



Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the Oireachtas

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT**

**AN COMHCHOISTE UM FHORFHEIDHMIÚ
CHOMHAONTÚ AOINE AN CHÉASTA**

Tuesday 12th and Wednesday 13th September 2017

**Visit to Cushendall Community Development Group
Rathlin Development & Community Association
Bridge of Hope**

**Launch of Joint Committee's Report on the Implications of Brexit
for the Good Friday Agreement: Key Findings**

TRAVEL REPORT

32/JCIGFA/03

1. Background

The Joint Committee, as part of its Work Programme, agreed the importance of stepping up engagement with the spectrum of political and community representatives in Northern Ireland on the issue of Brexit, and in other areas.

Following on from the conclusion of a series of public meetings on the impact of Brexit, and the launch of the Joint Committee report titled “The Implications of Brexit for the Good Friday Agreement: Key Findings” dated June 2017, the Joint Committee agreed to undertake a visit to Northern Ireland.

The Committee has held a number of informal meetings in the last 12 months which have all taken place in Leinster House. While these meetings are very useful the Committee also sees considerable potential in outreach visits both for informing stakeholders in relation to the work of the Committee and for providing access directly to the Committee in an informal setting.

At its meeting dated 6 July 2017, the Joint Committee agreed to a series of meetings with various community and interest groups. It was also agreed that a formal launch in Northern Ireland, of the Joint Committee report in Belfast would take place during this visit.

2. Members

The meetings were attended by the following Members from the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Deputies: Kathleen Funchion (Chair) and Declan Breathnach

Senators: Frances Black, Frank Feighan, Gerard Craughwell, Niall Ó Donnghaile and Mark Daly

Mr Francie Molloy, MP, was also in attendance.

3. Visit to Cushendall Community Development Group

Meeting hosted by representatives of “**Grow the Glens**”, an offshoot of Cushendall Community Development Group.

In attendance:

Grow the Glens: Liam O’Hagan, Andrew McAlister, Paul McAlister, Eddie McGoldrick, Paddy McLaughlin,

Cushendall Development Group: Bernie Delargy, Francis McCurry, Una Rowan,

Local Business Representatives: Eamon Gillan, Seamus McKeegan, Charlie McKillop

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Officials: Mr Paul Beattie (Head of Prosperity and Place Service), and Ms Suzanne Irwin (Rural Development Manager)

A presentation was made to the group by Grow the Glens. (see appendix)

A discussion followed and challenges faced by the Community were outlined to the Joint Committee including

- Brexit
- The Importance of the EU to protecting small coastal communities
- Fears that Westminster would not replace vital EU funding (particularly in relation to EU peace funds and EU Agricultural and Rural Development funds)
- Loss of Trade with EU and cross border
- Additional expense and inconvenience to cross-border workers
- Decline of vital local rural services and community supports/schools, etc
- Local employment challenges
- Outward migration
- Tourism
- Transport Links / Road Structures
- Additional transportation costs passed onto customers – greater impact in remote rural context.

Key themes throughout the discussions were the importance of linkages, particularly between North and South, and the absolute determination to ensure peace and protect prosperity.

The community expressed real fears about the impact on local business if there is a loss of access to markets in Ireland (potato farmers) and France (sheep farming – 80% exported to EU). EU funding is currently providing 50/60% funding support to farmers and there are fears that this will disappear after Brexit. One businessman advised the Joint Committee he may be forced to relocate his haulage business to the Republic to avoid the detrimental impact of Brexit, however this would result in a loss of local employment.

There were discussions around rural community decline, driven by factors such as local hotels all now closed with nowhere for tourists to stay and contribute to economy, and loss of employment, (Other long-established family businesses have indicated an intent to close in the near future further compounding pressure on rural life); houses being bought as holiday homes and contributing to outward migration as locals are priced out, with knock on impacts on local schools and services.

The community also expressed wariness that that any short term solutions which are put in place after Brexit could become long term, and may not necessarily be the most appropriate.

The group expressed frustration that there is no Executive in place, and projects are being held up.

The group are outward looking and have a very strong sense of common purpose.

They are working together to progress initiatives to enhance their community and discussed proposals with the Joint Committee regarding conversion of a now defunct PSNI station into a new business development hub; and discussed the possibility of setting up Centres of Excellence for Apprenticeships, to help education/employment in Northern Ireland and lessen the reliance on EU workers.

The group expressed fears that negative impacts of Brexit and potentially rising unemployment rates would risk a de-stabilising of the current peace, and in turn risk a return to the troubles of the past, and an undermining of the Good Friday Agreement. In many aspect this is a fragile peace, and at risk of fragmentation. The Good Friday Agreement has provided certain stability and the necessary foundations for economic prosperity. The potential risks materialising from Brexit is seen as fuelling uncertainty and fears for the future.

The Joint Committee heard very powerful and moving testimony from one individual who believed that through Brexit his right of identity under the Good Friday Agreement would be diminished, and he would become a third class Irish man. (he defined it as - 1st class being Irish in the Republic, 2nd class being Irish in EU and 3rd Class being Irish in Northern Ireland). *He believed this was a breach of his right of identity under the Good Friday Agreement.*

The group thanked the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement for meeting with them and hearing their concerns. Committee Members thanked the group for facilitating the meeting, and for their positive solution focused approach to the challenges they face. The Joint Committee Members advised they would be discussing their visit at the next Joint Committee meeting and would discuss what actions the Committee could take to help and support them.

4. Visit to Rathlin Development & Community Association

The Rathlin Development Community Association is the voluntary body that represents the Rathlin community and lobbies for improvements to services and infrastructure etc. The RDCA membership elects a committee of volunteers that are heavily involved in various projects, ranging from training and skills development, to renewable energy, and various initiatives in between. The RDCA is a charity, recognised by the NI Charity Commission and HMRC.

The Joint Committee met with the following representatives:

- Michael Cecil (RDCA Chair)
- Patricia McCurdy (Vice-Chair)
- Marianne Green (Treasurer)
- Marina McMullen (Secretary)
- Fergus McFarl
- David Quinney Mee (RDCA Community Development worker)

Apologies were received from Mervyn Storey, MLA (DUP MLA for North Antrim)

A presentation was made to the Group.

Rathlin Island is Northern Ireland's only off-shore inhabited island and the Rathlin Development and Community Association (RDCA) is the representative body for the Rathlin Island Community. It is responsible for representing the views of the island, ensuring the best possible services are secured, driving forward a sustainable development agenda, delivering economic and social well-being for and with the islanders including environmental protection and biodiversity.

After consultation with the RDCA Committee, islanders and Government Departments, in February 2010 the Northern Ireland Executive endorsed the Rathlin Island Policy, a unique model for Northern Ireland. In September 2016, a revised action plan was published (*insert link*)

A considerable proportion of the infrastructure investment in the island over the last forty years has come from the EU and its various programmes. The community has traditionally been reliant on farming and fishing and has benefited from EU subsidies and programmes (Common Agricultural Programme, Rural Development Programme, etc). The results of the Brexit referendum were greeted with dismay and great concern for the future economic security for a very fragile island community.

The RDCA are active, outward looking and solution focused. Their efforts have resulted in a doubling of the population in the last 20 years, and a marked increase in tourism in the last 4/5 years. They have developed valuable relationships with senior civil servants in key departments and they are better able to consider their future and its relationships at a strategic level. They have also increased contact with the Scottish Islands and other islands around the coast of Ireland. The RDCA use an asset based community development approach, focusing on the positives the island has to offer. This has resulted in the re-opening of the local hotel, development of an annual Maritime Festival, inclusion in the all-Ireland "Great Lighthouses of Ireland" trail, and of the West Light Seabird Centre which is managed by the RSPB. The island is proud of its inclusive approach and has experience of the benefits of avoiding difficulties experienced elsewhere, e.g. through the display of flags and other emblems

However they are very concerned about impact uncertainty over and changes to the borders and the relationships between Ireland and the UK/Scotland is likely to have on their community.

Threats identified by the community include:

- Impact on tourism and the perception that they may be viewed negatively by most of the EU, resulting in less visitors from this market
- Impact on fishing and agricultural, and difficulties for emerging businesses such as Kelp seaweed products. Currently 90% shellfish is exported to France/Spain
- Loss of vital medical supports, the potential loss of the Air Ambulance Service based in Sligo is a key concern post-Brexit.
- No Executive in Northern Ireland means no Voice
- Loss of EU legislation which protects islands.
- Enforcement of powers transposed to the UK from the EU (clean air, etc)
- Special areas of conservation - EU designated. (fear that scallop dredging, currently banned could be re-introduced)

Opportunities/strengths identified by the community include:

- Resilience of community
- Development of distinct Rathlin Island Kelp Seaweed brand
- Potential to develop fishing/catering college (Norwegian style)

- Project with Germany/Spain/Greece re kelp funding (but dependent on Interreg funding)
- Promotion of sea as a bridge rather than a barrier (supported by improved ferry links)

The group thanked the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement for meeting with them and hearing their concerns. They again expressed frustration at the lack of an Executive to hear their concerns and promote their interests, They asked that Committee Members consider

- Promoting awareness of the concerns of small coastal and island communities in any communications
- Promote all Ireland Island forum discussion with all island communities

Committee Members thanked the group for facilitating the meeting, and for their positive solution focused approach to the challenges they face. The Joint Committee Members advised they would be discussing their visit at the next Joint Committee meeting and would discuss what actions the Committee could take to help and support them.

5. Bridge of Hope - Belfast

Bridge of Hope is a department of Ashton Community Trust, based in North Belfast.

Bridge of Hope developed initiatives to empower local communities to come to terms with the legacy of the conflict. This process involves a programme of facilitated discussions and site visits culminating with cross community relationship building. It has been delivered in areas that are struggling with the legacy of the past and that are recording issues of segregation, marginalisation and isolation. This aim of this work is to promote discussion and understanding of conflict issues as well as increase levels of communication across community, religious and political divides. The programme is targeted at individuals from Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities who are experiencing high degrees of disconnection, deprivation and marginalisation associated with the conflict.

The Joint Committee met with the following representatives

- Margaret Bateson
- Paul Roberts (CEO)
- Paul O'Neill
- Aine Magee

- Jim Gibney
- Billy Hutchinson
- Irene Sherry
- Stephen Barr

Paul and Irene gave the Joint Committee an overview of the history and work of Bridge of Hope (see appendix)

Bridge of Hope was built from a local initiative, aided by funding from EU peace grants, in North Belfast which was the area most affected by the conflict and which remains the 2nd most deprived constituency in Belfast (Northern Ireland?).

The centre is built on a site that previously had been a Peace Wall. When this was demolished the Bridge of Hope was built.

(There were 18 so called “peace walls” before the Good Friday Agreement, but there were 88 of them in 2008)

EU funding has supported development of the centre by:

- EU peace grants (70 childcare workers employed)
- ESF funded projects (3m per year education support)
- New buildings (10m Peace Hub – Peace 3)
- Erasmus funding has benefited initiatives such as helping youths travel abroad to work in Romanian orphanages.

Concerns were heard about the capacity to continue to build and continue some of this work if EU funding were to be withdrawn.

The Joint Committee also heard concerns about the growing demand for mental health services and supports. Bridge of Hope advise they are currently seeing 700 new referrals per month related to stress/anxiety related to the conflict. The North Belfast area reports the highest suicide rates, self harm levels, and highest levels of medical scripts issued. A high level of victims and survivors presenting for mental health services previously self-medicated.

Billy Hutchinson spoke about his work with the Ashton Community Trust. He recognises that the Ashton Centre supports all communities, and understood that all communities in North Belfast faced the same challenges in relation to employment, health and community renewal.

Cross community programmes and initiatives have been developed, i.e. anti-drug campaigns and anti-poverty that are rolled out across all communities. Poverty and under-achieving are high across all communities and they are united in believing that the police do not support any working class community. In helping to build cross community relationships, site visits have been arranged into other constituencies and one of the many positive outcome of this has been previously unknown, historic family connections

While the challenges of Brexit are becoming clearer, there was a belief that a hard border does not need to be in place. Psychological borders have been a bigger challenge with people believing they have no freedom of movement. Young people are now mixing freely across communities and while normal society had not yet been reached, there were fears expressed that this welcome progress may be undermined.

Margaret Bateson gave an overview of the work of the Victims and Survivors Service, and the support provided by PEACE 4 funding. She advised the SEUPB are looking at non EU country funding streams as a means of replacing current funding from the EU, which underpins services in addition to the Executive Office funding.

Matters relating to Prisoner issues were also discussed and the group heard examples of programmes being developed to provide integrated support services to ex-prisoners and their families. Studies have shown approx. 70% prisoners fit into victims profiles, in relation to the conflict. Frustrations were expressed that ex-prisoners were discriminated against making it harder to access supports and to get basic services, and that prisoners were still being subjected to the Terrorism Act 30 years later. Fears were expressed that this could lead to a failure mentality that could help drive up radicalisation. Trans-generations impacts were also discussed and the group heard examples of how children/grandchildren/and partners were stigmatised and suffering consequences of a relative/partners crimes decades after.

Key themes throughout the meeting were

- Communities are engaged in working together rather than sectarian issues being the focus
- A strong belief that there is no political will to lift people out of poverty. Although Belfast has undergone huge regeneration in the last 20 years, there is a belief that this starts and ends in the public realm and is not benefiting disadvantaged areas.
- Frustration that there was no Executive in place to represent Northern Ireland
- Voluntary sector is suffering the most with no Executive in place
- Frustration that despite all the good work that takes place poverty, disadvantage and health stats remain the same.
- Reconciliation work needs to continue

- EU funding is crucial to the work being undertaken
- Collaboration and moving past issues is difficult, but experience has proved that communities are stronger when they are working together rather than competing for funding

Committee Members thanked the group for facilitating the meeting, and for their honest and frank discussion on the challenges they face, and the positive progress that has been made by working together. The Joint Committee Members advised they would be discussing their visit at the next Joint Committee meeting and would discuss what actions the Committee could take to help and support them.

6. Launch of Joint Committee's Report on the Implications of Brexit for the Good Friday Agreement: Key Findings

The launch took place at the Europa Hotel on the afternoon of Wednesday 13 September 2017.

There were approximately thirty people in attendance at the launch including several stakeholders who had appeared before the Committee to discuss the implications of Brexit for the Good Friday Agreement; representatives of a number of political parties; members of the media and others.

The Chair introduced the report and its key findings before opening the floor to questions and comments. Discussion focused on the psychological impact of Brexit, particularly on border communities and associated issues of citizenship and identity; the future of EU funding for PEACE and INTERREG; cross border cooperation; and the ongoing political stalemate in the North.

7. Follow up actions agreed by the Joint Committee

Follow on from this meeting the Joint Committee agreed the following:

- Consideration to be given to inviting groups down to public session hearing in Leinster House
- The Joint Committee would highlight the importance of giving a voice to Island Communities in connection with Brexit discussions
- The Joint Committee will hold public meetings to consider prisoner and former prisoner issues
- Further outreach visits will be undertaken to ensure the views of all communities can be heard

Appendix 1



Challenging Times Ahead for the Glens

Submission to JIGFA
17th November 2016

Agenda	Cushendall
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Who we are2. Challenges facing us incl. Brexit3. Our Response: Grow the Glens	<p>Population c. 4,000 Leading community in Glens of Antrim 2015 All Ireland Hurling Finalists Cushendall Development Group Voluntary organisation formed October 1990</p> <p>Locally based initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Heart of the Glens Festival - 25 Yrs– Cottage Wood Development– Grow the Glens

What are the key challenges now?

Signs of rural decline:

- falling enrolments in local primary schools
- fewer work opportunities in the area
- young people move away to obtain employment
- growing no's of young not in employment, education or training

Recent closure of:

- the only bank in the area
- the local post office
- prominent family-owned businesses



Implications for Glens

Strategic Impacts

- EU Rural Development programme **vital in marginal rural areas** such as the Glens of Antrim
- Marginal rural areas **very low funding priority** under UK government
- EU support has made NI community sector one of the most **vibrant and outward looking** in Europe
- EU environmental emphasis has created **more resilient and sustainable** communities and landscapes than under regional or Westminster governance.
- In particular, the emphasis on cross border working has help to **bring communities together** and to strength their capacity and economic focus
- Post-Brexit, danger of society becoming more inward looking and parochial
- EU PEACE funds in particular have boosted the PEACE process, risk of regression?

Funding Impacts

- **Loss of several £100m's per annum** from ESF, PEACE funds, Rural Development and other EU based funds
- Westminster government has said it would "honour funds that have been already agreed by the EU"
- **No assurances** beyond the present tranche.]
- Many jobs and **job creation capability** have been created by EU funding in the economic development, public and community sectors

Aims of Grow the Glens

1. Make The Glens an even better place
 - To Live
 - To Visit
 - To Do Business
2. Create employment, via the community
3. Address skills shortages



What does Grow the Glens comprise?

Aims

- leverage existing successful local businesses
- develop skills for the future and
- nurture local start-ups in terms of leadership, skills and finance

We need a hub;

- physical infrastructure that will support all three aims

Objectives

- provide flexible workspaces
- incubator units for digital and creative businesses
- skills development facilities.

Proposed hub

- ex-PSNI station
- 'stranded asset'
- strong telecoms infrastructure
- appropriately sized and sited

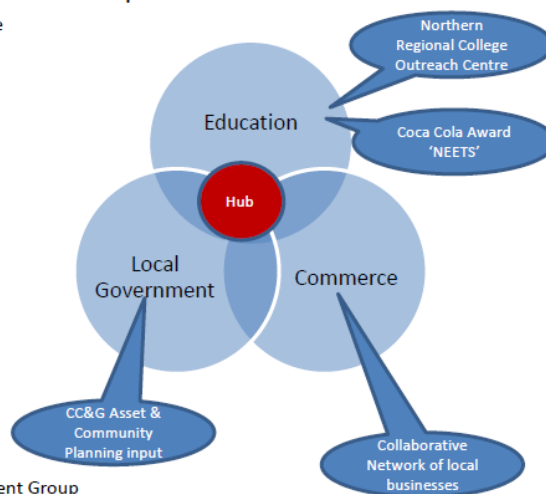
'Grow the Glens' governance

- social enterprise
- wholly-owned subsidiary of Cushendall Community Development Group
- Well-respected group, operating successfully for over 25 years

Leadership group

- Players in all three 'elements' with strong links to the area

Components of 'Grow the Glens'



What are we seeking?

1. Transfer of PSNI 'stranded asset' to Causeway Coast & Glens Council
2. Allocation of ex-PSNI asset to Grow the Glens as Enterprise Centre
3. Grow the Glens as long-run Centre Operators
4. Create 30-50 jobs over 5 years, 50-100 over 10 years
5. Leverage IT infrastructure ; Enterprise Zone, Scotland, US

***Governments (local and national) are 'under-invested' in the Glens
Needs to be redressed,
opportunity via Grow the Glens***



Appendix 2

Bridge of Hope

The Committee will meet representatives of Bridge of Hope to discuss reconciliation and legacy issues.

Some background information on Bridge of Hope is as follows:

Bridge of Hope developed an initiative to empower local communities to come to terms with the legacy of the conflict. This process involves a programme of facilitated discussions and site visits culminating with a cross community residential. It has been delivered in areas that are struggling with the legacy of the past and are recording issues of segregation, marginalisation and isolation. The aim of this work is to promote discussion and understanding of conflict issues as well as increase levels of communication across community, religious and political divides. The programme is targeted at individuals from Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities who are experiencing high degrees of disconnection, deprivation and marginalisation associated with the impact of the conflict.

Bridge of Hope, a department of Ashton Community Trust, is a community health & well-being service that supports individuals affected by the conflict and poor physical & emotional health.

We are based in North Belfast where 577 conflict-related deaths occurred and thousands of people were physically & psychologically injured. A high degree of our work is also delivered in West Belfast where 623 lives were lost. Statistically, the highest number of all conflict deaths took place in areas of high deprivation. North & West Belfast are highest regionally for deprivation and poor health outcomes. North Belfast deaths to cancer, suicide and alcohol are the highest anywhere. It also has the highest level of peace walls and conflict continues here. Since 2001 over 17,000 people have accessed wellbeing services through our clinics and outreach sites.

Our mission is “To empower and promote positive change for victims and survivors through delivery of quality health and wellbeing services.”

Wellbeing and holistic services include: **complementary therapies; physiotherapy; life coaching; counselling and psychological services; accredited VTCT training; personal development courses and conflict legacy programmes.** All of these services are designed to help manage and reduce stress, and encourage the development of positive, healthy and resilient lives. They also encourage exploration of the causes and effects of conflict, dealing with the past and social justice issues. Our services are victims-centred and based on the theory that no single approach will suit everyone. All services are monitored and outcomes recorded. We support people through a range of funding streams made possible by the Victims & Survivors Service, Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (BH&SCT) and Public Health Agency. We are a BH&SCT Primary Care Talking Therapies Hub provider delivering services across the city of Belfast to meet the needs of individuals who are experiencing common mental health problems.

Bridge of Hope is actively engaged in researching the needs of victims and survivors of the conflict so that we can better advocate their needs at a strategic level. Together with our partner at the

Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University, we have developed a community-university human rights programme that speaks to people whose lives have been changed by conflict. The Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit Programme is globally relevant to areas moving out of conflict and has been translated into Spanish and Arabic.

Our core staff team is supplemented by sessional practitioners which are Access NI checked and registered with the bodies including: British Association of Counsellors and Psychologists (BACP), Association of Coaching (AC) and Federation of Holistic Therapists (FHT). We adhere to Keeping Adults and Children Safe policies. Staff and practitioners are Mental Health First Aid qualified.

Values

- Open – We are available to anyone.
- Respect – We respect everyone’s journey
- Together – We’re stronger in partnerships and collaborations
- Responsive – We listen and are accessible.
- Trustworthy – We act with integrity
- Victim-centred – We are empathetic and understanding of the impact of the conflict. This guides our work and informs decisions
- Best Practice – We adhere to best practice at all times.
- Quality – Our services are of the highest standard.