

NI Community Relations Council
Finance and General Purposes Committee

14th July 2023

Held Online

1. **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair) Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Ms N Tandon (Board Member)
2. **In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Garrity (Finance Manager), Ms U Kelly (DFAP Director), Ms H George (PA to CEO and Board).
3. **Apologies:** Ms A Simpson (Board Member).

4. Minutes

The minutes of 31st March 2023 meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee was reviewed and approved.

5. Matters Arising

The CEO updated the Committee on a number of actions which were discussed at the previous meeting.

A review of Agile Working will take place and the outcome will be presented to the Committee.

As instructed at the previous Committee meeting, the Board held a closed session to discuss a gift for staff at their April meeting. This action is now complete.

At the previous meeting the Committee asked the CEO and Chair to contact TEO regarding the attendance allowance and Chair's pay. The CEO informed the Committee that she wrote to TEO and provided additional information to them regarding member's attendance. The Chair added that he raised this issue during his Chair's appraisal with Mr G Johnston, TEO.

The final action from the previous meeting asks that the Chair carry out a dignity at work check with staff in quarter two 2023/24. The Chair will be in touch with Ms J Adamson to organise this meeting.

6. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were raised by Committee members.

7. Annual Report and Accounts

- i) 2022/23 Annual Report and Accounts

Mr P Garrity presented the Committee with CRC's draft 2022/23 Annual Report and Accounts. He assured the Committee that the Accounts have been prepared in line with Charity Commission guidance, Department guidance, and Companies House guidance.

Mr P Garrity stated that these accounts have been shared with TEO for their whole of government accounts.

The draft, if approved by the Committee, will be presented to the Northern Ireland Audit Office on Monday 17th July and will be subject to field work in July.

Mr P Garrity drew the Committee's attention to the pension reserve and informed members that a surplus of £194,000 has reported for 2022/23. This surplus represents the difference between the liabilities of the pension fund and the value of underlying assets.

CRC's resource spend in 2022/23 was £3,310,999.

The CEO presented the Committee with a number of sections within the report including: The Chair's forward; The CEO's Comment; The Strategic Plan; The Going Concerns; The Performance Summary; Key Achievements; Detailed Analysis of Achievements; Breakdowns of Funding Paid, Break Down of Achievements in each Directorate; Overview of the Business Plan achievements; Detailed Financial Summary; Strategic Report; Governance Statements; Data Protection, FOI, and Complaints.

The Audit Office and Controller will insert CRC's audit report to page 53 of the Annual Report and Accounts, once it has been signed off.

A Committee member highlighted that brackets should be removed from the pension figure on page 48.

Following the amendment of the error on page 48 the Committee approved the Annual Report and Accounts for submission to NIAO.

The Committee and CEO thanked Mr P Garrity for his work on the Accounts.

ii) Solvency and Liquidity Report

Mr P Garrity presented the Committee with a Report on CRC's Solvency and Liquidity.

As of 31st March 2023 CRC's restricted income reserve sits at a surplus of £194,000. The deficit on the restricted pension reserve moved into positive territory in 2022/23 mainly due to an actuarial gain of £3,769,000. The pension fund now sits at a deficit of £365,640, compared to £2,866,485 in 2021/22.

Mr P Garrity reminded the Committee that as in previous years CRC's funds appear in the negative for two reasons: the accounts are based on accruals; and the pension

report. The CEO reminded attendees that TEO have provided CRC with a letter of assurance relating to the pension liability.

The Committee thanked Mr P Garrity and the CEO for this update and noted the report.

8. Performance Reports

i) Quarter Four 2022/23

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's Quarter Four 2022/23 Performance Report. This report sets out the financial position of CRC, the sick absence statistics, the red and amber risks, and the achievements in the quarter.

The CEO drew the Committees attention to the two actions CRC were unable to achieve during the final quarter of 2022/23. The review of financial and governance procedures was delayed due to staffing in the DFAP Directorate. This will be completed in quarter two and quarter three of 2023/24. One other action was not completed in the year. A Health and Safety audit was delayed due to scheduling. It took place in July 2023 instead, and the report is due this month.

ii) Quarter One 2023/24

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's Quarter One 2023/24 Performance Report.

Within the report one action for 2023/24 is predicted as not being completed this year, that is the delivery of emergency grant aid. Due to budget cuts CRC will not open the Pathfinder, Grant Media Grant, or Publications Grant to applications in 2023/24. This decision will be kept under review if further resources become available.

The Committee asked that reference to the finance and governance policy review, delayed in the previous quarter, be added to this list.

ACTION: Ms H George to add an update on the policy reviews delayed in the previous quarter to this report.

iii) Delivery Report Quarter One 2023/24

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's Quarter One 2023/24 Delivery Report. It sets out CRC's measurable objectives, and the schedule for implementation.

The Committee thanked the CEO for presenting the Performance Reports and Delivery Reports and noted the papers.

9. CRC 2023/24 Budget Letter

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's 2023/24 opening budget letter from The Executive Office.

The letter sets out a 10% cut to CRC's resource, compares to the previous year's budget. The letter also informs CRC that only 65% of cash allowance is permitted to be spend as the Northern Ireland budget is still unconfirmed.

The CEO assured the Committee that Mr P Garrity regularly reviews the budget and cash spend to ensure compliance with the 65% restriction.

The Committee thanked the CEO for this update and noted the letter.

10. Management Accounts - April, May June 2023

Mr P Garrity presented the Committee with the Management Accounts for April, May and June 2023, based on CRC's 2022/23 budget with the 10% cut.

He highlighted that the 2022/23 accruals are contained within these accounts with the aim from them to be paid in July and August 2023. Following this the first payments for 2023/24 grants will be made.

The Committee thanked Mr P Garrity and noted these accounts.

11. Service Continuity Plan

The CEO informed the Committee that in 2022 CRC conducted an exercise to identify any areas of business where only one member of staff was relied upon to complete a crucial piece of work. The Management Team then identified contingency plans to implement if that member of staff were absent from work.

These contingency plans have been added to CRC's Service Continuity Plan in Annex B.

The CEO assured the Committee that the separation of duties is still followed in the contingency plans.

The Committee noted that the details of the Funding Director will need to be updated when a new member of staff has been appointed. In the meantime, that section of the Plan should include the job title 'Director of Funding and Development' in the place of a named director.

The Committee reviewed the Plan and approved it.

12. Human Resources Policy Update Paper

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with an update on the review of CRC's Staff Handbook and the Health and Safety Audit.

CRC's Staff Handbook underwent a review by external HR advisors in June 2023. There were a number of suggested changes that CRC could make to ensure the policy meets best practice. These will be checked against NICS HR policy.

The HR Manager and DFAP Director will review the suggestions and bring any changes to a future Finance and General Purposes Committee for approval.

Ms J Adamson highlighted from the report that CRC's office underwent a Health and Safety audit in June 2023. The audit report will be issued in July and any recommendations will be implemented. The health and safety auditors commended CRC on the training of a staff member on mental health first aid.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for this update and noted the report.

13. Sickness Absence Report

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with CRC's quarter one sick absence report.

The report shows that sickness absence has decreased on the same period in 2022/23. Ms J Adamson added that there is no cause for concern in the rates of sick absence in this quarter.

The Committee noted the report.

14. Staffing Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with a report, setting out CRC's current staffing position.

CRC's DFAP Director has begun working three days a week and will start full time in September 2023. CRC continues to receive Finance Manager assistance from temporary member of staff Mr P Garrity.

CRC received notice that the Core Funding Officer, covering the position temporarily while an employee is on a career break, will be leaving on 21st July. The HR Manager contacted the permanent post holder to ask if they could share their intentions related to returning to the post when their career break is over. The staff member was not able to provide an update at this point, but will be in contact in December when a decision will need to be made.

In the meantime CRC have begun looking into another temporary staff member to take up the role. Two possible options were discussed, a part-time Core Fund Officer, and/or a full time temporary Director of Funding.

Mr P Garrity stated that there is resource in the budget for either of these options.

The Committee instructed Ms J Adamson to explore all options in relation to temporarily filling these positions. The Committee added that they are content for the HR Manager and CEO to go with what they believe to be most appropriate.

Ms J Adamson then presented the Committee with the draft permanent Director of Funding and Development recruitment timeline, Personal Specification and Job Description.

The Committee approved the timeline, Personal Specification and Job Description.

15. Premises Committee

Ms J Adamson updated the Committee on the last Equality House Premises Committee meeting.

It was reported that all planned preventative maintenance is up to date.

16. Health and Safety

There are no health and safety issues to report. Staff are reminded at all team meetings that any issues they have can be raised with the HR Manager.

17. Any Other Business

The CEO asked the Board to approve CRC's new DFAP Director being added to the Banking mandate.

The Committee approved this action.

The CEO assured the Committee that, as with all those on the banking mandate, separation of duties will be maintained in relation to the DFAP Director approval of banking transactions on the app. Generally, the task is taken on by staff members who are separate from the finance team to ensure separation of duties.

The Chair agreed to remain on the mandate to cover emergencies.

18. Date of Next Meeting

October 2023 – date to be confirmed