

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND TENTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON FRIDAY 24<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2020, 11AM, BOARD ROOM, 6<sup>th</sup> FLOOR, EQUALITY HOUSE, 7-9 SHAFTESBURY SQUARE, BELFAST, BT2 7DP**

**2243/20**      **Present:** Chair M McDonald, Mr R Campbell, Ms C Harris, Mr M McDonnell, Mr J McCallister

**2244/20**      **In Attendance:** Ms J Irwin (CEO), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Day (Director of Engagement), Mr P Jordan (Director of Funding and Development), Mr G McKeown (Director of Finance, Admin, and Personnel), Ms H George (PA to CEO and Board).

**2245/20**      **Observers:** None

**2246/20**      **Apologies:** Ms M Braniff, Ms N Tandon, Ms A Simpson

**2247/20**      **Standards 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*

Board members had nothing to declare

**2248/20**      **Minutes**

The Board approved the minutes of the 209<sup>th</sup> meeting held on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

**2249/20**      **Matters Arising**

i)      Strategic Plan

Mr M McDonnell asked that CRC look again at the Key Performance Indicators within the Strategic Plan. The CEO agreed that KPIs for the new areas of the Plan will need to be developed. She added that the year on year KPIs in the Business Plans are drafted in agreement with TEO. She stated that CRC draft a document annually called 'The Difference we make' which shows the impact of CRC's work. This document will be brought to a future Board meeting.

ii)      Actions from Previous meeting

The Chair ran through the actions identified in the previous Board meeting, asking for updates on the following:

i)      Presentation from North Belfast Strategic Fund groups:

Mr P Jordan stated that this would take place once the evaluations have been completed.

ii) Core Funding details:

Mr P Jordan has circulated the details of the Core Funding Scheme and the applicants to all Board members.

iii) Workshop on Risk:

Ms J Irwin stated that this workshop would take place following the completion of the Strategic Planning period, in March.

iv) Memo to staff on Pay Remit and Pension Discussion:

The Chair stated that he had send an update to all staff on the outstanding Pay Remit and Pension discussion.

v) Board appraisals:

The Chair met with TEO on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January and asked when the Board appraisals would be due. TEO were not able to provide clarity around this, however, the Chair believes that these appraisals should take place one year from the new Board's start date.

vi) Incoming Ministers:

The Chair informed Board members that he had written to the incoming First Minister, Deputy First Minister, and the TEO Junior Ministers, welcoming the return of the Executive and has offered to meet at their convenience. CRC has received no response to this yet.

Board members asked if CRC could circulate to them a list of the Ministers, Committee Chairs, and Special Advisors.

**ACTION:** A list of the Ministers, Committee Chairs, and Special Advisors to be circulated to Board members.

vii) Liaising with local journalists:

Mr P Day informed the Board that, following a discussion with TEO's Comms Office, he has received details of local newspaper contacts across Northern Ireland to enable him to liaise with them directly.

viii) Liquidation and Solvency analysis:

Mr G McKeown stated that he had hoped to bring a paper on this item to the Board but it is not complete. This paper, instead, will be brought to the next Board meeting.

ix) Exit Interview Policy

The Board then discussed the Exit Interview Policy. The Chair stated that Ms A Simpson had raised the policy again with him. The Board reiterated their opinion, agreed at a previous Board

meeting, that the exit interviews should be conducted with the HR Manager, rather than the Line Manager, to keep it detached from this relationship.

## **2250/20 Chair's Update**

The Chair updated Board members on a number of developments following December's Board meeting, making particular reference to the following:

- The Chair attended CRC's staff meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> January and had an informal discussion about the pension and equal pay issue. Staff noted that they appreciated the Chair speaking to them about this. Following this, the Sub-group, made up of the Chair, two Board members, the CEO, and Mr G McKeown met on 15<sup>th</sup> January, regarding the pension and equal pay issue, then met with Unite Union representatives on the same day. He highlighted that he was there to represent the Board and staff's interested but is also accountable to TEO. He added that the process will be as open and transparent as possible.
- 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020 – the Chair and CEO met with Ms Sue Gray regarding the move to James House, to which the CEO will speak later in the agenda.
- The Chair met delegation from Malaysian Government, including a Minister, who are conducting research ahead of setting up a Reconciliation Commission. The CEO also attended the meeting.
- The Chair attended a TEO session on DoF Partnership Agreement guidance.

The Board then discussed the Partnership Agreement guidance, highlighting that there is no detail on how it will work in practice, but it will recognise that there should be no one size fits all approach to ALBs. The CEO added that the guidance highlights that it will be 'proportionate autonomy'. The Board asked for a copy of these Partnership Agreement documents to be circulated.

**ACTION:** Mr G McKeown to circulate 'Partnership Agreement' guidance to all Board members.

## **2251/20 Pay Remit**

The Board held a closed session, staff were asked to step out.

Staff left the meeting and returned following the Board's closed session.

The Chair noted that the Board had a discussion and were brought up to date on developments with the pension and equal pay issue. The Board will consider all options that meet the requirements of the Department of Finance guidance.

He added that the 6% pension contribution is categorised as an irregular expense in CRC's Annual Report and Accounts.

The Board noted that they wished CRC to cover the cost of financial advice for staff, as they are not in a position to give this advice themselves.

The CEO stated that there may be an issue on whether CRC would be allowed to spend money on independent financial advice for staff members. The Board stated that it hoped this would be categorised as expenditure accrued to protect CRC against risk of discrimination.

Mr G McKeown added that he had sent an email to TEO regarding the submission of a business case proposing CRC cover the cost of independent financial advice.

The Chair recorded that the Pension Sub-Group should have a satisfactory level of segregation from the Audit Committee.

**ACTION:** Mr G McKeown to follow up with TEO regarding CRC covering cost of independent financial advice for staff.

The minutes from the subgroup are being drafted by Mr G McKeown, who will circulate once they are agreed.

**ACTION:** Mr G McKeown to circulate minutes of the subgroup to the Board once confirmed.

Mr G McKeown stated that there had been no further developments since the subgroup met. Mr G McKeown added that he has drafted a timeline for this work and will share this with the Chair. He hopes to procure projections for staff loss of pay and pension losses. CRC hope to have updated legal advice in the next week, and then a meeting of the subgroup will be called.

## **2252/20**

### **CEO's Report**

The CEO provided an update to Board members, making particular reference to the following:

- i) The Strategic Plan is currently out for consultation. It will return to the Board at the end of the financial year.

- ii) The Draft Business Plan has been shared with TEO for comment and she has requested a discussion around the budget needed to fulfil the plan.
- iii) 'New Decade New Approach' agreement –The CEO and Chair met with TEO officials to seek information about the creation of new Commissioners, however, TEO had no information on this yet.
- iv) The CEO pointed out a correction to be made to her report. At the time of writing she was due to meet Mr C Gardner, TEO, on the 16<sup>th</sup> January, however, he cancelled this meeting.
- v) The 11<sup>th</sup> February TBUC Engagement Forum will be taking place in the Armagh City Hotel, to which Board members are invited.
- vi) Staffing – CRC have appointed the third party 'Heads Together', to work with staff members with a view to drafting a Dignity at Work Charter. A full update is included in the papers for this meeting.
- vii) Premises move – The CEO reminded the Board that CRC was due to move to James House as part of the Reform of Property Management project. The ALBs in Equality House had a number of concerns with the implementation of the project. At a meeting with Sue Gray, (DoF Permanent Secretary) it was announced that CRC would no longer be moving in the first phase of the project, scheduled to take place in 2021. CRC and the other ALBs in Equality House will now be included in phase two, due to be completed in 2024. DoF have asked the bodies in Equality House to consider the ways in which agile working can be implemented in the meantime.
- viii) Health Checks – The CEO stated that CRC staff received voluntary health checks from Chest Heart and Stroke in January. She commended the session as the tests gave staff lots of information about their health, and provided advice too.

In relation to the CEO's Report Mr M McDonnell noted that his organisation, Choice Housing, are involved in the NIFHA Peace IV Housing Associations Integration Project, but that there was no conflict of interest.

## **2253/20 Management Accounts**

Mr G McKeown informed Board members that the expenditure for the year 2019/2020 is on target with a projected underspend of £18k, which is 0.5%, within the allowed variance. He completed a risk analysis of potential underspend over 1.5%. The Finance Manager and Mr P Jordan had worked with Mr G McKeown to reduce the potential maximum underspend to £35-40k, which is within the 1.5% tolerance.

He added that procurement had been conducted in line with all CPD and CRC guidance.

**2254/20 Labour Relations Agency Report Update**

Ms J Adamson informed Board members that the third party, appointed to hold sessions with staff, attended a preliminary meeting with the CEO, HR Manager and a Union representative. They produced a timeline of sessions, the first of which will be taking place on the 28<sup>th</sup> January and the last session taking place on the 24<sup>th</sup> March. The organisers will offer staff members one on one meetings during the week beginning 17<sup>th</sup> February, and a Dignity at Work charter will be completed by the 30<sup>th</sup> March.

The Chair asked if staff were any happier, if there was a feeling of positive change in the office. Ms J Adamson stated that the Unite representative had stated that she felt there was an improvement and wanted that built upon, so that the organisation did not regress.

The Chair asked Mr J Adamson to contact the LRA and ask when they would be completing their follow up check.

**ACTION:** Ms J Adamson to contact The LRA and get a date confirmed for their follow up check.

**2255/20 Sickness Absence Report**

The Board were presented with the Sickness and Absence Report for October 2019 to December 2019.

Ms J Adamson explained that the figures are higher than the previous period as a number of staff were off with the Norovirus in November and December. Ms J Adamson stated that the statistics are similar to the same period the previous year.

No members of staff are currently off on long-term sick leave.

**2256/20 Funding and Development**

Mr P Jordan updated Board members on funding and development, making particular reference to the following:

- CRCD grants closed 17<sup>th</sup> January, with 42 applications currently pending.
- Mr P Jordan included in the papers, a list of the projects that have received funding to date.
- CRC is currently assessing the 20/21 Core Funding applications. These assessments will then be peer reviewed. A paper on the financial position of the applications is being prepared.

- Mr D McNally is working on evaluations and end of year reports for the continuation groups.
- Mr P Jordan and Ms G Attwood met with each of the Media Grant awardees. Many of these projects will produce good resources. The media grants this year very much focus on young people and the question of 'where next'.
- The North Belfast contracts have been revised to place an emphasis on strategic partnerships. These will be scored with TEO in February. If any changes are needed, Mr P Jordan will meet with the applicants to discuss.
- A meeting of the North Belfast Shared Learning Forum will be taking place on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> January. Mr P Jordan invited Board members to attend.

**ACTION:** If Board members are interested in attending the North Belfast shared learning forum, please contact Mr P Jordan.

- The North Belfast grantees will be submitting evaluations in April/May and a full breakdown of their work will be provided to Board members following this.
- CRC received an Assembly Question on the Irish Language.
- Mr P Day added that the Engagement Team are working on a map for the website, which will show the locations of CRC funded projects.

In relation to the list of grants provided, Mr R Campbell informed the Board that he had conducted pro-bono work for Horn of Africa, which received CRCD funding, however, there is no conflict of interest.

## **2257/20 Good Relations Award Update**

Mr P Day presented the Board with a timeline for the Good Relations

Awards. He asked a Board member to volunteer to be a reserve for the panel, to ensure that the meeting will be able to go ahead, regardless of one member's absence. Ms C Harris volunteered, joining the Chair, Ms N Tandon, and Mr J McCallister on the panel.

Mr P Day stated that press releases on the awards had gone out to regional press as well as to Good Relations Officers in the Councils.

Mr P Day asked Board members to promote the award nomination process to their contacts and colleagues. He added that Mr M McDonnell has been very helpful circulating details among his housing networks.

**ACTION:** Board members to promote the Good Relations Award nomination process.

He added that there would be another push to promote the awards at the end of January.

Mr M McDonnell left the meeting.

## **2258/20 Community Engagement Update**

Mr P Day updated the Board on items under his directorate, making particular reference to the following:

- TBUC Engagement Forum – 11<sup>th</sup> February, Armagh City Hotel, on the theme of sport and good relations. 90 people have requested to attend so far. IFA, GAA and Peace Players will be presenting at the event. He added that Mr M McGlade would be streaming the event on Facebook Live. Mr P Day invited Board members to attend.

**ACTION:** Board members interested in attending February’s TBUC Forum, to let Mr P Day know.
- CRC held a Core Fund Shared Learning Forum on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Google presented on drafting social media strategies and writing for social media. CRC received very positive feedback on this event. The next Shared Learning forum will take place in April, on self-care.
- The Engagement Team will be attending a series of Funding Fairs in January.
- The profiles of people involved in GR work is the most read section on the website.
- The engagement team are in the process of organising this year’s series of Decade Roundtable meetings, the first taking place on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The structure of these events will change, moving away from meetings, and becoming more seminar in style for a period.
- CRC have compiled a list of ideas to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A plan will be brought to the Board at the next meeting. The aim is to hold a key event each quarter.

## **2259/20 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

- i) Minutes of the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2019 Audit and Risk Committee meeting



Mr R Campbell presented the minutes of the November ARAC meeting for the Board's information

ii) Audit and Risk Committee Update

Mr R Campbell said that during the last meeting, the Committee reviewed the Risk Register and saw no reason to downgrade 'Political' from red at that time. However the return of the Executive, which has taken place since then, may change the risk level.

Mr R Campbell then spoke on the investigation into a group previously funded by CRC. He stated that The Department of Finance Group Fraud Investigation Services (GFIS) had looked into the financial transactions of the group and written to CRC, stating that fraud was unlikely. The Committee asked Mr G McKeown to get back to the GFIS to ask for a more definitive response.

Mr G McKeown added that he wrote to GFIS and asked for this, and they confirmed that they would write to CRC formally. Mr G McKeown also asked GFIS to confirm what lessons can be learned from the investigation. An update on this will be presented to the Committee at a future meeting.

Mr R Campbell added that the Committee had also requested a list of investigations conducted in the past, and the lessons learned from them as a useful reference document.

**2260/20**

**Date of Next Meeting**

5<sup>th</sup> March 13:00 CRC

16<sup>th</sup> April 11am TBC