minutes. In addition, the recent figures for rape that I mentioned trouble us very much indeed. Perhaps our expectations should not have been raised in that context.

Mr McClenahan:

Disability Action’s view is that, even if the strategy considers only racism and sectarianism, you

must still look at other factors, such as disability. For instance, there are ethnic disabled people, so to see them as separate is, frankly, nonsense.

Ms Clifford:

We also support that view. We are carrying out research with Disability Action into violence against disabled women, and one area in which the strategy falls down is in its failure to understand that people can have multiple identities. You can experience sectarian abuse and violence, coupled with sexism and racism. People have multiple identities.

Ms M Anderson:

To be honest, I am hearing two different responses. On the one hand, you told Dolores that you would have preferred it to have been contained in section 75(2) and for it to deal only with sectarianism and racism, because that would not have built up your expectations. However, on the other hand, you recognise that section 75(1) is the primary duty. We cannot do anything on sectarianism or racism without giving due regard to yourselves, which, I would have thought, you would have supported more, as opposed to preferring expectations not to have been raised and it to deal only with sectarianism and racism.

Mr McDermott:

Our joint submission, which was also sent to the Committee, highlights the ministerial foreword to the document. It states:

“We aim to build a strong community where everyone, regardless of race, colour, religious or political opinion, age, gender, disability or sexual orientation can live, work and socialise in a context of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect.”

We would love the document to reflect that, but, if it is not going to, the statement should be removed and the document should be called what it is: a strategy to address sectarianism and racism. As it stands, that is what it is. However, we would prefer them not to remove the statement and to amend the document to include it.

Ms M Anderson:

I just want it to be clear.

Dr Farry:

The central issue is the concept of cohesion, which, in and of itself, can be a very powerful tool and, in some respects, often does not live up to its billing and its title. In addition, the equality

provisions are set out clearly. This is more than an equality document; it is a good relations and cohesion document.

I want to clarify and tease out the ideal way forward. The door to moving beyond sectarianism and racism has been opened, so it is probably better that, rather than regress, we push ahead with that. I appreciate that there are difficulties in deciding exactly how and how far to do it, but is it fair to say that a distinction exists? On the one hand, there is ensuring that we have a proper definition of cohesion, which references all its various aspects — it is probably broader than the four sectors represented here — and ensuring that, at the appropriate points, as Gillian mentioned with regard to secure communities, we cross-reference the various actors?

On the other hand, specific strategies, whether on sexual orientation, disability or general equality, remain free-standing. You are not suggesting that we try to integrate all of that into a future CSI document. Those remain separate strategies in their own right. However, we want to have a proper definition of cohesion and to properly cross-reference all of the rest of the policy within the CSI document so that it does not happen in isolation. Is that a fair understanding of where you feel that this needs to go?

Ms O’Kane:

Certainly, from our point of view, we think that all the different strands of equality and different strategies that specifically address particular issues have to be complementary to one another. No one strategy can exist in isolation. That would not work.

Mr McClenahan:

Let us take shared space as an example. Shared space is open to everybody, so it has to be suitable for disabled people. That is not mentioned here. It might be part of the actual disability strategy, but it should still be in the CSI.

Dr Farry:

Yes, cross-referenced.

Ms Clifford:

Cross-referencing the strategies is something that we would be happy with. We would be concerned about documents being kept solely in isolation, given our concerns around the issue of

multiple identities. If a strategy deals strictly with sexuality, it does not deal with other aspects of an individual's life experience. That would be our concern. They need to feed into one another.

Mr McDermott:

The definition of cohesion is a problem in that cohesion has not been defined. A lot of groups and people who were responding to the consultation were debating the meaning of cohesion among themselves. One response — I read this just this morning — used the definition from the UK cities report in 2007. I will not read it out now, but it defines cohesion and what it is. The lack of a definition was a big problem for a lot of people who did not really know what cohesion meant. Again, to see a document called 'Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration' coming out for consultation raised expectations.

Dr Farry:

There are also European definitions of cohesion through the Council of Europe. There is a particular problem in the rest of the UK in that the whole cohesion debate over the past decade has focused on the very narrow Islamic issue. It is only now that it is being broadened out. It is, nevertheless, something about which there is active debate across the water, and we should be aware of that. That is moving quite rapidly too.

Mr McDermott:

You are right that we do not need to reinvent the wheel. That is why we are disappointed that it is not aligned to international best practice, because definitions and models exist that could be used in a local context. However, because it is not aligned to that, it will be more difficult to define and to address it.

The Chairperson:

If you spread the remit of a policy or strategy too wide, it may lose impact on the specifics that it was intended for. I am not saying that I support that analysis, but it may come back from the Department and officials. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr McDermott:

I take you back to what I said earlier. It would be pretty disingenuous for an official to use that as an adequate response to excluding people whom they have an obligation to deliver for. That is because, where an evidence base exists, a need is included. That is not to say that LGB people

will need to be addressed when the strategy addresses divided housing, because —

The Chairperson:

My question was not broadly around that. My question was about whether most of the issues are similar but affect a different section of people. That is the basis. Are the issues similar enough that they could be dealt with in one strategy?

Mr McDermott:

I do not understand.

The Chairperson:

I am trying to get at whether the issues that the four groups here are putting forward, along with, for example, sectarianism, are broadly compatible with one another for one strategy. That is what I am trying to say.

Mr McClenahan:

For certain sectors, we do not know. For example, have there been any studies on minority disabled people? Do we know what their needs are? Do we even know how many there are? I do not think that we do.

Mr McDermott:

The strategy has come from OFMDFM, and it transcends a number of different Departments and strategies. It refers to the community safety strategy, hate crime and all of those issues. If the strategy addresses the fact that 10% of young Protestants and Catholics hear verbal abuse because of their religion, surely it should address the fact that 98% of young gay or lesbian kids hear the same about their sexual orientation. There is absolutely no reason why that cannot be addressed. That is not to say that that same issue needs to be addressed for another group. It may not be relevant. If an evidence base exists of a need in a particular area, it should be included in the strategy.

The Chairperson:

That is what I am trying to get at. Do they all fit compatibly together?

Mr McDermott:

They are not all the same, and there will be different needs, but they all fit.

Ms O’Kane:

My interpretation is that the aspirations of the document are very much about community relations, community development and supporting people in local areas to be more cohesive. That is absolutely a relevant issue to the LGB community, which is a distinct social group that has been marginalised in the wider society in which we live. That is an incredibly relevant issue for our community. We are not adding an extra issue. There needs to be recognition that the LGB community is a distinct social group with cultural and historical differences from the mainstream wider society. That fits very nicely into community relations and good relations work. The current draft of the strategy does not place an onus on those who will be given powers to implement it to include the LGB community. That is a real oversight.

Mr Kinahan:

I wish to follow the Chairperson’s exploration of whether the strategy would become too cumbersome if it were expanded too much. My feeling is that it needs to be expanded because there are lots of similar matters, but, equally, there are many different ones. Until we get examples of the targets and the mechanisms for delivery on all those points, we are none the wiser. I was really hoping for some ideas from you today on the sort of targets that you are talking about. Until all of the little problems are defined, there will not be a picture of the big problem. Everyone to whom I have spoken about the document has criticised it for having no targets, but no one has come up with any.

Mr McDermott:

I am sure that we could give plenty of examples, but it is not really our place to write a significant part of the strategy for OFMDFM, particularly because we do not know what budget constraints it has or what its relationships and working partnerships are with other Departments. We just know that we are excluded from the strategy and that our issues are very similar to those that are dealt with in it. The Department needs to include us and to provide targets and dates.

Mr Kinahan:

I am happy to take that on board. It is a chicken and egg situation.

Mr McDermott:

In all of our submissions, we provided a raft of statistics and research, mostly locally commissioned, that give a very good picture of Northern Ireland society for the various groups that are represented. That should give the Department some idea of the targets that it should start to implement.

Ms Clifford:

Targets could be explored in areas such as women's participation in public and political life. The strategy could also look at things such as preventative education programmes and the numbers of children who participate in those kinds of programmes across Northern Ireland. Those are very compatible with good relations. We look at domestic violence and those kinds of issues, but those could be explored further to look at other issues of tolerance and how children are taught in an age-appropriate way about how to address and treat one another, what is appropriate and what is not. That could be expanded to look at other issues as well.

Ms O'Kane:

It is difficult for us to give ideas around targets, but we can point the Committee towards good practice, such as Strabane District Council and Newry and Mourne District Council. They have engaged very well with the LGB community, despite the fact that they have no real duty under good relations regulations to do so.

Ms M Anderson:

They have a duty to promote equality of opportunity.

Ms O'Kane:

Yes, if it were limited to section 75(2), they could say —

Ms M Anderson:

Picking up on Danny's point, the problem that the Committee has and the problem with this document is that it was not up to the groups to collect the data. Qualitative and quantitative data collection should be done as part of the EQIA process. That would give us a picture of the structural inequalities that exist, and we would be looking at what the programme aims to address, based on the evidence provided. The entire system has a problem, in that it has not been carrying out EQIAs, because that data is not there.

The Chairperson:

OK, Martina, we have got your point.

Mr McClenahan:

I would like to make a brief point about those markers. One of the guides is the good relations indicators for 2009, which is mentioned in the CSI document. A quick look through those indicators reveals virtually nothing in relation to disability. I apologise for repeatedly returning to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but it is relevant that article 31 mentions statistics and data collection, which is a major hole here.

Ms M Anderson:

It is a major hole in this entire system.

Mr McClenahan:

Yes, very much so. Currently, nothing is being collected about disability to mark out cohesion.

Ms M Anderson:

Those good relations indicators are based, in part, on surveys, not data collection or hard evidence.

Mr McClenahan:

Yes.

The Chairperson:

OK. Thank you very much for your presentation. The Committee will consider how to move forward. We are to take other evidence.