



Briefing Paper No 17

Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland **Independent Advice to Scottish Ministers and Report – December 2013**

1. Introduction

1.1 On 13 December 2013, The Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland published its findings and recommendations on a one year study into sectarianism. The group, which was founded in August 2012 by Roseanna Cunningham MSP, the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, collected evidence on the impact that sectarianism has, analysed existing data and reported on the lessons learnt from previous work. The aim of the group's report is to raise awareness and increase discussion on sectarianism within a diverse cross section of Scottish Society; thereby promoting a more inclusive and understanding society.

2. Introduction

2.1. The groups report provided a direct view into the issue of sectarianism and the difficulties in providing a robust solution to an issue that has been prevalent in Scotland for generations. The group's analysis of the research showed that views were much divided. Some were convinced sectarianism did not exist as a major issue whilst others considered sectarianism to be ingrained and institutionalised within Scottish culture and a major issue. What the study identified was that sectarianism is still an issue, prevalent in school playgrounds, youth groups, cyberspace, sports and cultural group and remains both a local and national problem.

2.2. The report looks at what sectarianism is; the inequality, diversity and racist aspects of sectarianism are examined and solutions such as leaders being willing to affect a change that will impact on many requiring a balance to establish effective dialogue, leadership and a spirit of generosity. In essence for a new Scottish culture on sectarianism to be developed the old culture needs to be eradicated.

2.3. To achieve such an aim the group identified five areas that need to be addressed in order to facilitate an effective anti-sectarian cultural shift; leadership and a commitment to change, legislation and the robustness to implement, monitoring to evaluate effectiveness, responsibility by all involved parties to affect change and the financial support to ensure that change is achievable and longstanding.

2.4. It is evident through the research conducted that community focussed activities are already tackling sectarianism but the report identified that this work is very localised and specific to an issue. As a result there is a need for community activities to be expanded so that they can tackle the whole problem and not just localised issues.

3. Research and Recommendations

3.1. The report looks at many areas that are affected by or related to Sectarianism in Scotland; analysing the turbulent historical background, the political and religious divide and the manifestation of sectarianism today. One unexpected result of the evidence is that often communities are unaware of what exactly sectarianism is which the report attributes to how sectarianism has changed over the years. The mixture of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, actions, history and politics have resulted in a confusing mixture of drivers for sectarianism which often result in religious and historical beliefs being forgotten, replaced with a sense of “them” and “us” which the report considers is more divisive and negative for communities.

3.2. The identification of what sectarian is, quantifying its definition, differences and influences was a key aspect of the research, however to maintain a balance the report also researched what was not sectarianism and identified how sectarianism could be present without any overt signs being evident. This balanced research enables the reader to clearly understand that sectarianism is not as simple as bigotry and religious divide; it is a multifaceted problem that has developed and diversified as a result of many influences and is often ingrained in Scottish society.

3.3. The aim of the research for the report was to ensure that the assumptions made were based on robust and reliable evidence. To ensure that the research is robust and evidence based the structure examined multiple areas which include the perception of sectarianism, experiences, inequality in income, explaining differences, life choices in related communities and what is currently unknown. The research adopted a cross societal approach to ensure that national and community based evidence was collated, thereby providing a wide, robust and holistic approach within the report.

3.4. It is clear from findings that when tackling sectarianism any resistance to acknowledging sectarianism will be negative due to the realities and legacy that sectarianism has left embedded within communities. From a political stand the report states that sectarianism can only be tackled if it does not become a matter for party political competition, requiring a shared determination across all parties, financially backed and with the support of football clubs, churches and cultural organisations.

3.5. Within Scotland’s permissive environment the report identified that those in position positions of influences (church, football, local authority and cultural groups) should challenge the passive acceptance of sectarianism. In addition the Scottish Government needs to research the links between sectarianism and violence, whilst those with responsibility for activities that bring large numbers of followers together, i.e. football, churches and parades must be willing to take active steps to combat sectarianism.

3.6. Within the regulatory environments the report recommends that the Scottish Government monitor human rights, equality and hate crime legislation to ensure that it continues to be used effectively, whilst at the same time working more effectively with the Crown Office, Procurator Fiscal Service and Police Scotland to improve the application of such legislation.

3.7. To ensure that an effective database of evidence was collated the report also looked at civil leadership, politics, media, local government, policing, young people and education, community activities, churches, parades and marches, sporting events, workplaces, professions, human rights, equality and good relations, public responsibilities, mainstreaming and learning resulting in a wide and comprehensive list of recommendations aimed at addressing the issues that the research identified as factors leading to or evident in sectarian activity. The main recommendations formulated from the research evidence included:

- Leadership and Professionalism. Recommendations were made on multiple levels of leadership with the Government and local authorities equally responsible for the implementation of a whole system approach to tackling sectarianism based on evidence and evaluated to ensure effective and sustainable change. In addition the report emphasises the need to get business and trade unions involved in promoting an anti-sectarian in the workplace.
- Football. In addition to public leadership the report highlights the need for private and commercial input into change with football clubs and governing bodies being responsible for fostering an anti-sectarian message, implementing legislation and codes of conduct ensuring that players, fans, and organisations promote a change in culture and take responsibility for what is often the cause of non-religious sectarianism.
- The Media and Church. The report identified that society is often influenced by the media and the church as a result the report recommends that both the media and church are primary drivers for change. Religious groups must unite and foster a unified religious message against sectarianism, whilst the media must take responsibility for realistic and none-inflammatory reporting.
- Culture, Marching and Parades. One of the major areas where sectarianism is evident in Scotland is within the cultural, marching and parade aspect of community cultural events. The report recommended that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) take action based on evidence to balance the right to march against the rights of the community. When this balance is not achieved a dialogue should be held to try and establish a balance. In addition to dialogue a more robust code of conduct should be established which contains information on action points on sectarian behaviour. The recommendation made for the police in tackling sectarianism concentrate on the need for better training for stewards. .
- Human Rights. The evidence showed that sectarianism is an equality and diversity issue impacting on human rights, which the report recommended should be addressed by the Scottish Human Rights Commission and Equality and Human Rights Commission with evidence reporting and evaluation into promoting good practice, harmony and tolerance.
- Educations and Learning. When tackling sectarianism the report identified that education is a fundamental part of the solution with recommendations calling for a commitment to provide training and support to all staff, developing

a toolkit with resources to engage all children at all stages, implementing already established initiatives such as the Glasgow City Council Sense Over Sectarianism (SOS) model. To achieve this the report acknowledges that additional support from youth workers, youth engagement schemes, social services and the education system would be required and recommends a joint initiative to tackle sectarianism, backed by policy and supported with funding.

- **Projects.** The existing anti-sectarian campaigns are an essential aspect of promoting the message; however the report calls for evaluation of projects to ensure that all funded community projects are evaluated to better understand the impact and analyse approaches to ensure the best delivery, effectiveness and financial value. The report emphasises that to progress and learn evaluation must be conducted so that successes can be highlighted and lessons drawn out and disseminated with tool kits created to show best practice. In addition the Scottish Government must look at establishing a national standard framework that is delivered Scotland wide.

4. Conclusion

4.1. In conclusion the report is a well evidenced study of sectarianism, identifying that sectarianism is not a single issue phenomenon, it is linked inextricably to Scottish history, divided by region, sport, culture, generational bias and bigotry. As a result the research has had to look at multiple areas of society, its people, governance, culture and ideology none of which can provide a single solution. The report makes it clear that sectarianism is a cross party, cross community issue that will requires a large amount of input and impetus from leadership, religious organisations, private and public business, sports and culture to ensure that any progress is made on defeating sectarianism.

4.2. The report also identifies that there is a great deal of excellent work being conducted by anti-sectarian projects but this needs to be evaluated so that lessons learnt locally can be disseminated nationally, ensuring that the necessary demographics are targeted and issues such as generational divide, schools and education, youth service and projects and community initiatives are effectively evaluated so that the excellent local work that is being conducted is fed into future plans and initiatives on tackle sectarianism.

4.3 The report is a comprehensive evidenced based look at sectarianism in Scotland; deals with realistic truths and tracks how sectarianism has changed and evolved into something new and more divisive and covert. The report effectively highlights the drivers and documents how people perceive sectarianism which adds a humanistic dimension to the findings and recommendations of this report. It is evident after reading this report that for changes to be implemented commitment, acceptance and determination, supported by appropriate funding and evaluation, will need to be implemented to ensure that sectarianism is acknowledged, discussed and irradiated.