

**Supplementary written evidence submitted by Professor Marie Breen-Smyth, Independent Reviewer of the exercised powers under the Justice and Security, relating to the effect of paramilitary activity and organised crime on society in Northern Ireland inquiry (PNI0025)**

On Wednesday 23 November 2022, I gave [oral evidence](#) to the Committee on paramilitarism in Northern Ireland, following an invitation from that Committee to attend and do so. At that hearing, the Chair (at Q204) said:

“In a number of answers you have pointed to something that I think is very clear. ‘Do not deal with this as an amalgam’. It is bespoke; it is different; it is granular. It is rather nice to be setting a professor an essay question. If you want to, please feel welcome to submit your thoughts on the issues, the breakdowns and the geographies, et cetera. That might be very helpful to this Committee. We can probably think of some solutions to issues or recommendations, but the Committee would welcome your thoughts on that as well. I am not necessarily going to say that we are going to endorse them all, but it would be very useful to have that to hand.”

I am informed by the recommendations of the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC), who, in their fourth report in December 2021 and again in their fifth report in December 2022, urged the Governments to establish a “Group Transition” process whereby organisations can formally and officially relinquish paramilitarism in favour of exclusively peaceful and lawful lifestyles.

On the basis of the Committee’s request and the IRC recommendations, I am pleased to submit the following thoughts, which have been formed in response to a range of interactions with practitioners in the field and with those whose knowledge of the situation on the ground surpasses my own. The scope of this report goes somewhat beyond my remit as Independent Reviewer and relies on previous work in this field. I hope it makes a small contribution to ending paramilitarism in Northern Ireland.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**1.1** As Independent Reviewer of the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements for Northern Ireland I

report to parliament and the Secretary of State on the continued need for certain additional legislation and security measures arising from the security situation which largely results from the persistence of paramilitarism. This paper goes somewhat beyond that role, in response to the request from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. Beyond my Independent Reviewer roles, I have been involved in various capacities with issues relating to paramilitarism in Northern Ireland since the mid 1970s.

- 1.2** This paper is based on current engagement with those engaged with members of the two main loyalist groupings, namely the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association. I also have contact with some people who have direct engagement with Dissident Republicans.
- 1.3** Paramilitarism remains a threat in Northern Ireland, albeit at a reduced level to that in previous years. Section 3 of this paper provides a summary account of my own assessment of the current situation. This is based on ongoing interactions with communities, practitioners and officials engaged on this issue. Paramilitary groups, especially those on the loyalist side, cannot feasibly be regarded as homogenous and unified organisational entities. Rather they are composed of sub-groups who vary in location, affiliation and involvement in criminal activity, with some sub-groups moving substantially away from illegal activity and readying themselves for transition.
- 1.4** There is no official direct engagement with paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland for the purposes of taking forward their transition out of paramilitarism. There is opposition in some quarters to such engagement. Yet the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC), exercising their mandate to report on progress towards ending paramilitarism, has, in successive years recommended the Governments to establish a formal “Group Transition” process.

- 1.5 I urge the Committee to consider the great benefits of direct engagement with those in paramilitary organisations who are sincere and willing to embark on a process of transition, and methods of mitigating the risks. A strategy to end paramilitarism that does not engage with the continued existence of armed paramilitary structures is one that ignores the elephant in the room. Empowering communities and building their resilience, whilst deflecting people from joining these organisations (some of whom are not recruiting in any case) is important. However these measures alone will not bring paramilitarism to an end, even with the addition of law enforcement to the suite of strategies. If the organisations themselves are to exit the stage, group transition in some form will also be required.
- 1.5 The Committee might assist by considering the personal and professional principles and the public service values that should inform direct work with paramilitary groups. This would go some way to clarifying the legitimate purposes and parameters of such direct work and recognising the good work that has already been done.
- 1.6 There are two main groupings of people engaged in work to end paramilitarism in Northern Ireland: official engagement through **government programmes**; and charitable and **non-governmental organisation (NGO)** engagement. They adopt divergent approaches. Government programmes use approaches that do not involve direct engagement with paramilitary members and can be characterised as **'Outside-In/ Top-Down' approaches**; whereas the NGO sector, who directly engage with members of paramilitary organisations using community development principles, use an **'Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up'** approach.
- 1.7 A range of government initiatives are directed at ending paramilitarism. The Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) provides the law enforcement aspect of this work. The Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime programme

(TPP) was established under the Fresh Start Agreement<sup>1</sup>, which also led to the establishment of the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) who report on progress on tackling paramilitarism. The Fresh Start Panel's report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups led to the Northern Ireland Executive's Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitarism Criminality and Organised Crime, which includes Communities in Transition (CiT) projects aimed at building resilience in local communities to violent paramilitary influence. These are located in a number of areas where paramilitarism was found to be concentrated.

1.8 Rates of paramilitary violence and other illegal activities are very low in other areas of Northern Ireland. In an area of Northern Ireland that roughly half the population inhabit there are no dedicated Communities in Transition (CiT) projects, although the TPP may provide funding for other projects. The area without CiT projects comprises the council areas of **Mid-Ulster; Mid and East Antrim; Lisburn and Castlereagh; Fermanagh and Omagh; Newry, Mourne and Down;** and **Causeway Coast and Glens.**

1.9 In Section 4, I set out and discuss in detail the range of political and governance issues that impact directly on the prospects for any form of transition. These are, currently:

- The Legacy Bill;
- the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill;
- the future of the Northern Ireland Executive;
- the prospects of a Border Poll;
- Policing;

and the attitudes of local political parties and public opinion on these issues.

1.10 Current interventions aimed at ending paramilitarism can be seen as either **“Inside-Out or Bottom-Up” approaches which rely on direct engagement at community level to support community and sub-group driven processes of pacification and**

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<sup>1</sup> NI Office, 'A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan', (2015) Section A.

**transition or “Outside-In or Top-Down”** transition, which describes much of current government programmes which rely on intervention aimed at creating conditions of resilience to paramilitarism in individuals and communities combined with a law enforcement operation aimed at apprehending those involved in a range of illegal paramilitary activity.

- 1.11 What is missing from many current assessments, for example my own in my last report to parliament and that of the IRC, is an awareness of how both the Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up and Outside-In/ Top-Down processes can complement each other in working towards the goal of paramilitary transition. Government-led Outside-In/ Top-Down and Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up work, currently conducted by NGOs, could be better coordinated, and the gains made by Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up work better understood and capitalised upon.
- 1.12 Successful transition will also depend on a working government making credible and sustained efforts, with the flexibility to engage and address issues that underlie the continuation of paramilitarism. It will also rely heavily on community-sensitive policing and vigorous and effective law enforcement.
- 1.13 Paramilitary group transition has, until now, been conceived of as involving the entirety of a paramilitary organisation. Given the fragmentation of loyalist groups in particular, set out at paragraphs 3.5 – 3.11 and characterised by the lack of central command, lack of clarity of purpose and diffuse reasons for membership, I argue for supporting those sub-groups who are no longer involved in illegal paramilitarism but who operate within wider organisations, to advance along a path to transition in their own right as sub-groups.
- 1.14 There are also major differences between Urban Loyalism and Rural Loyalism within both the UDA and UVF. My engagement with those associated and working with both the UDA and the UVF has led me to conclude that substantial parts of both the UDA and UVF, largely outside of the Belfast area, could verifiably be regarded as in a position to embark on a transition process. Some elements of both groups are

currently engaged in activity which they deem to be transitional – as part of an “Inside-Out” process (see Section 5 below).

- 1.15 Whilst group transition is the ideal, the path to whole group transition is blocked by the persistent involvement of elements or sub-groups within both the UDA and the UVF in violence, intimidation and a wide range of criminality.
- 1.16 These obstacles can be circumnavigated by engaging with sub-groups to permit progress to be made, whilst isolating those parts of the organisation who continue to practice criminality, thus avoiding the danger of allowing the perfect to be the enemy of the possible.
- 1.17 Advancing sub-groups along the path to transition could well also cause a domino effect and serve to sort out those who are committed to peaceful means from those who are unwilling to relinquish violence and criminality.
- 1.18 Clarity about what an “exit from paramilitarism” involves is of foremost importance. Deproscription is one process that might be considered as part of a larger whole. Given previous experience where some of these organisations reneged on undertakings to forswear violence, establishing benchmarks and processes of verification are of paramount importance in building public, community and political confidence in the reliability of any process of transition. Whilst it is ultimately for government, a collaborative approach to identifying and putting in place benchmarks and procedures could provide optimal outcomes.
- 1.19 A range of possibilities for the reintegration of former paramilitaries should include schemes which capitalise on the motivation of those who wish to work peacefully and positively within their own communities. These include restorative justice schemes and other forms of community service.

- 1.20 Useful ideas for these processes might be derived from consideration of international models of DDR and work undertaken in the US and elsewhere on dealing with gang violence.
- 1.21 The IRC's recommendation that an Independent Person be appointed to prepare the ground, and who would be officially authorised to speak to the various parties, including the paramilitary groups themselves, could take forward this work.
- 1.22 Cross-border law enforcement co-operation and work to support transition is a vital part of this work and it would be helpful if group transition could be added to the battery of methods and approaches they are currently considering for the immediate future.
- 1.23 I also endorse the IRC's recommendation that organised crime legislation be enacted for Northern Ireland.

## **2 MY ROLE**

- 2.1 My current involvement with the issue of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland as Independent Reviewer of the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements for Northern Ireland relies on the continued need for additional legislation and additional security pressures which result from the persistence of paramilitarism. Whilst paramilitarism underlies the necessity of all of the work I do, and I comment on it in my [2022 report to parliament](#) (paras 4.1 - 4.20) it is not its main focus. However, were paramilitarism to end, the need for legislation and special measures such as the Justice and Security Act would disappear. As the Committee is aware, the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) holds the mandate for reporting on progress on ending paramilitarism, and I consult with them and welcome their December 2022 report.
- 2.2 My own involvement with the issue of paramilitarism predates my current roles. This includes, *inter alia*, community work in 1970s Belfast, subsequent engagements commencing in 2000 with the armed groups alongside the Special Representative of

the Secretary General of the United Nations on Children and Armed Conflict. This work focused on [Optional Protocol 1579](#) to which the UK government is a signatory, and which commits signatories to a range of prohibitions including that “Armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a country should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities anyone under 18.” All the armed parties to the conflict in Northern Ireland have, at one time or other, recruited and deployed persons under the age of 18. Later, in 2004, I was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Office to report on support for paramilitarism in communities in Northern Ireland.

2.3 It is my policy to talk to anyone willing to talk to me in the pursuit of peace and conflict resolution. In spite of my efforts, I have not yet been able to engage with groupings on the dissident republican side, although, as a public servant, I remain willing to do so. I do, however, have contact with some people who have direct engagement with republicans. My current engagement, as I explained to the Committee, is limited to the two main loyalist groupings, namely the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association.

### **3. CURRENT SITUATION**

3.1 Approaches and attitudes to the issue of paramilitarism is, to a greater or lesser extent, shaped by age and generational issues. For those under the age of 45, the history of the troubles is, for the most part, something about which they have learned from their parents’ or grandparents’ generation. They have seen documentaries about, read about it in books, or otherwise acquired an abstract knowledge. Those who lived through the entirety of the Troubles as adults are now in their 70s or older. They have lived with the death of friends and colleagues, bombs, lying in bed at night listening to gunfire, had their lives threatened, or their bodies maimed by the violence of the past. They are also the generation who also had neighbours, schoolmates and relatives who joined paramilitary organisations. It was just the way things were, the people who were killed or who did the killing were our friends, neighbours, family members or loved ones. The troubles for that generation is close, it is part of their lives in a way that thankfully if cannot be for



people under the age of 40.

- 3.2 Similarly, the bulk of paramilitary group membership is drawn from that generation, with the bulk of members and leadership falling into the 50-80 year age group. There is little appetite among them for a 'return to war', there is revulsion at the criminal path chosen by some in their ranks and no desire to use violence to 'police' drug issues in their local communities. Many wish to put their houses in order and embark on a new, peaceful and demilitarised future.
- 3.3 In my [last report to parliament](#) I included a detailed picture of the security situation including the threat assessment of the dangers posed by paramilitary organisations and in my forthcoming report I will provide an update. In its fifth report on December 2022, the IRC also provides such a detailed picture. Both of these assessments are based on ongoing security briefings provided by the security services and the PSNI.
- 3.4 It seems important to clarify that not all of those holding dissident republican or loyalist views belong to paramilitary organisations. Holding a political view is a civil liberty, and provided that view is expressed using peaceful and democratic means it is an important civil liberty. Stigmatising people with particular political views simply because of their views is likely to be counterproductive to the project of ending political violence and marginalisation. The political views of those in and close to paramilitary organisations are as legitimate as any other views, provided they are expressed in exclusively peaceful and democratic ways.
- 3.5 Some practitioners who work on programmes aimed at ending paramilitarism are particularly concerned about the extent of coercive control of individuals, communities and territory. It is crucial that the PSNI are aware where crimes are being committed or intimidation is taking place, so that a law enforcement response can address this. It is also important that there is clarity about the nature and extent of illegal and dangerous activity on the part of paramilitaries.

**3.6** We are at an odd point here where several of the older armed groups are ready and willing to embark on their final journey while sections of the civil society wish them to ‘go away’ or ‘disappear’ without need for any process of group transition. Yet the paramilitary groups are facts on the ground, and since their members are resident in Northern Ireland, without some form of group transition, there is little prospect of disappearance, short of spontaneous combustion.

**3.7** Communities, including those free of paramilitary influence, are not always benign environments, and rumours and the stigmatising and marginalising of individuals without due cause is unfortunately all too common. In the words of His Honour Judge McFarland at our peril do we rely on what the “proverbial dogs on the street” know, since we must “not rely on canine intuition, but rather on hard evidence.”<sup>2</sup> Clarity about what constitutes illegal and problematic behaviour and the importance of the role of law enforcement is of paramount importance for all of those working in this field. Most current practitioners are convinced that protection against anti-social and violent behaviour is best delivered by inclusive and pro-social approaches. However, being a former combatant or being associated with a paramilitary group is, not in itself a crime, nor is that alone grounds for censure or exclusion, for reasons I will detail below. It is important to judge people, sub-groups and organisations by their current behaviour, not their paramilitary pasts. **I invite the Committee to reflect on (a) the methods and processes by which the credibility of information about paramilitary activity is determined and (b) who ought to be regarded as qualified and mandated to make such determinations.**

### **3.8 Current threats**

Although the threat assessment for Northern Ireland was reduced on March 22 2022, from Severe to Substantial, in their Fifth Report the IRC point out that paramilitarism remains a clear and present danger in spite of some reduction in paramilitary activity and progress by the Executive Programme for Tackling Paramilitary Activity. The threat from Dissident Republican (DR) groups remains a concern for law enforcement, mainly in the form of the New IRA (NIRA) and the Continuity IRA (CIRA) whilst other

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<sup>2</sup> *R v Thomas Ashe Mellon* [2015] NICC 14.

smaller groups Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH), Arm na Poblachta (ANP) and the Irish Republican Resistance (IRR) are, or have been active. Some of these groups target police, prison officers and members of the armed forces. Regular arrests and seizures have depleted the personnel and resources of the main DR groups. As I explained to the committee, I have been largely unsuccessful in engaging with these groups, some of whom are unlikely to wish to transition out of violence until their political goal of a united Ireland is achieved. There are some dissident republican elements who may be open to such a prospect. In general terms, republican groups do not see themselves as paramilitary groups, and may also be unlikely to formally sign up to or even recognise a government-led transition process. There are examples of republican groups who, like some loyalist groups, have moved towards transition since the Good Friday Belfast Agreement through an “Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up” process, described at Section 5 below.

3.9 The two main loyalist groups, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) continue to operate, and sections of both groups, largely in the Belfast area, are involved in intimidation, criminality and violence. Outside of Belfast, there are sections of both these main loyalist groups who declare themselves to be ready to embark on, or are already engaged in, a transition process out of all forms of violence. The lack of a formal and official process for transition is an impediment to the recognition and completion of this process. The IRC discusses in some detail what such a process would entail in their view (paragraphs 1.81-1.111) and point out that such a process must be ‘owned’ by the two governments (paragraph 1.102), who ultimately have the power to verify, or not, the *bona fides* of such transitions.

### **3.10 STRUCTURES WITHIN PARAMILITARISM**

Until now, the approach to ending paramilitarism through engagement aimed at group transition has conceptualised the armed groups as unified entities and dealt with them as single units. Whilst the UVF can be regarded as a relatively coherent organisation, the UDA has long been without an Inner Council. Their command structure is composed of six autonomous brigades, some of whom also control areas outside their original territorial boundary. Loyalists would point to this process of

'Satelliting' as an indication of expansion of criminal paramilitary activity which does not respect the older "Brigade" geographical boundaries and structures.

3.11 Currently, the six UDA brigades are:

- North Belfast (which is dominated and subjugated by West Belfast);
- East Belfast which extends into North County Down;
- South Belfast which extends into some areas of County Antrim and South County Down;
- West Belfast which has 'satellite' constituencies in other areas (North Down, North Belfast etc);
- Southeast (County) Antrim which is removed from the other UDA Brigades and seen as "dissident" and which has 'satellite' constituencies in many areas outside of its own geographical patch;
- North (County) Antrim, Londonderry and Tyrone Brigade which covers the largest geographical area.

3.12 In geographical areas not 'covered' by existing UDA Brigades, localised structures in support of the UDA align with particular Brigades; for example, South (County) Londonderry and elements in Fermanagh align with North Antrim. Due to this complicated structure and the variety of orientations and alliances of the various brigades it is not feasible to engage with the UDA as one entity, since relationships between (and sometimes within) brigades is not always harmonious. Currently South East Antrim and sections of some of the other brigades are assessed as being involved in violence and criminality. These dynamics explain why there is no longer a functioning "Inner Council" operating as an overall command structure. The competing interests within the UDA include those who pursue criminality alongside those who wish to pursue transition.

3.13 The UVF, on the other hand is led by a Belfast-centric Brigade Staff with a Chief of Staff or Brigadier General in overall command. That is not to imply that the organisation is entirely coherent. There is considerable disquiet amongst the leadership and ranks about the activities of East Belfast UVF who have been linked to recent attacks and some of whose members have recently been arrested. East

Belfast is a major cause of concern for the UVF leadership, and they exert no control over that brigade area. Since the leadership have distanced themselves from East Belfast, engagement with the UVF in relation to group transition should take account of this and the rogue sub-group removed from consideration. East Belfast is also one of a number of UVF brigades who also engage in 'satelliting' into other areas outside of their own geographical patch.

3.14 There are also major differences between Urban Loyalism and Rural Loyalism within both the UDA and UVF. My engagement with those associated with both the UDA and the UVF has led me to conclude that substantial parts of both the UDA and UVF, largely outside of the Belfast area, could verifiably be regarded as in a position to embark on a transition process. **My recent security briefings do not dissuade me from that view. Some elements of both groups are currently engaged in activity which they deem to be transitional – as part of an “Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up” process (see Section 5 below).**

3.15 The Loyalist Communities Council (LCC) was founded in 2015 by David Campbell, then Chairman of the Ulster Unionist Party, and solicitor Richard Monteith in response to the perceived marginalisation and political disenfranchisement of working class loyalists. Three loyalist paramilitary groups - the UVF, most brigades of the UDA and the Red Hand Commando initially signed up to the LCC. Subsequent political statements by the LCC have led to sections of these same paramilitary groups distancing themselves from it. Currently the perception is that it is run by a small, largely Belfast based group who do not speak for many within loyalism. However, the LCC still purports to do so and enjoys links with some of the mainstream Unionist political parties.

3.16 A more detailed security focused intelligence picture is properly the domain of the security and intelligence services and the PSNI, and in the event of group transition, will lie with any body or individuals appointed to oversee and verify the process of transition. Any assessment of groups / sub-groups should be rounded and also include a wide range of information, drawing on, for example, published data,

research, devolved agencies, politicians and communities' lived experience/perspectives.

- 3.17 In summary, the paramilitary sub-groups who are currently engaged in violent attacks, drug dealing, intimidation and other forms of criminality appear to be mainly located in the Greater Belfast (and subsequent satellite areas) and in Derry Londonderry in the case of dissident republicans. The prospects for a formal process of transition for sub-groups located in more rural areas is impeded by the activities of "associates", largely in urban areas, from whom, in some cases, those in rural locations are estranged, albeit nominally belonging to the same paramilitary grouping. I wish to argue that group transition should move forward based on engagement with those sub-groups who are ready for such a process and with organisations who can 'shed' sub-groups who are engaged in criminality, even if they claim allegiance with the parent organisation.
- 3.18 The very low level of violent activity, particularly in areas outside of Belfast and Derry Londonderry could also be an indication of ongoing processes of 'Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up' Transition. We know that a number of groups have had splits over the years, with elements moving away from support for armed actions. Such 'Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up' transition at paramilitary sub-group level could be augmented and encouraged by some process of formal recognition. The proposal for sub-group transition, or group transition for groups with former sub-groups engaged in criminality, is designed to address this situation.
- 3.19 Capitalising on the pre-existing movement of these groups toward transition could also incentivise others to follow suit into a transitional process, whilst isolating those sub-groups within the same organisation that are set on a path of criminality and violence, providing a clearer focus for law enforcement.

### **3.20 Engagement**

There is currently no official direct engagement with the paramilitary groups in

Northern Ireland for the purposes of negotiating transition. Attitudes to such official direct engagement with paramilitary groups vary widely and there is strong resistance in some quarters to it. Many of us have suffered intimidation, threats, attack, injury and bereavement at the hands of these organisations and there are strong and widely divergent views about paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. The past resistance amongst some sections of society to direct engagement led to the late John Hume being excoriated by some for his willingness – and theirs, following an Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up transition process - to bring the IRA to the negotiating table. It was his willingness – and theirs – that ultimately won us the prize of the ceasefires and the Good Friday Belfast Agreement. We would not have emerged from the darkest days of the Troubles had resistance to direct engagement been allowed to hold sway. **I urge the Committee to consider the benefits of direct engagement with those in paramilitary organisations who are sincere and willing to embark on a process of transition.**

- 3.21 Paradoxically, those who have suffered most, such as [Paul Gallagher](#), rendered paraplegic by a hostage and gun attack by the UDA, or [Alan McBride](#), widowed and bereaved of his father-in-law in a bomb attack by the IRA, are amongst those most willing to directly engage with former combatants.

#### **4. INTERLOCKING ISSUES IN THE POLITICAL CLIMATE**

- 4.1 The issue of transition sits in the midst of the complex and changing political situation, in Northern Ireland as we move into 2023. That situation has various moving parts that impact directly on the feasibility of any form of transition. Chief amongst these are, currently:

- The Legacy Bill;
- the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill;
- the future of the Northern Ireland Executive;
- the prospects of a Border Poll;
- Policing;

and the attitudes of local political parties and public opinion on these issues.

**4.2 The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill:** Currently this Bill is at Committee Stage in the House of Lords, having had its first and second readings in both Houses. It is designed *inter alia* to substantially end legacy prosecutions including inquests, police complaints and prosecutions under specified circumstances and purports to “promote Reconciliation and Information Recovery.” It establishes an Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) and sets out provisions for the admissibility of material provided to ICRIR in criminal and civil proceedings, for immunity from prosecution and for prisoner release. In a rare moment of unanimity, the Bill is comprehensively opposed by all the political parties and civil society organisations in Northern Ireland.

4.3 The IRC note in their report that they believe this legacy legislation will have major ramifications for the ending of paramilitarism. It is estimated that between 30,000 and 40,000 Republicans and Loyalists were imprisoned during the Troubles, most of whom stood trial for Troubles-related offences. There have only been a very small number of security force personnel tried during this same period. Whilst the legislation is designed to end or substantially reduce legacy prosecutions, the IRC point out that the proposed Statute of Limitations will have direct implications for the transition and disbandment of paramilitary groups and for the effectiveness of any truth recovery process.

**4.4 The Northern Ireland Protocol Bill**

This Bill removes from effect in the United Kingdom aspects of the Northern Ireland Protocol, gives Ministers powers to nullify further provisions of the Northern Ireland Protocol in the United Kingdom. It ensures that Union with Ireland Act 1800 and the Act of Union (Ireland) 1800, are not to be affected by provision 10 of the Northern Ireland Protocol and gives Ministers powers to make new law in connection with the Northern Ireland Protocol including where provision of the Protocol does not have effect in the United Kingdom. This Bill is at report stage in the House of Lords, the final stage is yet to be scheduled. Conflicting media reports indicate that the Bill may be on hold in anticipation of further negotiations with the European Union in



February 2023.

4.5 Whilst the provisions of the Bill do not directly affect prospects for transition, it has an indirect effect in two main ways. First, it impacts on the level of discontent expressed in certain quarters of the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) community, which, in turn, can create pressure on the loyalist paramilitaries to engage in protest or other activities. Second, it has a direct impact on the future of the Northern Ireland Executive, insofar as the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has exercised its veto as the second largest party in the formation of a new Northern Ireland Executive. Whether or not the Bill as it passes will satisfy the DUP and an Executive is formed, or whether they will have other issues which prevent them from participating, remains to be seen. Either outcome has implications for any transition process and for the continuation of the raft of programmes, including TPP, which could support transition.

#### **4.6 THE FUTURE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE**

The current political crisis in Northern Ireland has meant that all devolved government departments lack a Minister and are currently run by civil servants. This includes the Department of Justice who lead on the delivery of the TPP. Any moves towards transition made in the absence of a functioning executive and without the input from the local parties would have to be made by the civil servants who currently run the Northern Ireland Government departments, but it is unlikely that they would be willing – or empowered – to make a major move on a sensitive matter such as paramilitary transition. Whilst this may mean that progress on transition must await the formation of an Executive, the Secretary of State has advanced the Legacy Bill without the support of the Northern Ireland political parties who all opposed it, so ultimately the decision of whether or not to move on these issues is in the hands of the Secretary of State, the Northern Ireland Minister and the UK parliament. As the Committee are no doubt aware, there are a range of Northern Ireland Executive Programmes which are also at risk due to the current lack of a functioning Executive. Such programmes can provide additional support for transition processes.

#### 4.7 **THE PROSPECT OF A BORDER POLL**

There is considerable disquiet in both Loyalist and Republican circles around the issue of any prospective Border Poll. This disquiet can and does potentially impact on any process of transition. What I have found in some Loyalist areas, is that progress on transition is possible when the issue of a Border Poll – and the surrounding issues - is named and openly discussed in a factual way by any particular sub-group. The manifest strength of any sub group to tackle such difficult issues and offer local leadership on such challenging topics as the potential for a Border Poll is a likely measure of their ability to engage successfully in 'Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up' transition. On the mainstream republican side, political energy has gone into organising high profile events anticipating a republican victory in such a poll. Although such an outcome is far from certain and achieving it creates a range of other political challenges for republicans, and there are divergent views within republicanism on the commissioning of a border poll and how the result should be actualised. The effect of republican calls for such a poll has ramped up tensions on the loyalist side.

#### 4.8 **POLICING**

The relationship between policing and paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland is complex and sits at the centre of any prospect for transition in a number of ways.

First, the perceived effectiveness of the police in combating the illegal drug problem is a key to building confidence in many of the local areas where paramilitaries hold sway. Yet there is a perception that the police have recruited some of those in paramilitary groups and those who are trafficking drugs as Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) and are therefore reluctant to take them off the streets. Paramilitary members report that they come under pressure from people in the local community to act against drug dealers in the wake of, for example, an overdose death in the area, where local people have called the police but no action was taken. When a paramilitary sub-group is intent on transition, they have not only undertaken not to engage in drug dealing and other criminal activity, but also not to use their powers of intimidation, or worse, where members of the community approach them to intervene when drug dealing by other criminal elements is taking place. Yet the

pressure on them from the local community is real.

4.9 Second, in both loyalist and republican constituencies there is some distance to go in the building of confidence and trust in policing amongst many local communities. These issues are particularly acute amongst young people in both communities, as is evidenced by the PSNI's own online survey of young people in 2021. None of this is assisted by under-resourcing of community policing, the undercover use of CHISs some of whom engage in criminal behaviour in the local community and ongoing issues about officer discipline and behaviour including ongoing criminal investigation of serving police officers<sup>3</sup>.

4.10 Third, the relationship between the PSNI and loyalist paramilitaries is substantially different to that with their republican equivalents. Some of the latter group's target, or have targeted in the past, the lives of police and security personnel and are classified as threats to national security, unlike the loyalist groupings. These factors have implications for the way they are policed, with the republican groups subject to joint policing and surveillance involving both the PSNI and the security services. Policing the dissident republican groups operates differently to the policing of loyalist groups as a result. Until now, the policing of loyalist paramilitary groups has, with few exceptions, fallen to the PSNI. These arrangements have implications for any process of transition and how each community is likely to view and/or support government-led approaches.

#### 4.11 **POLITICAL AND PUBLIC OPINION**

In spite of the May 2007 undertakings by the UVF that they and the closely affiliated Red Hand Commando (RHC) would 'assume a non-military, civilianised, role' and would engage in a process of 'transformation from a military to a civilian organisation', and the November 2007 UDA announcement that it too was 'standing down the Ulster Freedom Fighters' (UFF), both organisations have reverted to

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<sup>3</sup> "Scores of PSNI officers under investigation for sex, drugs and assault allegations"

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/scores-of-psni-officers-under-investigation-for-sex-drugs-and-assault-allegations-42199946.html>

violence. Both the UVF and RHC statements included a promise to put weapons 'beyond reach', rather than decommissioning, which was required of the Provisional IRA, although the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) publicly decommissioned a token amount of small arms and munitions in December 1998. In the court of public opinion, these organisations committed to standing down in the wake of the Good Friday Belfast Agreement but have welched on the deal.

4.12 It is not surprising that consequently there is strong resistance in some quarters to further efforts to persuade paramilitaries to disband, since in they have already undertaken to do so and have not delivered. This raises questions about the trustworthiness of any future undertakings they might make in that regard. There is suspicion about that paramilitaries' intentions, rumours that government grants have already paid them to 'go away' and cynical views that they are expecting (another) pay-day before they are willing to disband. Whatever the reality, there is resentment that a good deal of public money has already been spent on ending paramilitarism at a time when many families are struggling to survive financially. The widely held perception of the secret world of each of the paramilitary groups is of an organisation *en bloc*, a view that vests these organisations with a coherence and a unilateral involvement in violence and criminality that belies the fragmentation explained at 3.5 - 3.15 above.

4.13 Whilst financial assistance to impoverished communities is welcome, substantial issues face loyalist communities in particular that such intervention will not alleviate. The long-standing issue of community capacity within loyalist areas coupled with the current challenges to loyalist identity security must largely lie with indigenous leadership to address and resolve. External assistance, if not channelled correctly, can, in many ways, be counterproductive<sup>4</sup>.

4.14 Further opposition to direct engagement is likely to arise in that section of victims' groups who are opposed to the Good Friday Belfast Agreement. For these reasons,

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<sup>4</sup> Mildred Warner "Building social capital: the role of local government" *Journal of Socio-Economics* 30 (2001) 187–192

both the content of any future undertakings and the political choreography attending any fresh initiatives aimed at transition are crucial, if public support is to be managed.

4.15 First, **any fresh initiatives undertaken by government with the aim of transition must be seen to be devoid of direct financial incentives to those groups involved in paramilitarism in order to maintain credibility in the eyes of the public.** Any assistance should rather take the form of training, capacity building and other non-monetary forms of support.

4.16 Second, **meaningful engagement with a broad range of opinion in the victims' constituency should be undertaken with a view to encouraging a broader range of opinion from that quarter to be expressed as any initiatives are taken. A public and representative consultation process designed for this purpose could do much to balance the social media-amplified views of particular unrepresentative sections of the victims' constituency.**

## **5. PROCESSES OF TRANSITION: "INSIDE-OUT/ BOTTOM-UP" & "OUTSIDE-IN/ TOP-DOWN"**

5.1 In the absence of any defined process for Transition in Northern Ireland, and in order to elucidate the difference between some of the current interventions aimed at ending paramilitarism, it is useful to consider the concepts of **"Inside-Out or Bottom-Up"** and **"Outside-In or Top-Down"** transition.

5.2 "Inside-Out" is a term applied by some practitioners in Northern Ireland to refer to changes that are driven by internal forces within sub-groups of paramilitary organisation at the behest of their local sub-group leadership and without recourse to outside direction. In his work, *Everyday Peace*,<sup>5</sup> Roger Mac Ginty's calls this approach "Bottom-Up". Such work may be supported by fieldworkers engaged with the sub-group but is a result of internal decisions made within the paramilitary sub-group. Currently in Northern Ireland, such changes are regionally defined and do not yet involve the entirety of the two main loyalist organisations, due to the internal

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<sup>5</sup> Roger Mac Ginty (2021) *Everyday Peace: How So-called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict*. Oxford University Press

dynamics of those organisations, set out at 3.5 - 3.10 above. The changes within the subgroup are made purely to benefit the group, or ideally the whole organisation, in managing its transition process. The IRC refer indirectly to these processes at 1.91 – 1.92 of their fifth report:

1.91: We have given this question, of whether Group Transition in some form is already underway, considerable thought over the past year. In our view it is. The evidence for this is clear. It is there in the sharp decline in the numbers of people involved in paramilitary groups compared to the height of the Troubles/conflict. It is there in the scale of activity being engaged in by the groups, as is set out in the data provided in this Report. It is there in the wide range of constructive community activity being undertaken by people historically associated with various paramilitary groups.

1.92: But having said all that, it is also clear that while some dimension of Transition has taken place at group level, the reality is that it has stalled or not been completed. A major obstacle to completion is the absence of a formal process of engagement with the authorities to ensure Group Transition is accelerated and completed.

5.3 Each sub group process is determined by its capacity and works at a pace that is suitable for the circumstances within that sub-group. The goal of this work is to keep making progress and build towards the ultimate goal of disbandment of the sub-group. Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up transition by a paramilitary sub-group is an organic, managed process which requires strong leadership and direction and can be reversed or stalled by responses from the state to the actions of sub-groups in other geographical areas purporting to act on behalf of the “Whole Group” or that are treated by the state as doing so. Pronouncements and policy responses by the state to fragmented and diverse paramilitary organisations as if they are homogenous, whilst simultaneously allocating resources for transition to only a few narrowly defined areas is inconsistent and unhelpful to the project of removing all paramilitary groups from Northern Ireland.

- 5.4 In contrast to this approach, what local practitioners call “**Outside-In**” and what Mac Ginty<sup>6</sup> calls “**Top-Down**” transition involves external authorities setting a number of conditions or requirements which groups must meet in order for their transition to be officially recognised. Whilst this approach may have worked with some paramilitary groups in the past who had strong internal cohesion and powerful leaders, conditions have changed, not least within the paramilitary groups remaining active. The political environment, too, has been and is being transformed, as was noted in section 4 above.
- 5.5 Republicans are perhaps less likely to participate in an “Outside In” process which is imposed by authorities and are perhaps more likely to contest the exact meaning of externally set conditions and less likely to comply with them. “Outside In” approaches also pose a challenge for the authorities who must anticipate every eventuality in the design of such processes, perhaps discovering late in the day that an unanticipated shortcoming in the parameters they set has opened a loophole which can be exploited by less sincere participants. Furthermore, whilst Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up processes rely on energy within the sub-group or paramilitary organisation and the capacity of its leadership to steer the process, Outside-In/ Top-Down processes place a much larger onus on the authorities to manage the momentum of change by the provision of incentives, deadlines and penalties. The authorities must also identify and recruit external oversight that can provide fair and comprehensive verification of group compliance.
- 5.6 Outside-In/ Top-Down processes also suffer from a comparative lack of access, detailed local knowledge and awareness of variations in local conditions. In an Outside-In/ Top-Down process, a sub group in one area may be able to comply easily with externally set conditions while another sub-group of the same organisation may not be able to meet any requirements at all. This would render the entire organisation as defaulting, whereas a great sensitivity to local conditions and more

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<sup>6</sup> Roger McGinty (2021) *Everyday Peace: How So-called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict*. Oxford University Press

reliance on internal leadership could minimise such risks. Outside-In/ Top-Down processes rely on exclusion and other punitive measures as sanctions on groups who do not meet targets or requirements which may not encourage progress in the overall project of ending paramilitarism, which must rely to some extent at least on the willingness and cooperation of those in paramilitary organisations and the sub-groups within them.

- 5.7 Of course, both the Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up and Outside-In/ Top-Down processes can work in tandem with one another provided the government-led Outside-In/ Top-Down process is not over proscriptive and takes account of Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up processes.
- 5.8 Successful transition will also depend on a working government making credible and sustained efforts, with the flexibility to engage and address issues that underlie the continuation of paramilitarism. It will also rely heavily on community-sensitive policing and vigorous and effective law enforcement.

## **6. PARAMILITARISM: CURRENT INTERVENTIONS**

- 6.1 All of those currently working on the issue of paramilitarism share the same overall goal of ending paramilitarism. There are two main groupings of people engaged in this work: those officially engaged as part of **government programmes**; and those in the charitable and **non-governmental organisation (NGO)** sector, albeit some with government funding delivering government programmes. These two groupings are broadly distinguished by the divergent approaches they take to this work. Government initiatives by and large rely on programmes such as those aimed at creating conditions in communities where paramilitarism will wither, include measures aimed at diverting those who might join such organisations away from such a path and the focusing of law enforcement on paramilitary groups' activities in order to end them. These approaches could be characterised as '**Outside-In/ Top-Down**'. The NGO sector on the other hand contains programmes that directly engages with those who have access to members of paramilitary organisations using peace-building and community development principles, providing information, and organising events that support paramilitaries to design and implement policies and



practices that pave the way out of violence and towards a peaceful civic role. This process of relying on social influence, community development and education could be characterised as an **'Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up'** approach. In contrast to Outside-In / Top-Down approaches, these approaches are more intimate and hands-on, rather than at arms-length.

## **6.2 GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS**

The Committee has had detailed information about the range of government programmes and initiatives engaged with the project of ending paramilitarism.

- 6.3 The Paramilitary Crime Task Force, a joint initiative between the National Crime Agency, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), focuses on the criminal justice and law enforcement aspect of the work.
- 6.4 The Committee has also been briefed on the Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime programme (TPP) established under the Fresh Start Agreement<sup>7</sup>, and the work of the four person IRC reporting on progress on tackling paramilitary activity; likewise the work of the Fresh Start Panel and the Northern Ireland Executive's Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitarism Criminality and Organised Crime.
- 6.5 The Department of Justice coordinates the Cross-Executive delivery of Northern Ireland Executive Action Plan and Programme for Tackling Paramilitarism Criminality and Organised Crime which contains a wide range of programmes aimed at addressing socioeconomic vulnerabilities that render communities vulnerable to paramilitary influence and control. As the Committee is aware, the key programmes are concentrated in a small number of selected geographic areas, based on research indicating areas where criminality linked to paramilitarism is concentrated.
- 6.6 Phase 1 of the Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme (TPP) was established in 2016 and ran until March 2021. In April 2021, the Department of Justice announced a Second Phase to run until March 2024, and

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<sup>7</sup> NI Office, 'A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan', (2015) Section A

£13m of funding support for reconciliation and tackling paramilitarism and criminality<sup>8</sup>. 'Communities in Transition' (CiT) targets eight areas where paramilitarism is thought to be most concentrated, shown on the map in Figure 1.

These are:

- North Down (Kilcooley and Rathgill housing estates);
- West Belfast (Lower Falls, Twinbrook, Poleglass, Upper Springfield, Turf Lodge and Ballymurphy housing estates);
- East Belfast (The Mount and Ballymacarrett housing estates and locality);
- Shankill (Belfast area);
- Derry/Londonderry (Brandywell and Creggan housing estates);
- Carrickfergus and Larne (Antiville and Kilwaughter housing estates in Larne, Northland and Castlemara housing estates in Carrickfergus);
- North Belfast (New Lodge and Ardoyne housing areas); and
- Lurgan (Drumgask and Kilwilkie housing estates).

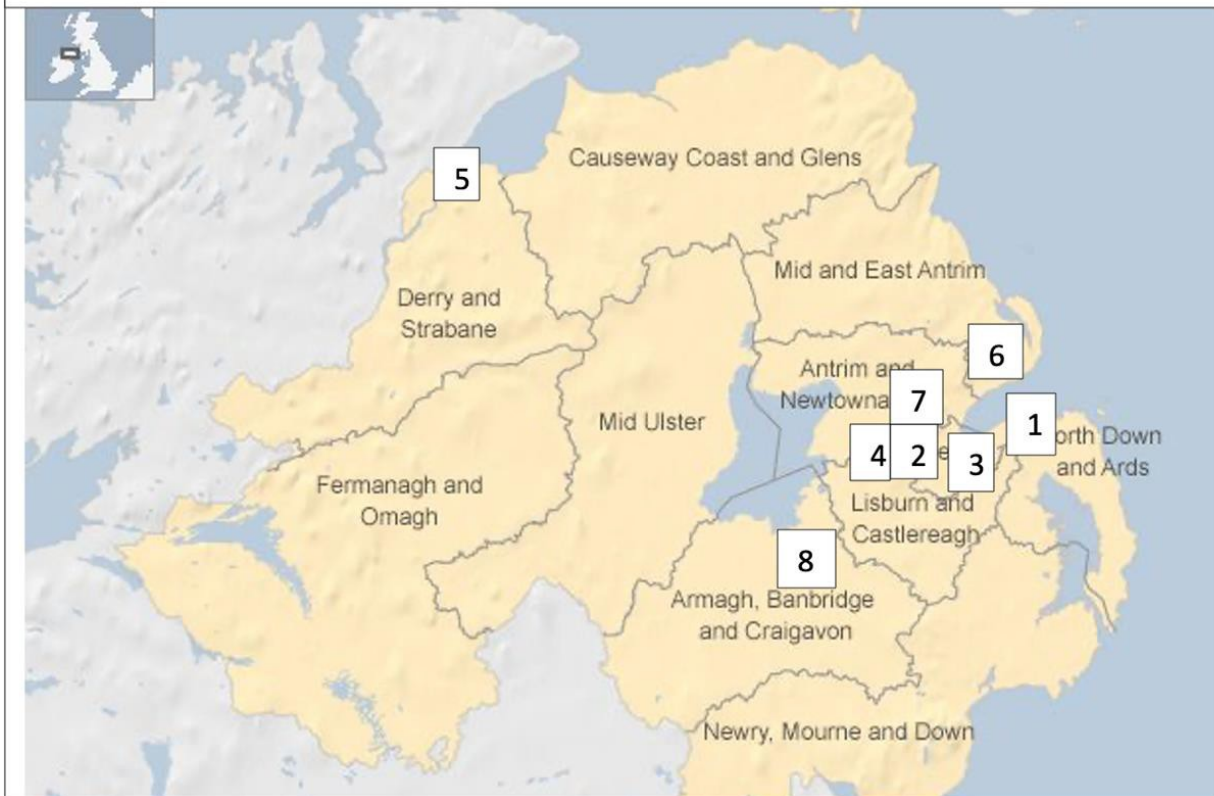
6.7

**Figure 4.1**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/ending-harm-inflicted-people-and-communities-by-paramilitaries-and-criminals-executive-priority-says>

**District Electoral Areas Map showing DOJ Communities in Transition project locations in Northern**



1. North Down (Kilcooley and Rathgill);
2. West Belfast (Lower Falls, Twinbrook, Poleglass, Upper Springfield, Turf Lodge and Ballymurphy);
3. East Belfast (The Mount and Ballymacarrett);
4. Shankill;
5. Derry/Londonderry (Brandvwell and Creggan);
6. Carrickfergus and Larne (Antiville and Kilwaughter in Larne, Northland and Castlemara in Carrickfergus);
7. North Belfast (New Lodge and Ardoyne); and
8. Lurgan (Drumgask and Kilwilkie).

6.8 That there are no CiT projects in **Mid-Ulster; Mid and East Antrim; Lisburn and Castlereagh; Fermanagh and Omagh; Newry, Mourne and Down; or Causeway Coast and Glens Council** areas. As a result, more than half the population of Northern Ireland live in council areas where there are no CiT projects.

### 6.9 NON-GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS: NGO PROGRAMMES

A number of charitable foundations and NGOs have been working assiduously over a period of years throughout Northern Ireland with both loyalist and republican paramilitary organisations both outside and within the areas covered by CiTs. The purpose of this work is to support their organisational journey towards transition out

of paramilitarism. Some of these NGOs have considerable experience, both within Northern Ireland and internationally, of engagement with armed groups for such purposes.

6.10 Whilst one could characterise the engagement recommended by the IRC and any future initiative by governments as fostering **transition from the outside**, the work undertaken by NGOs has been to equip sections of paramilitary organisations to **transition from the Inside-Out/Bottom-Up**. These concepts are expanded upon further below.

6.11 The work of the **Reference Group, the International Committee of the Red Cross** and others has paid dividends and the results can be seen across a number of areas outwith those covered by CiTs. Many of those paramilitaries who have been engaged with this work are now readying themselves for transition by offering leadership to their colleagues, engaging with the PSNI, declining to 'police' their areas when approached by local residents. They are also stepping down from a range of roles associated with violence or the threat of violence that were filled previously by their paramilitary group and considering future exclusively peaceful contributions to their communities. This work has been ongoing with both loyalist and republican organisations and sub-groups. I am most familiar with work taking place with the two main loyalist organisations, the UDA and UVF. It may be the case that the nature and outputs of this work are not widely known, including those involved elsewhere in working towards ending paramilitarism (see for example Annexes A and B).

6.12 The work currently undertaken by these and other NGOs is highly sensitive, conducted largely 'under the radar' and requires a process of internal engagement within the paramilitary organisation, or with a substantial sub-group within the organisation, such as a brigade area. Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up transition has appeared to have worked best at sub-group level in areas outside of the current TPP programme. However, since this work is outside of TPP areas and 'under the radar' it is largely unknown and is not evaluated or much understood. Nor does it attract the resources in financial support mechanisms or cross departmental initiatives like

those provided to TPP programmes but may have been supported by some independent funders. It is unclear to me whether and to what extent government, policing, statutory and funding agencies are aware of the extent of the 'Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up' transition work already taking place in some areas.

- 6.13 The purpose of the NGO engagement with paramilitary sub-groups is to support a number of cognitive and social processes within the sub-group, in which the sub-group leaders are instrumental. These sub-group leaders are charismatic individuals with considerable local influence. The processes they support are, for example:
- the recognition within the sub-group that the “War / Conflict” is over;
  - that the traditional enemy is no longer the main (or any) threat;
  - that the reason for existing as an armed group has disappeared and that the sub-group no longer needs to use armed actions;
  - that the sub-group constituency and their constituent communities need to meet any new challenges without recourse to armed actions or coercive activity;
  - that the PSNI should continue to prosecute past and the current crimes but that policing should also be sensitive to transition processes;
  - that the sub-group and its constituency should use legal processes to deal with community problems and local crime, even when policing does not live up to expectations or standards;
  - that new pathways for community resolution of issues need to be identified, supported and encouraged so as to negate any need for armed groups;
  - that the sub-group turn to community development / activist development / political development processes to replace armed activity;
  - that confidence, and/or democratic challenges within the state and legal processes should be built;
  - that this will involve building relationships with the state(s) and its institutions as a way to effect change;
  - that capacity to engage in peaceful and democratic methods within their

constituency and community is built and developed;

- that they and their constituency and community become engaged in democratic, transparent and accountable processes to entirely replace past armed actions;
- That they use their powers of persuasion to prevent the next generation from going down painful routes to paramilitarism taken in the past.

6.14 This work is ongoing in some areas in Northern Ireland and some new structures have been established to take forward some aspects of 'Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up' transition for some sub-groups. There are areas where recruitment for armed groups has ceased, where recruitment is channelled instead towards engaging in democratic structures, at positive activism, community development or peaceful political involvement. Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up transition in some areas is substantial, involves whole brigade agreement and has had significant impacts, such as shedding membership, tackling criminality from within and directly engaging with the PSNI.

6.15 In other areas, structures to support restorative practice as an alternative to past violent paramilitary 'policing' have been created, thus building new pathways and methods for community change and dealing with difficult and contentious issues. Such work with paramilitary sub-groups also normally involves some wider discussion with other elements of the wider paramilitary 'parent' group and with other groups both within the constituent community and in the 'other' community. The result in communities where this work is undertaken is a reduction in violence and coercive control, better relationships with policing (which needs to be reciprocated) and a marked decline in paramilitary influence. There are ways in which restorative work could be better supported by government, which are discussed at 7.21 below.

6.16 The **Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up** work of NGOs with persons of influence within these organisations has succeeded in a number of areas in creating a cohort of paramilitary leaders who are set on a path of non-violence and towards a positive engagement with the social issues in their community. Numbers of these individuals within paramilitary groups are committed to finding collaborative and community-based

solutions, including restorative practices and directly working with the PSNI to find solutions to the problems that face them and their communities.

## **7. DIRECT ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS TRANSITION**

- 7.1 In their fifth report, the IRC repeat their recommendations for a process of Group Transition first made in their fourth report. They indicate that they have held discussions on the concept with the two Governments at political and official levels with leaders and representatives of political parties, relevant officials of Executive Departments with a range of academics and other stakeholders. They welcome the initiative of the former Justice Minister in examining the issue at the Political Advisory Group of the Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme. Whilst noting the complexities and sensitivities and the divergent views about Group Transition, they remind us that the Peace Process required a decision to engage directly with those previously involved in campaigns of violence. They conclude that ending paramilitarism now will require a process of engagement with paramilitary groups, since individual transition will not deliver ‘the critical mass required’ to end paramilitarism. Whilst these processes will be distinct from those used earlier in the peace process, anxieties remain about the risk of processes of engagement sending signals of legitimacy to paramilitaries and thus undermining progress towards transition and disbandment. This calls for close cooperation between the various state agencies and clarity about certain red lines which are made clear to the paramilitaries in advance.
- 7.2 It is clear to the IRC, and indeed to others in community development and policing, that law enforcement alone will not end paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. Direct engagement with certain paramilitary personnel already takes place between politicians, public agencies and the police, so there is no objection in principle to speaking to paramilitary personnel.
- 7.3 Yet obstacles to direct formal and official engagement with paramilitary groups aimed at driving a process of transition are substantial. Not least of these is the continued involvement of sub-sections of most, if not all of the paramilitary groups

in criminality, extortion, violence and intimidation.

#### **TRANSITION EN BLOC OR SUB-GROUP TRANSITION**

- 7.4 Following the recommendations of the IRC for group transition and my evidence to the Committee, I have discussed briefly with one of the IRC Commissioners the idea of sub-group transition. The ideal form of transition would involve the entirety of a paramilitary organisation, yet this is currently impeded by the violence and criminality on the part of elements of both the main loyalist groups who are not committed to the idea of transition. It is rendered difficult by complex internal structures and divisions within the groups detailed above at paragraphs 3.5 – 3.11 and characterised by the lack of central command, lack of clarity of purpose and diffuse reasons for membership ranging from family legacy through desire for community status to a desire to profit financially. Whilst it is theoretically possible to engage with the UVF as a single entity, it is more difficult to treat the UDA as one organisation by reason of its current structural position. The successful engagement of the totality of a paramilitary group affords better prospects of taking all weapons out of circulation and would provide an easier and more elegant path for transition out of paramilitarism. Yet such success is not currently achievable given how paramilitarism currently operates.
- 7.5 Whole group transition remains the gold standard, even if it is not feasible. To hold out for the gold standard, however, is to permit the path to group transition (elegant or otherwise) to continue to be blocked by the persistent involvement of elements or sub-groups within both the UDA and the UVF in violence, intimidation and a wide range of criminality.
- 7.6 Processes of transition can be advanced, and these obstacles can be circumnavigated by engaging with sub-groups, those parts of each of the main loyalist groups that have indicated a willingness to engage in transition and who no longer engage in recruitment, crime or violence. Likewise, whole organisations that are largely ready to transition should be allowed to do so provided the sub-groups associated with them that are involved in criminality are not included. Such a flexible



approach to engagement would permit progress to be made, whilst isolating those parts of organisations who continue to practice criminality. Such an approach would also avoid the danger of allowing the perfect to be the enemy of the possible.

- 7.7 Engagement with sub-groups and advancing their transition could well also cause a domino effect within the overall organisation and serve to sort out those who are committed to peaceful means from those who are unwilling to relinquish violence and criminality.
- 7.8 Success of sub-group transition poses its own difficulties. Other non-transitioning sub groups may see opportunity for increased satelliting and criminal empire building, but this would be a matter for law enforcement and would require careful choreography in the planning and implementation of such transition. There is also a risk of internal feuding. Careful planning with buy-in from all stakeholders including the sub-groups themselves would be required alongside careful monitoring of processes and outcomes. There is much to be gained in potential outcomes of eradicating paramilitarism and paramilitary structures across large swathes of Northern Ireland. This could be game-changing. Successful transition out of paramilitarism of those willing to adopt exclusively peaceful means and disband their sub-group would permit the state to re-focus its law enforcement and other resources more narrowly and precisely on tackling the remaining violent criminal elements revealing them for what they are.
- 7.9 The design and establishment of sub-group transition processes in Northern Ireland should capitalise on all expertise of all those currently engaged in this work, including the NGO sector. A degree of imagination and the willingness to innovate is required. Ultimately the ideal approach would be to use a complementary combination of both **Outside-In/ Top-Down** and **Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up** processes.
- 7.10 Consideration should be given to the geographic deployment of resources and to the balance between support for transition on the one hand and security responses on the other. Support for transition could be focused in those areas where sub-group

transition is feasible whilst the security response could be concentrated on those identifiable locations where the criminal elements, who have no desire to transition, are operating.

7.11 The table below focusses on likely outcomes for Outside-In/ Top-Down Transition process elements and shows the benefits of targeting both sub-group transition while also combining complementary Inside-Out/ Bottom-Up and Outside-In/ Top-Down approaches.

<b>Table 1: Evaluation of forms of transition</b>			
	<b>Group transition</b>	<b>Sub-group transition</b>	<b>Individual transition</b>
<b>Group commitment to exclusively non-violent means</b>	Potentially supported	Supported by sub-group	Not delivered
<b>Group management of hawks and spoilers</b>	Supported	Supported within sub-group but not in rogue factions	Not supported
<b>Management of territorial vacuums</b>	Potentially supported	Relegated to PSNI et al	Not relevant
<b>Group public declarations of transition</b>	Potentially supported	Delivered by sub- group	Not delivered
<b>Removal of all weapons from group control</b>	Potentially supported	Removal by sub- group, isolating rogue factions	Not delivered
<b>Encourages adoption of a democratic approach</b>	Potentially supported	Possible within sub-group, isolating rogue factions	Left to individual

<b>Table 1: Evaluation of forms of transition</b>			
	<b>Group transition</b>	<b>Sub-group transition</b>	<b>Individual transition</b>
<b>Addresses unresolved legacy issues</b>	Subject to the passage of legislation: Potentially supported	Subject to the passage of legislation: Potentially supported for members of sub-group	Not supported
<b>Exit routes for individuals</b>	Not supported	May be supported	Supported
<b>Risk to individuals</b>	Minimal (see below)	Moderate, (see below)	Possible punishment as 'traitors'
<b>Risks to public order</b>	Risk of fragmentation of organisation	Risk of internecine warfare and feuding	Minimal (see above)
<b>Feasibility</b>	Not currently feasible due to rogue elements and pending legislation	Imminently feasible by isolating rogue elements, but pending legislation	Ongoing
<b>Source: Marie Breen-Smyth, 2022</b>			

## **7.12 AGREED GOALS AND BENCHMARKS**

In their fifth report, the IRC identify a number of Outside-In/Top-Down commitments that should be sought from participating paramilitaries, with the goal of disbandment of the groups. These are:

- Ending recruitment to paramilitary groups;
- Giving up paramilitary structures and activity;
- Ceasing mobilisation of members;
- Ceasing to exercise coercive power and control in communities;
- Ending of all paramilitary style attacks and all other forms of violence, threat of violence or intimidation;

- Disposal of any remaining weaponry and materiel;
- Allowing people to exit from paramilitarism without cost or consequence
- Publicly supporting the PSNI and criminal justice system in tackling criminality and committing to democracy and the rule of law; and
- Engaging with Legacy Bodies.

7.13 Consideration needs to be given to what an “exit from paramilitarism” involves. Will a formal oath of disavowal be required? Will it be an individual process, or will it require group or sub-group disbandment? Whilst the ultimate goal of group transition is disbandment of the paramilitary organisation, has been no armed organisation in Northern Ireland that has done so. The Provisional IRA’s structures are intact even if they currently use exclusively peaceful methods. Whilst disbandment can remain the ultimate endpoint to group transition, bringing all the other paramilitary group to the point where they, too deploy exclusively peaceful means would be an achievement worth working for.

7.14 More crucial is the need to reintegrate the members of a paramilitary group into civil society, where members of paramilitary organisations transition from their current status as paramilitary members to a new status as civilian members of society. Traveling this route will involve forswearing their previous espousal of paramilitarism and all forms of violence and giving particular undertakings to deploy only peaceful means to achieve whatever political goals they might have.

7.15 Since there are concerns about coercive control of communities by paramilitaries, the process of reintegration must have a strong community element, backed by participation of government representatives and the police and security partners. Successful reintegration should aim at building successful and egalitarian relationships between former paramilitaries and the wider society, allowing for their participation, where they wish, in useful social enterprises and initiatives as members of civil society. Individuals who successfully transition can be offered a number of incentives, such as the ending of bans on their adopting children, holding taxi licenses and their protection against discrimination. Pilot reintegration projects could be

instituted based on the location of current CiT projects which have already been working on building resilience in communities where paramilitarism is concentrated.

7.16 In acknowledgement of the political motivation of many of those who joined paramilitary groups, inside-Out/Bottom-Up achievements should be acknowledged, and some elements of the earlier Mitchell Principles might be added, namely, commitments:

- To democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues;
- To renounce for themselves, and to oppose any effort by others, to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course of political life in Northern Ireland and beyond;
- To agree to abide by the terms of any agreement reached in the course of transition processes.

#### 7.17 **Deproscription**

As indicated by the IRC at para 1.108 of their current report, further consideration needs to be given to the role of deproscription in processes of transition. Where a group wishes to transition into a purely peaceful and political role, deproscription may be a useful additional process. Many of the groups discussed here have pre-existing proxy political structures that could serve to support such transition.

#### 7.18 **OVERSIGHT**

The IRC envisage (paras 1.102 - 1.103 of their current report) that any process of transition would be 'owned' by the British and Irish governments in consultation with the Executive, and the two governments would jointly appoint a formal body to oversee the process. The IRC suggest that such a body should be 'along the lines, for instance, of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains' and consider the inclusion of members from a specialist security background to be worthy of consideration.

7.19 Consideration should also be given to the inclusion of community representatives and those experienced in working with armed groups. A more broadly based oversight will improve the credibility and incisiveness of the process. It may be useful to engage international or external experts who have experience from other conflict regions where transition processes have been engaged.

7.20 **ROLE OF THE WIDER COMMUNITY**

Violence does not occur in a vacuum, but in a wider social and political environment where certain acts of violence are regarded either openly or covertly as justified and legitimate by sections of the population who can simultaneously remain distant from armed actors. As Duncan Morrow has pointed out, “we were raised in a society where sectarianism was ‘built in’ to normality...Sectarianism in true sectarian fashion, is usually a word which we resist when applied to ourselves and rest more easily when it is applied at a level of generality, or to others. But it is perfectly possible, indeed likely, that attitudes, behaviours or presumptions that we take to be unproblematic or ‘normal’ are regarded as ‘sectarian’ by others.” Violence and the threat of violence continues to play a part in politics in Northern Ireland. Otherwise peaceful campaigns allude to the threat of return to violence, an allusion that intended to put pressure on the authorities to satisfy demands and augment the might of the campaigning lobby. Yet those who use the threat of violence in these ways will distance themselves from violent politics, whilst simultaneously enjoying the additional power it affords their cause. Thus paramilitarism can be seen as the thick end of a wedge, on the thin end of which many more than members of paramilitary groups have sat.

7.21 Any moves towards the end of paramilitarism and the successful transition of paramilitary groups should be accompanied by a campaign of public education aimed at building wider awareness of the issues and the goals of any future initiative. The involvement of the victims’ sector and prominent former paramilitaries who have played positive roles in their community, the publicising of successful community initiatives such as AIMS and ACT (see Annexes A -D) can

increase public awareness of the goals of transition and the possibilities of positive participation by former paramilitaries.

## **7.22 REINTEGRATION AND THE ROLE OF FORMER COMBATANTS**

Kieran McEvoy and Peter Shirlow's work on former combatants identifies the potential for former combatants to act as moral agents in conflict transformation processes and peace-making. They argue that the Northern Ireland peace process offers conspicuous examples of former prisoners and combatants as agents and leaders in the process of conflict transformation<sup>9</sup>. Roger Mac Ginty's<sup>10</sup> work on peace-building identifies the power of charismatic individuals to effect change locally and the value of a strengths-based approach to reintegration utilising the positive capacities of former combatants in Northern Ireland. McEvoy and Shirlow point to the work undertaken by both Loyalist and Republican former combatants in truth-focused civil society initiatives, such as Healing Through Remembering and the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in the Irish Republic and to the centrality of the role that members of paramilitary organisations would have to play in any successful truth recovery process.

7.23 In both communities, it was former combatants who were instrumental in challenging the practice of paramilitary style assaults of alleged anti-social offenders and who established and worked in community restorative justice schemes, namely Northern Ireland Alternatives and Community Restorative Justice Ireland. They have worked to build relationships with other former combatants and community leaders across the sectarian divide in order to reduce tensions and violence at interface areas. Former combatants have used their profiles and previous experience to work at transforming communal attitudes to violence in communities where it had been previously tolerated. Some work to dissuade young people from becoming involved in militarism and paramilitarism.

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<sup>9</sup> Kieran McEvoy and Peter Shirlow, Re-imagining DDR: Ex-combatants, leadership and moral agency in conflict transformation *Theoretical Criminology* 2009; 13; 31

<sup>10</sup> Roger Mac Ginty (2021) *Everyday Peace: How So-called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict*. Oxford University Press

7.24 The range of these activities were summarised in a study of ex-prisoner centres carried out by Shirlow & McEvoy<sup>11</sup>.

<b>Table 2: Ex-prisoners involvement in community-based work</b>				
<b>Type of Activity</b>	<b>Republican Ex-Prisoners</b>	<b>Republican Ex-Prisoners' Relatives</b>	<b>Loyalist Ex-Prisoners</b>	<b>Loyalist Ex-Prisoners' Relatives</b>
<b>Alleviation of Interface Tensions</b>	63.3%	70.6%	33.3%	34.7%
<b>Youth Work</b>	53.3%	54.9%	26.7%	30.7%
<b>Community Safety Issues</b>	51.7%	45.1%	24.0%	22.7%
<b>Supporting the Elderly</b>	25.0%	17.6%	12.0%	5.3%
<b>Women's Groups</b>	30.0%	23.5%	6.7%	1.3%
<b>Environmental Issues</b>	36.7%	33.3%	12.0%	5.3%
<b>Restorative Justice</b>	33.3%	33.3%	25.3%	29.3%
<b>Economic Regeneration</b>	46.7%	43.1%	9.3%	8.0%
<b>Other</b>	16.9%	8.0%	6.7%	8.0%
Source: Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008				

7.25 Their previous involvements in paramilitarism also equip former combatants to exert powerful influences for the good as communal leaders, since they have the authority of experience when they advocate peaceful and non-violent ways of working. In any process of transition, efforts could be devoted to training and deployment of some

<sup>11</sup> Peter Shirlow and Kieran McEvoy (2008) *Beyond the Wire: Former Prisoners and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*: Pluto Press, London.



former paramilitaries with an interest in doing so, in peace-building initiatives and community work, including in restorative justice work, where former combatants have already been prominent.

#### **7.26 Restorative justice**

On the issue of restorative justice, further work is required to ensure the integration of restorative justice into the mainstream of the criminal justice system. The IRC point to the delay in establishment of the long-promised Centre for Restorative Excellence, which, if established will provide a pathway to the validation of new community restorative justice schemes, unfreezing the validation of new restorative justice initiatives at community level, such as those operated by the AIMS Project in Ballymoney (see Annexes A-C), the ACT group (see Annex D) and the Resurgam Community Development Trust in Lisburn. Community restorative justice schemes have made an enormous contribution to tackling paramilitarism within local communities, according to the IRC.

#### **7.27 OPERATIONALISING TRANSITION**

The IRC emphasise the need for a formal Group Transition process with the aim of disbandment of the paramilitary groups, using a Twin Track approach of policing and justice on the one hand and measures addressing socio-economic issues in affected communities on the other. As I have argued, I believe a complementary process incorporating both Inside-out/Bottom-Up and Outside-In/ Top-Down approaches offers the best chance of maximising resources and ultimately the success of any future process of transition.

#### **7.28 Lessons from elsewhere**

I support the IRC's plea for urgent consideration of building on models from elsewhere, both of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and additionally from work on criminal syndicates. Whilst elements of the DDR model may not entirely apply, other useful lessons might come from the extensive work undertaken in the US and elsewhere on dealing with gang violence. This is particularly apt when dealing with crime syndicates, especially the US and UK work

with former gang members working with their communities to prevent younger people joining up.

7.29 Likewise I support the IRC's recommendation that an Independent Person be appointed to prepare the ground, and who would be officially authorised to speak to the various parties, including the paramilitary groups themselves.

7.30 I also share their view that cross-border law enforcement co-operation is a vital part of this work. I, too, welcome the new Sponsor Group, under the leadership of the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, which draws together senior officials from those departments and agencies involved in tackling paramilitarism and would hope that they can see the merits of the IRC concern to add transition to the battery of methods and approaches they currently deploy.

7.31 Likewise, the IRC's recommendation that organised crime legislation be enacted for Northern Ireland would greatly enhance the powers available to fight paramilitarism and organised crime as it is currently constituted.

*January 2023*

## ANNEX A: A paper from the AIMS group in Ballymoney on THE ROLE OF AIMS

1. AIMS support truth and justice and recognize that no organisation is above the law, including North Atrim/Londonderry UDA. If members of this group are engaged in illegal acts, then the PSNI should investigate and where evidence exists, bring charges against them accordingly.
2. AIMS cannot or will not act as a source for intelligence gathering against North Atrim/Londonderry UDA as
  - Aims have no knowledge of the activities of the said group, other than whatever they choose to inform them of.
  - It would be naïve to think that the PSNI do not already have well placed intelligence sources within the ranks of said organisation.
3. AIMS will however, be happy t act as a conduit for the delivery of intelligence about criminal activities of individuals or groups provided by the said organisation, it's supporters or the community which they operate in.
4. AIMS will continue to encourage transition amongst the members of the said group and discourage all acts of violence and illegality.
5. AIMS sincerely hope this may be new beginning which will ultimately lead to the complete dismantlement of all paramilitary structures within the North Atrim/Londonderry.

## ANNEX B A paper from AIMS on obstacles to transition

### Some Obstacle to Transition

1. Lack of confidence in policing within Loyalist working class communities. PSNI unable or unwilling to deal with the source of drugs. Pressure from communities or organisation to act.
2. Perceived two tier policing. Bobby Story Foundation etc. Progressive Loyalists targeted by PSNI. Criminality ignored by police.
3. Legacy issues. The perception that historical enquiries are loaded against the actions of the State, whilst Republicans can hide behind comfort letters from the government.
4. Constant erosion and demonization of Loyalist culture.
5. Who fills the vacuum?

### Exert from the 4<sup>th</sup> report of the International Reporting Commission

#### Possible Elements of a Group Transition Process

1.38 A critical question that emerges in our discussion is “Who would own the process?” Our answer is the two Governments and the Executive, acting on a co-ordinated, collective basis, as happened for the Fresh Start Agreement. Only the Governments and the Executive have the mandate and authority to design and implement what is needed.

1.39 We envision that the overall process would be overseen by a formal body established for that purpose by the two Governments, in consultation with the Executive (along the lines, for instance, of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains). In terms of the various milestones that would mark the process of engagement with the Paramilitary Groups, we envision them committing, among others, to the following:

- Ending recruitment to paramilitary groups;
- Giving up paramilitary structures and activity;
- Ceasing mobilisation of members;
- Ceasing to exercise coercive power and control in communities;
- Ending of all paramilitary style attacks and all other forms of violence, threat of violence or intimidation;
- Disposal of any remaining weaponry and materiel;
- Allowing people to exist from paramilitarism without cost of consequence;
- Publicly supporting the PSNI and criminal justice system in tackling criminality and committing to democracy and the rule of law; and
- Engaging with Legacy Bodies (see paragraphs 1.45-1.46 below).

1.40 The primary goal of the process should be disbandment of the Groups rather than their continuation in any form, but we recognise that this is one of the issues for consideration. Achieving each step in itself would be valuable progress.

1.41 we acknowledge that this process would involve work on what would happen on the other side of Group Transition – in other words, reintegration. This is a major question in its own right and would need to be considered in any comprehensive process of Group Transition.

## ANNEX C Summary of the AIMS project

### Causeway Coast and Glens AIMS

#### Summary of Project Description

The organisation is known by the acronym of AIMS which stands for A= Advocacy, I= Inclusion; M=Mitigation from Violence, S = Support. The objects of the organisation are as follow:

- (1) Promote restorative justice and restorative practices for the public benefit in the Causeway Cost and Glens area and its environs (the "area of benefit") as a means of peacefully addressing socially harmful activities and developing non-violent, innovative approaches to achieving justice within local communities by assisting and coordinating the work of groups and organisations to enable them to embed the philosophy and practice of restorative practices.
- (2) Provide and co-ordinate supportive interventions for victims of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- (3) Promote conflict transformation and resolution for the public benefit by setting out a transformative pathway for those formerly involved in paramilitary organisations.
- (4) Promote human rights, advocate for measures that strengthen the application of such rights and the elimination of any infringements, raise awareness of human rights issues and promote public support and respect for human rights.

These were agreed in our Articles of Association of Causeway Coast and Glens, adopted by our Board and Members in 2017.

We also have all necessary safeguarding policies in our Company Handbook which was updated in May of this year and refer to the Field Manual on Front Line Humanitarian Negotiation developed by the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation, (CHNN), with whom we have a close relationship.

The organisation has been funded for the past seven years by the International Committee of the Red Cross, (ICRC), to deliver a Programme dealing with humanitarian issues arising from the legacy of violence because of the troubles. We work in an extremely hard-to-reach Loyalist constituency where suspicion and distrust of peacebuilding is rampant.

It has taken many years to persuade individuals and groups from these communities to buy into the concept of transition and necessitates constant dialogue with the person concerned. The dialogue takes the form of meetings with stakeholders in the various areas of interest and developing protocols around potentially contentious issues such as bonfire, flags, parades etc. We have been very successful in this regard in recent years.

The major issue in the area is the continued use of violence by paramilitary and other non-state armed groups. Over the years has taken the form of murder, shootings, pipe bombings, punishment attacks and the expulsion of individuals and families. In addition to direct intervention, AIMS seek to carry out preventative work with individuals and groups may be at risk or coming to the attention of armed groups, either as victims or potential perpetrators of violence, as well as progressing engagement within and between communities, police, and other statutory agencies.

Our primary objective is the mitigation of violence and the safety of individuals, families or groups who come to us for assistance, and to this end we will speak to all involved from all sides in disputes or threats. We believe our projects is an appropriate response as in many instances we are the only group who can get access to the organisations involved in issuing threats etc. In instances such as this our response would be to:

- Attempt to alleviate any immediate danger to the individual group.
- Seek to find a resolution which negates the threat.
- If a resolution is not possible, make the relevant authorities such as PSNI, Social Services etc. aware of the situation and if the individual is in danger.
- Continue, after a cooling off period, to seek a resolution if possible.

We signpost many of our beneficiaries to relevant organisations and statutory agencies, if necessary, as well as referring them to some of the programs run by our sister organisation Ulidia Training.

Those who avail themselves of the organisation's activities are mainly from the PUL community within the area of interest, the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area and its environ, although we work with groups and individuals outside this catchment area, including Counties Londonderry and Tyrone as well as the city of Belfast. Aims also enjoy excellent relations from organisations from within the Catholic, Nationalist, and Republican community and meet regularly with our counterparts in various forums and when necessary to mediate in potentially volatile inter-communal disputes.

Beneficiaries of the project are many and varied and range from victims themselves, and the families of those under threat from paramilitaries to the opposite end of the spectrum such as young people who are in danger of becoming involved with non-state armed groups, as well as former combatants seeking to bring about transition within Loyalist paramilitary organisations.

We also work closely with the PSNI and representatives of the CNR community to discuss contentious situations around parades and other politically volatile issues. Last year we worked with other statutory bodies such as the Housing Executive, Fire and Rescue Service, local Councils and Community Groups around drawing up a Bonfire Protocol to ensure safer, family friendly celebrations would take place over the 12<sup>th</sup> of July period. This was an outstanding success and has received praise from all agencies involved.

## ANNEX D

**Action for Community Transformation** – taken from <https://act-ni.co.uk>

**THE ACT INITIATIVE** emerged in 2008 as a conflict transformation programme (obtaining charitable status in 2012), to facilitate the civilianisation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), following its Statement of Intent (May 2007).

The core objective of ACT is;

- To support the reintegration of former political prisoners and;
- To develop the capacity of those categorised as former combatants; through a process of training, capacity building, empowerment, peace building and community re-integration.

ACT promotes the charitable purposes of

- 1) The advancement of citizenship or community development
- 2) The advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation as defined in the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

In sum, ACT continues its transformation efforts against the backdrop of well publicised issues which impact significantly on the PUL community; such as flags/parading, criminality, under educational achievement, disengagement/disenfranchisement from the political architecture and other structures, as well as the perception that mechanisms for dealing with the past serve only to further demonise loyalists.

### **Area Action Groups**

Area Action Group implements and demonstrates conflict transformation.

This Group provides opportunities for former combatants to develop partnerships with voluntary, community and statutory agencies. ACT believe that training and education are key components of capacity building for individuals, organisations and communities to transform and sustain peace.

As such, ACT members complete an initial training program which is delivered over a 12-week period. This training starts with the individual through self-reflection and self-development processes and ends with the positive contribution they can make within their communities and society at large.

Training is delivered in an environment which is safe, comfortable and conducive to learning. The facilitator(s) work with participants, covering a number of teaching modules from self-awareness, group dynamics and restorative practices to positive leadership roles. Participants are encouraged to discuss their real-life experiences, which enables them to explore their role in the past, in order for them to look forward

After the completion of training, ACT members form Area Action Groups (AAG) which are rooted in community development principles. There are currently 8 AAGs across the province, whereby ACT members liaise with the wider community to; establish/build relationships with statutory agencies, community stakeholders, residents and others, to identify issues which require a community development approach.

The work of AAGs to date is reflective of the efforts of former combatants at the grassroots level in their endeavors to assume full and meaningful citizenship, against the backdrop of the

policies and mind-sets of those conceding legitimacy to former combatants and their work. All ACT members are involved in the program and the AAGs on a voluntary basis.

## **WHAT WE DO**

Throughout Northern Ireland, ACT staff and volunteers host and facilitate a diverse range of events and activities, with all sections of society. Examples include, conflict transformation workshops, historical tours, mental health support for men and women and developmental workshops with young people.

### **Training and Courses**

Currently, we have courses in progress which include Safer Bonfire Schemes, Cultural/Jubilee Festivals, Legacy Workshops, to name a few. Our main training programme centres on Conflict Transformation and is a series of 12 seminars.

### **Community Safety Project**

This project originated as a collaboration with two primary schools in the Shankill community and the PSNI, and has now been disseminated throughout the country. Look for and please adhere to our signs on your travels.

### **ACT Initiative Women's Group**

Our ACT Initiative women's group meet up at the centre, and create valuable change for our local community.

### **Community Garden**

If you would like to visit our community garden on the Shankill Road, call the centre or pay us a visit to check the availability of our volunteer gardener Stuart.

## **NEWS**

### **[ICE Project is back](#)**

Christmas is getting closer and so is the winter. Peace Impact Programme, in partnership with South Belfast Alternatives and TREE, is bringing back this year the ICE (In Case of Emergency) Project to help and support the community with practical help through the cold winter months.

### **[Peace Impact Programme](#)**

Another successful Level 2 'Events Management' training course was completed at the ACT Community Hub, Friday 5th July. Thank you to Eventsec for facilitating the programme, at their own expense, and to all those successful participants. More training opportunities will be forthcoming and our PIP Belfast Co-ordinator, Ian Shanks, will be posting details soon.

### **[The 'Belt, Boots & Bullets – From Tartans to Paramilitaries' seminar at Carleton Orange Hall, Portadown](#)**

The 'Belt, Boots & Bullets – From Tartans to Paramilitaries' seminar took to the road this week and 'played' at Carleton Orange Hall, Portadown. With approximately 100 in attendance from the Mid-Ulster region, an evening of poetry, prose, drama and stories was well received. With readings from his book by Gareth Mulvenna and poetry and excerpts from Beano Niblock, this was a creative evening of interaction which we hope will travel to other localities soon.

### **[CSR Card training](#)**

The ACT Community Hub was packed out last Saturday with people taking part in CSR Card training, this was put on by Unite the Union.



### **Pittsburgh MBA group visit**

Pittsburgh MBA group visit the ACT Community Hub for our 'Signing of the Covenant to the Signing of the Good Friday Agreement' exhibition workshop.

### **'No Parking' Patrol Signs Launch at Belfast City Hall**

Today we launched our new 'No Parking' Patrol Signs, in partnership with the PSNI, PCSP and the four schools. On behalf of the ACT INITIATIVE, thanks to Steven and Annette for their work on the ground.