

A Response to the consultation document -

Pathways to Inclusion

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Introduction

Women's Support Network

The Women's Support Network, established in 1989, is an infrastructural umbrella organisation, which provides support services to, and represents up to 40 groups including; community-based women's centres, women's projects and women's infrastructure groups.

WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and promote and develop networking to enable collective action and impact policy and decision making processes. The WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an important information resource on issues relevant to community-based women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

Area-based community and community of interest

In terms of the 'communities' addressed in the Pathways document, WSN consists of organisations that represent both area-based communities and communities of interest, 'working both in and between' community development at a local level and gender equality work, locally, nationally and globally, each constantly informing the other. The community women's sector and the Women's Centres are engaged in addressing the multi-dimensional experience of social exclusion of women in a holistic way.

Social exclusion, whether it is of people with disabilities, people from ethnic minorities, young people, the elderly and people living in economically

disadvantaged areas *always* has a gender dimension. Government policies should therefore explicitly recognise that women in general are, by virtue of their gender, at a relative social and economic disadvantage relative to men in general. Some groups of women and individual women are particularly disadvantaged as members of other socially excluded or marginalized groups, e.g. young parents, women from ethnic minorities, lesbian and bisexual women, women with disabilities. These, and others, are the interests of the groups represented in WSN's consultation on Pathways for Change. The future resourcing of the voluntary and community sector, and of a separate funded women's community sector (area/interest) supporting distinct facilities for women, is important to them.

WSN's day to day work of providing support to local area and interest-based groups feeds directly into its policy work, lobbying for change in the public policy agenda to meet the needs of women and other disadvantaged and marginalized social groups. From its inception it has been centrally involved in campaigning and lobbying for the mainstreaming of gender equality and for the mainstream funding of the work of its member groups. It campaigned for the introduction of strong equality legislation across a wide range of grounds and represents women's interest in the large and important body of work which has developed for the sector as a consequence of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, the establishment of the Human Rights Commission and European Union and United Nations initiatives.

Building Social Capital

The work of the community-based women's sector is 'Building Social Capital' in action. Within their own communities, area and interest, women's organisations are at the heart of community development, working in close relation to other

local groups to improve, regenerate, renew, empower the community, for example, minority ethnic communities groups such as Al-Nisa are central to the provision of personal development, capacity building, education, training and cultural activities. Local area based Women's Centres are at the heart of the 'bonding' synergy of local community action.

Because of the dual community identity, area and interest, of women's organisations they are bridge builders between communities. The history of WSN is one of women's groups in Belfast's coming together 'across the sectarian divide' in mutual support on the extensive range of issues that they could work on together. The ground-breaking work of Women into Politics' Dialogue Across the City, working through the Network structure, in 'the Talks' period leading up to the Good Friday Agreement moved the sharing agenda from the social and economic issues to take on board 'bridging' in the addressing of traditionally divisive and difficult political cultural issues. Network membership continues to diversify.

With regard to the women's sector, it is for heuristic purposes only that 'linking' between communities and government structures is separated out from the processes of bonding and bridging. Women's organisations work in partnership with the public sector in their local areas and through hard work, commitment to principles and the learning gained from experience, they have developed a model for the delivery of integrated services at local level. Their representatives spend much unremunerated time actively participating meetings, working in district level partnership boards, building partnership arrangements with local hospitals, trusts and boards, and making contracts to deliver a wide range of public services and accept referrals, placements etc. (See Taillon and McCann 2002). And they engage in consultations, campaigning, lobbying and policy work at local, regional, national and global level, making the connections, developing participative democracy and active citizenship.

General Points

WSN welcome's opportunity to think strategically

The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the fact that the recommendation from the Harbinson Report (2000) has been implemented to set in motion a positive discussion about the future resourcing of the voluntary and community sector. While some participants expressed reservations about possible sub-texts in the 'Pathways for Change' document, e.g. 'was it about genuine rationalisation or simply reduction?' there was, overall, an appreciation of the extent to which the work of the sector was appreciated and acknowledged, and a genuine willingness to engage with the issues, including the more difficult ones, raised in the document. Participants welcomed the space provided 'to think strategically'.

WSN views Pathways as the beginning of a process of discussion

In appreciation of the seriousness of the documents objectives, which imply not only re-structuring of the voluntary and community sector, of its relationships with the statutory sector and other agencies and of restructuring of government itself, it was felt that the task required an initial period of work and time on the part of all stakeholders to ensure that the cross sectoral structures ultimately set up would be sustainable. Therefore the outcome of the Taskforce consultation should not be an end in itself, but rather the beginning of a process in which the stakeholders would work together across sectors to develop the structures that would enable the kind of partnership work envisaged in the document.

Pathways must be dealt with in the context of other major reviews and initiatives

It was also hoped that given the relevance of the Taskforce to other current consultations and processes of review, such as; the Review of Public Administration, Shared Future, Neighbourhood Renewal, Healthy Cities, Sure

Start, URBAN, the Community Support Programme Review that is currently underway and the B Map work going on in the Belfast City Hall, there would be meaningful communication between those involved in this work. This would go some way to 'real rationalisation'. One of the most worrying aspects of WSN's consultation was the reiteration of incidences of government departments not only uninvolved in joined up thinking within and between themselves, but of them operating with one another in a spirit of competition to the extent that they deliberately do not share good practise.

If communications between relevant government bodies engaged in review and strategic change is not happening in a structured way, perhaps the VCU might take the initiative to address such an absence.

Community development as defined by the sector

While the Pathways document appears to list and acknowledge the core aspects of community development as an approach, there was an expressed need for reassurance that the definition of community development being used in the document really accorded with that embraced by its practitioners. Participants found it necessary to stress that the community and voluntary sector had very different origins and operated and developed in a very different way from the statutory and private sector. Key words and concepts used included, needs-led, bottom-up, organic, dynamic, innovative, diversity, complexity, capacity-building, added-value, independent and equality. Compared to government's focus on representative democracy, the community sector's focus was on participation and participative democracy. It is sectoral *difference* that gives value to cross-sectoral partnership. The sector was distinct and worked in complementarity with the public sector.

Mainstreaming

We welcome warmly suggestions for increased mainstream core funding for community and voluntary sector organisations. However, caution was expressed about the idea of mainstreaming the work of the sector. There was some discussion about the idea of 'Government departments and other public sector agencies' adopting 'community development best practice' (Pathways. 4.8). There would seem to be a need to explore more fully what is implied in this phrase, and care taken that it does not imply an idea that the work of the community sector can be subsumed within government.

It has been the experience of some sectors that the process of mainstreaming can be mainstreaming 'out of existence', this happened in some instances of gender mainstreaming in the European Union when separate gender specific funding streams were closed down in the name of gender mainstreaming, which did not in fact occur.

Also some of the work of the sector is more appealing to the mainstream than others, such as critiquing policy and campaigning, advocacy around unpopular issues. 'We need to maintain its radical edge and necessary separateness'. It is of paramount importance that independence maintained to enable this valuable and unique contribution of our sector.

Some of the greatest fears are summed up in the following 'mainstreaming the sector might lead to the creation of 'super groups' located 'in safe areas' whose role it would be 'to deliver government policy'.

The Specificity of Northern Ireland

We welcome the initial acknowledgement in the document of the involvement of many organisations in the sector in the development of policies and programmes to tackle inequality, communal and social divisions and the promotion of peace and reconciliation (3.3) and the recognition of the need to support the new and important work of the sector in relation to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

Some participants in the WSN consultation, however, felt strongly that the document in total did not take enough account of the specificity of Northern Ireland as a 'post conflict' or 'transitional society' and the long term impact which this has had on local communities, e.g. sectarianism and trauma, and hence, community development work. 'This report could be about anywhere, Liverpool or Blackpool, there is no special mention of the North's unique situation'.

This discussion feeds into that above, about independence of the sector. While raised by all consulted, it is more important for some organisations than others for whom it was necessary that, e.g. their service delivery be not seen as mere extensions of government, delivering the work of government 'at arms length'.

The Equality and potential Human Rights legislation provided for in the Good Friday Agreement and Northern Ireland Act (1998), irrespective of its *raison d'être*, are models of good practise that we have reason to be proud of. They make important and unique demands on NI's voluntary and community sector, which in the interests of good government, should be supported financially to carry out the work, and also appreciated for their active and willing participation in it.

There is a uniqueness about community development work and the work of the sector in NI, which requires recognition, and not just as a transitional phase. Participants felt that the richness and diversity of the sector, irrespective of how

that came to be, was something to be valued, nurtured and supported as a model of good practise in the area of genuinely active citizenship and participative democracy.

Responses to Specific Questions

Funding Community development

A comprehensive programme for support of community development

WSN welcomes the proposal of a comprehensive programme for the support of community development work, which we understand, in the spirit of the document, to refer to both local area communities as well communities of interest. As a network whose membership is involved in effective and essential service delivery to people, especially to socially excluded and economically disadvantaged groups and which also in significant policy work, giving voice to the interests of our constituents, we welcome the Taskforce's 'special interest in these areas of work' (3.9, 3.10).

WSN research on problems with EU funding programmes

Short term funding has been detrimental to the effectiveness and sustainability of the work of the sector, and WSN has been proactive in raising awareness, through research and representation, about the disproportionate bureaucracy and other serious problems associated with EU funding programmes.

EU Funding and Additionality

While impending changes to funding programmes, particularly with regard to EU funding, centrally informs the present discussion, a point reiterated in our consultations was that EU Peace and Reconciliation funding was not simply additional to the normal work of community development (nor indeed to the work of government, which also packaged work to fit Peace 1 criteria.- government departments had the biggest slice of peace money to give out and they paid it out as mainstream, e.g. New Deal). In many instances community development funding that formally had been the responsibility of government bodies, e.g. some local councils, was withdrawn and organisations and projects had to seek to replace such funding through the not always entirely appropriate strands of EU funding. As one participant put it as follows: 'In the past and presently Peace monies have been used to support projects and/or groups which deliver services or provide resources, which perhaps should have been delivered or funded through government departments such as DEL.'

Developing effective routes for delivering funding and mainstreaming

Government departments and other public bodies

Those consulted welcomed the proposal of mainstream funding from central government departments and other sources for central administrative costs as a basis on which to carry out core work and to develop projects. It was felt that a mapping exercise identifying what core funding, Service Level Agreement arrangements etc. are actually out there, in different organisations, would be a necessary starting point. There was also discussion about which departments might be appropriate as funders for organisations doing different kinds of work. (See discussion below on Relationships)

Districts Councils

Although it has not been a significant source of funding in the sector to date people felt that the Community Support Programme was a potential source of funding for smaller community groups and for some projects. The Programme is currently undergoing a process of review during which there has been an opportunity for input, which may lead to improvements in the way it, defines its remit. Also the Review of Public Administration will hopefully bring about positive changes in the structure of local government.

Core Costs and Project Costs

Activities defined as core to the sector's work in the Pathways document (4.2) are comprehensive. While fully appreciating the importance of distinguishing the activities involved in the work of the sector from specific posts, there was felt, by some, to be a need for some further discussion of the meaning of core costs. In trying to think through their core work in terms of posts needed to achieve it, organisations arrived at different solutions, e.g., whereas Childcare work was core to the work of local area based women's centres, it was not necessarily considered core to the work of, e.g. women's training organisations for some of whom the work of Outreach would be better defined as core in addition to the basics. Organisations dealing with minority ethnic communities argued for translation costs to be identified as 'core'.

There was some agreement around a definition of core that would provide the basic sustenance of organisation, supporting key roles and providing long-term security, a baseline for continuity. Such funds would underpin all the project work of the organisation providing the essential framework of management, administration, finance and development. Project costs would be for various 'packaged project' work, such as educational projects targeting different groups and with different foci. Project costs would enable the continuation of projects

and allow the organisation to have the flexibility to develop projects to meet needs as they arise.

WSN participated in NICVA's consultations on 'Pathways' and would generally agree with the elements of work identified as core which we see as beginning to meet the needs of more realistic valuing of the work carried out by the sector, including its cutting edge and innovative work.

Funders Forum

A funder's forum that was mutually supportive and complementary could be a very positive development. It would be important that it was not used as a context in which independent funders might be pressurised to 'fall into line' with government spending priorities.

Delivery of Public Services

Public Services delivered by the Women's Sector

WSN welcomes the acknowledgement that the sector had contributed to significant improvements in public service and has the potential to do more (1.2). In research recently (August 2002) carried out by WSN in which 51 women's organisations in NI were involved the services provided were diverse and included:

Advice and Support – Listening Ear and Referrals, Mental and Emotional Health and Social Service Referrals, Volunteer Programmes, Support to Older Women, CV, Interview Skills and Career Guidance, Specialist Counselling Services and Support, formal Advice Services

Work on Social and Public Issues – Human Rights and Equality Issues, Policy development and Research

Other Services – Meeting spaces and use of Facilities, Information, Community Business, Community development and Capacity Building

Community Arts, Cultural Programmes and Activities

Health and Well-Being Services

Specialist Health-related Services – Domestic Violence, Sexual Health, Parenting and Young People

Work with Children

Childcare

Our members would be glad to have this work acknowledged and appropriately funded in a sustainable manner, which allows for development responding to changes such as the identification of new need.

Women's Centres as models of best practise in the delivery of integrated services

The community-based women's sector is good at service provision, they can and do reach socially excluded and economically deprived people in a way that government bodies simply cannot. The Women's Centres, for example, have developed skills and expertise in the provision of integrated services at local level that provides a model of good practise. Much of value has been learned over time and they are involved in the provision of a complex and developing range of services useful to government.

Their approach, coming out of feminist and community development ethos and praxis, enables women to access services and identify their own progression routes via services offered within the safe, supportive and empowering atmosphere of a local women's centre. Childcare is considered core as a service,

because it is key to enabling women to access other services, as well as respite! The women-centred and gender-segregated aspect of the work is integral to its success.

Women's Centres Experience of SLAs

WSN currently coordinates a Service Level Agreement on behalf of the Women's Centres in the Belfast and Greater Belfast area with the Eastern Health and Social Services Board, and some of these Women's Centres have entered into SLAs with different government bodies. However, it has been their experience that despite strategic linking of services to government strategies, and the instigation of research carried out by WSN demonstrating the social and economic impact of the work of women's centres and its relevance to the key objectives of government over a wide range of policies, especially in the areas of health, community development, childcare and education, their advances to relevant government departments to engage in partnership around service delivery has been relatively unproductive.

Women's Training as effective service provision

Women's Training Organisations, as well Advocacy and Support groups, share the experience and ethos and methods of Women's Centres. As one training provider put it, 'there are training schemes for women, government initiatives, but they just can't get the people, we can, so why do we not work in an effective and complementary partnership?' The training organisations coming out of the women's sector know about pre-vocational work, the confidence building that is required, creating suitable environment, recognising and catering for the barriers. They know the value of female role models, the support mechanisms

needed, the value of a holistic approach, and how to 'deliver' it. In the context of the work carried out in the sector, 'delivering services' as a term, jars and encapsulated the fragmented and unjoined up approach associated with statutory provision. This is not to be fussy about language, which as a sector we have become proficient in, but to draw attention to the diversity of sectors, which adds value to cross-sectoral work.

Willingness to be involved in sharing of good practice – e.g. Public Procurement

Those organisation in our sector who are at a level to become involved in social economy work and tendering for government work, would be very glad to have support in the process of engaging, or furthering their engagement, in such work. They would welcome informed presentations based on best practise which as important for the future sustainability re: tendering of services. The Belfast City Council public procurement policy and practice was cited as such a model.

If the voluntary and community sector is to compete competitively with the private sector access to information etc. would need to be put on an equal footing in relation to making bids for contracts.

Advocacy and Campaigning

WSN and advocacy/campaigning/lobbying/policy

WSN has a history of advocacy, campaigning, lobbying and policy and research work, and was the first women's organisation to successfully acquired funding for policy work, of course, as a project. Initial funding, NIVT, came for the Making Women Seen and Heard project which fed into the development of Section 75,

then from the National Lottery Charities Board. A policy post, again as part of a project, is currently funded from EU Structural funding 4.1. delivered by the OFMDFM. Our work, as a support organisation within the women's sector, is very centrally involved in bringing a gender dimension to the development of government policy and in ensuring effective policy implication and in informing and consulting with our membership.

Policy as core cost in community and voluntary sector

We therefore see policy, for an organisation such as WSN, as a significant core function and cost – the same applies to any infrastructural organisation in the sector. Advocacy, campaigning and policy work is integrally linked to the delivery of services as it is closeness to service users and policy outcomes on the ground that alerts organisations to new needs, or policies and practises that are not operating effectively. Our constituency needs to have, and/or develop, the capacity to be able to participate effectively in consultation processes that WSN engages in regularly, and will need a budget for that. While this may not necessarily amount to the cost of a salary and post, it should certainly be built in as a core cost. We therefore support what we understand to be the proposal that given the centrality of advocacy and policy in the work of the sector, part of the core budget of all voluntary and community organisations should be allocated for policy, advocacy, campaigning and lobbying work.

Unpopular causes

Costing advocacy and policy work as part of long term secure funding, not tied to specific projects, would go some way to meeting the often expressed scepticism about how the real critical and change-seeking work could be supported from government budgets. Participants to our discussions were glad to see the realistic acknowledgement in the document that there may be some tensions around emerging new areas of social need that the sector may wish to promote but which are not generally popular. It would of course be best if the statutory

sector, in the course of carrying out its statutory duties under Section 75 of the NI Act (1998), began to develop greater understanding of realities of marginalisation and social exclusion - some parts of that sector are benefiting from the legislation more than others. As a safeguard, the sector is glad to have available to it recourse to some independent funding bodies.

Relationship between service delivery and advocacy - issues

The fruitful relationship between service delivery and advocacy referred to above has been abused in the past, and present to the extent that funding to support the latter has been unofficially gleaned from the latter. There have been suggestions that the positive aspect of this relationship might be formally recognised and brought above board such that costings for advocacy could be included into surpluses within service level agreements and other cross sectoral contractual relationships. There may be some value in this, but it might preclude from funding for advocacy and policy involvement the many organisations in the sector who are not in a position, for one reason or another, to be engaged in such cross sectoral relationships. This was part of a more general feeling that service delivery was being privileged in the document to the detriment of other aspects of the sectors work.

Delivery Mechanisms

Mechanisms Delivering EU programmes

The Taskforce is right to assume an impact on the thinking and attitude of those from community sector who had experience of LSPs and IFB, it was apparent in discussion, and anticipates the discussion of how partnership might be improved – better knowledge, communication and more respect, possibly trust for those involved certainly had greater awareness of culture and needs of the other sector.

It was thought that that there was enormous variability among partnership boards, some being far more effective than others. 'The work of the community sector looks quite different depending on which of the Belfast Partnerships you look at'. It was thought they had worked much better in the innovative initial period when District Area Partnerships (DAP) worked much better than the LSP model.

LSPs could work reasonably well so long as there was good representation of different sectors. Because of different agendas there was a need for a strategy to pull them all together. This applied internally to community and voluntary sector groups also. It was also thought that they were too unwieldy with too many people.

Experienced problems of delivery

The problems associated with delivery mechanisms relating to P&R funding are well documented (Taillon 2002). In the hope of reducing counterproductive bureaucracy we would support a standardised procedure for applying and accounting across all statutory funders.

We would also support any reform within funding bodies that would lead to the people with whom our sector work might have some knowledge of, and hopefully respect for the work that we are trying to do. And that, if this were achievable that greater continuity of contact might be arranged, thereby avoiding time wasting going over of the same ground with every new person one has to deal with. 'Their life revolves round a box' (for ticking) was how one informant graphically put it.

Mechanisms being put in place that might facilitate improved time keeping in relation to payment schedules. There have been cases in the women's sector

when payment for work done came in, only after the work was finished. However it is anticipated that there will be much fewer problems of the kind here cited in a new longer term, more secure funding climate in which better knowledge of one sector about the other, respect and trust might develop.

Collaboration

Experience of Collaboration in the Women's Sector

Without overstating it, the organic development of the community women's sector has been very much one of co-operation, collaboration and partnership both within the sector, across the wider community and voluntary sector, across political and geographic boundaries, globally, and across sectoral divides. They have been in the vanguard of such activity at many levels and interfaces. The political definition of the term 'women' actually enforces this process on us! That does not mean that the sector is complacent about this matter: participants welcomed the opportunity to think strategically about the use of resources.

In our consultations, which, in a sense went beyond the narrowly defined 'women's sector', as a consequence of the collaborative way in which our hosting organisations and members work on a day to day basis with other local community groups in their areas (local and interest), there seemed to be a view that building could certainly be made better use of. On the other hand, WSN, WiP, Women's News, LASI and the Zimbabwean Women's Group share physical space and resources in the one building, as do WRDA, WiG and CWC. WSN also shares common resources such as a 'conference room' with a number of other voluntary and community organisation within Cathedral Quarter Buildings and people and groups often work into the night. Recently WSN facilitated the short-term lending of premises among two of its member groups.

Collaboration among groups who came together for the different consultations

The local area groupings that came together in the Women's TEC as part of the way in which WSN organised its consultation were an education in the potential for co-operative work at local area level. The arguably unique problems faced by North Belfast, where there is great mistrust, problems of mental health, need for anger management, self-esteem, and ways to deal with the past before moving on, were the domain of the organisations round the table. They were together because they were used to working together, but the opportunity to talk strategically was productive for them, as well as for WSN's consultation response. It was an opportunity for them to discuss the way in which URBAN, the strategy for the regeneration of North Belfast was, or was not progressing. A lack of joined up thinking was identified and insufficient commitment on the part of the other sectors in the partnership board.

The same could be said of the West Belfast grouping that came together in Falls Women's Centre, the participants not only showing the extent of their collaborative work, but also the empowering nature of locally based women over time, for the participants from other locally-based organisations had 'come through' the women's centre as a starting point for their 'progression route'.

The group that came together in the South of the city was also revealing in the extent to which they were familiar with one another's work as well as working together in referrals etc. There was lively synergy brought into the room by a discussion of the different experiences of funding between, for example Nexus, Windsor Women's Centre and NIWEP, and a putting to bed of some erroneous assumptions.

Duplication Issues

Politico-religious issues

There were fears expressed in local areas with strong political and cultural identities and/or issues and with concerns therefore about safety and boundaries that the duplication discussion in rationalisation might result in their community being cut off from services. It was thought that the push for integrated living implicit in this document and in the recent Shared Future document, was premature. There was still a lot of work to be done in local areas.

What is wrong with 'duplication'?

Another strong argument against the rationalisation of what might be perceived to be duplication was, that there was nothing wrong with duplication. If services are good, meet needs and are not under-used the fact that there was one service located within a certain proximity to another, irrespective of politico-religious issues, could be viewed as a good thing. What one person might call duplication, another might call adequate provision of services. And this is even before you take into account the value of choice for the individual seeking service provision.

Gender dimension of 'duplication'

Following on the above discussion, who decides what is duplication and what is adequate service provision? It should be related to issues of need, and in the case of women with children, on low incomes, there is a case to be made for a reasonable distance to a service as that of 'the length you could reasonably push a buggy', given that you will have a return journey to make.

Advice

Because there have already been cuts in funding for Advice Services in Women's Centres, there was inevitably some discussion on this. While the centres who

had experienced cuts were now, more or less successfully operating a referral system to other advice providers in the area, or to other local women's centres – for who defines what 'an area' is? – they felt strongly that there were important advantages to having Advice Services based in all women's centres. This was related to the holistic and multi-functional nature of women's organisations whereby a call for advice often leads to the beginning of identification of other problems and needs which can be addressed in the context of the women's centre and not in more uni-purpose organisations.

At the same time as being multi-functional, the particular development of women's organisations have led them to development different professional specialities. So women's centres will refer from one to the other depending on the advice needs of the individual.

Some Duplication needs to be addressed

Having said all this, those consulted generally agreed that there were cases of duplication and that these should be addressed. The sector needs to acknowledge and make changes where appropriate to develop and grow.

Accountability

Members of the Network and other colleagues experience themselves as quite proficient in accountability, perhaps over-accountability, given the lack of proportionality applied in the accounting of the funding bodies delivering EU funding. Participants felt strongly that open and transparent systems of accountability should be evident across all sectors, community and voluntary, statutory sector, private sector and government departments, for the spending of public money. This will perhaps be an outcome of the Review of Public Administration, which has strong strategic linkages with the outcomes of the Pathways consultation.

We would welcome the development of auditing and accounting systems that would seek to measure outcomes, rather than being seen in purely financial terms. And we would seek to ensure the development of systems that evaluate adequately the less easily measurable aspects of our work, such as campaigning and advocacy and participation in partnership bodies.

Governance

WSN while wishing to maintain the distinctiveness of the sector's reliance on the goodwill of volunteers, and its commitment to capacity building, accepts that the skills required for good governance have increased in complexity. We have developed a 'Sharing of Good Practice' project, within and outside of the sector, which will include issues of governance, and are committed to the need for Management Committee Training making use of models of good practise wherever they might be identified. WSN is currently involved in a joint training programme in Diversity and Anti-discrimination with DENI, which acknowledges and makes productive use of the differences between our sectors. We would anticipate value in equal and respectful joint training in the area of good governance. The Network will continue to diversify its membership and potential pool of management committee members in line with government policies on equality and active citizenship. We have already successfully run a 'shadow scheme' whereby members have been able to shadow the work of the coordinators of women's centres and training organisations and would consider such an approach to management committee responsibility.

Grant Administration

Participants warmly welcomed the proposal of a model of accountability focusing on robustness of system, and sampling as contributing to their being able to better to by releasing time for them to fulfil the objectives of their organisations

and projects rather than filling in disproportionately bureaucratic forms. (See Taillon, 2000)

Taking Risks

Much of what is currently of value in the sector has developed through taking risks, often, in our recent history, risks for peace. Dynamic and need-related work requires the ability to take risks. WSN endorses the view of the Taskforce's Accountability Working Group that 'it is important to differentiate between the risk associated with funding any particular organisation because of inadequacies in its internal systems of governance and control, and risks associated with more innovative and entrepreneurial approaches.

Some groups felt that in taking the lead in innovative ways of working, 'if things didn't go to plan, they the community groups were 'punished'.

Relationships

WSN looks forward to seeing the independent evaluation of Partners for Change. Participants endorsed the concept of partnerships as a healthy part of a participative democracy and were keen to see the development of powerful working relationships with government. They saw the work of the Taskforce as the beginning of a conversation that would work to develop such relationships, complex and at differing levels, that would reflect the reality, value and difference of the voluntary and community sector.

Who will be our funding partners?

There was considerable discussion among groups about the routes through which funding might be better delivered which fed into the issue of relationships between sectors. People understood of why government might find it easier to deal with the sector through the mechanism of one body and perhaps even fund it through one unit of one department, but this was, it was argued, to lose a key positive value of the sector, its diversity. For genuine mainstreaming, there should be different sources of funding, government departments etc., to reflect the diversity of outcomes of the sector's work. Women's training organisations offering education opportunities to women, for example, felt that their funding should come directly from DEL, but in the wider context of a working interdepartmental body with enough power and authority from their department to make a difference.

There was discussion of the model developed for the mainstreaming of TSN and New TSN across departments, and the go-between job involved there. If DSD is taking the lead on this could they not be tasked to do it on an inter-departmental basis with a brief to enforce the recommendations of the outcome of the Taskforce's deliberations. There was appreciation among some of those consulted of 'the radicalness' of such a document coming out of a government department. It was up to the DSD 'to sell it' to the other departments with a proactive strategy championing it across departments – 'A Voluntary and Community Sector Czar!' This job could be facilitated by the identification of committed Senior Officers in government department, whose task would be communication with DSD and to champion the recommendations of the Taskforce in her/his department.

Partnerships

Experience of partnership was mixed and certainly not always positive. Pathways calls on community and voluntary sector groups to be more realistic in

their costings of their work - examples were given of partnership work with the educational sector; in one instance a college delivering courses in a local women's centre paid no overheads, did not pay towards promotion or recruitment to the programme, and required the local group to produce quite hefty examination fees for candidates, in another community sector responded positively to a request to provide support for funding applications for liaison officers and sports facilities on the basis of some entitlement to the use of facilities, this was never forthcoming. Trainee and student placement is a notorious area of exploitation of skills, time and facilities of the voluntary and community sector, with highly qualified and experienced, e.g. childcare workers in our sector, bringing up to par, the education of trainees.

There was a suggestion of the need for a facilitated transitional stage if sustainable partnerships were to be developed. The issue of power relations would need to be addressed so that each partner might learn to truly value the work and the difference of the other, and the partnership develop as one between equals, which could lead to trust, and therefore take some pressure of the need for so many face to face meetings, for trust would mean that your interests might be understood and acknowledged by the other partner. Job swaps were suggested as aid to the development of partnership work. But as one participant put it; ' there needs to be an attitudinal change on the part of government. The sector are not being 'given' money: there needs to be an acknowledgement of the work of the sector and a real commitment to see that continue.

It was felt that there were models of good practice in place, which could be built on, such as Sure Start, which was flexible, responding to conditions. Sometimes it was delivered through schools, sometimes in a combination of community and school. Ballymurphy Women's Group Yahoo peer group project on sexual health was commended as working in effective partnership with the Royal Hospital

Trust, the Health Boards which provided related training and the local Irish Language Secondary School, which worked with all of them in adapting the model to suit a school context.

People felt that there were too many partnerships and that it needed rationalisation, but not to the extent of belying the diversity and complexity of the sector. This however still left room for significant reduction, rationalisation and streamlining and development of structures to replace the proliferation of meetings with boards, trusts etc.

Joint Government/ Voluntary and Community Sector Forum

Concerns about the lack of representativeness of the joint forum, and had little or no knowledge of its activities or its relation to their work. People were not necessarily objecting to the existence of the forum, but would see it as one of many means of communications between the sectors, and hope that it would become more representative and meaningful.

The tenor of much of the consultation as written up above was to emphasise the diversity and complexity of the sector and the need for multiple means of communicating cross-sectorally. This emphasis is related to the scale, and the active, grass-roots, vibrant and diverse nature of, the community and voluntary sector specific to NI. The argument was also made strongly by groups who represented the multi-dimensional aspect of women's identities, who dealt with multiple and complex issues of social exclusion and marginality and for whom Section 75 legislation was of paramount importance.

Statutory equality legislation as a route to cross-sectoral partnership

The Joint Forum emerges from the UK initiative of 'the Compact', aimed at creating partnerships between key voluntary and community sector players and the government, and giving them a say in government. However, NI has a much stronger legislative basis to the relationship between the voluntary and community sector (and the people they work for and represent) and the government in Section 75 of the NI Act (1998). Section 75 creates a legal duty to promote equality, and a legal duty to take the views of the sector, in terms of consultation, into account in decision-making, and requires the public sector to engage, not only with 'representatives' of, but also with those directly affected by policies. This should deliver strong and effective partnership.

One way of developing a partnership

A model of good practise might be the partnership work that WSN is engaged in with its sectoral partner NICEM and cross-sectoral partner, DENI. It is a diversity and anti-discrimination training programme for senior civil servants emanating from Article 13 of the European Convention (it also has transnational partners), but functions also, with modification, as training in Section 75. Trainers are drawn from both DENI and the voluntary and community sector, and undertake intensive, 7 days, training together. The initial stage involved a consultation session with voluntary sector groups, whose members were DENI service users, providing issues to feed into the training programme. Several bouts of training have occurred for different, and mixed parts of DENI staff: 2 days +1, the latter being an action-planning day. An outcome of this has been the idea a consultative forum, drawing on the initial consultation group and open to others. Because of interest shown in the training itself by that group, and also as good practice to enable them to experience the training that DENI staff had undergone, the training is being offered to the voluntary and community sector. A DENI/community sector consultative forum will be established involving

participants in the entire project, and of course other relevant parties. It is anticipated that the functions of this forum will extend beyond issues of equality and Section 75 to matters of policy and partnership.

Partnerships need decision-making personnel

Participants to our consultations argued strongly for the need for people with power to make decisions being the only feasible representative in all cross-sectoral partnerships. It therefore follows that government ministers should be involved in the Joint Forum at a formal level, indicating commitment and leadership, and provide senior level representatives for regular work. The same applies to other relevant cross-sectoral fora.

Infrastructure

Provision of Support Services

WSN, is an infrastructural organisation that developed organically as a Women's Support Network, with potential therefore for bridging 'the community divide' here, which it did, in no easy way, from its very inception. As part of its many functions it continues to play a crucial role in building relationships across political, religious, ethnic and other divides (an aspect of work which should be mainstreamed into government provision and not remain reliant for its future on funding from Europe).

It is, of course, not complacent and strives to identify new, or unrecognised need for support.

Multi-identity groups

As a support organisation WSN actively seeks to extend its support to all marginalized and socially excluded women. Over the last few years we have undertaken a focused outreach drive to include in our membership groups, often within larger groups and categories, women from ethnic minority communities, Women Traveller projects within 'mainstream' Traveller groups, lesbian groups and disabled women. The need for specifically tailored support of such 'women's groups within groups' was brought home to us very clearly when we organised a special consultation for members dealing with issues of multi-identity. Despite the very different groups being represented, they found that they, as women within wider categories of social exclusion, shared many issues and required a separate framework of support drawn from the women's sector.

Protestant women

Many WSN member groups are located in Protestant areas, and one of WSN's two founding members was Windsor Women's Centre, however, the Shared Future consultation identified as a gap in their responses, Protestant women, WSN is re-addressing its membership drive and consultation processes to address this issue.

Servicing a divided society

Certainly some of the women's organisations consulted in Protestant areas and in Catholic areas were concerned at the implication that the document was advocating a premature rationalisation of service provision at local area level that would preclude some people from accessing services. (See discussion above; Collaboration – politico-religious issues)

Strategic Development within the women's sector

In the course of our consultation which included representatives from other major women's organisations such as WRDA and NIWEP, scope was identified for

several potential areas of collaborative working, and the consultation had the beneficial effect of flagging up such opportunities which will be followed up and which a crisis funding period had caused to be obscured. In the longer term, we see value in support being provided for the community women's sector, and of course the rest of the voluntary and community sector, to set in motion a process of research and reflection that would facilitate positive management of a process of change. The lead organisations have begun formally to talk about exploring areas of overlap, potential collaboration and what support we might need to make changes. It was suggested that WSN might seek funding for a limited term post to carry out research and facilitate planning for the development of the sector in the new climate of funding and relationship with government. The need to work together on developing a general framework is recognised and being acted upon.

Capacity and Resourcing

WSN believes that there should be core, long term funding for an agreed standard of infrastructure provision and would consider it essential that the community sector, and specifically the women's community sector, be integrally involved in the development of a set of core indicators to measure performance and outcomes of organisations so funded.

Social Investment

We see the introduction of the basic elements of the social investment model as real progress in how the work of both community and voluntary sector and the public sector might be more appropriately evaluated. Longer term, more sustainable funding makes sense and allows for the longer term, continuous work that will produce outcomes that will make a real difference. In WSN's research into the Social and Economic Impact of Women's Centres, we used a model of Activity/Indicator/Impact in which the 'indicator' is comparable with the Output and the 'impact', such as,

increased health awareness, healthier life styles, enhanced parenting skills, less anti-social behaviour, enhanced employability etc. was comparable to the Outcome in the particular model of social investment employed in Pathways.

This raises the issue of the number of other systems that exist to measure long term effect. Shankill Women's Centre and the Citywide Women's Consortium shared with their consultation groups their experience in training in, and the use of Rickter Scale, an 'innovative method to measure the soft outcomes of the sector'. So there are several other models - Mike Morrissey was giving a talk on 9 others or thereabouts, and there are certainly issues about how it might pan out in reality. Real joined-up government would be one pre-requisite, as well as sets of base-line data that currently do not exist. We feel that there is need for further discussion on this kind of model and of involvement of the sector in developing it.

Talking about the impact on the community, one participants said; 'Women's Centres may run personal development courses; women may initially call into the centre for advise and then take up a course, thereby starting a process of change. These women may move on from the centre to take up jobs or university programmes. They still live within the community, using their new skills in the community, passing on skills to their children. This leads to increased capacity and confidence in that community – All because of the women's group!

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Appendix 1

Setting up the Pathways Consultations

In responding to the Pathways position paper Women's Support Network (WSN) sought to consult with an extensive range of groups with a view to raising awareness around the contents and ambition of the Pathways Position paper and to enable a broad-based response to the document. Although extensive, the aim was also to be focussed, therefore WSN (in consultation) decided to execute a number of small consultation meetings across geographical and interest/issue based 'communities'. The Pathways document itself highlights the concept of community as both a geographical entity and an issue-based concept. Of course there is some degree of cross-over within these entities, for example a women's group could be represented through the Women's Centre Managers, as a women's education provider and as a local geographical hosting venue, with a particular and specific reference point under each of these headings

Geographical Community Consultations

Locally based consultations were held across Greater Belfast, one in each geographical area (North, East, South and West) using a local women's centre as a venue. Falls Women's Centre in West Belfast, The Women's Tec in North Belfast, Windsor Women's Centre in South Belfast and Ballybeen Women's Centre in East Belfast. Unfortunately the event in East Belfast did not happen due to time constraints in the local hosting centre.

West Belfast – Host Falls Women's Centre
Group attending West Belfast Consultation

Tuesday 9th March 2004
Falls Women's Centre
Beechmount Community Project
Greater Turf Lodge Residents &
Advice Service
Greater Turf Lodge Residents
Association
West Belfast Economic Forum
Homestart Colin Mill
Women's Support Network

South Belfast – Host Windsor Women’s Centre Monday 15th March 2004

Groups attending South Belfast Consultation

Equality Commission
NIWEP
Windsor Women’s Centre
Nexus Institute
Citywide Women’s Consortium
Women’s Support Network

North Belfast – Host – The Women’s Tec

Groups attending North Belfast Consultation

Tuesday 16th March 2004

The Women’s Tec
The Ashton Centre
Univ of Ulster at Jordanstown
Intercomm - Weave Project
Women’s Support Network

Issue based consultations

Issue based consultation took place across a range of multi-identited groups including the locally based women’s centres.

Women’s Centre Managers

Host WSN

Groups attending

Tuesday 27th January 2004

Ballybeen Women’s Centre
Falls Women’s Centre
Footprints Women’s Centre
Greenway Women’s Centre
Shankill Women’s Centre
Windsor Women’s Centre
Women’s Support Network

Groups working across multiple identities –

Host LASI & WSN

Groups attending

Wednesday 10th March 2004

Belfast Travellers Sites Project
BTEDG
NICEM
LASI
Women’s Support Network

Women’s Community Education Providers –

Host Citywide Women’s Consortium (CWC)

Groups attending

Thursday 11th March 2004

Belfast Women’s Training Service
Women’s News
Women’s Tec
Shankill Women’s Centre

Appendix 2

All groups invited to Pathways Consultations

WSN invited a number of organisations to the various consultations we facilitated. Not all of the groups were able to commit to attending the sessions, although they supported a sectoral response. This list is an attempt to demonstrate the divergent, yet complimentary groupings within our diverse sector, and is also an acknowledgement of the need to involve such diverse groupings.

Al-Nisa

Belfast Travellers Sites Project

Belfast Travellers Education & Development Group

Belfast Brook Advisory Service

Ballybeen Women's Centre

Belfast Women's Training Services

Citywide Women's Consortium

Falls Women's Centre

Family Planning Association NI

Footprints Women's Centre

Greenway Women's Centre

Lesbian Advocacy Service Initiative

Multi Cultural Resource Centre

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
Women's Information Group
Women's Resource and Development Agency
Women's Aid
Women's Tec
Windsor Women's Centre
Women into Politics
Women's News
West Belfast Economic Forum

Appendix 3

Groups attending and contributing to the Pathways consultation

Ashton Centre

The Ashton Centre works with and for the local community of the lower Antrim road and North Belfast. We offer education and development opportunities, support and advocacy.

Beechmount Community Project

Beechmount is a community-based organisation catering for after school and youth provision in the local area. The young people who participate belong to the local youth club and the group works on projects that best promote images of young people and their community.

Belfast Women's Training Services

Belfast Women's Training Services is an alliance of Belfast based women's centre/groups which exists to design, promote and run pre-vocational training for women in local communities suffering economic and social disadvantage

Belfast Travellers Sites Project

We are a support group for the Traveller Families in Belfast and work mostly with the official and unofficial sites in the City. We run a community development office, a play-development group and a Youth Group across the three sites.

Belfast Travellers Education & Development Group

A community development organisation working with, and for, the Belfast Travelling Community. We offer various services and are committed to working to promote their own culture, and to preserve it for posterity.

Citywide Women's Consortium

Citywide Women's Consortium is composed of specialized women's training providers and women's groups and organizations, which have come together with the common goal of working to encourage and enable women to empower and advance themselves personally and professionally.

Equality Commission

The Equality Commission is an independent public body established under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The commission took over the functions previously exercised by the Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland, the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment Commission and the Northern Ireland Disability Council.

Falls Women's Centre

Falls Women's Centre offers holistic education, childcare, advice, healthcare and personal development opportunities for local women in the ethos of community development

Footprints Women's Centre

Footprints is a locally based Women's Centre in the Poleglass area. It offers a range of services for local women and the local community. This includes various educational and personal development programmes, advice, healthcare and alternative therapies and childcare provision through an on-site crèche.

Greater Turf Lodge Residents & Advice Service

Greater Turf Lodge Residents Association

Greenway Women's Centre

Greenway is located in the Creagh estate in East Belfast. The Centre is a vital support for local women and the local community. Greenway offers educational opportunities, an on-site crèche and support services.

Homestart Colin Mill

Homestart is a voluntary organisation in which volunteers offer support, friendship and practical help to families in their own homes who have at least one child under the age of five and who are experiencing difficulties.

Intercomm - Weave Project

Intercomm - Women's Educational & Vocational Education (WEAVE) - WEAVE aims to teach women from North Belfast how to produce and sell fabric gifts. With help from tutors, women will be given the opportunity to learn how to make money from their ideas. This will include product design, fashion trends, shoestring selling and budgeting

Lesbian Advocacy Service Initiative

An advocacy and lobbying project for lesbian and bisexual women. LASI seeks to ensure that the concerns of the lesbian community are adequately articulated and acted upon.

Nexus Institute

The NEXUS Institute works to respond to the needs of adults who have experienced sexual abuse. We work to increase awareness of sexual abuse and its consequences through research, public awareness and information services

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform

The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform is an umbrella body of groups with a primary interest in matters of importance to women. It has a membership of national and local organisations and generalist and specific bodies. The Platform aims to facilitate and increase women's contribution to the social, economic and political agendas domestically and internationally.

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) is the voice of ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland. It directly represents their interest and is a forum to promote the participation of those ethnic minority communities. NICEM works for social change in relation to race relations and in particular for the elimination of racial discrimination.

Shankill Women's Centre

Shankill Women's Centre aims to identify and address the needs of women from the Greater Shankill Area. The focus is on both supporting and empowering women, whilst providing opportunities for personal and professional development. Services and activities available include; an education project, young women's project, culture & diversity project, childcare facilities and advice and guidance.

University of Ulster at Jordanstown

Jordanstown is one of the campuses of the University of Ulster

Vine Centre

Christian principals drive the work of the Vine Centre. At all times the Vine Centre endeavours to identify and address the needs of all people from the surrounding North Belfast community, by providing relevant services and support. Work undertaken by the Vine centre includes; advice services, education and training, youth work, a volunteering program, pregnancy crisis support, childcare facilities and a senior citizens support group.

West Belfast Economic Forum

The West Belfast Economic Forum (WBEF) is a non-party political, non-governmental organisation whose membership is drawn from community activists, academics, lawyers, educators and trainers living and working in West Belfast. The Forum seeks to challenge economic injustice and marginalisation in West Belfast by identifying key issues, providing critical analysis, research, information, and monitoring economic, social change and development

Windsor Women's Centre

Windsor Women's Centre as a community based resource centre for women situated in an area of social and economic urban deprivation.

Women into Politics

WiP offers a variety of training programmes, working with women to develop their capacity and the capacity of their communities. WiP actively work towards increasing the real participation of women in politics and public life through education, lobbying and advocacy.

Women's News

Women's News produce Ireland's only feminist magazine. We also offer practical skills development training for women.

Women's Resource Development Agency

The WRDA's mission is to be a development agency for women's groups in Northern Ireland so that the diverse needs of women can be recognized and addressed. WRDA prioritise work that targets women who are most severely disadvantaged. WRDA believe that education is a key factor in addressing women's marginalization.

Women's Tec

The Women's TEC is an innovative organization which aims to provide facilities to advance women's involvement in sectors of training and employment that have a low level of female participation, and specifically women who are socially and economically disadvantaged in the Belfast and Greater Belfast Area.