



To develop, empower and transform disadvantaged  
Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities

An Introductory Guide

# What is a Community Convention?

There is no set format for a Community Convention. Each Convention will be tailored to local circumstances. The Company and all local representatives will agree the most suitable format to fulfil the aims of a Convention.



## What are the aims of a Convention?

### The aims are simple:

- To encourage and reinforce individual and community confidence
- To improve relationships within disadvantaged Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities and with government
- To develop a positive vision for disadvantaged Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities
- To identify areas for action e.g. capacity
- To lobby for policy change
- The values which underpin a Community Convention are inclusiveness and transparency.

## What is the process for developing a Convention?

### There is a four step development path for a Convention:

**Step One** - The Company receives an expression of interest in holding a Convention from local community group(s), church organisation(s) or public representative(s). The Company will consult with all relevant organisations in the area to see if there is a consensus about holding such an event. If a consensus exists, the Company will work with interested parties to establish a Local Area Committee, reflective of the diversity of the PUL community. This committee, with the support of the Company, will define the nature of the Convention and develop a full proposal.

**Step Two** - This full proposal will be presented to the Company Board who will decide which level of support it can provide under three options.

**Step Three** - The Convention is held and a series of recommendations will be agreed with participants. These will be produced in report form.

**Step Four** - The recommendations that impact upon policy will be pursued with

government through a roundtable with senior government representatives and any project ideas will be developed and delivered by the local grassroots organisations. Progress on these ideas and recommendations will be regularly reported to participants.

### What support can the Company offer?

The Company envisages that it can offer three options of support to the development of Conventions:

**Option One** - Staff and financial resources for the three anticipated Conventions.

**Option Two** - Staff support to other communities interested in developing and delivering a Convention in the next eighteen months to two years. Those who fulfil the values of Conventions will be awarded a kite-mark to demonstrate the high standard the event has achieved.

**Option Three** - Preparatory support for areas planning Conventions after the hopefully successful pilot stage.

## Where will the Conventions be held?

The Company wishes to see the Convention approach spread across Northern Ireland. To fulfil this commitment, the Company has divided the Province into four areas (based on parliamentary constituencies) and it hopes to see a Convention held in each of these areas by a community before December 2006.

As this is the pilot phase, the Company wishes to use the Convention model in a cross-section of communities with different experiences and circumstances. Therefore, in its allocation of the four pilots it will prioritise:

- A Belfast PUL community
- A rural PUL community
- A town with a majority PUL community
- A town with a minority PUL community

However, the Company is committed to a high degree of flexibility in all its work and decision-making.

### How will the areas be chosen?

In the event of more than one community seeking a Convention, the Company will apply agreed selection criteria. The Company has made its options for support as flexible as possible to ensure it supports as many communities as possible. However, it is likely demand for Conventions will be greater than the Company has the resources to support so choices will have to be made.

Area Name	Parliamentary Constituencies
North-East Ulster	East Antrim, East Londonderry, North Antrim, South Antrim
South-West Ulster	Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Foyle, Mid-Ulster, Newry & Armagh, West Tyrone
South-East Ulster	Lagan Valley, North Down, South Down, Strangford, Upper Bann
Greater Belfast	Belfast East, Belfast North, Belfast South, Belfast West

### Origins

In March 2003, an ad-hoc group of politicians and community leaders (known as The Think Tank) met informally to discuss the state and future of local Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities (PUL).

After a few months of discussion it was agreed it was imperative that a programme to 'Transform Loyalist Communities' should be developed. The analysis was based on the strong belief that while many issues of deprivation are common to disadvantaged communities across Northern Ireland, there were issues, experiences and dynamics that are particular and distinct to PUL communities.

The Think Tank believed mainstream government programmes were failing to effectively address PUL community problems and if transformation was to be achieved it would require a particular focus and special programmes. These issues express themselves, for example, around levels of educational underachievement, population decline/imbalance, paramilitarism, physical degeneration, alienation and stigmatisation governed by a sense of loss.

### The Convention model

A number of the Think Tank members had been involved with the first Shankill Convention, a community based response to the devastating paramilitary feud.

The Greater Shankill Community Convention, held in May/June 2002, was organised around a two-day exhibition emphasising community achievements. It involved over eighty local interests and was followed by two days of discussions around key local issues facing the community. The agenda was set by the community which reflected local ownership of the Convention.



The Shankill Convention succeeded in establishing a new sense of community confidence, unity of purpose and a resolve to work together. It became a mechanism which the community could use to address strategic issues e.g. housing.

### The work begins

The Think Tank believed the process of transformation could be enhanced, in the first instance, by using the Convention model in other PUL communities. They successfully lobbied government for funding to run four pilot Conventions across Northern Ireland, the first of which was a successful follow-up Convention held on the Shankill in September 2004. Also that month, the Community Convention and Development Company was formally established with a board representative of the different interests of the PUL community. A staff team and base were established in January 2005.



### My community is interested, what do I do now?

If you are interested in finding out more or wish to express an interest in holding a Community Convention please contact:

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