

Strategic Plan

Making the extraordinary ordinary: Integrating good community relationships into everyday life.



COMMUNITY
RELATIONS
COUNCIL

2020-2023



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CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to present The Community Relations Council's Strategic Plan 2020-23. The development of the plan was one of the first tasks to be undertaken by myself and the Board following our appointment by The Executive Office. It has given us a valuable insight into what was achieved in the previous plan, the current issues and the views of stakeholders. We have a diverse and experienced group of board members who quickly became the cohesive team that will lead the organisation and support the staff to deliver the new strategic plan.

The Community Relations Council continues to deliver a programme of funding, engagement and shared learning that aims to closely compliment the other work undertaken in the Together: Building a United Community strategy. As an Arm's length body for government, I am happy to report that the Community Relations Council's relationship with our sponsor Department, The Executive Office, is strong and mutually beneficial. We look forward to delivering our plan in close co-operation with colleagues in the

Department, with District Councils, with other funders, delivery bodies and the wider community.

Looking at how far we have come in building peace and good community relations, we need to remind ourselves that we have done extraordinary things in difficult times. During this planning period the Community Relations Council will focus on ensuring that message gets beyond public and voluntary organisations to become more fully embedded into our everyday lives to build a transformed, united community for ourselves and our children.

Covid-19 and our response to it has given us many lessons, both positive and negative, in terms of how communities have worked together and realised their mutual dependence. Our Good Relations practitioners have had to adapt to delivering in a very changed environment. Over this planning period we expect to see much more innovation in terms of how CRC will assess the good relations content and value of applications, but also in how colleagues in the community will deliver on our grant awards.

Martin McDonald MBE, Chair



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BACKGROUND

The Community Relations Council was established in 1990 to lead and support change towards reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust; and to be a catalyst for good inter-community and inter-cultural relationships in the region. The Community Relations Council is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body of The Executive Office, a charity and a company limited by guarantee.

We promote the benefits of good relations policies and practice at regional, institutional, local, and community levels. We advocate for acknowledgment of our interconnectedness; challenging sectarianism, racism and all the related activities that are motivated by hatred.

We distribute grant aid on behalf of The Executive Office; provide development support; identify and share best practice; and facilitate wide community engagement on effective approaches to peace-building and good, shared community relationships.

WHAT WE DO

We promote good community relationships and support delivery of the Programme for Government and The Executive strategy “Together: Building a United Community”



FUNDING

We distribute funding, in collaboration with The Executive Office, to build and support good community relationships.



ENGAGEMENT & DELIVERY

We promote learning, best practice and assist good communication between all relevant sectors and Government in the delivery of the T:BUC Strategy and good relations outcomes.



TRUSTED AND EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SERVICE & GOOD GOVERNANCE

We ensure the efficient and effective use of public resources allocated to us by operating to the highest standard of corporate governance in line with relevant guidance and best practice.



OUR VISION

**A DIVERSE, SHARED AND
INTERCONNECTED SOCIETY**

OUR VALUES, OUR BELIEFS

Human dignity is the fundamental basis for good community relations. In that context, the Community Relations Council is guided by the following values and beliefs:

Interconnectedness:

CRC recognises the importance of living well together and the interdependence of 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, inclusion and interconnectedness.

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 human rights, inter-cultural respect, 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.

The common good:



CRC believes that community relationships built on trust and living well together contributes to sustainable development, the general well-being of our society and the common good.

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.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

HOW WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

-  In adopting an outcomes-based accountability approach, the Community Relations Council has worked collaboratively with The Executive Office to draft strategic outcomes for the funding we provide on behalf of government. The outcomes are aligned to the draft Programme for Government and the policy Together: Building a United Community.
-  The indicators and measures contained in the Community Relations Council Outcome Delivery Plan are set at an organisational performance level to distinguish the difference the Community Relations Council and the work it funds can make and for which it can be held to account.

-  A full review of our overall performance along with our annual accounts can be found in our Annual Reports. The full record of our grant funding can also be found on our website in the Annual Reports. These can be accessed on our website www.nicrc.org.uk.
-  In our grant making an outcomes-based approach has been designed into our application, assessment, performance monitoring and evaluation processes. In relation to our engagement work we are developing a new outcomes framework.
-  Progress is monitored by the CRC's Senior Management Team; the CRC's Board; and The Executive Office. The risks to the CRC and delivery of its plans are monitored by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

ACTIONS DELIVERED

REVIEW OF HEAD-LINE ACTIONS DELIVERED IN THE LAST STRATEGIC PLANNING PERIOD (2016-20)

Funding:

In 2016 we said we would administer funding schemes that build and support community relationships in collaboration with The Executive Office.

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.

The following was delivered:

1. The administration of the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme was transferred from TEO to CRC.
2. The application forms, guidance notes and evaluation processes for all CRC funding schemes were revised to incorporate an outcomes based approach aligned to wider TEO and government policy objectives.
3. On line application procedures were introduced.
4. Bureaucracy associated with the administration of CRC funding schemes was reduced (for example, performance reports were reduced from 4 to 2 per year in the Core Fund).
5. Procedures for checking the financial viability of organisations in the Core Fund assessment process were strengthened.
6. Vouching and verification procedures have also been enhanced. Suspected fraud or irregular expenditure reporting procedures to TEO were also reviewed.
7. Closer collaboration with TEO and assistance with the assessment process in its funding stream (MEDF, Central GR fund, T:BUC camps; urban villages etc).

T:BUC engagement and delivery:

In 2016 we said we would 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.

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.

The following was delivered:

1. CRC has successfully delivered the T:BUC Engagement Fora three times per year on behalf of TEO.
2. A programme of shared learning events is delivered to groups in the Core Fund and North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme.
3. CRC sits on a number of implementation structures related to T:BUC (e.g. summer Camps, Urban Villages, housing) and Fresh Start (Tackling Paramilitarism).
4. The “Decade of Centenaries” project (run in collaboration with The National Lottery Heritage Fund) has

delivered online and hard copy resources, conferences, roundtable meetings of stakeholders.

5. Good Relations Week has taken place annually. The name has been updated, the advisory group has grown to include a number of government department, and the number of events has also increased.
6. The Community Relations Award has been made annually (and on 3 occasions an award has also been made for civic leadership, an initiative of the previous Chair).
7. NI Peace Monitoring Reports (funded by The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust) have been published.
8. The CRC logo and presentational materials have been renewed.
9. The CRC website, e-news and e-bulletin have been refreshed.



Trusted and effective public service and good governance:

In 2016 we said we would 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.

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.

The following was delivered:

1. The appointment process for new Board members has been revised (to allow TEO Ministers to appoint).
2. Memorandum and Articles have been updated including provision for Board members to be remunerated (following approval by the Charity Commission).
3. CRC has undergone 3 reviews:
 - Funding: outcome was satisfactory and fit for purpose.
 - Governance: all recommendations have been implemented with the exception of whether and to what extent the Board is involved in grant making decisions.
- Staffing and structure: this was taken forward in 2 phases. The management structure has been revised to 3 Directorates and in relation to the second phase, changes to other staff job descriptions are now in negotiation with the union.
4. Increased budget pressure in every year of this strategic planning period but the annual plan has been delivered on time and within the annual budget targets. Accuracy of cash requirements/drawdowns has improved through strengthened financial management procedures to anticipate and track expenditure.
5. Unqualified internal and NIAO audit opinions.
6. Record management systems reviewed and strengthened to incorporate GDPR requirements.
7. Introduction of a new Equality Scheme.
8. Move to new offices in Equality House.

CONTEXT AND OUR PLANNING

THE CONTEXT AND OUR PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS FOR 2020-23

The overall aim of the Community Relations Council is to promote good relations among the citizens and communities of Northern Ireland and the delivery of:

1. The draft Programme for Government (PfG)
2. The strategy Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC).

The Programme for Government and Together: Building a United Community indicators most relevant to our work are:

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Indicators:

26. Increase respect for each other.
31. Increase shared space
35. Increase reconciliation.

The work of the Community Relations Council also contributes indirectly to:

1. Reduce crime (relevant to CRC, crime motivated by sectarianism or racism).
27. Improve cultural participation.
28. Increase the confidence and capability of people and communities.
30. Improve our attractiveness as a destination.
40. Improve our international reputation.

Outcomes:

7. We have a safe community where we respect the law and each other.
9. We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity
10. We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest.

TOGETHER: BUILDING A UNITED COMMUNITY

Our Children and Young People

Aim: To continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations.

Strategic Outcomes:

1. Improving attitudes between young people from different backgrounds.

2. Young people engaging in bringing the community together.

Our Shared Community

Aim: To create a community where division does not restrict the life opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone.

Strategic Outcomes:

1. Increased use of shared space and services.

2. Shared space is accessible to all.

Our Safe Community

Aim: To create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety.

Strategic Outcomes:

1. Reduce the prevalence of hate crime and intimidation.

2. A community where places and spaces are safe for all.

Our Cultural Expression

Aim: To create a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced.

Strategic Outcomes:

1. Increased sense of community belonging.

2. Cultural diversity is celebrated.

OUR PESTEL ANALYSIS FOR THE YEARS 2020-23

(POLITICAL, ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL,
ENVIRONMENTAL AND LEGAL)

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

CRC was pleased to see the return of the Executive in 2020. In the last strategic plan, we assumed that the devolved government in the region would be stable. This proved to be wrong but it did not cause the wider work of reconciliation to unravel in the way that might have been expected and across society other aspects of public life continued. However the absence of the NI Executive did impact legislative and policy review and development. When the Executive collapsed, Together: Building a United

Community (T:BUC) was relatively new and at the implementation stage. With the return of the Executive, Ministers will have the opportunity to review T:BUC implementation and make any necessary changes to priorities and resources to reflect the operational context.

New Decade, New Approach, the agreement which marked the return of the Executive, makes a number of recommendations that will be taken into account by CRC in this strategic planning period. In particular the work of the new commissions on language and culture, the review of Arms-Length Bodies, and the NI Centenary (in the context of our Decade of Centenaries project). CRC was pleased to see a continued emphasis in the document on building good community relations.

At the time of writing it is unclear what the future agreement between Britain and the EU will be. However, the uncertainty is creating unease in respect of the constitutional settlement that underpins the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the security impact at the border between Northern Ireland and

the Republic of Ireland, and the arrangements for those who are living, learning or working here on a temporary basis. This aspect of the environment scan will be kept under review but we anticipate delivering the new Strategic Plan in a period of some political instability linked to the wider uncertainty about the outworking of the UK referendum decision to leave the European Union. This uncertainty may affect the wider context of work on peacebuilding and community relations in a number of areas: the sense of shared identity; security; the future framework of equality and human rights; the demographics of our community; and our economic future.

THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

During the period of the last strategic plan CRC had its opening budget allocation cut every year. In-year allocations helped the organisation to ameliorate some of the impact in those years. During that time CRC attempted to protect its grants schemes (and

therefore the impact on funds to the community) by setting an internal constraint that its grant schemes should be cut by no greater a percentage than that endured by the organisation in overall terms. CRC also mitigated the impact of the cuts through the use of shared services and the organisation will continue to do so.

CRC anticipates a further period of constraint in public expenditure as society continues to respond to the impact of the pandemic. CRC will work with its sponsoring department, The Executive Office, to try to ensure that resources are prioritised for good relations work as further cuts in this area of public expenditure put at risk years of investment in peace and community relationships.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

We continue to have high levels of separation at community level, although there has been a slow steady improvement in the statistics over

time. We sustain largely separate education structures albeit that there is some evidence of good work in bringing children together in shared education and youth programmes. We continue to have high levels of segregated living, although we have developed more examples of shared housing projects. Beyond these important but isolated projects there is more work to be done to mainstream good relations outcomes into all publicly funded activity as a consistent, reliable feature of public life here.

There is also more to be done to mainstream good relations into people's everyday lived experience. This objective will be a particular focus of the work of the Community Relations Council during this strategic planning period. In our Strategic Plan 2016-20 we said: "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.

This remains true. We also believe that the approach to the work of building good relations needs to reflect the issues facing each new generation and our programmes must respond to those changes. Twenty-two years after the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement we recognise the need to show leadership in thinking about future needs and how good community relationships will be fostered and sustained in everyday life. We believe the latter would be evidence of the extent to which we have truly embedded peace and made the transition to a shared society. In this strategic planning period CRC will focus on the ways in which good relations work may need to adapt for the future and place greater emphasis on the extent to which we interconnect in our everyday lives.

Side by side with this the organisation will also maintain a focus on the hot spot where change has been slower or interrupted. CRC will work with others to target specialist services to where they continue to be needed to deal with the legacy of the conflict including

sectarianism, racism, the impact of the past and the continued effects of paramilitarism.

As a trusted link between government and all sections of society, CRC will continue to adapt and change as necessary to most effectively promote peace and good relations. With our partners we will continue to make a positive contribution to the delivery of T:BUC and Programme for Government priorities, including the reduction in levels of inter-community tension, an increase in intercultural connection, the sharing of positive cultural celebration and the removal of the everyday physical and social barriers that divide our community.

We anticipate continuing changes in the make-up of our society as an outcome of globalisation. Our funding will reflect these changes.

As people become less comfortable with binary identity labels linked to community or religious background, the processes for recording impact and change will be kept under review

(in conjunction with lead agencies such as the Equality Commission and The Executive Office).

TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXT

During the period of the last strategic plan we reviewed our grant making programmes to further draw out their outcomes and contribution to government's good relations priorities and objectives under T:BUC and the Programme for Government. We also assisted with the development of a more co-ordinated approach to grant funding across The Executive Office programmes. During the implementation of the last Strategic Plan, CRC also used technology to help reduce bureaucracy and increase user-friendly services. The organisation moved its grant application processes online and increased its focus on management information to identify need and better target our responses. The work on business improvement will continue in the next strategic planning period.

In addition, building on what we are learning during COVID-19, the organisation will continue to work with other bodies to explore new creative ways in which digital technology can assist with increasing social cohesion in the future.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

The concepts of well being and the common good provide a link between good relations and a wide range of other issues. With relevant stakeholders, the organisation will continue to explore the interconnection between good relations and wider issues of well being. In some cases, this could take the form of specific programmes with positive environmental outcomes as impact on climate becomes increasingly prioritised. CRC understands the need for everyone to make a positive contribution in this area.

The organisation will be decreasing its use of paper as we move more of our work online and towards a paperless office environment.

During the period of the last strategic plan a considerable amount of structural change took place in central and local government. In line with wider changes, the Community Relations Council moved to share premises with other Arm's-length bodies as part of the initiative to make best use of the government estate and the TEO undertook staffing and governance reviews of our organisation, leaving us fit for our purpose as we move forward. CRC expects to move to new premises again during this strategic planning period (along with the other bodies currently based in Equality House). It is anticipated that the new premises will be modern offices equipped for an "agile" working environment and CRC will alter some of its current terms and conditions in line with the wider civil service to incorporate this new approach.

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The CRC was not established by statute, it operates as an arms-length body of the TEO (formally as an Executive NDPB since 2012), a company limited by guarantee and a charity. We are a key delivery agent for departmental good relations policy, including the implementation of the aims and objectives of the Together: Building a United Community strategy (T:BUC). This includes promoting policy through positive engagement with relevant stakeholders in the community, an example of which is our delivery of the T:BUC Engagement Forum on behalf of The Executive Office which began during the last strategic planning period and is now an established event in the good relations calendar. Our strategic direction is aligned with departmental priorities and our business plans, financial procedures, performance and risk management will all continue to be agreed with the Executive Office on behalf of Ministers.

During the last strategic planning period the General Data Protection Regulations were introduced and CRC made all the changes necessary to comply with the new requirements.

The organisation routinely monitors the regulatory environment and will continue to identify and implement changes that ensure the organisation operates lawfully at all times and within a robust governance framework.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL 2020-23

CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, WELL BEING AND THE COMMON GOOD

1. We will work to embed and normalise good community relationships demonstrating positive impact in our funding and prioritising work that focusses on sustainable interventions and everyday life, the changing composition of our community and the legacy of the conflict.
2. We will support delivery of long term financial and development aid for good community relationships and reconciliation by providing strategic interventions with an appropriate balance between thematic, area based, small and large grant awards; by working in partnership and

aligning our funding schemes with other relevant interventions, complementing funding from other sources including central and local government in the context of the T:BUC priorities and The Executive Office Good Relations Indicators Framework.

3. We will offer guidance on effective community relations interventions to organisations seeking or receiving funds from our organisation.

Our impact and key outcome:

CRC's annual regional grant assistance will strengthen good community relationships and prioritise work that focusses on everyday life; contribute to a collaborative and outcomes based approach; be delivered on time and in budget.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

SUPPORT EFFECTIVE DELIVERY AND LEARNING

1. We will provide engagement between wider society and government through the T:BUC Engagement Forum.
2. We will provide opportunities for shared engagement and learning; and for evaluation and research on community relations, cultural diversity, peace building and reconciliation.
3. We will showcase good practice to raise awareness and better involve wider society in building a united community.

Our impact and key outcome:

Progress and outcomes associated with the implementation of T:BUC will be widely shared; learning on community relations and reconciliation will be disseminated and aimed at improving practice.

BE A WELL GOVERNED, TRUSTED AND EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SERVICE

1. We will demonstrate leadership, objectivity and openness, and adhere to the Nolan Principles.
2. We will be a responsive, learning organisation and keep our processes under review.
3. We will provide value for money and deliver services and programmes within budget and agreed timeframes.

Our impact and key outcome:

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.

CONTACT US

If you would like to know more about the work of the Community Relations Council, or any of the services we provide, please contact us:

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A group of diverse people, including men, women, and children, are walking away from the camera on a grassy path in a park. One person is in a wheelchair, and another is walking alongside them. The background is filled with lush green trees. The entire image has a magenta overlay.

Making the extraordinary ordinary: Integrating good community relationships into everyday life



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