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**RE: Proposals for the Update NI Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM 2017)**

**Introduction**

The Community Relations Council (CRC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to NISRA’s Proposals for the ‘Update NI Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM 2017)’.

CRC’s primary interest in this current consultation is its role in contributing to the promotion and delivery of good relations.

The legacy of the conflict has had, and continues to have a long-lasting impact on disadvantage and social exclusion within and across many communities. The economic costs of conflict are well known and areas of endemic and long-term conflict are often characterized by deep poverty and disadvantage. CRC believes that the legacy of the conflict must be tackled alongside the challenges of unemployment, poverty, qualification attainments and poor health. This means tackling disadvantage and mainstreaming good relations together, and will ultimately necessitate improving access to employment, education, housing and tackling health inequalities as well as making a commitment to improve good relations.

**Policy/Practice Context**

The Draft Programme for Government (PfG) has a number of outcomes and indicators that are relevant in the context of this review. The indicator and delivery plan which prioritises ‘Shared Space’ has a particular connection to the domain ‘Access to Services’.

The ongoing PfG data development agenda linked to the ‘Respect Index’ and Reconciliation’ has the potential to intersect with Deprivation measures. It is therefore important that the PfG data development process and the Multiple Deprivation Measures Review work in parallel to deliver robust data collection.

In addition the Executive’s ‘Together Building a United Community’ (T:BUC) and its associated programmes of activities are relevant to this review, in particular ‘Our Shared Community’ and ‘Our Safe Community’ priority areas. These priority areas intersect with ‘Access to services’ domain and the ‘Living Environment’ domain, and therefore need to be paid attention to by those developing data collection and those developing policy and practice.

**Comments**

CRC welcomes the fact that the Domain Expert Group and the review process recognised issues linked to the legacy of the conflict, especially as they affect people and their choices. Cross-community movement, peacelines, invisible geographical barriers and poor physical environments continue to impact negatively on communities, and the inclusion of these issues as recommendations for potential action reflects the ongoing relevance of these outstanding issues, and the need to progress data development on these themes to help support our society continue its journey from conflict to peace.

It is worthwhile to briefly revisit how living in a segregated society can affect people’s lives.

A 2006 publication on segregation in Belfast reported that out of a survey of 9,000 individuals living within interface communities, 78% of respondents provided examples of at least three publicly funded facilities that they did not use because they were located on the ‘wrong’ side if an interface[[1]](#footnote-1) The survey also revealed that the vast majority of respondents in both republican/nationalist and unionist/loyalist communities (81% and 72% respectively) stated that on least 3 occasions they had not sought a job in an area dominated by the ‘other’ community.[[2]](#footnote-2) More recent research carried out by Ulster University (2015) revealed that younger people feel more inconvenienced by peace walls, with 29% of 18-34 year olds believing that the wall makes access to services harder compared to 18% of those over 55, and importantly 39% of all respondents believe that the peace wall reduces local investment[[3]](#footnote-3).

Inter communal chill factors can also act as barriers to employment and facilities[[4]](#footnote-4) and conflict transformation research commissioned by Belfast City Council reported how ‘public transport can play a major role in helping to change perceptions, enlarge travel horizons, and shape new travel and social patterns in Belfast’[[5]](#footnote-5). Public spaces increase informal social contact and therefore help create and sustain ‘social capital’ in socially excluded communities[[6]](#footnote-6). This is especially important for areas where people have developed patterns of not travelling too far from their areas due to a history/legacy of violence.

CRC advocates that policy makers acknowledge the impact of fear and distance, and how living in divided society has created mistrust within and across some communities, how a segregated society continues to have an impact on where people choose to live, how, what and where our children are educated, how and where investment is attracted, and how we develop inclusive sustainable regeneration.

In order to transform existing patterns of social disadvantage those involved in the development and implementation of policy require relevant data. This information enables analysis of the impact of ‘chill factors’ and the identification of ‘additional’ barriers to mobility and labour, which can ultimately impact on access to training, employment or other services aimed at reducing poverty and disadvantage. Without data development on the issues it will be harder to lift families, children and communities out of poverty.

This is the backdrop to the ‘Access to services’ domain and the ‘Living environment’ domain. So whilst CRC was initially pleased at the inclusion of these issues it is somewhat disappointing that the Domain Expert Group having identified these issues as matters that had a relationship to the relevant domains, then concluded it was unable to move data collection forward for these themes. The group concluded it was unable to identify a suitable indicator to measure barriers to cross-community movement (Access to Services) and that for interface areas (Living Environment domain) there was a ‘lack of uniformity in terms of the availability of comparable information’ and that data available for urban areas might create a bias. The group again concluded that a suitable indicator could not be developed.

Given the policy and practice backdrop, as well as ongoing data development related to PfG outcomes, CRC asks that Expert Review Group and officials from NISRA retain these important post-conflict issues as ‘uncompleted’ matters. Issues linked to a society emerging from conflict such as segregation and safety, continue to impact negatively on life choices and opportunities and *need* to be paid attention to during the data development process. Data collection (including longitudinal studies) on these themes is critical to policy makers and practitioners in order to support the development of evidence based solutions.

Subsequently, those tasked with data collection, including NISRA and central government statisticians, should engage directly with those groups and stakeholders who work directly with communities whose lives are affected by segregation. In particular, a wealth of relevant information has been produced by those working to promote inclusion and access, and communities affected by urban physical interfaces and contested spaces in rural communities. These discussions should focus on exploring data collection and the development of potential indicators. This co-design process has been useful in other programme areas and could be beneficial for this process also.

**Conclusion**

This review offers an opportunity to support data development and influence policy development at both regional and local government level. CRC hopes that these comments support NISRA’s current review and would welcome the opportunity to discuss further any aspect of this response.

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1. Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City. Shirlow P and Murtagh, B. 2006 page 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City. Shirlow P and Murtagh, B. 2006 page 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Public Attitudes to Peace Walls (2015) Survey Results. Byrne. J, Gormley-Heenan. C, Morrow. D and Sturgeon, B. December 2015. <http://socsci.ulster.ac.uk/pws.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Breaking Down Barriers: Sectarianism, Unemployment, and the Exclusion of Disadvantaged Young People from Northern Ireland Society, Hargie et al 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Improving Connectivity and Mobility in Belfast. 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Transport Investment and Social Cohesion. Table 3.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)