**COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2016-2019**

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| The Community Relations Council was established in 1990 to lead and support change towards reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust. The Community Relations Council is an arms-length body of the government of Northern Ireland and a catalyst for good inter-community and inter-cultural community relations work in the region.  The organisation works to identify and develop effective approaches to peace-building and reconciliation in partnership with local people and organisations, and with central and local government.  We promote the benefits of good relations policies and practice at regional, local, community and institutional levels; advocating for acknowledgment of our interdependence; challenging sectarianism, racism and all forms of violence motivated by hate. We provide financial support, development and policy guidance for peace building and good relations through civic leadership, wide community engagement and the sharing of best practice.  We believe the delivery of a peaceful, reconciled and interdependent society will be based on social partnership, the broader engagement of civil society and positive political leadership underpinned by priorities including fairness, equity, openness and diversity. |

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| **OUR VISION**  A peaceful, reconciled and interdependent society. |

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# Introduction

Over the years, the Community Relations Council has played a crucial role with and within communities all over Northern Ireland stimulating and supporting peace-building work.  Northern Ireland is in a much better place than it has been in its recent past, and much credit needs placed with political and civic leaders.  Thankfully recent years have seen the dismantling of the infrastructure of conflict. The CRC wants to play its part in strengthening the infrastructure of reconciliation.

It is an infrastructure that helped deliver the peace process. It is the infrastructure at a community level that helped hold people and communities together at the most testing of times.  It is an infrastructure that will continue to galvanise the peace from ground level up, that has the experience and skill to do it; but it needs supported and resourced in the important years to come.  Galvanising the peace is critical to address racism, sectarianism and segregation; encourage regeneration; challenge poverty; enhance life opportunities in stressed communities; and promote a shared society.

This strategic plan therefore, focuses on providing some of the support and resourcing required that will help to deliver peace building and reconciliation within communities, in the context of the Northern Ireland Executive’s leadership and good relations strategy. It is building on successful work delivered to date. But it is also challenging everyone to reflect on how outcomes are achieved and change is realised.

Interdependence, diversity and equity remain as core values for the CRC; and building relationships remain at the heart of reconciliation.  That is because we believe that bigotry will be dismantled by relationships; racism will be dismantled by relationships; intolerance and indifference will be dismantled by relationships; sectarianism will be dismantled by relationships.

As the peace continues to grow stronger roots, the next years must be a time for substantial, generational, systemic change to occur; when there is recognition of interdependence, a greater prioritisation of reconciliation and a removal of the causes of division.

The CRC intends to continue to play its part, pro-actively with government and with civil society together, providing a critical link between political leadership and the ground level peace-builders.

It is for us all to carry part of the burden to shape the society we want for this and future generations.

Peter Osborne

**Chair**

# The Context and Our Planning Assumptions for 2016-19

**THE CONTEXT**

Given the many years of conflict in the region it is no surprise that peace building is the work of decades. After a political agreement it takes time to end enmity, overcome estrangement, build trust and heal division. We are now well into the post-Agreement implementation stage of peace in the region but Northern Ireland is still very much a “post-settlement” society. Even in that context people in Northern Ireland should have a reasonable expectation that the rights and privileges that civil society enjoys elsewhere should apply here. We have assumed that the devolved government in the region will be stable but that community relations will evolve over the planning period to reflect the Executive priorities and this will continue to have implications for the work of CRC. As an outcome of globalisation, we also anticipate continuing changes in the make-up of society across these islands. We are all impacted by the economic realities of this period, the pressures on public expenditure combined with the need to sustain and improve delivery, including good relations programmes. Over the next three years the CRC will focus on maximising positive impact using the available resources.

We are not yet beyond the impact of the conflict. Building the peace at community level remains challenging, even in the context of an agreed Executive good relations strategy. We have matters that remain to be resolved which continue to affect and influence lives here. We have valuable experience gained during and after the conflict which can contribute to the delivery of the current strategy. We will continue to identify and acquire good practice and learning and disseminate it across the region and also internationally when appropriate.

There is an imperative to approach community relations, informed by the wisdom of experience, in a way that helps people value mutual accommodation rather than the victory of one side over another. The generation that grew up in the conflict is now middle aged. By virtue of their uniquely vivid experience, this generation has unenviable wisdom which must be harnessed and put to good use so that our children and young people inherit a society where an understanding of reconciliation and a deeper peace has taken root to build a united community.

**PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS**

The Community Relations Council has undergone change in recent years and in the coming years there will be further changes. We are an ALB of The Executive Office and our strategic direction, confirmed by Ministers, is to be a key delivery agent for departmental good relations policy, including the implementation of the aims and objectives of the Together: Building a United strategy (T:BUC) and an outcome based approach to delivery. This includes promoting policy through positive engagement with relevant stakeholders in the community and establishing and implementing best practice. As an ALB of The Executive Office our work will be agreed with Ministers and aligned with departmental priorities. In that context we have assumed that our business plans, financial procedures, performance and risk management will all continue to be agreed with the Executive Office on behalf of Ministers.

We are in a time of considerable structural change in central and regional government which will affect the structure for delivery of programmes supporting reconciliation and good community relations in the coming years. CRC itself anticipates considerable change in the coming period related to: -

* Staffing and governance reviews currently being undertaken by TEO;
* The move to new accommodation as part of the government’s wider strategy to make best use of its estate
* Implementation of the review of funding currently being undertaken by TEO and the development of a more co-ordinated approach to grant funding focused on T:BUC priorities and objectives;
* The establishment and ongoing secretarial support of the T:BUC Engagement Forum;
* Supporting and implementing an outcomes based approach to delivery and performance monitoring utilising the revised good relations indicators as the performance monitoring framework;
* Assisting District Councils in ensuring that good relations and T:BUC priorities become an integral part of community planning;
* Indentification and dissemination of relevant good relations policies, research and best practice initiatives that contribute to delivery improvements on the ground; and
* Engagement with government with regard to the delivery of T:BUC priorities including contributing to the work of the thematic groups.

In addition we anticipate the next scheduled formal review of CRC in March 2017. CRC will adapt and change as necessary to further reinforce its role as a trusted and critical link between government and all sections of society and we will continue to promote good practice in building peace and good relations.

1. **IMPACT**

Over the next 3 years CRC will be a key delivery agent of the NI Executive’s priorities as contained in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy (T:BUC). T:BUC outlines a vision based on equality of opportunity, good relations and reconciliation. It provides a framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation. Our work will be focussed on transformation and outcomes aligned with the T:BUC Strategy and the exchange of learning and best practice. We are an organisation undergoing change: in our structures; in our relationship with the Northern Ireland Executive; and in service delivery. We are also aligning funding outcomes with the Northern Ireland Executive policy ‘Together: Building a United Community’. In the changing context, over the next three years we will seek to make our contribution in partnership with others in central and local government and the community to support good civic leadership at all levels of society. With our partners we will aim to make a significant and positive contribution to the delivery of T:BUC priorities, including 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.

# Our Values and Beliefs

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| Human rights are the fundamental basis for good community relations. In that context, the Community Relations Council is also guided by the following values and beliefs:   * **Interdependence:** CRC recognises and affirms the interconnectedness of the personal and community experiences of all those living and working in Northern Ireland. We believe in inclusive and open dialogue. The CRC exists to promote good relations based on trust, respect and inclusion. * **Diversity:** We believe that our diversity of identities and cultures in Northern Ireland enriches life and is to be celebrated. * **Equity and Equality:** CRC is committed to fair treatment for all, through open access to resources, structures and decision-making processes at all levels of society, as an essential basis for good community relations. * **Respect and dignity:**  CRC is committed to the promotion of inter-cultural respect and freedom of expression and movement (whether expressed through religious, ethnic or political background) and supports the peaceful expression of variety and difference. CRC therefore recognises non-violence as an essential condition for the growth of trust, dialogue and conflict transformation. * **Openness, Transparency and Accountability:**  To maintain trust and confidence in our work as a provider of public services CRC embraces these values in all its work. |

# Strategic Priorities of the Community Relations Council 2016-2019

**CRC will support the Programme for Government and the good relations strategy: *Together: Building a United Community*, by:**

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| **Funding:**   * Provide regional funding programmes that complement funding from central and local government * Provide funding programmes that respond to need and demonstrate positive impact * Provide variety in funding packages facilitating access to smaller and larger awards * Offer guidance to funded organisations and opportunities for shared learning between projects including the development of outcome based accountability models * Work to ensure that the longer term financial support for reconciliation is outcome-based in the context of the T:BUC priorities and the Good Relations Indicator framework   **Key output and outcome indicator:** CRC’s annual regional grant assistance will strengthen community relationships; contribute to a collaborative and outcomes based approach; and be delivered on time and in budget. |

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| **T:BUC engagement and delivery:**   * Advise government on the practical impact and delivery of policy * Provide a critical link in all aspects of community relations between wider society and government through the T:BUC Engagement Forum * Encourage and develop the capacity of people and organisations * Identify and collate relevant research and evaluation to share good practice and learning locally and internationally * Be an advocate and conduit for positive change, good relations, peace building and reconciliation * Communicate and show case good practice and information regionally to raise awareness and better involve wider society in building a united community   **Key output and outcome indicator:** Progress and developments associated with T:BUC will be widely shared; learning will be disseminated and aimed at improving practice and an outcome focused approach to delivery . |

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| **Trusted and effective public service and good governance:**   * Adhere to all required NICS and TEO governance and financial management requirements and the Nolan Principles in all aspects of our work * Demonstrate leadership and objectivity * Undertake ongoing review of processes as a responsive, learning organisation * Deliver services and programmes within budget and within set timeframes * Provide value for money   **Key output and outcome indicator:** CRC will implement its role in an accountable, transparent, safe, fair manner and contribute to wider objectives on efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector. |

**Support the delivery of the *Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy***

1. **Funding**

We will administer funding schemes that build and support community relationships in collaboration with the Executive Office.

**3) Trusted and Effective Public Service & Good Governance**

We will ensure the efficient and effective use of allocated resources and public expenditure by ensuring that CRC operate to the highest standard of corporate governance in line with relevant guidance and best practice.

1. **T:BUC Engagement & Delivery**

We will promote learning, best practice and assist good communication between all relevant sectors and Government to assist in the effective implementation of the T:BUC Strategy

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