

# **DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL GOOD RELATIONS FORUM**

## ***DRAFT***

### ***Good Relations Policy on Flags in Public Spaces in Down District***

#### **Purpose of this Policy**

To make all public spaces in Down District more welcoming to local residents and visitors and to implement in practice agreed mutual respect based on equality and the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements.

#### **Consultation on Draft Policy**

Consultation with local people and key stakeholders is essential for strategic planning and policy development. Down District Council is committed to involving our customers in the consultation process from the outset, allowing them a chance to shape the Council's policy as it directly affects their well-being and their quality of life.

Down District Council is committed to listening to the views of local people and wants to ensure that they have the opportunity to be involved in the policy development of flying flags in public spaces.

Down District Council will endeavour to involve residents in the consultation process as early as possible to allow real input into the decision making process. Customers will not feel that crucial decisions have been made prior to or without their participation. An early involvement will also help promote community interest in the development of this policy.

A Consultation Strategy will be developed which will contain clearly defined objectives and the nature of the consultees' involvement will be made known at an initial stage of the process.

The implementation of this strategy will ensure that Down District Council is open and responds well to customers' views and that the local community is involved in identifying needs and priorities that will impact policy development at an early stage.

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### Background to Policy on Flags

All six political parties represented on Down District Council subscribe to the Good Friday Agreement as amended at St Andrews. As a result of this we are committed to working together to resolve difficult issues involving national identity, culture and differing views on the history of conflict in our community. We intend to work together to find solutions based on mutual respect. We note some relevant points from the Peace Agreement;

- a) Formulation of a general obligation on government and public bodies fully to respect, on the basis of equality of treatment, the identity and ethos of both communities in Northern Ireland.
- b) An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society.
- c) All participants acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division.
- d) We are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland.

### 4. Policy on Flags

- a) The policy is that the identity and culture of each community should be celebrated and respected by the entire population in the Down District Council area.
- b) The policy accepts that flags will be used by each community as a means of celebration of traditional events, political and cultural commemorations.
- c) It is the aspiration of the Good Relations Forum that identifiable community groups or organisations with a constitution and a means of being contacted about issues arising from this policy will be permitted to erect flags in Down district.
- d) Provincial flags, county and council flags, community flags, sporting flags, religious flags and cultural flags are all acceptable under this policy.
- e) Paramilitary flags are not acceptable.
- f) Flags are important emblems and international protocols exist for the respect and protection of flags. Flags should never be fastened, displayed, used or stored in such a manner as to permit them to be easily torn, soiled or damaged in any way.
- g) Flags should never be used for demarcation of territory or intimidation. They should be erected before an event and then taken down within reasonable timescales of between 1-14 days. Consultation with communities is planned to establish what is considered to be a reasonable timescale.

***[See Appendix 1 for examples of current practice in Down District]***

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### **5. Implementation of Policy on Flags**

1. Before the draft policy is put to council, the individual party representatives on the committee should report back that the policy has the support of their party.
2. The policy will be passed as an all-party resolution at a full council meeting. A majority of each party on the council is required for the draft policy to be passed.
3. There should be public consultation of the draft agreed in council before it is finalised and ratified. (This consultation could be facilitated by the community relations staff in council, helped by Mediation NI in contentious areas.)
4. Council officers and committee members will seek to sign up organisers of events, parades and commemorations around Down District.
5. Where these organisations currently have a policy that fits into the broad parameters above, they will be expected to keep to their traditional arrangements and not “average upwards” to the maximum leeway given to any other group.
6. Where organisations or collections of individuals in certain areas do not conform to the above broad parameters, conciliation and mediation will be attempted through the auspices of the Good Relations Forum.

Approved by Down District Council 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009

**Examples of what is considered reasonable is reflected in the examples below;**

- a. Castlewellan and District Orange Order – flags erected and taken down same day.
- b. Republican Movement in Castlewellan – flags erected and taken down over a 48-hour period during the Easter Weekend.
- c. Republican Movement in Downpatrick – both erected and taken down on Easter Monday.
- d. St. Patricks Day Parade - flags erected a few days before and taken down as soon as possible after – the flags fly for no more than a week.
- e. The Saintfield and District Orange Order – flags erected for the “July Fortnight” only.
- f. Local sports clubs may celebrate successes –e.g. getting into the semi-finals or finals of a competition - and have flags and emblems celebrating their achievements for up to a fortnight.
- g. Minority communities may erect flags for their cultural celebrations for up to a week. – e.g. Chinese New Year or a success by the Polish soccer team.
- h. The Royal Black Preceptory always flies a flag on the last day in August.
- i. Orange Halls traditionally fly the Union flag outside their buildings in July and August.
- j. Down District Council agreed in 2000 that Council will fly only the neutral Council flag on ceremonial and all other occasions except on St Patrick’s Day when the St Patrick’s flag is flown.