

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY SIXTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON FRIDAY 19th MAY 2023 10:30AM
HELD ONLINE**

3895/23 **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Ms S McClelland (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Mr R Campbell (Board Member), Mr J McCallister (Board Member). Ms A Simpson (Board Member) Ms C Harris (Board Member) Ms M Braniff (Board Member)

3896/23 **In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr P Day (Engagement Director), Ms J Adamson (Human Resources Manager), Mr P Garrity (Temporary Finance Manager) Ms H George (PA to CEO and Board).

3897/23 **Observers:** Ms L Harley (Boardroom Apprentice)

3898/23 **Apologies:** Ms N Tandon (Board Member)

3899/23 **Standard Checks**

- (a) *Members should declare any conflict of interests in any discussions where decisions were required.*
- (b) *Members need to register any offers of gifts or hospitality since the last Council meeting*

Mr R Campbell works at the same firm as CRC's legal advisors, assisting with the tribunal case set out in the Risk Register, and CRC's Grant Management System. There is no conflict as Mr R Campbell was not involved in the procurement process and is not involved in these matters.

3900/23 **Minutes**

Members reviewed the minutes of the 235th meeting of the Board which took place on 7th April 2023. The Board approved these minutes.

3901/23 **Matters Arising**

The Chair presented the Board with the matters arising paper, setting out actions which emerged in previous meetings.

Only one action remains outstanding. This is the completion of the Board Evaluation and Appraisal by one member. The Chair asked the member to submit these outstanding forms as soon as possible.

The Board noted this paper.

3902/23 **Correspondence**

The CEO presented the Board with correspondence from The Executive Office dated 21st April 2023.

The correspondence sets out an indicative budget for CRC for the 2023/24 financial year. The final budget has not yet been agreed by the Department, however it is expected in June.

The Department are currently conducting an Equality Impact Assessment of their overall budget.

Until the final TEO budget is agreed they are only allocating up to 65% of the cash budget for the year. The CRC spend and drawdowns are being tightly managed by the Finance Manager.

The Board discussed the impact that not filling the Funding and Development Director role would have on work at CRC and the workload of the CEO, and agreed that recruitment should begin soon. The budget should be adapted to take account of this decision. Work will begin on reviewing the Job Description and Job Specification.

ACTION: CRC to begin work on reviewing the Funding and Development Director's Job Specification and Job Description, with a view to advertising the vacant post.

The Board thanked the CEO for her work on finance and funding in the absence of Directors in those teams.

3903/23

Chair's Update

The Chair updated the Board on a number of events and meetings he attended following the previous Board meeting.

On 20th April the Chair and CEO met with the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ). This meeting was arranged by CAJ following the informal resolution of their Freedom of Information request to CRC and the release of the Bonfire Report to them..

The Chair attended an interview on 26th April with NVTV. A number of recent Good Relations Award Winners were also present for this interview.

On 2nd May the Chair and the CEO attended a meeting of the Peace Monitor Advisory Group. The Authors have produced a draft of each chapter of the report. They are now working on a final draft and aim to have the report ready for production in September 2023.

Staff and a number of Board members attended a meeting on 3rd May to mark Mr P Jordan's final working day at CRC. The Chair thanked Board members for attending and contributing to his gift.

The Board informed staff that they received correspondence from The Executive Office regarding a further extension to their terms by another year. Board members are to respond directly to TEO with their decision.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update.

3904/23

CEO's Update

The CEO presented the Board with her update and highlighted a number of items.

i) Budget

The indicative budget letter was reviewed by the Board previously in the meeting. The CEO will continue to raise the need for a final budget with The Executive Office

ii) Staffing

Mr P Jordan's last working day at CRC was 3rd May, and his final day was the 19th May. The CEO thanked Board members who were able to attend the Paul's departure event. She noted that it was also a celebration of Paul having worked almost twenty-five year with CRC, which was an excellent achievement.

In the absence of a Funding and Development Director the CEO has taken on overseeing the work of the team. Weekly meetings are taking place and the team are working well together.

CRC's DFAP Director will begin full time in July 2023. The CEO thanked Mr P Garrity, CRC's Finance Manager Temp, who is working on the close of the 2022/23 year and preparation of the Annual Report and Accounts.

CRC currently have two other temporary staff members assisting with the vouching and close of 2022/23 grants.

iii) The Executive Office

Mr C Gardner, TEO met with the CEO on Thursday 18th May to discuss the ongoing pension and DoF guidance issue. The Board were reminded of the issue, which appears as a red risk on the register and as a recommendation in CRC's NIAO audits.

TEO are hoping to progress this matter although there are still ongoing court cases involving other bodies. CRC requested updated figures on the impact in 2022/23. CRC has responded informing TEO that the unaudited figure for 2022/23 is £15,302. That figure has reduced since last year as it is affected by the number of staff in employment. In 2022/23 that number was 9, however, in 2023/24 that number will drop again to 8.

CRC are awaiting further information from TEO, following this the Sub-Group will be reconvened.

iv) Events and Meetings

The next TBUC Engagement Forum will be taking place on 13th June in Portrush. All Board members are welcome to attend.

The next Finance and General Purposes Committee will be taking place in July 2023. The meeting will receive the first draft of the Annual Report and Account before they are submitted to the Audit Office for review.

The next Board meeting will be held over the summer. The meeting is likely to focus on a review of the last year of funding and discussion on plans for the coming year.

The CEO noted an addition to her report which was a further meeting of the Funding and Development Team held on Thursday 18th May.

The Board thanked the CEO for her work and noted the report.

3905/23 Engagement Sector Update

Mr P Day presented the Board with an update on the work of the Engagement Team.

The next TBUC Engagement Forum will be taking place on 13th June in Portrush. 98 individuals have already registered to attend, after registration opened this week. Board members are welcome to attend. This meeting will focus on the TBUC Review currently being undertaken by TEO.

A photocall is being held on 23rd May to mark the launch of Good Relations Week 2023. The theme of this year's festival is 'Together'. Graphics are being designed and the Steering Group continue to meet.

Mr P Day reminded the Board that there was discussion last year about expanding the Good Relations Awards in 2023, however, due to the budget constraints and impact that will have on groups, it was decided that the awards will go ahead with no expansion this year.

The Board enquired as to why there was a spike in social media engagement in March. Mr P Day explained that Mr M McGlade published a number of new video interviews with grant awardees on their projects that month. This material is very popular on CRC's social media pages.

The Chair and Board commended the Engagement Team for their work, and reiterated how important engagement is at the moment, considering the cuts taking place this year.

3906/23 Funding and Development Sector Update

The CEO presented a report to the Board setting out the work of the Funding and Development Team. She thanked Ms H George for compiling the report in the absence of the Funding and Development Director.

The team is working on the close down of the 2022/23 grants. Some vouching materials are outstanding and the team is following up with groups to ensure these are received in reasonable time.

The 2023/24 Core Fund groups and North Belfast groups are awaiting their contracts and first payments, once CRC's budget has been agreed by TEO.

One investigation conducted by TEO in 2022/23 of a group in receipt of Core funding and North Belfast funding has delayed the close down of this grant.

The Community Relations/Cultural Diversity 2023/24 grant is open to applications. Assessment work is being completed and awards will be made when the budget has been confirmed.

The CEO reminded the Board that CRC will not be opening the Media Grant, Publication Grant, or Pathfinder Grant in 2023/24 due to budget constraints unless further resources are provided by TEO. This will be kept under review.

The Board thanked the CEO for the update and noted the report.

3907/23

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

i) Verbal Update from Chair on 4th May meeting

Mr J McCallister, the Committee Chair, provided the Board with an update on the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting which took place on 4th May.

A representative from the Northern Ireland Audit Office attended the meeting and presented the Audit Plan for 2022/23. The audit field work will begin on 17th July. The audit fee will be £24k which is an 8% increase on the previous year. The Committee expressed their concern during the meeting at the continuing yearly fee increases.

CRC's internal auditors presented their plan for the 2023/24 audits. This year CRC will see a review of: grants administration and distribution; the work of the Finance and General Purposes Committee; and the implementation of previous audit recommendations.

A number of audit recommendations were completed in April/May 2023 and have now been removed from the register. Those that remain include: the implementation of DoF guidance; quality of accounts which will be reviewed following the 2023/24 accounts submission; Finance and Funding software upgrade; and the review of HR, Engagement, and Governance policies.

ii) Risk Register

Mr J McCallister presented the Committee with the Risk Register. A number of risks were removed from the register at the last meeting. 5 remain on the register.

Implementation of DoF Guidance remains rated red. As discussed earlier in the meeting, the CEO met with TEO on 18th May to discuss the next steps to move this forward.

Staffing remains rated red due to unfilled posts including that of the Funding Director.

External Audit Fee is rated amber as there has been no further development.

The pension tribunal risk remains rated amber. CRC awaits further correspondence from the tribunal service on this case.

2023/24 Resource is rated amber. CRC still awaits the final budget for 2023/24, however, has received correspondence presented at today's meeting regarding a 10% cut.

iii) Minutes of the 23rd March meeting

Mr J McCallister presented the Board with the agreed minutes of the Audit Committee meeting which took place on 23rd March.

The Board thanked Mr J McCallister for this update and noted the reports.

3908/23 Staffing Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Board with a paper setting out the current staffing situation at CRC, and noted that many issues had already been discussed earlier in the Board meeting.

CRC's DFAP Director will begin full time in July 2023.

The Funding and Development Director position is now vacant. The HR Manager will begin the review of the Job Specification and Description, as instructed by the Board earlier in the meeting.

CRC currently have two temporary staff members assisting with vouching and verification work.

The Board thanked Ms J Adamson and noted the report.

3909/23 Purchase Order Update

Ms H George reminded the Board that in November 2022 a paper was brought to the meeting setting out an approach to purchase orders related to temporary staff members. Due to the timing of these payments, the Board had agreed that the Chair could approve the Purchase Orders on behalf of the Board, and regular updates

would be brought to meetings, informing members of the current totals of these Purchase Orders.

CRC currently have two temporary members of staff whose purchase orders have reached the Board's authorisation level. The Chair approved these purchase orders. Ms H George presented the Board with an update on these two totals.

CRC's Funding Temporary Staff Member's Purchase Order currently sits at £23,138.92.

CRC's Finance Temporary Staff Member's Purchase Order currently sits at £15,129.73.

The Board thanked Ms H George for this update and noted the papers.

3910/23 Any Other Business

None

3911/23 Date of Next Meeting

To take place during the summer. Date to be confirmed.