



## Submission to The Heenan-Anderson Commission

East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA) supports the development of a confident co-ordinated community sector in East Belfast. EBCDA is the 'umbrella organisation' supporting community development in East Belfast. Our membership is made up of community groups drawn from an area that contains almost 109,000 people.

EBCDA's job is to add value to the activity undertaken by groups in local areas and to work with key organisations to ensure the continued development of a community sector in East Belfast that is recognised, valued and effective. We seek to support successful community development, encourage reflective practice and promote cooperation and locally based solutions.

### Introduction

This paper provides EBCDA's response to the Heenan-Anderson Independent Commission on economic marginalisation and deprivation in Northern Ireland. This submission follows on from issues raised at a meeting held in East Belfast Network Centre on 21 January with: Co-Chair of the Commission Colin Anderson and staff from the Commission; Shadow Secretary of State Ivan Lewis MP; Lisa McElherron from NICVA; staff from EBCDA, East Belfast Independent Advice Centre, and East Belfast Partnership.

### Context

Below are some statistics in relation to the East Belfast constituency area based on the most up to date information from the NI Assembly Constituency profile in December 2013<sup>1</sup>:

#### Education

- The **Proportion of the population age 16+ participating in Further Education** fell by 0.4%.
- East Belfast had the **lowest proportion of school leavers** achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A\*-C or equivalent.

#### Health

- The constituency of East Belfast has the **4<sup>th</sup> lowest male life expectancy** in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> Belfast East Constituency Profile; Northern Ireland Assembly;  
[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Constituency-Profiles/2013/belfast\\_east.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Constituency-Profiles/2013/belfast_east.pdf);  
2013

- *The constituency of East Belfast has the **4<sup>th</sup> lowest female life expectancy** in Northern Ireland*

#### **Benefits**

- ***26.3% of the population of Ballymacarrett ward, and 20.9% of the population of The Mount ward** are in receipt of **disability-related benefits**.*
- ***55.4% of the population of Ballymacarrett ward, and 46.8% of The Mount ward, and 46.2% of the Cregagh ward** are claiming at least one benefit.*

#### **Poverty**

- ***51.3% of children** in the Ballymacarrett ward, and **40.9%** in the Ballymacarrett ward are **living in poverty**.*

#### **Crime**

- *The **overall recorded crime rate** per 100,000 persons **increased** by 375 reports and is higher than the overall Northern Ireland rate.*

Some other key facts on the four electoral wards of the inner East Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area (Island Ballymacarrett, The Mount, Woodstock):

- *Living in these wards you are likely to die between two and ten years earlier than the Northern Ireland average.*
- *Two-thirds live in rented accommodation*
- *23-30% of the population has long-term health problems or a disability that affect their day-to-day activities.*
- *32-46% of the population is economically inactive.*
- *A considerable number of households (at least 4,780) are dependent on benefits to survive.*
- *More than 10% of adults are unpaid carers*
- *32-39% of the children have some form of learning disability*
- *About half the adult population have no or low qualifications; and*
- *Less than half of those leaving schools achieve at least 5 GCSEs at A-C.*

These statistics provide a brief snapshot of the challenges faced by the most marginalised communities in East Belfast. The proposed cuts to public expenditure across the departments responsible for these areas will have a further detrimental effect on communities in East Belfast unless a radical re-think of public service delivery is considered.

#### **Deprivation**

Neighbourhood Renewal is a cross government strategy, which aims to bring together the work of all Government Departments in partnership with local people to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in all aspects of everyday life. The four strategic priorities are: community renewal; economic renewal; social renewal; physical renewal. East Belfast contains two Neighbourhood Renewal areas: Inner East Belfast and Tullycarnet<sup>2</sup>, as well as a designated “area at risk” of further deprivation: Ballybeen.

However the Neighbourhood Renewal Budget is facing a proposed 14% cut from the Department from Social Development (DSD). Added to the 10% cut implemented in 2011/12, this current administration has reduced Neighbourhood Renewal funding by almost a quarter. Areas of deprivation in

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<sup>2</sup> East Belfast Partnership, <http://neighbourhoodrenewal.eastbelfastpartnership.org>

inner East Belfast and Tullycarnet. cannot sustain further cuts without significant adverse consequences to the end users of services.

### **Economic Marginalisation**

The recent flag protests and related civil disturbance highlight the growing disconnect between the political institutions and marginalised communities. The consequences of this disconnect between working class experience and middle class politicians occur not just in the nothing-to-lose attitude of 'NEETS' at the interface; they also filter through to attitudes about the peace process itself<sup>3</sup>.

In his book "What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets" the Harvard Professor Michael Sandel argues that we are moving towards a society where everything is up for sale and that, without realising it, we have drifted from having a market economy to being a market society<sup>4</sup>. Applying this analysis to the deprived neighbourhoods of inner East Belfast, the flag protests and anger towards the political system could be interpreted as a reaction to the market society model labelling certain services in the area as commodities: health, education, employment - and selling them off to other areas.

EBCDA recently launched a Guide to Crisis Support Services<sup>5</sup> in East Belfast in partnership with East Belfast Partnership and East Belfast Independent Advice centre, providing local information on advice services, practical support and food banks. We are also about to embark on a joint venture with community organisations to gather local data on the level of poverty in East Belfast. This is in response to anecdotal evidence which suggests the situation is worsening.

### **Recommendations**

- (i) EBCDA is concerned about the NI Executive's long-term commitment to tackling disadvantage and deprivation across departments and would recommend that the Commission **calls on the Executive to outline, in the light of proposed budget cuts to Neighbourhood Renewal, its long-term vision for working together across Government to seriously address disadvantage and deprivation.**
- (ii) There is a growing distrust of political institutions, especially within marginalised communities. The Commission should **challenge local political parties to "change the conversation" and prioritise issues of social and economic justice in these communities.**
- (iii) Collaborative, cross-sectoral initiatives such as the Inner East Belfast Family Support Hub and the Mental Health Hub are effective and efficient

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<sup>3</sup> Page 106, The Flag Dispute: Anatomy of a Protest; QUB; December 2014

<sup>4</sup> Page 10, Sandel, Michael J, What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits Of Markets, Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2012)

<sup>5</sup> <http://neighbourhoodrenewal.eastbelfastpartnership.org/news/east-belfast-crisis-support-services-directory-launch>; December 2014

intervention services for families in crisis<sup>6</sup>. Having a single point of contact in the community for agencies and families has enabled local referrals to be processed more quickly. The Commission should **ensure early intervention services like support hubs are recognised and resourced as part of mainstream service delivery.**

(iv) 23% of all employees in Northern Ireland earn below the living wage<sup>7</sup>. These workers are predominantly young, part-time, with low skill levels. As East Belfast has one of the highest proportions of young people in Northern Ireland, EBCDA (a living wage employer) would call on the Commission to **propose the introduction of the living wage in Northern Ireland.**

(v) As existing anecdotal evidence suggests the level of poverty is worsening – beyond the traditional socio-economic boundaries of disadvantage and social exclusion EBCDA recommends that the Commission should call on the Ni Executive to **develop a robust anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland.**

EBCDA is keen to develop an ongoing relationship with the Commission, and looks forward to hearing its findings. We can be contacted at the address below.

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<sup>6</sup> Inner East Belfast Family Support Hub, <http://www.cypsp.org/publications/fs-hubs/launcharticleinnereastbelfast.pdf>, Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, December 2014

<sup>7</sup> Page 7, An Economic Analysis of the of the Living Wage in Northern Ireland, NICVA Centre for Economic Empowerment, 2014.