

6 Recommendations

81. This section sets out the implications of the research for the development of a response to the *Shared Future* process. It is clear from the forgoing analysis that much of the activity the Executive implements, supports or partners others on is not fully acknowledged in contributing to a broadly based and coherent community relations approach.
82. Therefore issues are set out here for consideration although it would be possible to develop these into a coherent statement of the Housing Executives approach to equality and community relations in Northern Ireland.
83. It should be emphasised at the outset that the Housing Executive should, in responding to *A Shared Future* challenge OFMDFM to set in place an effective strategic and operational structure to allow all the relevant agencies and interests outside Government to work together in residential segregation. Progress on very specific initiatives such as flags and graffiti could be supported by the appropriate integrating mechanisms and one idea was to develop the Community Action Group as a mechanism to allow this to happen.

The need for a clear statement on community relations policy

84. There is a consensus among community relations policy sector and activists that the Housing Executive need to make a clear statement about its response to the *Shared Future* process. The policy response should *inter alia* explain the Housing Executives analysis of circumstances, the limits to policy and the need for monitoring and review as the basis of a flexible and adaptive approach. What might not be possible now could be considered in five and ten years. The Executive should relate this analyses to a statement of principles, which are attempted below.
85. Operational planning and programmes sit within the context of high-level strategic objectives and organisational values. The first set of core values for the organisation are *fairness and equity* and the proposed policy approach sits within this organisational aspiration. Two relevant *key objectives* deal with equality (1) and regeneration (7) and set the framework to consider embedding the activities identified below within organisational planning and monitoring systems.

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Table 10 Key objectives of the Housing Executive

KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE HOUSING EXECUTIVE
Objective 1: To ensure that all social housing programmes and services are delivered in a manner which is demonstrably fair and equitable on the basis of objective assessment of need;
Objective 2: To reduce unfitness and improve housing conditions in all tenures in Northern Ireland and promote high standards of housing design;
Objective 3: To work with Housing Associations, private developers, private landlords and other providers and interests to ensure affordable housing choice across the range of tenure options;
Objective 4: To deliver excellent housing services;
Objective 5: To improve services and develop wider access to the Housing Executive's services through new means of service delivery under the Modernising Government initiative;
Objective 6: To promote Energy Conservation (as Northern Ireland's Home Energy Conservation Authority) with a view to improving energy efficiency throughout the residential sector;
Objective 7: To promote social inclusion by tackling environmental, social and economic problems in co-operation with the communities affected and with other agencies in a co-ordinated programme of urban and rural regeneration and community development;
Objective 8: To shape and influence the development of housing policy through research, market analysis and information and advice services.

86. The Housing Executive should consider the following community relations aims linked to the delivery of these high level objectives:

- a. To respond quickly and effectively to the needs of people in danger as a result of community conflict in Northern Ireland;
- b. To facilitate and encourage integrated housing as far as this is practical, desirable and safe;
- c. To recognise the desire of some people to live in segregated areas and to work in partnership with others to address the complex housing needs of a divided society.

Principles for community relations policy

87. At the outset, it may be worth explaining the values or principles upon which a policy response might be based and from the research these might centre on five themes:

- Safety is paramount in that no policy or programme action should endanger the lives of people, communities or property;
- Freedom of choice is a value that the Housing Executive has always recognised and it is important to point out that integrated housing options can not be forced on tenants through Government policy;
- Partnership should be an important value underpinning the analysis of problems and programme responses to segregation, integration and territoriality. Clearly the problems identified and the responses envisaged require an integrated approach in which the Housing Executive is one important stakeholder;

- Equality of opportunity is a statutory obligation and value that has been embedded in the organisation since its creation;
- Social need has also informed housing policy in this area and need-led planning and resource allocation will continue to set the context for housing policy in segregated areas.

Policy to respond effectively to the management of conflict

88. The Executive has already developed clear policies and programmes to address the housing effects both intra and inter community conflict. For example, the *Community Relations and Community Safety Strategy* recognises that the agency has a clear process for dealing with intimidation and whilst this is important it needs to be placed in the context of more positive actions the Executive are already involved in. Similarly, the SPED system is in place to deal with the practical effects of intimidation and has worked effectively to ensure that the housing system is sensitive to violence and its effects on property and people. The Executive has also put in place Emergency Planning systems to deal with inter and intra community conflict especially during the marching season and at times of high sectarian tension. This has worked effectively to deal with the short-term crises in which alternative and safe housing is a priority.

Working in partnership with other agencies

89. It was recognised that the Housing Executive are only one of a number of agencies involved in the management of territoriality and segregation. The Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, *People and Place*, provides an important platform for the Executive to contribute to the stabilisation of mixed estates and the management of contested places. *People and Place* describes the need for action on community relations and in particular the need to connect with housing management and regeneration programmes in individual estates. The Housing Executive, through their *Housing and Regeneration Division* has already put in place an active programme of 'neighbourhood renewal', which provides linkages with the DSD strategy.
90. This could build on effective relationships with other agencies put in place to deal with issues including flags and graffiti. For example, the Housing Executive has developed a good working partnership with Belfast City Council, at senior and operational levels, to tackle segregation as part of the Council's initiative on anti-sectarianism within and between communities.
91. It is important that the Executive makes explicit the work carried out at this level on community development, removing graffiti and sectional symbols, managing the demographics of the stock, special initiatives including the Common Ground Consortium and the potential impact of work with Habitat for

Humanity to introduce an element of housing integration. It is also important to recognise the role that the Executive programmes play in planning and urban regeneration strategy in highly contested places including URBAN II in North Belfast and the PEACE II interface pilot neighbourhood renewal areas.

Spatial planning

92. We noted earlier that the new form of spatial housing strategies do make reference to the implications of conflict in local plans. This needs to be recognised and identified as a contribution to local community relations in the broadest sense. However, there is scope to develop this approach especially given policy commitments in the Regional Development Strategy on segregation and integration (see SPG 3 on Community Cohesion) and the DSD urban regeneration programmes. This could involve specific statements on the context of territoriality where relevant and initiatives to reduce conflict, manage supply in sensitive ways and facilitate and encourage integration. Both the Derry and the North Belfast Housing Strategies attempt to do this and should be seen as the basis for models of good practice in other areas.

Housing management

93. *People and Place* provides a mechanism for housing management policy to underpin regeneration of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the region. However, the research here suggests that the Executive has undersold the level, intensity and diversity of activity at housing management level to deal with sectarian graffiti, managing estate stability, disputes over bonfires, work with police, work with communities through District Consumer Panels and liaison with local groups (often including paramilitary elements). There was also evidence that some District Managers felt that the Centre did not always support these difficult and at times, personally dangerous interventions. It is clear that local initiatives and risk taking need to be valued and supported by the organisation through more tailored training, support systems and pastoral care.

NITAP

94. It is also clear that NITAP has facilitated better inter and intra-community relations by establishing tenant structures, skilling local people and supporting fora (such as Consumer Panels) that offer opportunities for people from very different traditions to meet and mix around mainstream housing and regeneration issues. NITAP point out that this is an *outcome* rather than objective of what they do and that community sharing and reciprocity is a natural process that flows from their work. As with many other interventions, NITAP is concerned about over-publicity especially where it could destroy the tenuous trust that is being built across the ethno-religious divide. However,

given that this work is adding real value to community relations the Housing Executive should consider negotiating with NITAP to have cross-community contact and trust building around commonly confronted issues a more explicit part of the organisations work. This might be presented as a *networking* function that could support a number of cross-community initiatives and structures. It was noted that the Housing Executive has attempted to place the issue of chill factors on the agendas of the CAGS across Northern Ireland and this function could help to facilitate these discussions.

Intensive management process: *wardens*

95. It was pointed out in the case studies that the warden system has helped to reduce sectarian graffiti inter-community conflict, anti-social behaviour among young people. Again, it is important to recognise that the warden service has the potential to add further to community relations within and between estates. This may involve more explicit training in this area but already there is the potential for wardens to connect with locally based networks and cross-community organisations.

Learning through practice

96. It is clear from this analysis that the Housing Executive has built up a wide range of operational expertise in the management of conflict and in initiatives to reduce tension. The experiences of removing graffiti in contested areas, cross-community environmental schemes or emergency response planning indicate the diversity and depth of practice within the organisation. The Executive should consider auditing and describing these interventions, looking at other projects (e.g. the work of the Belfast Interface Project) and make the material available both internally and externally. This could be an important resource as well as an opportunity for the organisation to demonstrate progress on this issue. One Manager mentioned that an information pack would be a valuable tool when supporting worthwhile initiatives in regeneration and inter-community development at estate level. The development of practice through learning from previous experience is also a positive, creative and far-reaching response to community relations in Northern Ireland more generally.

Intelligence and monitoring community relations

97. There is an acceptance across sectors including OFMDFM, community relations and equality that the context within which housing operates is a fluid and dynamic one. The Executive has important monitoring (or intelligence systems) as part of its role as the strategic housing agency for the region. In fact the Housing Executive has, since the PSI studies in the late 1980s, routinely measured the impact of its policies and programmes on both religious. For example, the latest House Condition Survey has identified differences in the

housing stock for both religions whilst the Executive has measured public and tenant attitudes to segregated and integrated living since the early 1990s. The criticism might be that this information does not translate into specific policies or initiatives but it is clear from the evidence presented here that implicit or not explicit connections can be made. A consistent theme here is that these connections need to be more explicit especially as we noted earlier that more recent strategy documents have made reference to statistical differences in the demographics of the two main religions and how that in turn relates to housing planning, especially in new build provision.

Strategic policies that have an effect on community stability

98. It should be emphasised that mainstream policies have both positive and negative impacts on community stability, integration and segregation. For example, it was pointed out that allocations and transfers facilitate segregation and some of the more radical comments in the interviews suggested that the Executive should explicitly manage the Waiting List to secure integrated housing outcomes. However, the corollary is also true. It was noted during the case studies that the House Sales policy has created community stability, which in turn has reinforced the ethnic-religious cohesion of some mixed estates. Whilst it has not been the intended effect of the policy it is important for the Executive to identify policies and initiatives that have positive impacts on integration rather than being defensive about practices, such as allocation choices, over which they have limited control.
99. Related to this, it is clear that building up community infrastructure and capacities has also had a positive effect on community relations, muting sectarianism and creating possibilities for contact that were not there before. It is interesting to look at Coleraine in this context. Certainly, the conditions for the development of integrated housing are not there at present but the slow and incremental development of tenant associations through participation is an investment that is starting to yield greater stability and less sectarian volatility, in some cases at least. OFMDFM have suggested that developing community capacity, especially in Protestant areas is an important pre-requisite for better community relations in interface areas, evidenced by their recent investment in North Belfast.

Programmes that have a direct impact on community relations

100. The opening section described a number of initiatives and projects that address directly the housing effects of a divided society. These need to be clearly identified with connections made between them and with related

policies as part of a more comprehensive approach to the management of segregation and integration. The three initiatives below each identify one of the three objectives suggested above including response to crises (Mediation Network), the effects of contested places (Common Ground) and the possibilities for integration (Habitat for Humanity). We know that these individual initiatives have not been conceived nor implemented in this way but placed in a stronger strategic framework, they do demonstrate operational commitment to deliver better community relations through housing policy down to the level of implementation. The key initiatives include:

- The Common Ground Consortium involves the Housing Executive working in partnership to develop community led environmental regeneration projects in contested neighbourhoods;
- Mediation Network involves the Housing Executive in the development of projects, systems and skills to address neighbourhood disputes across Northern Ireland. As noted before this project could be used to support housing management skills in interface areas, especially when resolving issues such as flags and sectarian graffiti;
- Habitat for Humanity involves the Housing Executive in the support of key strategically placed housing initiatives designed to improve the stability of mixed estates in conjunction with mainstream Estate Action and housing management practices at locality level. Again the Housing Executive need to take a strategic decision to support this initiative but this action would make an important contribution to the development of a policy response to *A Shared Future*.

101. The possibility of planning and developing an integrated estate should not be overlooked at this stage. It is recognised that it may be difficult to 'badge' the initiative in an open way and that with other issues much of the work on segregation and integration cannot be overtly publicised. For some interventions this could destroy or damage well-intentioned housing developments or community relations initiatives. Such a development would involve a major interagency commitment, which would require variations to the Common Selection Scheme and careful analysis about its long-term feasibility and security.

Structures and relationships

102. It was noted above that the Housing Executive can only effectively deal with contested places and integration in partnership with other interest and it is clear that the Housing Executive are represented on many structures that are designed to facilitate joined up management of territoriality and conflict. These include both external and internal arrangements:

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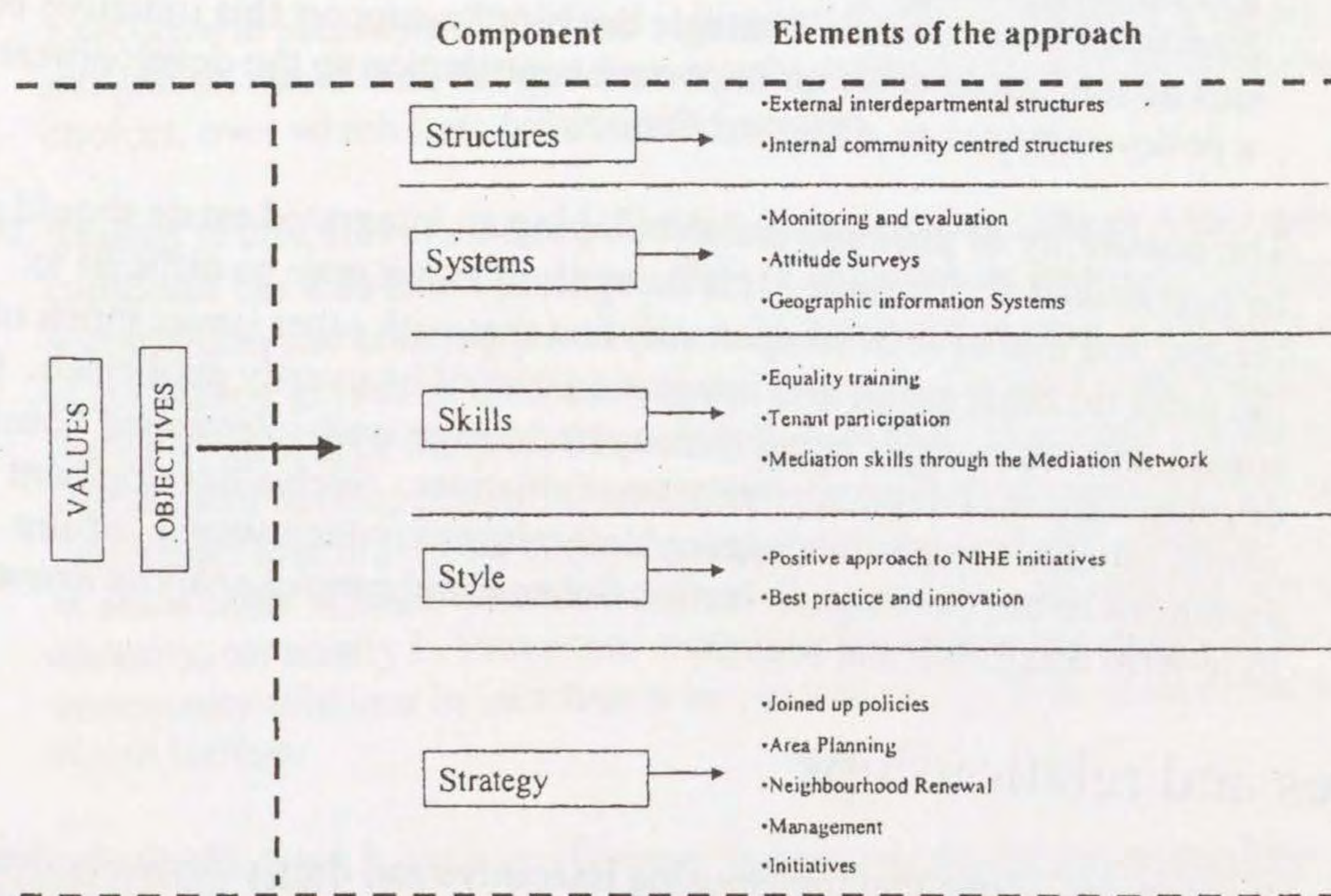
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- The Housing Executive are represented on a number of important structures including the DSD *Interdepartmental Steering Group on Neighbourhood Renewal* and on the OFMDFM *Community Action Group on Interfaces* and play an active role on these bodies. This high level strategic commitment needs to be explicitly identified in the response to the *Shared Future* process.
- Internal structures relate to the Consumer Panels operating at Regional, Area and District levels as noted above but the point here is that there is an organisational infrastructure in place to actively pursue community relations objectives including responding to crises, managing segregation and contributing to integrated housing.

Summarising the approach

103. The diagrams below attempt to summarise some components of a response to the *Shared Future* and what they might mean in terms of policies and implementation programmes. The diagram below suggests that a comprehensive response can best be thought of in terms of strategy development (including values and aims), structures, systems, skills and style as a convenient way of categorising the material presented above.

Figure 7 Summary of the main components of a strategic response to A Shared Future



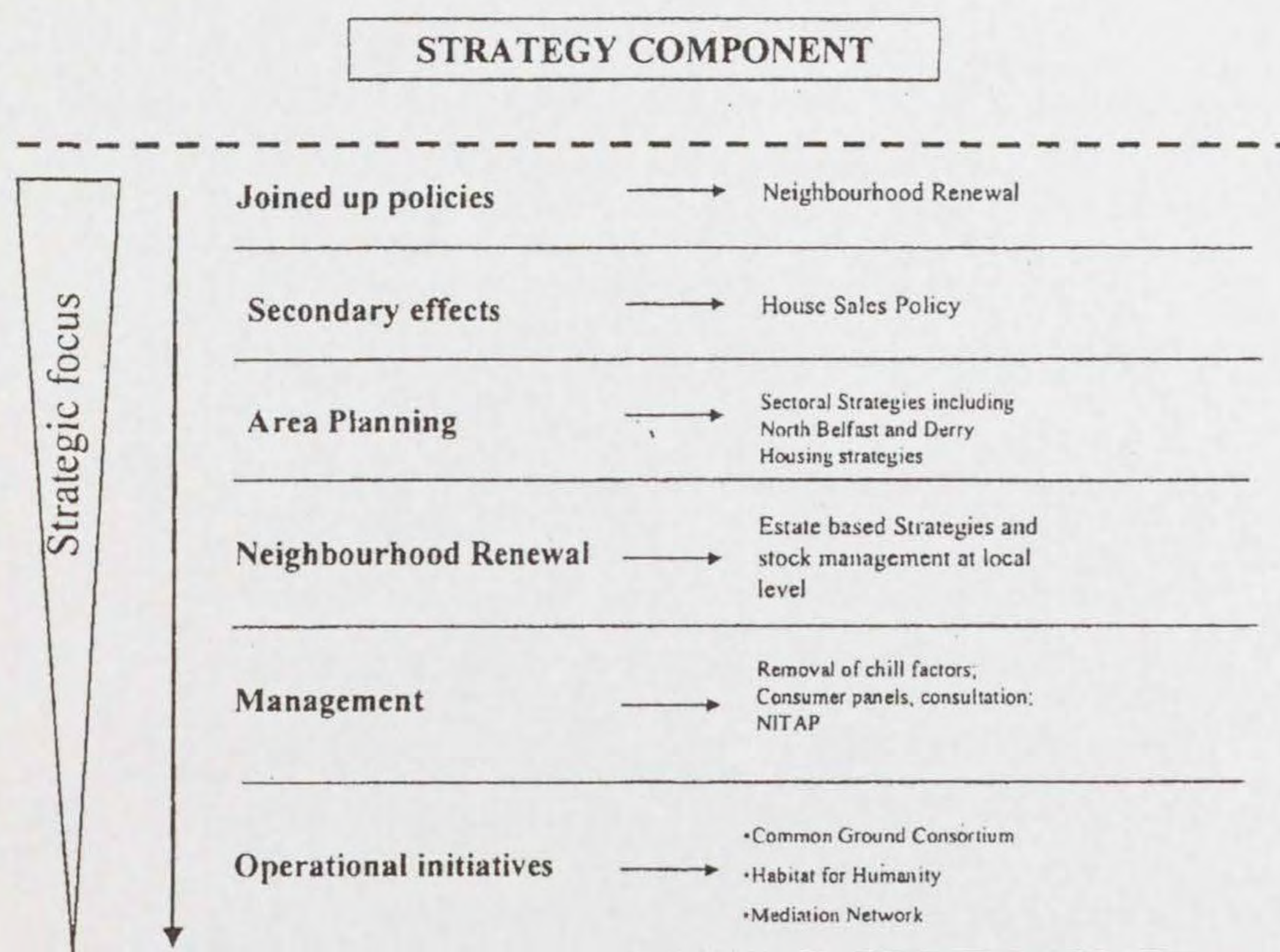
104. The diagram shows that there is a need to reinforce some systems especially with the availability of small area statistics and the capacity of the GIS Unit to present more detailed analysis of the spatial distribution of

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segregation and what this might mean for Housing Executive estates. It also suggests that we need to think more carefully about the skills that might be required especially at housing management level to deal with the role of paramilitaries and sectional symbols across Northern Ireland. It was recognised that, by necessity, work with paramilitaries or delicate cross-community projects cannot be publicised in an open way, but there is an opportunity for the Executive to more forcefully set out its contribution to community relations in Northern Ireland. This will be especially important of the Housing Executive can develop programmes and address some gaps in support and skills provision. Some of the practices and models of intervention such as the work under the *Common Ground Consortium* could be more effectively show cased within and outside Northern Ireland in terms of community relations and regeneration work.

105. The diagram below develops the strategy component of the overall framework. This suggests that the Executive can describe a multi-level and multi-functional approach to community relations from high level strategic commitments to more focused operational programmes. Clearly, the effective implementation of this approach requires significant developments in the individual initiatives, strategy objectives and connections within and between policies.

Figure 8 Strategy and community relations work in the Housing Executive



7 Conclusions

106. This report has demonstrated the extent of progress in housing policy in a divided society. The Housing Executive has assembled a wide range of systems, instruments and practices that have made a meaningful contribution to addressing segregation and promoting integration. This represents significant policy progress in the last five years but needs to be supported, developed and networked more carefully in order to be effective.