

DEFINITION OF SECTARIANISM WORKING GROUP:

DISCUSSION PAPER: MEDIA HANDLING

Purpose

1. This paper is to allow the group to consider how best they wish to deal with media enquiries.

Background

2. We are aware that there will be a significant level of media interest in the work of the group. This is likely to come from a range of different sources:

- **Mainstream/national media** – both print and broadcast media – have taken an interest in sectarianism and continue to feature stories on this issue, although these are most often in relation to football or, to a lesser extent, marches and parades. Interest from this source is likely to be most intense at the point the group's findings, conclusions and recommendations are published.
- **Local media** – interest from this source is most likely to come from papers based in areas where sectarianism is an issue for the local community. As such, they are likely to be interested in reporting any work that is being taken forward to tackle the issue.
- **Specialist media** – this could be specialist in the sense of representing a constituent group with a specific interest in tackling sectarianism (for example, the Irish community; the Catholic community; or football supporters), but may also come from legal and policing journals or journals and newsletters aimed at third sector organisations working in communities.

Consideration

3. It should be noted that responding is entirely a matter for the group and there is no obligation for the group to respond to all, or indeed any, media enquiries they receive. It is also open to the group to proactively engage with the media to highlight the work they are taking forward, but the appropriateness of doing this would need to be carefully considered. However, it is important that the group is consistent in the way that they chose to respond, or not respond, to such enquiries, and this paper is to help the group reach a clear agreement on this.

4. It is likely that any media enquiries will either go directly to the Chair of the group or to the Scottish Government which is providing the secretariat to the group. It is not for the Scottish Government/secretariat to respond to such enquiries, so all approaches will be passed directly to the group via whatever process the group agrees. However, it would be helpful for the secretariat to be sent all of the enquiries received so that these can be responded to in a coordinated way.

5. It may be difficult to coordinate the whole group in relation to responding to the media, particularly if they are seeking a comment by a relatively short deadline. Therefore the group should consider whether they wish to appoint a specific spokesperson to deal with all media enquiries. It is common practice for this to be the Chair of the group.

6. It may also be helpful for the group to develop a clear set of lines which can be used to ensure responses to any enquiries are clear and consistent. There already exists a one page document which sets out the group's remit and membership, and this is in the public domain so can be sent to anyone who is interested. Media enquiries which the group would need to consider responding to would therefore be additional to this.

7. The group will therefore wish to consider which, if any, types of enquiries they would respond to, and some basic principles for doing this may be helpful. For example, these could include:

- Media enquiries which seek to pre-empt the findings of the group should be given standard responses confirming that work is on-going without setting out any likely findings or conclusions.
- Media enquiries about who the group has met with can be answered, but generally the responses should stick to organisation names and not the names of individuals who attended the meeting.
- The issues discussed at the meetings should not be discussed in response to media enquiries – this could be seen to undermine the finding of the group.
- Group members can confirm on social media that they are participating in the group, but should not reveal the content of specific discussions on social media.
- Personal attacks on individual members of the group, made through social media or otherwise, should not be responded to. In the first instance these should be highlighted to the Chair and secretariat to consider how best to respond.

Conclusion

8. Group members are invited to consider how they wish to deal with any media enquiries and advise the Chair and secretariat accordingly.

**Working Group Secretariat
April 2018**