

Response to Cohesion, Sharing and Integration—Executive Summary

General

- a. CRC welcomes the publication of a consultation document on cohesion, sharing and integration. The signature weakness of Northern Ireland has been sectarianism, territorialism and organised hatred. This policy or programme should be the place in which all of that is acknowledged and the next steps to progress outlined.
- b. There is a need for clear vision and purpose and for specific actions. CRC has considerable concerns about both of these in the draft programme.
- c. The draft CSI Programme does not fully acknowledge the civic effort and international investment to date, nor does it conduct a review of these achievements. If a consequence of CSI is the destruction of inter-community infrastructure here, it will be a serious setback on the road to reconciliation and not progress. We believe that the policy must build on existing practice and on the contribution of thousands of people and must not be in any way regressive.
- d. We have been handed an historic opportunity to address the legacy of division. Peace brought a huge dividend that Northern Ireland became an attractive place to visit and move to. The issues of cohesion, sharing and integration do not diminish through this process, they change. This is not an additional extra but a core challenge to all in a global economy. It is vital that we take this opportunity through the CSI programme.
- e. The proper inter-relationship of Racial Equality Strategy, Sexual Orientation Strategy, Anti-sectarianism is not developed in the programme. CRC believes that the title of the document has given rise to legitimate expectations that it will deal with all aspects of these complex subjects. Racial Equality is referred to but without clear guidance on future priorities. It has also led to a real sense of frustration in relation to equality, injustice and hate crime as a result of sexual orientation. CRC urges that policy strands on all aspects of this complex overarching policy area be developed as a matter of urgency.
- f. The critical test of the proposals in the CSI document must be: 'Do they work to promote cohesion, sharing and integration?' CRC has concluded that the proposals do not meet this test.
- g. There is a number of uncertainties about the status of the document which must be clarified.
 - Is the programme inter-departmental or is it a commitment of OFMDFM? CRC believes that it should be overarching and interdepartmental.
 - The absence of any Triennial Action Plan or replacement action framework makes the value of the document difficult to judge.
 - The time lines appear vague and the brief division of outcomes into 'short, medium long' does not make obvious sense.
 - There appear to be few truly new policy commitments.
 - There is no framework for measuring outcomes, monitoring or evaluation.
 - The document does not contain an EQIA.
 - Worryingly there are no indicative budgets, nor any analysis of resources against CSR 2010.

Policy Framework and Principles


- a. The policy lacks a formal statement of purpose, goals and aims and objectives. It does not contain a review of current practice. This sometimes makes it difficult to engage with the detail of the document.
- b. The requirement to build a truly inter-cultural future is a paramount concern here and across Europe. The CSI policy should be rooted in a broad legal and political framework which promotes a new normal- of intercultural integrated societies, open and welcoming to all and rooted in democratic values. Section 75 should be understood as the domestic mechanism to ensure these international outcomes.
- c. CRC believes that sectarianism is the defining feature of our political and social landscape and requires a comprehensive and deliberate policy approach. Sectarianism here is part of normality. A shared future is a different future. What we need is a root and branch change or it will be at risk of just tinkering. The scale of the current CSI is inadequate to deal with the topic. CRC believes that Equality and Good Relations are intimately linked and must be pursued as common objectives. CRC believes that a properly understood commitment to good relations in relation to sectarian, political and racial division is a vital supplement to the requirements of equality. Equality demands a commitment to inclusion and solidarity and cannot be achieved without it.
- d. A number of important social constituencies and issues are not referred to in the programme. The role of women in peacebuilding is not referenced. Trade Unions and churches are not significantly mentioned. The challenge of and to victims and ex-prisoners/ex-combatants is not tackled. There is little on the opportunities which are presented by peace to reform community development or to grow cross-border work. Also, there is no mention of how the Past is to be addressed.
- e. The document does not review the race equality strategy, nor does it address the problems of race hate and intercultural matters.
- f. The values stated in the CSI document need to be revised to ensure that there is no ambiguity about the Executive's commitment to sharing and inter-cultural equality. CRC does not believe that apartheid is benign, but is based on enforced exclusion. As currently stated the document does not offer sufficient assurance of the Executive's preference for increased interdependence and sharing over separation in everyday life.

Policy Issues

- a. CRC welcomes policy commitments in the CSI Document to:
 - Physical and community division at Interfaces, and support these communities
 - Ensure safety of vulnerable groups
 - Tackle manifestations of intolerance and sectarianism
 - Address hate crime
 - Promote equality and tackle disadvantage
 - Create and expand shared spaces

However, we believe that they are not strategically prioritised, leaving significant policy gaps in any attempt to support cohesion, sharing and integration. CRC has

laid out a comprehensive list of areas where we believe that a direct connection should be made between CSI and core political issues.

- b. Violence in the past continues to throw a long shadow over all attempts at reconciliation in the present. CSI Programme offers a serious possibility to address the legacy of past injustice. However it contains nothing on causes and appears to have dropped the goal of deeper reconciliation in Ireland. The failure to acknowledge our division is an omission in the CSI document and fails to set the backdrop against which success in this policy might be measured.
 - c. Division is an economic issue. At a time of serious fiscal austerity there is no attempt to connect the economics and continued division and fractured relationships. The CSI document does not make the vital connection of investing in reconciliation and investment nor of investing in sharing and reducing dependency. CRC believes that Programme for Government's economic aims can only succeed with a serious programme to tackle sectarianism, racism and violence. Sectarianism and antagonism cement social exclusion and destroy prosperity.
 - d. CRC believes that young people should be a core priority for cohesion, sharing and integration. The document has the unfortunate appearance of presenting young people them as a problem rather than a source of positive change. We are disappointed at the lack of any promise of investment in intercultural and intercommunity engagement by young people. Too often young people appear to be a problem to be curtailed rather than a critical resource. The Education commitments in the document are weak.
 - e. CRC welcomes the commitment to improve the quality of life and safety of communities at the interface. We believe that the drive to reduce and eventually eliminate all reliance on massive and permanent safety barriers should be led by government, and a new paradigm of community safety developed for peaceful times.
 - f. The emphasis on shared space and cultural engagement are welcome. However these are important changes and will require a strong inter-cultural and equality framework that has not been identified in the programme.
 - g. The CRC submission contains detailed proposals for action on the past, economics, safety, inter-culturalism and race equality, housing, shared space, education and young people, community development and interfaces.
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Delivering Change

- a. CSI – opportunity to review policy, goals, actions, structures and made fit for purpose. There is no review of current practice nor any assessment of its value for money. This makes judgements on current reality very difficult to make.
- b. CRC welcomes the commitment to Ministerial leadership in CSI. However, arrangements for inter-Departmental co-ordination are vital if this is to be more than a paper exercise. If this is an inter-departmental document, then the leadership should reside with the Executive led by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
- c. The role of regional body is far more than that of funding and advice to government. We believe that CRC continues to play a vital role as a development agency and co-ordinating body ensuring innovation, expertise, networks, credibility. All of the current functions listed for CRC in the last public policy on this area of work need to be retained. CSI must not only be 'delivered'. Change requires a dedicated capacity for development, practical support, innovation and learning, partnership and advocacy. This is not reflected in the document or in the structures proposed for delivery.
- d. The proposals for delivery and funding are all retrograde. CRC believes that they should all be reconsidered if the principle of 'fit for purpose' is to be fulfilled. The peace process was and is built on the interaction of political leadership and broad civil society. Mandated independence, as is currently exercised by CRC, has been an important aspect of maintaining honest debate and practical progress towards reconciliation. There is a real requirement to ensure that exchange is open, values are shared and power is held to legitimate account. CRC believes that we perform an important task by speaking independently and combining a capacity to tackle intercommunity, intercultural and legacy issues together. There is a danger that the current proposals confuse political leadership with political control.
- e. The programme will not be plausible without a serious resource review and commitment of resources particularly as many strands of external funding are coming to an end. That said this goes beyond funding for community based activity into a rethink of much larger and significant budgets such as education, housing, community development, regeneration, justice and culture. Without this rethink, commitment to reconciliation is likely to remain merely rhetorical.