



## **Social Investment Fund**

### **Forthspring Inter Community Group Response**

#### **Introduction**

Forthspring Inter Community Group is committed to working with local people in the Springfield/Woodvale area and promoting good relations within and between these communities. Forthspring is situated on the Falls/Shankill interface and has over 10 years experience of providing services on a cross community basis.

Our vision is of a diverse and peaceful community, where all people are free to live with dignity, hope, respect and understanding.

Forthspring has been successful in providing a much needed safe and welcoming environment where people from both communities can meet and find a different way from the violence and division of the past.

Forthspring brings together Protestants and Catholics to increase tolerance, understanding and trust by supporting people to talk about their religious, cultural and political similarities and differences within a safe space as well as engaging in social and educational activities on a shared basis.

Using a community development approach, a range of programmes are delivered that bring together people of all ages to interact across the wall and to break down barriers. These include youth provision, work with men and women, mothers and toddlers, after schools and senior citizens. Current projects include a local history project, an innovative community engagement programme and planning for your future that engages local people in exploring the potential for social and economic development and the changing planning environment.

Forthspring welcomes the publication of the Social Investment Fund proposals, the investment of £80m and the commitment 'to reduce poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration in areas through area based interventions of significant scale which will be delivered in partnership with communities'.

## Summary of Response

- Whilst the approach is sound and the amount of funding significant it is unlikely that the resources allocated are sufficient to meet the extent of the problems being addressed. Assuming that the resources identified are fixed the number of areas targeted should be reduced to ensure that real change is achieved. As the document stands there is no clear rationale supporting how the investment zones have been established.
- Concerns have been raised that the Fund will reproduce existing community divisions. The allocation of resources and the delivery mechanisms should be structured in such a way that they actively challenge sectarian divisions and cut across existing political and administrative boundaries. The Fund, were possible, should actively support the creation of shared space.
- Delivery mechanisms should be established that are both representative of the whole community in investment zone areas and structured to ensure real community engagement, including the development of new ways to encourage participation. The idea of community conventions is useful but they should be seen as the top of a pyramid of engagement activities, not as a means of signalling community consent.
- Appointments to steering groups should be an open and fair process, based on an individual's record of delivery and commitment to ensuring the widest community engagement possible.
- This should be an opportunity to develop on the community planning pilots that are currently being evaluated and to build on these. Forthspring would welcome an attempt to progress a cross interface community planning model at the interface where a more joined up approach is vital.

21<sup>st</sup> December 2011