

CRC forward strategy 2008-2011 - Building on Opportunity

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Context of this paper

Churches agreed in January 2007 to continue funding CRC with around £48,000 a year until 2010. For the past 18 months, plans have been underway to consider actively how CRC's work can be sustained, following the end of our Yorkshire Forward contract in summer 2008. A sustainability group devised an action plan currently being worked through, and the fruits of this are in bids being put in or considered, partnerships being forged, and opportunities sought.

MTL's evaluation of CRC, funded by Yorkshire Forward, was extremely positive, and we seek to build on the opportunity we have, to use our considerable experience of delivery, of credibility as an organisation, and as a strategic player in the region, to further our work, which has received national recognition from government bodies such as our work to support those engaging with Migrant Workers (Commission for Rural Communities) and our work contributing to cohesion (Commission on Integration and Cohesion).

Obviously this will be developed and built upon with more concrete proposals as things become clearer, and this is a work in progress document which will be annually updated.

Liz Carnelley
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1. CORE AIMS

CRC ensures that strategic connection is made between regional policy objectives (such as in the Regional Economic Strategy – the RES) and local economic development activity from churches and faith groups.

The CRC's activity is informed by our three core aims:

- Represent the churches to regional bodies
- Assert the significance of faith in the life of the region
- Work as partners in regional regeneration

MTL did a recent evaluation of CRC commissioned by Yorkshire Forward which concluded that: CRC was found to be 'proactive and action-focused', delivering at grassroots level supported by a 'value-added contribution to policy debate through research and briefing publications'. This strategic added value is delivered through effective partnership working.

Churches and faith groups are enabled to make a full and effective contribution to regional policy and programme development, whilst partnerships with sub-regional organisations enable local projects to be supported and developed. This means that we are able to advise regional and national policy-makers – for example the national work by the Commission on Rural Communities about migrant workers – by contributing local knowledge and experience – as well as reporting back to the grassroots on how the political and policy landscape is shifting. The sub-regional partnerships allow on the ground project support and advice. This builds capacity and extends reach into communities others find "hard to reach".

The creation of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum by CRC and partners has allowed the voices of all the nine major faiths to be heard at regional level, and work has focussed on developing a forum of young people of faiths to work together. CRC continues to be the accountable body, but it is hoped the YHFF will be independent by March 08, and CRC and YHFF will be sister organisations working in partnership together.

2. METHODOLOGY

CRC adds value to faith-based activity, by being a catalyst organisation who can bring partners together, exemplify good practice, share expertise, disseminate good practice, and provide training, briefings and events. We are able to "build the capacity" of faith-based projects by sharing advice and information. CRC only works where it can add capacity to what is already being done; CRC seeks if at all possible to work as partners with the churches and with other faith-based groups, and not to duplicate what is already being done well.

CRC also tries to ensure coherent and consistent representation at regional level. CRC cannot speak for the churches, nor does it issue statements; instead CRC supports individuals from the churches who may have representative roles, and equips the churches so that they can issue statements and make policy, campaign and have a voice. CRC also makes sure that voices from the churches are fed into regional strategies and policies, as well as nationally. CRC also works with other faith communities where appropriate so that the profile of faiths in the region is raised, especially in its partnership with the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum.

AREAS OF WORK

3. RURAL WORK

Strategic influence and local economic activity:

CRC has several ways of influencing and energising economic activity focussed on rural issues. CRC's rural task group enables volunteers from the churches engaged in rural issues to resource the churches and feed into regional and national policy. For example, CRC paid for an event in Thirsk in November for faith groups, statutory bodies and voluntary groups on the State of the Countryside to enable the work of the national Commission for Rural Communities to be linked to work in Yorkshire and Humber, to raise awareness of issues and ensure voices from Y and H are heard clearly at national level. CRC brings together the three faith representatives on the regional Rural Affairs Forum to ensure co-ordination and strategic connection.

CRC Farm and Rural Business Project:

CRC's project in North Yorkshire enables isolated & need-to-reach farmers and rural businesses to get the right support from volunteers and statutory agencies, in a partnership with Farm Crisis Network and this project has been independently evaluated as being of real value at grass roots. It has a direct impact on areas like profitability and sustainability, and care for the environment. It also makes important links to other rural agencies like the Royal Agricultural Society, the Rural Stress Network, Business Links and the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institute.

Future Rural developments:

3.1 Making rural strategic connections, supporting faith representation in rural arenas, building and supporting local skills and networks, will be developed and expanded, taking a long term partnership approach, which will include "networking, sharing knowledge and good practice" (Regional Economic Strategy - RES p. 91).

3.2 CRC will make an application to support the CRC Farm and Rural Business Project to the new European funding for Rural initiatives, the RDPE. The part of the RDPE we are applying to is LEADER, geographically-based local groups seeking rural renaissance. The project has been extended from the Northern dales into Ryedale and the North York moors. It will focus on succession planning, animal welfare and environmental care, and advice to rural businesses and farms.

4. COHESION AND DIVERSITY

Black majority churches

CRC has been working since 2002 with the West Yorkshire African Caribbean Council of Churches in a creative partnership to build the capacity of black majority churches to make community development projects more effective, as many of them have projects around healthy living, rehabilitation of offenders, and supplementary education tackling under-achievement. The partnership has enabled the development of Street Pastors in Leeds and elsewhere (a national safer streets initiative improving community cohesion and community safety). It has also linked to the newer African churches.

ICLS

The CRC contract has enabled the delivering of the InterCultural Communication and Leadership School (ICLS) in new areas drawing participants from outside Bradford, to Leeds and Kirklees.

Strategic influence and local economic activity

CRC has a strategic influence linking national and regional policy to local activity. For example, CRC hosted the visit of the national Commission for Integration and Cohesion to Yorkshire and Humber faith representatives in March 07. 280 people attended an event in Hull linked to the bi-centenary of the abolition of slavery in February 07. CRC managed a black heritage project for young people to record the history of black elders in churches, building the media skills of young people, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Faith Matters

The Faith Matters course (which explains why faith is important, encourages businesses, voluntary groups and statutory bodies to understand faith diversity issues and the laws on discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief) is developing into a widely respected series of training programmes and consultancy services. The YHFF have partnered this project. The half-day seminar has been delivered to over 1000 people from the private, public and third sector. This has resulted in a franchising agreement with Hull City Council, and bespoke training to several other organisations.

Cohesion Future developments:

4.1 The partnership with West Yorkshire African Caribbean Council of Churches continues in a reduced way, and money has been levered in from churches and others, to a total of £10,000. This is an area of real need and significance and funding development work like this is precarious. WYACCC now employ the BMC development worker.

4.2 CRC intends to continue building strategic connections in the area of faith diversity and cohesion, to develop policy briefings, events and web support.

4.3 Faith Matters: It is developing into an income generating project which we hope might be self-sustaining. However, it is planned to further develop faith matters as a regionally and nationally recognised suite of products – enquiries have come from other faith bodies in England who would like our help to develop their capacity to deliver Faith Matters. We are working with local authorities, universities, and the voluntary sector, to promote understanding of faith communities. Nationally CRC is part of a coalition proposing faith literacy training for Local Government, in collaboration with the Department for Communities and Local Government. A bid is to be made to the new Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

5. SOCIAL INCLUSION

Strategic influence and local economic activity

CRC has held the only regional events so far on financial inclusion, bringing together participants from banks, credit unions, faith groups and statutory agencies, highlighting work in Sheffield and Leeds. A recent success has been the agreement with Barclays Bank for accounts for 45 newly released prisoners. CRC has also headed up work on migrant workers, advising government office and the national work on migrant workers by the Commission for Rural Communities. We have brought together faith-based projects in the region, acting as a catalyst for new work in this area. CRC has also had events around housing, and health, and focused especially on a partnership with SEARCH on mental health and faith. We have also produced highly thought of briefings on transient communities, wellbeing, destitute asylum seekers, and political extremism. CRC have represented faiths on the Regional Inclusion Framework drafting body.

CRC has sub-regional partners who work with local faith projects providing funding advice, governance expertise and training, linking local experience and knowledge to sub-regional level

including change up consortia, VCS partnerships and local authority bodies. All are well placed to link to the developing city-regions.

Social Inclusion Future developments:

5.1 Strategic engagement and local skills and networking will be built through a programme of local promotion and engagement with practitioners amongst faith groups. Social inclusion activity by churches and other faith based groups will be encouraged, supported and connected together. This work will be supported through high quality briefings, seminars, and links to sub-regional and national partners.

5.2 Sub-regional partners will be supported to directly build the capacity of faith-based front-line organisations in order to develop local economic activity. Direct project support will enable jobs to be created, money to be levered in and the encouragement of volunteering. Local projects will be able to contribute to neighbourhood wellbeing, through increased cohesion and social inclusion activity.

6. CULTURE WORK

Strategic influence and local economic activity

CRC has developed a national profile of excellence as regards heritage and tourism. The successful culture hub linking practitioners, providing training, briefings, project support and funding advice has resulted in money levered in, jobs created and local economies improved. It has resulted in Sacred Places leaflets, Treasures Revealed in Leeds week (41 places of worship opened up for visitors, including a mosque, a gurdwara, and a pagan stone circle, as well as many churches), and projects in York and Wakefield. A social enterprise in Leeds has been developed with Yorkshire Culture, which is a church focused on promoting the arts and diversity. CRC has represented faiths on regional and national culture/heritage/tourism bodies. There was also been a tourism project in the East Riding of Yorkshire, a partnership with LEADER Plus, a local historic trust and East Riding council which enabled one full-time worker employed by CRC for three years.

Sport

CRC has developed a new partnership with Sport England to link faith-based sport work and healthy activities to local, sub-regional and regional sport bodies. A conference in March, Body and Soul, had 150 registrations, with many faiths represented.

Future developments:

6.1 CRC will continue to resource practitioners, and support faith representation on regional culture/heritage/tourism bodies. Links will be made to local projects and networking will be encouraged, supported by events and briefings.

6.2 CRC have successfully bid to the Heritage Lottery fund to develop heritage and tourism work in West Yorkshire amongst faith communities. This project, Treasures Revealed in West Yorkshire, will employ a half-time co-ordinator and a full-time development officer for three years, to develop trails and leaflets, and provide training, expertise and signposting for faith communities.

6.3 CRC would like to build on the links with Sport England and at the Dept of Health at Government Office to develop support for faith based sport activities, recognising that need-to-reach groups can be accessed via faith organisations, and socially excluded groups are served by local faith communities. This pilot could provide training, support and links to wider sport bodies so that faith groups can access expert advice, coaching and mentoring training, and funding opportunities.

7. SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AND LEADERSHIP

CRC has been running a project called Effective Christian Presence and Enterprise to encourage sustainable projects which are innovative and pioneering, transforming local communities economically, spiritually and socially. As part of this there is work going on to support social enterprise in faith communities. 18 innovative projects are being directly supported whilst open events and briefings to church leaders have enabled the learning to be spread to the wider church. A report with the findings is due in summer 2008.

CRC has also hosted an event with a national partner on faith and social enterprise.

Future developments:

CRC could support the development and encouragement of local projects to encourage them toward entrepreneurial thinking, and develop leadership amongst faith communities engaged in community enterprises. We are currently speaking to the Foundation for Church Leadership, the Church Army, and Fresh Expressions, with Faithworks, to see how this work could be taken forward.

8. FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funding has been secured from the churches for the years 2008-2011 at a level of £48,000 per annum. Funding will be sought for individual projects from a variety of organisations.

In the future CRC would like to develop its work in leadership in faith-based community enterprises; to build on the Sport England/Dept of health partnership to develop work around Sport and Faith; and to expand our delivery around diversity and equality and faith. We also want to continue to build on the expertise gained in work around migrant workers, rural business support, culture, heritage and tourism, financial inclusion, and to work with our sub-regional partners to enable faith-based organisations to be more effective in tackling social exclusion. We aim to continue to link policy to practice, region to grassroots, and faith to government.

Thus we fulfil the aims of CRC, and our mission to transform communities.