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NWCN Response RE: EQIA on Resolution to make application to the Privy Council to have the name of the City changed from Londonderry to Derry

North-West Community Network is a community development, membership-led organisation that provides support to the Community & Voluntary sector in the North-West by way of advocacy and representation at various levels, support in terms of dissemination of public policy information and interpretation and a focal point for the sector in the area.

North-West Community Network welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the EQIA consultation process in relation to the proposed Derry City Council resolution on having the name of the city changed from Londonderry to Derry. It also commends that the EQIA has actually been applied, thus evidencing aspects of leadership in promoting the effective use of equality legislation.

North-West Community Network has been involved in a range of discussions with its membership on this issue, and is informed significantly by its role in the ongoing regeneration process as well as by the organisation's guiding principles of equality, inclusion and participation.

As an organisation with membership and connection to community & voluntary sector organisations from communities of all types and identities, NWCN's own long-standing practice has been to promote tolerance and accommodation by using the two most-

recognised labels for this city (Derry and Londonderry) in combination as an address and correspondence item. This said, the organisation by default exhibits an awareness of the range of identities that inhabit/use this city through adopting the nomenclature of choice where this is indicated or clearly suggested.

The reasons for the organisation adopting this approach stem from a consideration of realities, rights and responsibilities:

It is reality that the inhabitants of this city do not have uniform practice in how they describe the place where they live, work or study.

It is the right of every person living in, working in or otherwise referring to this city to do so in a manner of their choosing and in a way that meets their needs.

It is the responsibility of principled-organisations such as NWCN and of local government authorities with civic duties and functions to promote equality, in all its forms, so that the realities and rights referred to above are recognised and protected.

The origin of and rhetoric surrounding this resolution has made reference to:

- responding to the desire of the “vast majority of the citizens”
- addressing “the confusion that exists among investors and tourists” - often referred to as the marketing argument.

NWCN finds it difficult to fully accept the primary claim that the vast majority of our citizens desire this change when Derry City Council’s own telephone research, the most recent available on this matter, indicates that 43% of 1000 respondents had “No Strong Views” and an additional 43% find the city’s current name either Acceptable or Very Acceptable. This interpretative or statistical anomaly aside, NWCN feels that the majoritarian approach to decision-making is not viable in relation to civic matters for this city, and certainly not on this issue given the sensibilities involved. As a community development organisation, NWCN believes that the consensus approach is that which provides the best opportunity for the accommodation of all identities.

It is well known that particular fears have been expressed from within the PUL community that, this resolution having already been passed by majority vote, this EQIA will simply bring this matter to another seemingly democratic process which, given the make-up of Derry City Council, can only lead to one outcome. Of course the EQIA process is designed to allow for consideration of differential impacts of any proposed course of action - equality legislation exists as a bulwark against dominance-based decision-making and as a means of safeguarding the rights of minorities and less visible communities. It is to be hoped that this EQIA is handled with total integrity, devoid of political motivation and informed utterly by commentary on what impact a forced name change might bring about.

Council's own research indicates that 75% of those from the Protestant community prefer to use the name Londonderry - a majority-led decision to remove this name at this time creates therefore an immediate negative differential impact, on the Protestant community and on each of the Section 75 groups that this identity-based community inevitably contains. By extension, such a negative impact would have an equally negative seepage effect on the whole community at this time in terms of community relations, at a time when the NI Executive is expected to finally deliver on its "Cohesion, Sharing & Integration" strategy. Are we in the business of undermining the next step towards "A Shared Future"?

NWCN's involvement in the Strategy Board and in the "One Plan" regeneration process permits the organisation to note that the level of participation by the PUL community has been identified as an area of concern at each key juncture, notably at this year's "Changing Patterns - Changing Outcomes" event and in the evolving Sectoral Working Groups. While in no way presenting reaction to a name change as a legitimate premise for non- or disengagement, if there are options yet to be fully explored that might divert this position from being adopted, this can be the only route to pursue.

In terms of confusion or any other presentation of the marketing argument that suggests only one name will do, in as much as the claim might be made that the dual labelling

has generated some level of misunderstanding, no evidence has been presented either that the singular usage of Derry will immediately provide clarity, or indeed that Derry is the only option that can respond to such economic factors. The resolution as presented is therefore once again liable to cause negative differential impact to all groups who stand to lose out from economic consequences - those already in deprivation or suffering various forms of poverty are especially at risk here, and these interests are not themselves covered by equality legislation.


It is NWCN's considered view that taking this resolution to the Privy Council at this time:

- is based on far from robust statistical data;
- runs the major risk of alienating a sizeable proportion of the city's population;
- does not necessarily remove confusion over the city's name or guarantee economic benefits - no case has been presented that proves this assertion.

NWCN advocates a thorough analysis of the responses generated by this EQIA, that Derry City Council seeks to examine a consensus resolution to this matter, and that this leads to genuine community engagement approaches that may identify options that can respond more effectively to the two constructs of this resolution.

NWCN believes that this exercise can usefully lead to a more inclusive approach to engagement - on the city name issue but also with potential application to future city/regional issues. This organisation, as it has done in the past, is more than willing to help facilitate such actions, confident that only this way can the negative differential impacts of a forced name change be avoided.

With Regards



Colin Devine

On behalf of North-West Community Network