

THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

The Community Relations Council (CRC) is an arms-length body of the government of Northern Ireland and acts as a catalyst for good inter-community and inter-cultural community relations work in the region. In giving evidence, CRC is mindful of its particular existing responsibilities ‘to identify and develop effective approaches to peace-building and reconciliation in partnership with local people and organisations, and with central and local government’.

CRC contributes to the delivery of the Executive priorities as contained in the Together: Building a United Community (TBUC) strategy. Our work is focussed on transformation and the exchange of learning and best practice. Positive outcomes are sought in the reduction in levels of inter-community tension, an increase in levels of intercultural interaction, sharing and positive cultural celebration and the removal of the physical and social barriers that divide our community.

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT (PfG)

CRC welcomes the opportunity to offer comments on the Draft Programme for Government (PfG) which is currently being consulted on. CRC is currently devising a formal response which will then go to the Board of CRC for ratification. CRC will forward a copy of its final submission to the Committee.

General Comments

- CRC supports the outcomes based approach. We hope it will be meaningful and far reaching and engage all stakeholders in its delivery with a strong commitment and architecture to measure its progress.
- Central and local government will play a central role in making it happen and every effort must be made to engage service deliverers, policy makers, politicians, the business sector and society generally.
- CRC welcomes the greater emphasis on peace, shared society and developing respect. However, further clarification is needed as to how the proposed indicators relate to TEO’s Good Relations Indicators and what this means for future T:BUC monitoring.
- Peace-building work takes time and is not always immediately evident as to the impact. Achieving peace can be subject to shocks relating to breakdowns in relationships and unresolved legacy issues. It is important that measurements find ways to reflect underlying resilience.
- The Executive should not underestimate the importance of training in OBA for those involved in implementation at all levels. An ongoing opportunity to share learning across the sectors will also be important if we are not to find the new approach undermined by old ways of doing things, including planning and resource allocation.
- Data generation is important. All sectors should receive training and information about this as they all have a part to play. Duplication of effort in data collection should be avoided and material gathered should be widely shared and well used to underpin policy and funding choices.

Outcomes

- CRC welcomes inclusion of outcomes that identify issues which correlate with the work of CRC and the community based organisations we support. They also reflect themes and matters raised by participants at meetings of the *Together: Building a United Community Engagement Forum*

- If these outcomes are achieved they will make a positive contribution to peace-building and reconciliation.
- CRC supports a ‘unity’ of purpose and recommends making direct linkages between the PfG outcomes and TBUC outcomes.

Indicators

- CRC welcomes indicators that speak to shared space, reconciliation and respect.
- Previous indicators were restrictive and in danger of missing critical data. The addition of supplementary indicators is a welcomed development and will enable fuller analysis.
- Indicators should align with the Good Relations Indicators and new indicators developed to address data gaps.
- Quantitative data should be supplemented with qualitative data, either through specific research or data from evaluation processes. This would enable an examination of the hows and the whys, as well as helping to inform future interventions.

Shared Space

- CRC previously recommended additional indicators on education, housing and interfaces (Annex A) and makes this call again. .
- Quality of engagement within shared spaces is critical, and requires an examination as to how this *interaction has built* relations and improved attitudes.
- Safety within and between communities is key for the development of shared and safe communities.
- Planned interaction, as well as chance encounters, is needed to ensure real progress.

Respect

- CRC has contributed to departmental engagement events and awaits the publication of the ‘Respect Index’. CRC supports the view that ‘respect’ needs to be examined from a range of perspectives e.g. self, others, and society.

Reconciliation

- Previously questioned the single indicator of cultural identity and welcomes the inclusion of additional indicators to help supplement the mapping of progress. Aware the department is considering the development of a Reconciliation Index having taken on board comments regarding the complex nature of reconciliation.
- CRC is currently re-examining the meaning of reconciliation as we enter a new phase of the peace process and we will work with the Department with the aim of influencing the reconciliation dimension of the final PfG.

Delivery plans

- CRC welcomes the inclusion of delivery plans and the designation of a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) to co-ordinate, monitor and evaluate effectiveness of their given responsibility within their department and across government generally.
- The delivery plan captures issues that intersect with community relations and peacebuilding.
- The action plan should include targets, budget allocations and timeframes.
- A sustainable funding approach is critical to achieve generational impact.

Conclusion

- General comments provided; CRC currently working on its final submission;
- The plan has potential and the new approach is welcome in so far as it will encourage a more joined up response to long standing social issues;

- For issues specific to the work of CRC we look forward to further details regarding implementation.

Annex A

Examples of additional indicators

- %/number of teachers involved in shared and integrated education programmes;
- %/number of trainee teachers who undertake placements in two or more different sectors;
- %/number of people living in non-single identity areas;
- %/number of people requesting to live in a mixed area;
- %/number of residents actively involved in creating and supporting shared neighbourhoods
- % of interface barriers removed;
- % of new/strengthening of interface walls/gates/security barriers;
- level of cross-community engagement in change process;
- % of people who feel positive and harmonious relationships exist between communities at interfaces/contested spaces;
- %/number of people who have attended an event that celebrates a different cultural tradition;
- % of shared cultural events;