

Local Government and Communities Committee

City Region Deals

Submission from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

Call for Evidence on City Region Deals

CRER is an independent NGO working to eliminate racial discrimination and promote racial justice across Scotland. Through capacity building, research and campaigning activities which respond to the needs of communities, our work takes a strategic approach to tackling deep rooted issues of racial inequality.

CRER works closely with BME communities and public bodies to advance racial equality and support best practice. The evidence included in our submission has been gathered through CRER's research and stakeholder engagement on the impacts of local and national policies on BME communities.

Have local residents and businesses been kept informed and involved in the development and activities of City Region Deals?

Whilst there is no legal duties explicitly placed on the City Deal partnerships to advance the Public Sector Equality Duties, there are legal obligations required of each of the local authority partners to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not¹. Again whilst these duties are not explicit as part of the City Region deals, they do extend to all of the functions of the partnership. CRER would welcome further details on how PSED has been considered by public bodies as part of their partnership working.

In both the City Deal Procurement Strategy 2015-2020², and the Glasgow City Region – City Deal Cabinet Joint Committee 2015/16 annual audit³ there is no mention of equalities practices or details of how individuals with a protected characteristic will benefit from the investment and commitments within the scheme. CRER is aware that there have been several events organised by public and voluntary organisations in Glasgow and the surrounding local authority areas to inform residents of the City Deals projects. However there are areas for improvement to ensure that local residents are continually involved in the development and activities of City Region Deals.

¹ EHRC, "The Public Sector Equality Duty" <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/corporate-reporting/equality-and-diversity/public-sector-equality-duty>

² Glasgow City Region Deal "City Deal Procurement Strategy 2015-2020" <http://www.glasgowcityregion.co.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=16877&p=0>

³ Glasgow City Region – City Deal Cabinet Joint Committee 2015/16 Annual audit report to Members and the Controller of Audit http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2016/fa_1516_glasgow_city_deal.pdf

At an absolute minimum there must be a strong commitment to equality impact assess the regional deals to ensure they do not exacerbate inequalities. CRER also believes that each local authority must enact their equalities duties by ensuring the needs of individuals within their communities are met as part of this wider programme of investment. We were pleased to note the Scottish Government's declaration as a part of their 2017/2018 budget⁴, in which they stated they would be equality impact assessing the City Region Deals. CRER would urge the Scottish Government to ensure that these assessments are shared and used as a tool for improved equalities working.

All too often equalities issues are seen as an "add-on" to existing programmes. Ensuring that they are built into the everyday working of the City Deal partnerships through local consultation, stakeholder management and detailed planning would be a vital step forward in overcoming this.

Are City Region Deals supporting a shift towards local decision-making on major investment projects?

CRER would welcome greater transparency on the level of decision making that has been made at a local level. At present there is limited information available on how communities have been consulted and how their views have been used. There is also very little information on how community groups can engage with City Deals in order to put forward project ideas. Setting out a robust strategy for engagement would, in the longer term, help to meet the aims of the City Deals partnerships and better serve the communities that they represent.

Any other issues relating to City Region Deals which you wish to bring to the attention of the Committee?

In the case of Glasgow City Region Deal there are 26 projects planned over 20 years to improve the region's infrastructure, employability and the growth of new business. Over £1 billion of public funding has already allocated to Glasgow City Region Deal. As part of their engagement with local residents they have highlighted the importance of collaborative procurement and the need to address common issuing being faced by buyers to meet their collective goals.⁵

Earlier this year CRER hosted a roundtable meeting with the EHRC and public sector bodies in Glasgow to discuss the Public Sector Equalities Duties and how they apply to procurement. Below are some bullet points of issues that were raised in relation to delivering improved equality through procurement. With such large sums of money being set aside for the City Region Deals initiative the Committee may wish to explore some of the existing issues of implementing equality practices into

⁴ Scottish Government, Scottish Draft Budget 2017/2018
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/8841/11>

⁵ Glasgow City Region Deal "City Deal Procurement Strategy 2015-2020"
<http://www.glasgowcityregion.co.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=16877&p=0>

procurement to ensure that there is a clear commitment to use this money to advance equality, as well as supporting public sector workers delivering these projects.

Key points on procurement:

- It was suggested that equalities must be made high profile enough that it becomes a fully implementable, workable strategy to all practices. This then needs to be coupled with making procurement equalities high profile enough that they are fed into organisational outcomes. There is often too many different priorities which aren't on the Scottish Government agenda, yet there is a burden on public bodies to deliver them.
- There have been considerable changes enforced in relation to the sustainability requirements, and many of the regulatory bodies have been quick to implement the new regulations brought in through the EU. This said they seem slow to react to or enforce the equalities duties.
- Each body has different regulations, meaning that they are all individually feeding into the Scottish Government work plans, but with no leadership from the top.
- There is often a lack of equalities expertise in local councils, with West Lothian for example dealing with 250 to 300 contracts per year but only having one dedicated equalities staff member.
- The need to learn from other sectors about how to improve in this area was highlighted. The current set-up relies on leadership from equalities specialists who often have tight competition on resourcing meaning it often falls off of work plans.
- One organisation highlighted that they had sought engagement with organisations who had scored poorly on their equalities indexes. This was done to ensure that they improved, and that there is an ever growing pool of organisations that can deliver services with an equalities interest.

Conclusion

CRER welcomes this Committee call for evidence on City Region Deals. As mentioned, these region deals have the potential to tackle disadvantage and encourage local involvement on large scale projects across Scotland. We recommend that the Committee investigate whether Equality Impact Assessments have already been undertaken for the City Region Deals, and how these are to be carried out as part of the Scottish Government's 2017/2018 budget pledge.

Further to this, CRER would welcome greater transparency on how local authorities have applied their PSED requirements to their partnership working within City Region Deals. CRER would particularly welcome further details on how local residents have been consulted and if there has been considerations from local authority partners to tackle disadvantages faced by those with a protected characteristic.

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