Programme for Government Team

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**Introduction**

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 responding to this draft consultation on the Programme for Government (PfG), CRC is mindful of its particular existing responsibilities ‘to identify and develop effective approaches to peacebuilding 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 (T:BUC) 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**

CRC welcomes the opportunity to offer comments on the Draft Programme for Government (PfG).

**General Comments**

Peacebuilding and reconciliation are the business of the whole of government, not just the responsibility of a few departments. CRC is therefore interested to see how the important issues of peacebuilding and reconciliation will permeate all departments and how all departments and agencies will deliver on their statutory duties within and across departments.

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 with the inclusion of PfG indicators which aim to increase reconciliation, shared space and 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.

Peacebuilding work takes time and its impact is not always immediately evident. Achieving peace can be subject to shocks relating to breakdowns in relationships and unresolved legacy issues as evidenced by parading and flags disputes and matters relating to victims and survivors. It is important that measurements find ways to reflect this underlying resilience.

Also, the Executive should not underestimate the importance of training in Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) for those involved in implementation at all levels. An ongoing opportunity to share learning across the sectors will also be important in order to avoid the new approach being undermined by old ways of doing things, including planning and resource allocation.

Finally, the collection and generation of existing and new data is important. All sectors and stakeholders should receive training and information about this as they all have a part to play in informing OBA measures. 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 the draft PfG in that it speaks about reconciliation and good relations as the business of the whole of government and not just the responsibility of a few Departments. CRC is interested in learning about how this will work in practice.

OBA is not new and many sectors have been utilising this, or a form of this approach for some time in Northern Ireland. However CRC does welcome the commitment to this approach by the Executive at a regional level. It is a new way for government to do its business, and the process could make a very useful contribution to how it engages civil society and others in looking at the concept and practice of government, as well as what Governments should prioritise.

CRC welcomes the cross-departmental approach, which is not new, but again may provide a new stimulus for collaborative working. It will provide opportunities to look more effectively at how government across all the Departments does its business.

Due to the evolving nature of the PfG, particularly on issues relating to respect and reconciliation, the implementation of the programme could be defined as a period to experiment, and as a time to assess how effective government is at working together cross-departmentally, as well as with external stakeholders on the agreed outcomes.

Northern Ireland must continue to move from managing conflict to solidifying the peace, and CRC especially welcomes the inclusion of outcomes that identify issues which relate to a society emerging and transforming from conflict. Issues identified in the contextual sections 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.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

The PfG must also be attentive that the two community model of good relations is no longer sufficient for our more diverse Northern Ireland. Attending to the issues of a binary society is no longer sufficient and the current draft PfG must develop indicators and actions that encapsulate this evolving diversity and work to ensure wider integration of BME citizens in community relations.   While inter-cultural work in no way exhausts the requirement to ensure full race equality, it represents a vital element in ensuring the long-term equality, participation, security and belonging of all people of different backgrounds in NI. The necessary linkages to the Racial Equality Strategy must be made.

Finally, if the PfG outcomes are achieved they will make a positive contribution to peacebuilding and reconciliation. However, CRC also supports a ‘unity’ of purpose and recommends making direct linkages between the PfG outcomes and T:BUC outcomes. In this current draft it is unclear how the T:BUC outcomes interlink with the higher PfG outcomes. Further detail and clarification on their relationship will support those currently working to the T:BUC outcomes. It is important to ensure synergy between the two thereby maximising effort as well as impact.

**Indicators**

CRC is particularly pleased that indicators which speak to shared space, reconciliation and respect remain in this current version and offers the following comments:

* Previously CRC had concluded that indicators set within the peacebuilding matrix were restrictive and in danger of missing critical data. Therefore the addition of supplementary indicators is a welcomed development and should facilitate a fuller analysis;
* PfG Indicators should align with the Good Relations Indicators and new indicators developed to address data gaps. If there are gaps in data this has to be addressed rather than use less than suitable data.
* 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.

In addition to the above CRC will make some detailed comments on a number of indicators:

***Shared Space***

The principal indicator on shared space examines how "all leisure centres, parks, libraries, and shopping centres ... are 'shared and open' to ... Protestants and Catholics". Issues about areas where people congregate are important, however, CRC believes that, as a principal indicator, it is extremely limiting.

It is incomplete in defining shared space. Shopping centres, leisure centres and places like that are places where human interaction is relatively limited and mostly anonymous in nature. Restricting analysis at the primary level to these areas has the potential to lose data on very critical areas around what shared space actually is.

Shared space is a much more complex picture and CRC would like to see a range of principal indicators that can examine issues that measure where people live, attitudes to shared and segregated housing, the numbers living in segregated areas and the percentages involved in creating shared neighbourhoods. Progress should reflect interface barrier removal and cross-community engagement, as well as sharing in education and workplaces.

The quality of engagement within shared spaces is critical, and requires an examination as to how this interaction has built relations and improved attitudes. Furthermore 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. The 2015 CRC funded report *“Exploring New Residents’ Experiences of Contact in Mixed Areas of Belfast”* determined that if new residents in mixed areas formed links with their new community in their everyday lives, and thereby developed a sense of ‘shared identity’ with their neighbours, this provided the means to cope with threats as well as providing collective resilience to future sectarian division.

So whilst CRC is pleased that additional supplementary indicators have now been included, which also goes someway to addressing CRC’s earlier concerns in the first public consultation whereby we recommended additional indicators on the difficult aspects of sharing such as education, housing and interfaces. CRC remains concerned. By setting these additional indicators as secondary and not principal, or rather keeping ‘leisure centres, parks, libraries, and shopping centres’ as the primary indicator it could be viewed by many that this is where we need to see greatest change.

Certainly, if there are leisure centres, parks, libraries and shopping centres which are ‘out-of-limits’ because of identity or community background issues then clearly interventions must be taken to address these exclusions. It is important that policy and subsequent initiatives focus on local nuances rather than taking a generalist or blanket approach. Assumptions should not be made that services and commercial centres are more naturally welcoming and therefore efforts restricted to these areas. Government policy and practice interventions, as well as those from delivery partners must follow the evidence and focus efforts on desegregating ‘hard-to-share’ spaces.

We are a society emerging from conflict and the difficult issues of communal territory and segregation need to be addressed and need to be seen as a priority within this PfG. CRC therefore recommends the development of a new principal indicator or a group of principal indicators which truly reflects the scale of the issue. All aspects of shared space are important and interlink – it may not fit the current pro forma of the PfG but given the complexity of peacebuilding modifications should be enabled.

CRC is also not convinced that this issue should only concentrate on two communities i.e. Protestant and Catholic.

***Reconciliation & Respect***

CRC would like to comment on the indicator which relates to reconciliation.

CRC previously questioned the single indicator of cultural identity and welcomes the inclusion of additional indicators to help supplement the mapping of progress. Having said that, the proposed primary indicator reaffirms its focus on the percentage who believe that their cultural identity is respected, which has the potential to limit the analysis. CRC has been supporting work on these areas for decades, in partnership with a range of organisations and communities, and so whilst the inclusion of a cultural identity indicator is positive, CRC wants to emphasise that culture and cultural respect is only one aspect of the analysis.

It would be helpful when developing a Respect Index to further consider what culture is e.g. for many, culture may not relate to identity. There may also be very different definitions and versions of what culture is and what else can define identity beyond culture, but they can all play a role in reconciliation.

The relationship between respect and reconciliation should also be explored further e.g. how is respect defined.

It is complex and CRC does acknowledge engagements undertaken by the Executive Office to hear opinions and ideas on these important areas. Also, as stated already, the inclusion of supplementary indicators is helpful but similar to shared space critical data could be lost thus reporting an incomplete progress report.

An interim solution could be a group of primary indicators on reconciliation, which could support the Department and delivery partners whilst a Reconciliation Index is being developed and finalised. These indicators could take account of the supplementary indicators already included e.g. more reflective on attitudes to other communities; confidence in good relations and reconciliation going forward, which has increased over the last few years. They could also examine issues around social justice, equality and the rule of law; healing of fractured relationships; managing division while tackling the causes of division; dismantling the policies and structures that have caused division and thereby continue to undermine reconciliation as well as critical areas around segregated housing, education and teacher training.

CRC is 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.

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

Taking all of the above into consideration, and given CRC’s previous and current engagement on the important themes of shared space, respect and reconciliation, CRC would welcome the opportunity to directly engage with officials in the Executive Office, as well as assigned delivery partners, to examine these issues in more detail. This partnership approach would support the design and development of measurements and interventions that would make a positive impact and help deliver the Programme for Government.

**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 for Indicators 26, 31 and 35 captures issues that intersect with community relations and peacebuilding. CRC feel the current action plan could be strengthened if it included targets, budget allocations and timeframes.

Also as the PfG develops and progress is monitored it would be useful to have a flexible approach to enable new interventions and actions. Finally, peacebuilding work is long-term and requires a sustainable funding approach if it is to achieve generational impact.

**Delivery Partners**

CRC was disappointed not to be included in the delivery partners section for the plan relating to Indicators 26, 31 and 35. CRC has been advised this exclusion was an oversight and we look forward to this omission being rectified in the next iteration of the PfG.

**Other Comments**

The PfG needs to be seen in the context of the wider picture. For the past four years CRC has published an independently written annual Peace Monitoring Report, recently The fourth report was published in November 2016.

Much progress has been made e.g. stability of institutions and power-sharing devolution, a peaceful summer with some notable areas of contention being resolved; the 2016 commemorations took place constructively and positively and which has helped lay a foundation for future commemoration events during 2017 and in the difficult years that lie ahead.

Yet challenges remain. Challenges relating to reconciliation, truth recovery, justice, paramilitarism; challenges around the substantial increase in the number of racist hate crimes over five years, as well as challenges about recognising the huge social, economic and cultural contribution of minority ethnic communities and newcomers to this society over the last number of years – is enough being done to support those communities, including vulnerable communities, in policy, funding and resourcing terms; and finally challenges around gender and social justice. In particular, there are challenges about making systemic changes in policy and structural terms and this will require serious discussions about, not just managing division, but taking steps to make systemic changes and to proactively tackle the causes of division.

These are all linked to what reconciliation means in a divided society going forward.

**Conclusion**

The current working iteration of the PfG and its focus on impact has potential and the new approach is welcome insofar as it will encourage a more joined up response to long standing social issues.

CRC welcomes the inclusion of outcomes and indicators which directly correlate to our work and the work of many peacebuilding organisations we support.

CRC has a number of concerns mostly relating to the primary indicators, in that they are limited and incomplete. We feel they may encourage us to lose some critical data and, more importantly, lead us to miss the true state of good community relations and sharing and integration. We could miss an opportunity to make a real difference in building the peace in this society.

CRC looks forward to further details regarding implementation, specifically that which relates to the Respect Index and potential Reconciliation Index. CRC will continue to support the department as it develops these areas of interest.

For further information contact Gemma Attwood, Policy Development Officer, [gattwood@nicrc.org.uk](mailto:gattwood@nicrc.org.uk)

1. T:BUC Engagement Forum Summary Reports available upon request. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)