



# Putting the Community into Community Planning

*or ...*

## Community consultation is about more than 'ticking boxes'

On the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2006 Sustainable Northern Ireland (SNI) hosted the above Conference at Castlereagh Borough Council Offices. This conference was the culmination of a project funded by the Castlereagh Local Strategic Partnership.

The goals of the Conference were to:

- Look at what Community Planning really means and the role it can play in shaping future communities
- Explore how existing good practice of community consultation and involvement and the experiences of the Castlereagh Community Visioning programme can contribute to developing models of Community Planning
- Identify ways for communities, their representatives and statutory organisations to work together to identify problems and develop achievable and realistic solutions to give communities a stake in determining their future
- Look at how to overcome the 'victim culture' – helping people take responsibility for their area and engage in the political process.

The audience comprised some 60 delegates with an interest in Community Planning, Reform of Public Administration, sustainable development and local community action from local government, central government departments, statutory, public community and voluntary sectors.

The Conference was officially opened by Councillor James Spratt, the Mayor of Castlereagh. The Conference Report presents key points from the speaker's presentations and highlights from the roundtable discussions.



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## **Introduction and Background**

**Sue Christie, Sustainable NI**

This conference investigated ways in which we can develop the new governance systems now evolving in Northern Ireland in the best interests of our community. There has been much work done here on community development and community participation, and this conference aims to build on that work to provide positive input to the developing 'Community Planning' agenda.

Community Planning is a cornerstone of the new structures for local governance coming into place under the Review of Public Administration. However, while Community Planning is acknowledged to be a crucial and essential part of the new structures, none of us is yet sure what it actually IS – how it will work, what it will involve, and, crucially, how we can ensure that it fully takes into consideration the needs and desires OF the community. We hope that this conference and the work done at it will help us all to develop these ideas and provide useful input to those charged with developing the concept and the process.

The conference is the culmination of an 18 month project run by Sustainable NI and funded by the Castlereagh LSP. It has involved working closely with five communities in Castlereagh, developing local visions and action plans for delivering those visions, and finally beginning to deliver some of the actions identified. This conference will try to draw together some of the lessons from this work regarding getting communities really involved and active in determining their own futures. We have drawn out many thoughts on what factors can make community involvement a positive experience for all members of the community itself and the other sectors and support structures upon which any community depends. We hope that these ideas can contribute to other communities across Northern Ireland and to the evolving Community Planning process.

## **From Community Visioning to Community Planning**

***Murray Watt, Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project and Sustainable NI***

In Northern Ireland we seem to have been jumping from one strategy, initiative, programme or vision to another over the past decade or more. There is a lack of evidence that the issues that were to have been tackled have been successfully addressed. An additional worry is that there does not appear to be a common view of the benefits and dynamics of real community involvement and participation. There has been no sustained political drive nor strategic funding priority assigned to achieving long term goals. Community Planning may offer the opportunity to respond to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead with local government reorganisation.

### ***Potential for Community Planning in Northern Ireland***

- Improving local governance through local authorities working closely with partners and communities,
- Linking social inclusion, community participation, better service delivery and modernised local government agendas,
- Building on the good practice and experience in the fields of community development and community involvement,
- Taking a fresh perspective on how to achieve genuine community participation.

### ***Building on the Positives***

- A huge amount of existing community activity,
- Commitment, enthusiasm, dedication, increasing professionalism of community workers,
- The significant time, effort, energy and enthusiasm of community volunteers,
- The experience from initiatives, such as the Castlereagh Visioning Project, whereby people from the community have worked together to develop a vision for the future of estates and neighbourhoods.

### ***Key Concepts***

- A joined up framework for neighbourhood renewal
- Empowerment of communities
- Localisation of services
- Revitalisation of local democracy
- Modernisation of local government

### ***Challenges***

- To ensure that needs and aspirations developed through community visioning or community planning become the cornerstones of decisions and services delivery,
- To empower local people to develop solutions,
- To involve everyone, and to encourage everyone to find a role and make a contribution to community planning within their neighbourhoods.

# **Reform of Local Government; implications and opportunities for communities**

*Ian Maye, DoE Local Government Reform Unit*

*The aim of community planning is to make sure that people and communities are genuinely engaged in decisions made about public services which affect them. Through the community planning process we have an opportunity to address poverty, promote good relations, target environmental inequalities and tackle the fundamental issues which prevent the achievement of sustainable communities.*

Peter Hain

Community Planning has the potential to affect everything else in government. By bringing everybody together it will help communities to influence government, and pull all parties together. This is difficult, but we aren't starting from scratch. However, along with these reforms a number of other factors are also changing – reform of justice system, possible re-devolution among others, and this scale and pace of change is unprecedented. Nothing is given!

How can we ensure that public services benefit from the reform rather than suffer the dangers of fragmentation? The key is Community Planning and the strength of local government; although not as strong as elsewhere in the UK, it will be very much stronger than it has been in NI. The goal is to increase the local voice in determining and developing coherent policies and processes – and not just in forming these, but also in delivering them. It will put the community at the heart of the process.

There is still much work to be done on developing the process and ensuring that communities will be fully involved. There will be a number of pilot schemes to test the possible methodologies over the next two years.

We have learned from other work that the legislation and money are not the most important part of the process – relationships are, and developing those relationships is crucial – between government and non-government, as well as overcoming divisions within government. This will become the most important aspect of how government works in Northern Ireland, but it is up to all of us to optimise the opportunities; we must not underestimate the amount of work this will require.

## ***The Key Proposals from the Community Planning Subgroup***

- Adopt a modified Scottish model, adapted to Northern Ireland's needs, with regeneration moving to local government (although health and education will remain separate from local government, unlike the Scottish model),
- Place a duty on local government to participate and deliver local Community Plans,

- Place a statutory duty on other key players and central government departments to be involved and play a role in delivering the process and provide statutory guidance,
- Provide structures for representation,
- Develop local area partnerships, cross boundary/border,
- Implement the Power of Well-being
- Capacity building and pilot projects – a number of different approaches to community planning will be piloted, testing different ways of working in different areas. It is likely that more than one model will be available, learning the lessons from and evaluating the pilot projects, for community planning in the future.

***Key Points on Community Planning:***

- is a way to create more responsive and effective public services for citizens,
- is the creation of a new vision for a locality, not merely the process of sticking together a number of existing plans and practices,
- is central to the promotion of civic leadership – giving local government a stronger voice,
- is the bedrock of truly strong and influential local government,
- should be able to influence top-level strategies,
- requires the development and nurturing of relationships between local government and the community and voluntary sectors,
- is dependent on communication, partnership, leadership and working through hidden agendas,
- provides support for strong civic leadership in Northern Ireland – including the reinstating the Northern Ireland Assembly.

**Listening to Communities – what works and what doesn't**

***Irene Williamson, Cregagh Community Association***

***Participating in the Castlereagh Visioning Project***

In the past Cregagh Community Forum (an umbrella group for community groups in Cregagh) had been involved in a number of strategy development processes, with various degrees of success. When offered the opportunity to participate in the Castlereagh Visioning Project we felt this very opportune timing as we believed that we needed an action plan reflecting the needs and aspirations of local people, and welcomed the support that the Project offered us.

### ***The Process***

- We worked closely with SNI from the outset, who provided support and facilitation for the process,
- Rather than jumping into a prefabricated consultation process we developed our own ideas about what we wanted to achieve and how to go about achieving this,
- Wanted to involve the whole community in creating a vision for Cregagh,
- Wanted to ensure that control and ownership of the process remained local,
- Looked at a range of options around community participation – designed and constructed a model of the estate offering people the opportunity to comment on problems and priorities,
- Used the skills and attributes of Forum members,
- Considered who else should be involved in the process,
- A series of meetings and two well-planned residentials to set clear targets and tasks to ensure we focused on the right outcomes,
- Consultation with local people during the community festival and the VE Day celebrations,
- A Stakeholders Day for statutory and voluntary partners,
- Writing the Action Plan, where we considered and agreed content and priorities; and an editorial process where layout and format were agreed,

### ***The Action Plan***

- Viewed as a very important document in the local community as it represents an expression of needs and aspirations,
- Owned by the local community,
- Achievable and realistic,
- Tangible and measurable,
- Has the support of local people and stakeholders.

### ***Implementing the Action Plan***

Each objective has been placed on the agenda of one of three community bodies: Cregagh Community Association (formerly Cregagh Community Forum), Cregagh Housing Forum or the Cregagh Interagency Group. Actions have been set against each objective and over the next few years will be monitored in terms of successful completion of the tasks and achievement of objectives. Cregagh Community Association will undertake an annual review of the Action Plan to measure and record success.

### ***What worked well***

- Absence of a 'quick fix' mentality,
- Creative – using modes of participation that had not been used in Cregagh before,
- Engaged with people in an open and positive way – such that people responded positively to what we were aiming to achieve,
- Time and commitment given by local people and SNI.

### ***Outcomes (in addition to the Action Plan)***

- Community activists were encouraged to look at the community infrastructure and concluded that to breathe new life into the Community Forum it should be dissolved and the Cregagh Community Association formed to take the visioning strategy forward,
- Attracted new members to the committee and brought renewed vigour and energy,
- People in the community have undertaken training and capacity building to develop new skills and attributes,
- We have developed as individuals and as a community group,
- The process was empowering and has enabled us to set more ambitious targets for the future,
- Renewed community activity on the estate,
- Individuals have been empowered to become more involved in the life of their community,
- A fresh impetus to community development and a positive impact on Cregagh.

*would we do it again? the answer is 'yes'.*

## **Just Ask Us!**

***Sharon Skillen, Tullycarnet Young Women's Group, TAGIT***

### ***Identifying a Need in the Community***

In March 2005 the Tullycarnet Action Group Initiative Trust, known as TAGIT, held a series of volunteer evenings welcoming everyone living in Tullycarnet and Ardcarne to come and have a say about what was happening in their community. In these volunteer evenings the ages ranged from young to old, so every area of the community was represented. The aim was to find out what the community wanted and how they would go about doing this. One of the outcomes was that we identified that there was very little in Tullycarnet for young women. Another outcome was a revitalisation of the Young Men's Group and starting a Golfing Society.

### ***Establishing the Tullycarnet Young Women's Group***

With the help of TAGIT, the Young Women's Group was set up in Tullycarnet. Advice was sought from different people who had experience in developing and working with community groups, and meetings took place with other local young women.

A survey was undertaken asking young women in Tullycarnet what they would like to see available in the area and what the key issues are. Key issues included teenage pregnancies, single young mothers and childminding.

The Young Women's Group opened a bank account and drew up a constitution, and then applied for funding through Castlereagh Local Community Fund. Activities undertaken in the past year included:

- OCN Level 3 Peer Education course,
- A Youth Leadership course,
- A netball club,
- Working in partnership with TAGIT to set up a community café in Tullycarnet.

#### ***Why Consult with Communities***

- Identify needs and help to meet them,
- Identify and develop the way forward for communities,
- Through consultation we find out what is happening and start working in partnership,
- We can do more and achieve more if we work together.

#### ***Consultation with Young People***

- Young people need to be consulted about the future for their communities,
- It needs to be done in a way that we feel able to participate and join in, Sometimes consultations are done at such a high level that the real issues just go over our head – it's almost as if people don't want us to join in,
- Young people want to help develop Tullycarnet, we grew up here and now lots of us feel it's time for us to put something back into our community,
- We need to be taken seriously and have the opportunity to give our views – Just Ask Us!

## **Best practice in community involvement and local regeneration**

***Jane Field, Education and Development***

#### ***Advantages of Involving the Community in Community Planning***

**For local people** - factors which can encourage local people to get involved in community planning include:

- They have local knowledge – which leads to better decision making meeting needs and working towards the community getting what the community wants,
- Potential to access additional resources,
- Building community ownership, which in turn creates a sense of community,
- Building individual and community capacity and developing new skills,
- People feel more attached to an environment they have helped create.

**For statutory agencies, the public sector and professionals** - the advantages of involving the community include:

- People in the community bring local knowledge,

- Meets legislative requirements,
- The community is aware of what the plans for their community are, which reduces or removes conflict and may help development taking place more quickly,
- Community understanding of what is and is not possible (and the reasons why).

### ***Good Practice in Community Consultation***

- Engage the community,
- Two-way communication and information sharing,
- Make the process inclusive,
- Provide support for the community,
- Develop a realistic vision,
- Involve people of different ages, gender, backgrounds and cultures,
- Community take responsibility and ownership of the action plan,
- Encourage people to use their skills,
- Small wins encourage people to believe in the process and build interest and support,
- Be inclusive and seek to involve people from across the community.

### ***Creativity – do it differently***

There is no point in doing things differently just to be different, but creative approaches that meet the needs of the community may help to motivate and engage people.

- Carryduff ‘Thinking Outside the Box’: the community groups evaluated their own proposals.
- Themed workshops held to discuss key community issues in Inner East Belfast and Strabane when developing the Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans.
- The Cregagh community vision model on show at community fun days.

### ***Look at Building in Sustainability - work towards sustainable communities***

In recent years there has been a lot of talk about and support for ‘social economy’ projects. In reality it can be a long process to develop and establish a social economy project; whereby the profits are ploughed back into the community, thus contributing towards sustaining local initiatives without relying solely on external funding. Examples of such projects include:

- Mullaghmore Polytunnels: growing vegetables for the community, food to table projects, diversifying to flowers,
- Strathroy Units to let: disused NIHE depot – let to Sure Start, recycling projects and local businesses,
- Tullycarnet Community Café – new venture.

### ***Keep the Process Moving Forward***

Having developed an action plan it is essential that the process continues to move forward: if people’s hopes and expectations are raised and nothing happens there is the possibility that morale will drop and that people in the community will become reluctant and cynical about participating in a similar future process.

- Communities should be aware of the processes to move plans forward and who can help with the next steps,
- Use existing structures or develop new ones to maintain communication between statutory, public, community and voluntary sectors,
- Ongoing consultation is a must such that the action plan can be reviewed in order to continue to meet community needs – eg focus groups, citizens' juries,
- Consider the resources and support required to maintain momentum from the outset.

## **Making the Links – how can Community Planning deliver the goods?**

*Colm Bradley, Community Technical Aid*

### ***Localised community plans***

There is a legislative requirement that each of the new seven Councils develops an action plan through community planning. They may need persuading that there is a need to produce a larger number of locality focused community plans – e.g. in Dundee the Council took a wider approach to community planning and developed nine local community plans.

### ***Community planning should:***

- Be exciting and invigorating,
- Move beyond consultation to negotiation to coordination to action to a checking mechanism to more consultation,
- Make decisions, review and ask did this work?

### ***Key points***

- Community planning is not new to Northern Ireland,
- Local communities need service providers to understand local needs, recognising that coordinated services are beneficial to the community,
- There is a need for all agencies to cooperate with the Councils to produce effective community plans,
- Support needed for moves away from short-term project funding towards longer-term programmes.

### ***The next steps***

- Insist on locally based community plans as part of the bigger community plan; identify the benefits of localised plans for Councils and their representatives,
- Allocation of resources to help communities to be involved in the process. Engaging people requires time and the necessary resources, which need to be sustained to encourage and enable engagement,

- Talk to politicians and political parties about community planning,
- Recognise the need for involvement from the health and education sectors; they also need to be persuaded to engage with communities in different ways (and note the differences between the Scottish model and the Northern Ireland model),
- Bring past learning and experience into the equation.

## **Taking Community Consultation Forward**

*Heather Moorhead, Northern Ireland Local Government Association*

At the moment local government is facing massive change, and whilst at times it feels like everyone is trying to put too much into one pot there are signs that political parties and councils are starting to work together. It is not only local government that is facing change; globally there is a massive technological change, an increasingly aging population, the likelihood of a bigger gap between poverty and wealth across the population and environmental change.

Increasingly communities are going to need to provide their own solutions, and the seeds for the way forward are in community planning. The concept appears to be easy to grasp, but community planning is complex and people seem to have many different versions of what it is. At this point in time we should be piloting solutions to questions such as:

- Where will decisions be made?
- How will community planning be made accountable and by whom?
- How will community planning work with representative democracy?
- How can we ensure that communities have a voice, and in what way?

### ***Opportunities***

- Learn from lessons and good practice of the past,
- Contribute to shaping ideas and thinking about community planning; some of the issues have begun to surface during the conference,
- Look at different practices to enable communities to thrive,
- Hold onto local identities and ideas that work,
- In the western world many communities are breaking down. Look at ways in which we can retain and bring back quality of life, and not just wealth, into communities,
- Look at community planning on the human scale – people are happier when someone takes the time to talk, explain and listen; these are important values,
- Work towards long-term solutions and sustainable communities,
- Pioneer new ways of working in communities.

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Each table was allocated a Chair (with a remit to keep the discussion flowing) and a Note Taker (with a remit of recording discussion highlights). Stephen Donaghy, Sustainable Northern Ireland, presented a summary of the key points raised during the roundtable discussions. The questions asked during the Roundtable Discussions are shown in bold below; followed by highlights from the discussion. The highlights presented below build upon Stephen's summary.

## **What would you include within 'community planning'?**

- Everything that affects the community; although there may need to be limits (such as imposed by economic policy, international relations or state security)
- An accountable decision making process
- Joined-up: statutory, public, community, voluntary and private sectors
- Developing an action plan based on real evidence and identified needs
- Feedback of results throughout the process; both negative and positive

## **What makes community consultation effective?**

- Clearly defined responsibility for the statutory sector and good interagency working
- The ability to seek for and accommodate differing opinions
- Explicit commitment to building trust and confidence
- Commitment to communicating the resulting action plan; including lobbying and use of the media.
- Addressing traditional and non-traditional boundaries, both in terms of interests and geographical boundaries (what constitutes a neighbourhood?)
- Recognition of the value of everyone
- Participation – involving people from different age ranges, cultures, religions etc
- Relationships need to be worked out and partnerships developed: across the community and across sectors
- Need to work towards an open, honest, transparent process
- Recognition of the time commitment required
- Equality of participation and inclusiveness (including seeking ways to engage those who may be housebound) – an equal voice for everyone involved
- A process that is sensitive and effective
- Not raising false hopes or developing an unrealistic wish list
- Commitment to engagement in the delivery of the action plan through involvement from the appropriate agencies
- Commitment to the process and to producing results
- Developing good channels of communication and communication strategies

### **What prevents community consultation from being effective?**

- Lack of engagement through cynicism, disillusionment, apathy, or unintentional exclusion
- Only consulting those with whom it is easy to consult
- Government strategies, long-term plans and inflexibility that cannot accommodate or quickly respond to emerging realities
- Excess of uncoordinated community consultation
- Technical barriers such as language and 'jargon' used, accessibility, apparent power in the hands of the facilitators, capacity issues leading to exclusion
- External issues and events; in particular those that cause neighbourhood tension
- Political and personal agendas

### **How do you engage people effectively in community consultation and community planning?**

- Being adaptable and creative
- Recognising that something that works in one area may not work in another – adapt models and approaches to meet community need
- Allowing sufficient time at the outset to involve a wide range of people through proper preparation, ensuring that the mechanisms used meet the needs of different stakeholder groups
- Focusing on realistic priorities linked to resources, rather than a 'wish list'
- Bringing confidence to the process that resources will follow plans and the community voice is being listened to through quick wins and small gains
- Developing a sense of belonging to the process; and the resulting structures that are developed and the outcomes from the plan
- Making the process relaxed, fun, focussed, and professional
- Allocating sufficient time to get the work done; take into account that many people in the community will be doing this in their own time
- Building in time for capacity building such that people in the community feel confident and competent to engage in the community planning process
- Ensuring information is user-friendly, at a level everyone can understand

### **What are the consequences of not consulting with communities?**

- Wasted resources – facilities and services may not be where they should be and don't meet the needs of local people
- Lack of ownership, which leads to alienation and resentment, and people feeling that they don't count
- Pockets of need and deprivation unidentified
- The wrong solutions
- Lack of leadership leading to feelings of low self-esteem and deskilling
- Removes decision making from the community
- Lack of respect for or anti-social behaviour towards services and facilities put into place without consultation
- Disaffection and apathy

### **How do we encourage people to take responsibility for their communities?**

- Give people the information needed to make informed contributions and decisions
- Show the practical benefits to be gained from community planning
- Demonstrate the links between want, need, decision and action
- Communicate all outcomes - positive and negative feedback
- Support, allow and resource a 'we can do' approach and attitude (as opposed to a we can't do ...)
- Recognising and promoting community achievements, eg 'Best kept ...'
- Achievable goals
- Closer links with communities – avoiding communities feeling decentralised from the process and taking into account what is happening at a local level
- Proper support for community capacity building and access to people who the community trust and to whom they can turn for support
- Talking to people on the ground in their own community
- Respect for other people's views, cultures and backgrounds
- Use of non-traditional communities of interest
- Allow new ideas to be tried and tested

### **How do you engage communities, their representatives and statutory organisations in identifying successes and problems and developing achievable and realistic solutions?**

- Emphasise achievable and realistic outcomes, but with vision
- Promote making informed choices and the consequences thereof
- Establishing clear boundaries and parameters
- Ensuring the right skills – and a mix of skills – are around the table
- Facilitating good group work and team building skills so that people work effectively together on a level playing field
- Conducting preparatory work with people from the public and statutory sectors such that they are able to work effectively with communities
- Learning positively from mistakes rather than working within a 'blame culture'
- Actively building trust and communication
- Giving communities responsibility and the power and resources to be able to see decisions through
- Provide ongoing support; such that the action plan is the beginning of a process to deliver the vision

## **SUMMARY OF KEY WORDS AND ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CONFERENCE**

### **Key Words**

- Partnership
- Ownership
- Influence
- Developing relationships
- Leadership
- Roles and responsibilities
- Good practice
- Participation
- People having a voice

### **Key Issues**

Community planning is a developing process.

Community planning is not new to Northern Ireland. We can learn lessons from the past as well as adapting the Scottish model.

There is a need to adapt community planning to the local situation – there may be more than one model developed from the pilot project process.

Community planning will build community and individual capacity and empowerment.

Local government will need to work in partnership with health and education sectors to effectively deliver services and meet community needs.

Crucial to the success of community planning is moving on from the development of an action plan to the delivery of the future vision of the community.

## DELEGATES

Title	First Name	Surname	Organisation	Email
Clr		Badger	Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	reception.info@dungannon.gov.uk
Ms	Paulene	Beattie	NI Housing Executive	paulene.beattie@nihe.gov.uk
Mr	Bert	Beattie	Newtownbreda Baptist Church	secretary@newtownbredabaptist.com
Mr	Trevor	Belford	NI Housing Executive	trevor.belford@nihe.gov.uk
Ms	Linda	Berg	DSD Belfast Regeneration Office - South & East Team	bro@dsdni.gov.uk
Mr	Colm	Bradley	Community Technical Aid	colm@communitytechnicalaid.org
Mr	Michael	Briggs	East Belfast Community Development Agency	info@ebcda.org
Clr		Cavanagh	Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	reception.info@dungannon.gov.uk
Ms	Janice	Cherry	Castlereagh LSP	info@castlereaghpartnershiplsp.co.uk
Dr	Peter	Christie	AFBI	drpeterchristie@aol.com
Prof	Sue	Christie	Northern Ireland Environment Link	sue@nienvironmentlink.org
Mr	Fergal	Collins	Time Associates	fergal@timeireland.com
Ms	Yvonne	Cowan	South & East Belfast HSST	yvonne.cowan@sebt.n-i.nhs.uk
Mr	Darren	Curtis	Castlereagh Community Safety Partnership	dcurtis02@btconnect.com
Ms	Claire	Devlin	Department of the Environment	claire.devlin@doeni.gov.uk
Mr	Stephen	Donaghy	Sustainable Northern Ireland	qe4@mac.com
Mr	Aidan	Donnelly	Ballymena Borough Council	aidan.donnelly@ballymena.gov.uk
Mr	Tim	Duffy	Colin Glen Trust	tduffy@colinglentrust.org
Clr	Sara	Duncan	Castlereagh Borough Council	saraduncan@castlereagh.gov.uk
Mr	Graham	Elliott	Dennett InterChange	d_interchange@yahoo.co.uk
Mr	Laurence	Ferguson	South & East Belfast HSST	Laurence.Ferguson@sebt.n-i.nhs.uk
Ms	Jane	Field	Education and Development	janefield@educationanddevelopment.co.uk
Mr	Oliver	Fralley	Antrim LSP	partnership@antrim.gov.uk
Mayor	Lynn	Frazer	Newtownabbey Borough Council	info@newtownabbey.gov.uk
Ms	Margaret	Friel	Belvoir Thursday Night Club	
Mr	Frankie	Gallagher	Ballybeen Neighbourhood Regeneration Project	
Mr	Seamus	Gallagher	Northern Ireland Environment Link	seamus@nienvironmentlink.org
Clr	Harry	Greenaway	Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	reception.info@dungannon.gov.uk
Mr	Trevor	Greene	NI Housing Executive	trevor.greene@nihe.gov.uk
Ms	Jane	Gribben	Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency	jane@volunteering-ni.org
Ms	Louise	Hagan	Health Promotion Agency	l.hagan@hpani.org.uk
Mr	Jonathan	Hodge	South Belfast Partnership	enquiries@southbelfast.org
Ms	Helen	Honeyman	LSP Working Group	claire.conroy@blsp.org
Ms	Hilary	Johnston	Northern Investing for Health Partnership	hilary.johnston@nhssb.n-i.nhs.uk
Mr	Angus	Kerr	Planning Service	angus.kerr@doeni.gov.uk
Mr	Tom	Kerr	Cregagh Community Association	
Mrs	Sandra	Kilpatrick	Northern Ireland Environment Link	sandra@nienvironmentlink.org
Mayor	William	King	Coleraine Borough Council	townclerk@colerainebc.gov.uk
Mr	Mike	Maxwell	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	mike.maxwell@detini.gov.uk
Mr	Ian	Maye	Department of the Environment	ian.maye@doeni.gov.uk
Ms	Ruth	McAlister	Belfast City Council	mcalisterr@belfastcity.gov.uk
Ms	Audrey	McClure	Southern Group Environmental Health Committee	a.mcclure@sgehc.com
Mr	William	McIntaggart	Belfast Education & Library Board	williamm@belb.co.uk
Mrs	Iona	Meyer	Northern Ireland Environment Link	iona@nienvironmentlink.org
Mr	Clive	Mitchell	Omagh LSP	clive.mitchell@omagh.gov.uk
Ms	Margaret	Montgomery	Cregagh Community Association	
Ms	Heather	Moorhead	NI Local Government Association	hm@nilga.org

Title	First Name	Surname	Organisation	Email
Rev	Jacqueline	Mould	Belvoir Parish Church	
Mr	Paul	Murphy	Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	paul.murphy@dungannon.gov.uk
Ms	Paula	Murray	DSD Belfast Regeneration Office - South & East Team	paula.murray@dsdni.gov.uk
Mr	Patrick	O'Doherty	Strabane LSP	slsp@strabanedc.com
Ms	Jenny	Oliver	Belfast City Council	oliverj@belfastcity.gov.uk
Mr	David	Patterson	Down District Strategy Partnership	david.patterson@downdc.gov.uk
Mr	Geoffrey	Porter	Ards Borough Council	geoffrey.porter@ards-council.gov.uk
Mr	Gavin	Rafferty	Queen's University Belfast	g.p.rafferty@qub.ac.uk
Ms	Lisa	Rea	East Down Rural Community Network	lisa@eastdownrcn.com
Clr	Gareth	Robinson	Castlereagh Borough Council	garethrobinson@castlereagh.gov.uk
Mr	Richard	Rogers	Groundwork Northern Ireland	richardrogers@groundworkni.co.uk
Ms	Jackie	Sherriff	Carrickfergus LSP	jacquies.econdev@carrickfergus.org
Ms	Sharon	Skillen	TAGIT	
Sgt	Jim	Trueick	Castlereagh PSNI	
Ms	Eimear	Vance	Belfast City Council	vancee@belfastcity.gov.uk
Mr	Murray	Watt	Sustainable NI	dangerbadger@hotmail.com
Ms	Irene	Williamson	Cregagh Community Association	
Ms	Lisa	Wilson	Castlereagh Borough Council	lisawilson@castlereagh.gov.uk
R/Con	Robin	Wilson	Dundonald PSNI	
Mr	Patrick	Yu	NICEM	patrickyu@nicem.org.uk