

Separate Communities Cost

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Sectarianism and the deep divisions within Northern Ireland could be costing the public purse up to £1.5bn a year, an official report has concluded. The report looks at the additional drains on the economy and public purse as a result of violence, segregation and the duplication of services for the two main communities. These costs include

- £504m a year extra policing costs
- £24m added to annual housing bill
- £10m in education in one year
- £13m per year on community relations
- £7m annually on support for victims
- £50m tourism losses per year
- 27,600 jobs lost in 17 years

In one sense we have all known this but this is the first time a figure has been put on it – nearly £1000 per person in Northern Ireland per year.

Sectarian rivalry and conflict don't come cheap. Rivalry produces scarcity for everyone – or at least it would if the British Exchequer didn't bail us out. It often seems that the only thing that Sinn Fein and the DUP agree about is the need for more money from London (and money would be welcome from Dublin too, in the spirit of the new political ecumenism). There is much less agreement on doing something about the duplication of services and the costs of division. The DUP seems to want to focus on renewing (separate) communities and Sinn Fein on the equality agenda (which is about equality between separate communities).

The message of this report is that separate communities cost and are a huge economic drag on the overall society.

David Stevens