

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY  
RELATIONS COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> FEBRUARY 2022 10:30AM  
VIA VIDEO CALLING SOFTWARE**

**3696/22**      **Present:** Chair Mr M McDonald, Ms M Braniff , Mr R Campbell, Mr J McCallister, Mr M McDonnell, Ms A Simpson, Ms N Tandon, Ms S McClelland.

**3697/22**      **In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr G McKeown (Director of Finance, Admin, and Personnel), Mr P Day (Director of Engagement), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Ms H George (PA to CEO and Board),

**3698/22**      **Observers:** Mr D Johnston (CRC's Boardroom Apprentice).

**3699/22**      **Apologies:** Ms C Harris

**3700/22**      **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 informed the Board that the law firm he works for has recently merged with another firm. That firm provides CRC with legal advice. There is no conflict of interest as Mr R Campbell would not be involved in the procurement of this legal advice, however, he wished to declare this connection to the Board for transparency.

No other interests were declared.

**3701/22**      **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to today's meeting.

**3702/22**      **Minutes**

Attendees reviewed the minutes of the 226<sup>th</sup> Board meeting which took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2021. The Board approved the minutes.

**3703/22**      **Matters Arising**

The Chair informed members that there are no outstanding actions or matters arising.

**3704/22**      **Partnership Agreement**

The Chair informed the Board that a draft version of The Community Relations Council and The Executive Office's Partnership Agreement has been completed. This Agreement will replace the Management Statement/Financial Memorandum currently in place.

The Chair presented this draft to the Board. This draft was produced in collaboration with CRC, and follows a template to be implemented across all Executive Office Arm's Length Bodies.

The Chair highlighted a number of items within the Agreement, including: an annual engagement plan being drafted; an annual review of Board effectiveness; an external review of Board effectiveness every three years; and a yearly Board Chair appraisal. The Chair noted that many of these items are already in place.

Mr G McKeown added that a number of items within the report set out CRC's power to complete a specific action, but does not require CRC to do so. For example the power to assist training. This is an enabling power and not a requirement to carry this out.

The Board discussed and approved the Partnership Agreement. They thanked TEO, CRC and the Chair for their work on this.

### **3705/22 Chair's Update**

The Chair updated the Board on a number of meetings and events attended in January 2022.

The Chair and the CEO attended a session held by The Executive Office for all Arm's Length Bodies. The meeting discussed the priorities of the Department, and common issues, and how to resolve them.

### **3706/22 Operational Plan**

The CEO presented a first draft of CRC's 2022-23 Operational Plan.

The Plan contains actions which are carried over from the previous period, the removal of completed work, and the addition of items linked to CRC's Development Paper.

The CEO highlighted a number of additions to the 2022-23 Operational Plan, including: the work of the Funding Sub Group; a six month review meeting with TEO staff; supporting TEO with district council programme development; implement the recommendations from the North Belfast review; research into the social value of good relations investment; and continued implementation of ongoing governance projects.

The CEO added that the staffing changes may affect the delivery of aspects of the Operational Plan, however, this will be kept under regular review.

The Board approved the draft Operational Plan.

The CEO stated that the Plan would now be shared with TEO for review and any recommended changes would be shared with the Board.

**Chief Executive Officer's Report**

The CEO updated the Board on a number of projects, events and meetings held following the previous Board meeting.

i) Covid 19

The Covid 19 arrangements continue to work well.

Work on refurbishing the office will begin in the next financial year, however, a number of smaller aspects of the changes can begin.

ii) Government Departments and Committees

The 2021-22 Operational Plan is still awaiting ministerial sign off.

The Chair and CEO attended TEO's meeting for Arm's Length Bodies. This forum will work on areas of common ground, with particular focus on Covid recovery and the NI Civil Service Transformation Programme.

The CEO, Mr G McKeown, and Mr P Jordan attended a quarterly Accountability and Liaison meeting with The Executive Office. TEO congratulated CRC on their accomplishments in the 2021-22 financial year. They were satisfied with CRC's governance and have asked for these meetings to focus now on more front line work updates.

iii) Engagement

The CEO informed the Board that the next TBUC Engagement Forum would be taking place on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022. This event will focus on the connection between the private sector and good relations.

An event to mark ten years of the Decade Roundtable will be taking place on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. This event will include a presentation following the evaluation, reflections, and recommendations on how this work can inform the commemoration of living history.

Board members are welcome to attend these events.

iv) Governance

The CEO informed the Board that this will be Mr G McKeown's final meeting. He will be moving on to another organisation at the end of February 2022.

The CEO and the Chair thanked Mr G McKeown for all of his work over the years, and wished him well in his new role. Mr G McKeown thanked the CEO, Chair, and Board for their kind words and support over the years.

**3708/22**

**Staff Handbook**

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with updates to CRC's Staff Handbook. The draft presented has been reviewed and recommended by the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Mr G McKeown presented the proposed changes to the Handbook, which range from major to minor impact. All changes are based on best practice.

The Board reviewed the amendments and approved the document.

Mr D Johnston suggested that the document should make reference to CRC's good work around diversity and inclusion. Mr G McKeown agreed to add details of CRC's equality screening and equality strategy to the document.

The Staff Handbook will now be presented to the Union for formal consultation.

**3709/22**

**Sustainability and the Environment at CRC**

The CEO informed the Board that Ms H George has taken on the role of Environmental Champion at CRC.

Ms H George presented the Board with a paper setting out a number of ideas CRC could implement to become more environmentally friendly. This proposal was recommended to the Board by the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The proposal includes: a digital first policy for publication of resources; eliminate the use of single use plastics in the office; CRC procurement policy to include mandated criteria based on sustainability, the environment, and Fairtrade standards; and CRC seek to contribute to offsetting the overall carbon footprint.

The Board approved the proposal.

The CEO informed the Committee that, as part of the Environmental Champion role, Ms H George meet with experts in the field to find out how good relations currently intersects with the environment, how CRC can support good relations and environment work through the funding streams, and further suggestions for CRC to improve their environmental impact.

**3710/22**

**Assurance Statement**

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with CRC's quarter three Assurance Statement, for the period of August 2021-October 2021.

The Board approved the statement.

The Assurance Statement will be submitted to The Executive Office and any comments will be shared with the Board.

**3711/22 Dignity at Work Policy**

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with a draft Dignity at Work Policy. This Policy was drafted in collaboration with staff and has been recommended for approval by the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The Board approved this policy.

Ms J Adamson informed the Board that CRC's staff will soon be taking part in team building training, and then a meeting of the Dignity at Work Implementation Group will take place.

**3712/22 Pay Remit**

Mr G McKeown informed the Board that no further progress has been made on CRC's Pay Remits. All Pay Remits have been submitted to The Executive Office and all questions have been answered.

The Chair wrote to Mr D McMahon at TEO to raise this issue again.

**3713/22 Good Relations Week Recommendations**

Mr P Day presented the Board with a list of recommendations made by external consultants, following their review of Good Relations Week 2021.

He highlighted the recommendations, whether the recommendations were accepted/rejected, and the reasons for the decision.

Recommendations accepted include: widening participation in the Steering Group; engagement beyond Community Relations groups; and the addition of fringe events. One recommendation to rebrand the festival was not accepted for Good Relations Week 2022.

The Board were content with the adjudication of the recommendations.

**3714/22 Good Relations Award Panel**

Mr P Day informed the Board that the nomination process for the Good Relations Award 2022 opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021 and closed on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022. 12 nominations were received.

The Board agreed that The Chair, Mr J McCallister, and Ms N Tandon would sit on the decision panel, along with a colleague from The Executive Office and Mr D Johnston. Ms M Braniff would be held as a reserve panel member.

Mr P Day will circulate a number of potential dates for this meeting, to panel members for this meeting.

**3715/22 Community Engagement Sector Update**

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

The Engagement Forum will be taking place on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022, and all Board members are welcome to attend. The theme for this event will be 'Good Relations and the Private Sector'.

A number of private sector businesses will be involved in the event, including: All State; PWC; CBI; and Business in the Community.

The Decade Roundtable event to mark ten years of work will take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2022. This event will showcase the results of the recent review of the work and recommendations will be made on how the work can inform the commemoration of living history.

The Chair thanked the Engagement Team for their work.

**3716/22 Funding and Development Sector Update**

Mr P Jordan presented the Board with an update on the work of the Funding and Development Directorate.

The Community Relations/Cultural Diversity grant closed to applications on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January. The Project Officers are currently working through a number of applications.

The Core Funding decision meeting will be taking place on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022. Board members will receive the applications, evaluations, project officer recommendations, and a financial review of the groups prior to the meeting.

Mr D McNally is currently working on the mapping of 2022/23 funding.

Two projects have been awarded Media Grant Funding for 2021/22. These projects will be completed by March 2022 and launched in the spring.

A North Belfast support meeting took place on 18<sup>th</sup> January and contracts will be issued in due course. The Executive Office have now completed their review of the North Belfast Good Strategic Good Relations Fund, and any recommendations will apply to the 2023/24 funding year.

The Publication Scheme has now closed to applications. Ten applications are currently being reviewed however funding is not available for all applicants. Those that are fundable but where funding is not available will be asked to resubmit in the next financial year.

**3717/22 Finance and General Purposes Committee**

i) Verbal Update

The Chair updated the Board on the recent Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The Q4 Delivery Report was presented. Mr G McKeown assured the Committee that all outcomes are on target to be completed by the end of the financial year. The Score Card was presented, and further work is ongoing, in collaboration with TEO, on the measuring of the qualitative outcomes

The Management Accounts up to 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2021 were presented. The projected underspend is £14k which is within the 1.5% tolerance. 85% of the budget has been spent on front line Good Relations work

The following policies were approved at the meeting: Amendments to the Vouching and Verification Procedures; Hybrid Working Policy; Freedom of Info Policy and Model Publication Policy; and the Mobile Device Policy

The Sickness Absence Report showed that there was an increase in members of staff off sick, however, two members off staff off on long term sick have returned to work. The increase can be attributed to Covid-19.

The implementation of Microsoft 365 services is ongoing. The telephony system will be moving online in February.

ii) Minutes of meeting 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021

The Board noted the minutes of the F&GP Committee meeting which took place on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

**3718/22      Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

i) Verbal Update

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mr J McCallister, updated the Board on the recent Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

The Committee reviewed the Risk Register and the measurements of risk impact were amended. The Committee asked for another Risk to be added to the Register. This new risk relates to the outstanding Pay Remits and salary issues, which have a direct impact on the recruitment and retention of staff, as well as staff morale.

ii) Minutes of meeting 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021

The Board noted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance meeting which took place on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021

**3719/22      Any Other Business**

None

**3720/22**

**Date of Next Meeting**

11<sup>th</sup> March 2022 10am

**3721/22**

**Closed Session**

Staff left the meeting and the Board held a closed session to review the Board Evaluations and to discuss their concern around the outstanding Pay Remits.