

INTERFACES

ACTIVELY SEEK LOCAL AGREEMENT TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF PEACE WALLS (PfG COMMITMENT 68)

Lead Responsibility: Interfaces Inter Agency Group

Partners on Delivery Group: DOJ, PSNI, NIHE, DSD, OFMDFM, DEL, DCAL, DRD, Belfast City Council, Community Relations Council, International Fund for Ireland

Performance Indicators

- The Public Attitudes to Peace Walls (2015) survey results found that 14% would like Peace Walls to come down now and 35% at some time in the future.
- Number of DOJ interface structures – 51 (from 59).
- Number of interface structures subject to alteration/extended opening hours – 1/1 during 2015/16

The performance indicators have been revised to ensure consistency with Good Relations indicators developed to monitor progress under the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

Story behind the figures/context:

Government has three strategic commitments to removing interface barriers:

- PFG 68 – to actively seek local agreement to reduce the number of peace walls;
- Community Safety Strategy – to seek agreement with local communities to reduce the number of interface structures (by ensuring a collaborative approach by government and statutory agencies to the transformation of interface areas; increasing confidence with local communities and residents living adjacent to interface structures; and alternative approaches to designing out crime identified for specific interface areas);
- TBUC Headline Action – to create a 10-year Programme to reduce, and remove by 2023, all interface barriers and create a support package.

Throughout 2015/16, work has taken place to assess progress to date and identify specific issues in implementing the interface programme in moving forward. This includes research work carried out by the Ulster University (UU) through independent Economic and Social Research Council funding, which has looked at the challenges around the removal of interfaces and provided policy papers on approaches for consideration in relation to definition and design; delivery; and engaging communities. The Ulster University is also undertaking a research project through the Administrative Data Research Centre (ADRC) which will produce a report (and subsequent academic papers and presentations) that will highlight the socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the areas designated as proximate to the peace walls. This work is due for completion in Autumn 2016.

In addition, the Institute for Conflict Research completed three reports in relation to scoping out issues facing certain interface communities (East Belfast, Lower Shankill/Falls, Portadown), specifically exploring opportunities for engagement. Evident based research has also been carried out at both regional and local level. The UU published the second Attitudes to Peace Walls Survey in December 2015, exploring the current attitudes of residents living beside peace walls in Northern Ireland. The results of this survey show the need for continued engagement with residents living at interfaces and to work with them to bring about changes that will enable confidence to remove structures currently perceived as providing protection. At a local level, seven community based projects (four in North Belfast, two in West Belfast, and one in Londonderry/Derry) are currently being funded through the International Fund for Ireland's (IFI) Peace Walls Programme to assist community dialogue and engagement with the aim of identifying opportunities and developing plans to enable the removal and/or alteration of physical barriers.

Taking on board the feedback from the various sources, a new governance structure has been established to deliver the interface programme for physical structures. A DOJ led cross departmental Programme Board has been set up to provide a greater challenge function, ensure accountability and ensure that there is a cross Executive priority to deliver on the outcomes identified for the Programme. The Programme Board will also provide the opportunity to link in with existing programmes providing specific economic and social needs, for example Urban Villages and Shared Neighbourhoods. The Inter-Agency Group, which has been the mechanism used to date to co-ordinate issues and facilitate conditions in which the structures can be removed, will remain and will be reshaped to become an operational group.

In summary, whilst some progress has been made in reducing the number of peace walls, along with part removal of four other structures, there is recognition that this progress has been slow. This is supported by the findings of the Attitudes to Peace Walls Survey published in December which indicated a reduction in support for removing peace walls since 2012, when the previous survey took place. We continue to seek alternative ways of facilitating change within communities, and building confidence and trust that safety, and social and economic benefits, can be achieved without separation.

What we agreed to achieve in 2015-2017	What we did in 2015/16
Improve cross-departmental engagement	<p>To date, the mechanism for delivering the Programme for Government, Community Safety Strategy and TBUC commitments on removing physical structures has been an Inter-Agency Group (IAG) which meets approximately quarterly. Chaired by the DOJ, the group has a wide range of partners including representation from other Departments – OFMDFM, DSD, DEL, DCAL, and DRD. This membership aims to co-ordinate issues which will facilitate the conditions in which the structures can be removed including addressing physical; community; economic and social renewal appropriate to a particular area.</p> <p>Following feedback from a number of sources, including work carried out by the Ulster University through Economic and Social Research Council funding, a number of issues and challenges have been identified in implementing the interface programme. As a result, we have set up a DOJ led cross departmental Programme Board, including key funders and stakeholders, to provide a greater challenge function, ensure accountability and the same level of priority in all relevant Departments, and provide the opportunity to link in with existing programmes e.g. Shared Neighbourhoods and Urban Villages. The first meeting was held in February. The Inter Agency Group will remain and will be reshaped to become an operational group.</p> <p>In line with the TBUC Strategy, OFMDFM is establishing an Interface Thematic Sub-group which will comprise membership to consider both contested space and physical interfaces. It is envisaged the Interface Programme Board will work with this Sub-group given the read across to contested space issues.</p> <p>As recognised by the OFMDFM Committee’s Inquiry into Building a United Community, this cross departmental approach will assist addressing the complexity of removing interface barriers in the context of responding to the social and economic needs of those living closest to the peace walls.</p>
Inform communication between government and community groups	<p>The IAG is supported by the IFI community engagement programme which has now been extended through 2016, with a further four year programme approved (details to be confirmed). The IFI programme supports community based projects which have been developed to engage with residents and statutory bodies on the nature and extent of structural change and removal of peace walls. The DOJ, along with other statutory bodies on the IAG, is a member of the IFI Peace Wall Programme Review Group which monitors the progress of the community projects and provides feedback on issues arising. The DOJ and other statutory bodies e.g. NIHE and relevant councils representatives, also attend regular project meetings for each group to ensure two-way</p>

	<p>communication.</p> <p>In addition to the IFI project groups, the DOJ engages with non IFI project based residents groups through attending their regular meetings and consulting on local issues. For example, a hand delivered survey, with the help of the NIHE, was completed in the streets closest to Northumberland Street, Belfast, to measure residents' attitudes to further change to the security gates, particularly around future opening time. Following analysis of the results, a meeting was held in November 2015 with relevant community representatives, local councillors and statutory bodies to discuss the findings. As a result, it was agreed a forum would be set up for the area.</p> <p>To ensure the IAG is informed on community views and to help inform policy direction, membership includes representation from the Interface Community Partners (ICP), established by the Community Relations Council. The IAG and ICP held its fourth annual conference, on 16 December 2015, to update community groups and others on developments throughout the year. Workshops were also held to seek feedback on interface governance structural reform, led by DOJ, and proposals for a new Community Engagement Forum, led by OFMDFM.</p>
<p>Increase capacity for considering change at community level</p>	<p>The DoJ, alongside OFMDFM, commissioned three separate reports for East Belfast, Lower Shankill/Falls and Portadown, with the aim of identifying ongoing and emerging key issues and concerns in the areas in relation to the existence of interface barriers. The reports also explored ideas and possibilities for a new approach to community safety which would involve developing better relations, newly agreed approaches to policing, regenerating the areas currently occupied by barriers, and the potential for removing the barriers. Work on implementing these reports to generate improved engagement in these areas is now underway.</p> <p>Funded by the DOJ, a survey on Attitudes to Peace Walls was undertaken in 2015, repeating the survey carried out in 2012. The findings and analysis were published in a report by the Ulster University in December 2015. This report explored the current attitudes of residents living beside peace walls in Northern Ireland and contained comparisons to the 2012 survey. The results of this Survey show the need for continued engagement with residents living at interfaces to work with them to bring about changes that will enable confidence to remove structures currently perceived as providing protection, as well as dealing with the perceived lack of benefit from the peace process felt by some communities.</p> <p>The Survey results also reflect work carried out by Ulster University, through Economic and Social Research Council funding, to exam the challenges around the removal of interfaces. They provided</p>

	<p>three policy papers on approaches for consideration in relation to definition and design; delivery; and engaging communities which will assist increasing capacity for change.</p> <p>The OFMDFM Committee published an Inquiry into Building a United Community, in September 2015, to inform the Executive and make recommendations to support and enhance policy in uniting communities and community integration. Supporting the view that no peace wall should be removed without consent and support of the communities, one of the Inquiry themes was the need to place less emphasis on removing barriers and more thought on social and economic needs of those living closest to the peace walls. Feedback from community groups and residents notes the co-relation between increased social and economic benefits and confidence in interface removal. The new Programme Board set up to deliver the interface programme for physical structures will provide the opportunity to link in with existing programmes providing specific economic and social needs, for example Urban Villages and Shared Neighbourhoods. It will also work with the Interface Thematic Sub-group, being established by OFMDFM and which will comprise membership to consider both contested spaces and physical interfaces, to ensure consistency of approach where relevant.</p> <p>The Attitudes to Peace Walls Survey, Ulster University policy papers and Inquiry Report highlight how politicians, voluntary and community groups and statutory agencies can help develop the vision required to increase capacity for change. The new Programme Board will explore this further.</p> <p>The OFMDFM Committee, in an inquiry report into TBUC, encouraged the Committee for Justice to undertake scrutiny of the work of the Department of Justice in this regard to ensure that the Assembly is fully appraised, and can input into this work as appropriate. An oral briefing is planned to take place after the election.</p>
<p>Improve community safety</p>	<p>Stakeholder engagement has been carried out on a proposed scheme the DOJ has developed, in conjunction with the NIHE, DSD and PSNI, as part of our engagement with interface communities to assist those who are willing to support physical change to interface structures. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide protective measures for domestic properties adjacent to interface structures as a means of delivering reassurance to residents where there has been agreement that the structure can be altered or removed. Following DOJ analysis of the consultation responses received end September 2015, a workshop was held with statutory partners to consider the issues arising and agree a process for implementation. Further work is ongoing to</p>

	<p>finalise the scheme details with key stakeholders prior to seeking Ministerial approval.</p> <p>Community safety measures are considered for each individual interface area with a physical structure, in consultation with representatives from that area and other members of the IAG, for example PSNI and DRD. Such measures can include improved street lighting, traffic calming and installation of cctv. Protective works to homes have already been carried out, for example at Workman Avenue (North Belfast), following the installation of the new gate, to provide reassurance to residents. New street lighting at Flax Street (North Belfast) is currently being arranged. An action plan has also been developed, as a follow up to a residents' survey regarding the Northumberland Street security gates, to aim to resolve some of the concerns raised around ASB and crime. Funding is also being provided to facilitate a new cctv camera at an interface in Derry City Centre. There are currently eight cameras located at the Fountain/Bishop Street and Irish Street/Gobnascale. It is proposed that an additional camera is located at the Hawkin Street interface to provide additional coverage required by PSNI and its partners. Not only could this measure improve community safety, deter crime and aid detection, it can also provide reassurance to residents following their agreement to the removal of nearby security gates on Derry's Walls.</p>
Reduce community tensions	<p>The DoJ is represented on the TBUC community tensions sub-group and participates in the three task and finish groups in relation to intra-community tensions, racism, and sectarianism. The Department also continues to engage widely through residents associations, community organisations and community safety forums, as well as the seven IFI projects, to ensure that relevant and up-to-date information is shared with stakeholders and to build up key relationships with influencers in the community.</p> <p>PCSPs with interfaces located in their district have delivered and supported a number of initiatives including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BEAT: an Antrim and Newtownabbey PCSP summer Intervention programme running, in the evening during July and August, within identified priority areas or ASB hotspots. Activities aimed to challenge attitudes and behaviours of participants and topics included a range of sporting, art, music and educational topics (drugs awareness, domestic violence, cultural awareness etc) as well as engagement with statutory agencies such as PSNI, NIF&RS and YJA. • Greater Ardoyne Tension Monitoring Group/Action Plan: North Belfast DPCSP supports and administers a cross community group who meet monthly to manage community tensions in and across the Greater Ardoyne Area, utilising the tension monitoring and community

	<p>planning models. This includes the development of a local action plan which addresses youth engagement, diversion, resident engagement, cross community activity, policing, forward planning for events and local regeneration. The initiative includes a range of stakeholders from the Ardoyne, Woodvale, Lower Oldpark and Upper Ardoyne areas as well as PSNI, NIHE and Belfast City Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Belfast Tension Monitoring Group: East Belfast DPCSP supports and administers the operation of this cross community group working to tackle Interface issues. • The Care Project: This project is operated in the Seymour Hill area for young people to address both community concerns including alcohol/drugs and interface violence effecting the Seymour Hill/Colin/Dunmurry area.
Reduce the number of interface structures	<p>Throughout 2015/16, work has continued to implement Government's three strategic commitments to removing interface barriers. The overall number of DOJ structures has reduced from 59 to 51 (with one of these removed during this period, a set of gates on Derry's Walls), with parts of 5 other structures removed (including two within this period, i.e. removal of fencing at Longlands Avenue, Newtownabbey Oct 2015; and removal of a security gate on Derry's Walls Feb 2016). Alteration of one physical structure took place during the same period with the installation of a new gate at Workman Avenue, Belfast, in April 2015. Extended ad-hoc opening hours of gates continues at one location in Northumberland Street, Belfast.</p> <p>In February 2016 the Housing Executive, working in conjunction with the Tascit IFI Group, and following considerable engagement with residents, commenced work on remodelling one of their interface walls adjacent to housing on the Ardoyne side of the Crumlin Road. This is the first remodelling of one of the Housing Executive's twenty one structures.</p>