

Community Relations Council 88th Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
Thursday 1st September 11am 2022, held online

Present: Mr J McCallister (Chair of CRC Audit and Risk Assurance Committee), Mr R Campbell (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member)

In attendance: Ms J Irwin (CRC CEO), Ms J McGuckin (ASM), Ms S Nicholson (TEO), Ms H George (CRC PA).

Apologies: None

1. Conflicts of Interest

Mr R Campbell informed the meeting that he works at the same firm as CRC's legal advisors, assisting with the FOI set out in the Risk Register. There is no conflict as Mr R Campbell was not involved in the procurement process and is not involved in the legal matter.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the 87th Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, which took place on the 19th May 2022 were reviewed. The Committee approved the minutes of this meeting and the minutes of the special meeting held on 3rd August 2022.

3. Matters Arising

i) Audit Fee

The CEO informed the Audit Committee that the Chair raised the issue of the audit fee at The Executive Office's ALB Forum. TEO began an exercise, seeking details of previous NIAO audit fees from ALBs. CRC completed this exercise and submitted it to TEO. It is understood that TEO will be writing to the NIAO to raise the issue.

ii) Funded Group Correspondence

At the previous Audit Committee meeting attendees agreed a number of actions related to an issue with a funded group. The Committee had asked Mr P Jordan to draft a letter to the group which had since been circulated to members.

Committee approved the letter.

The committee's suggested amendments to future funding documents are now being prepared for Board approval. Mr R Campbell offered to review the drafts.

4. External Audit

The CEO informed the Committee that CRC's Annual Report and Accounts were submitted to the Audit Office and the audit field work is currently underway.

The Committee thanked the CEO for this update.

5. Internal Audit

Ms J McGuckin informed the Committee that the schedule of CRC's upcoming internal audit will be agreed and presented at a future meeting.

The Committee thanked Ms J McGuckin for this update.

6. Risk Register

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's Risk Register.

'Implementation of Pay Remit Guidance' remains rated red, as there has been no progress on this issue.

'FOI', 'External Audit Fee' and 'Staff Morale' remain rated amber. The CEO informed the Committee that the Chair recently held a number of check-in meetings with staff, as part of his role as Dignity at Work Champion.

Regarding the 'FOI' risk, CRC received correspondence from the Information Commissioners Office seeking a response to the FOI review. The Board met in August and decided that the circumstances had changed, and at this point a redacted version of the report could be released. CRC met with the ICO to discuss this direction. The case worker advised that a negotiated settlement may be possible and she would contact the FOI seekers directly about this. She also advised that if a negotiated settlement was not possible, her decision must be based on the circumstances at the time of the decision. . The CEO noted that CRC will continue to take legal advice throughout this process.

'Covid-19' is currently rated amber, however, it was recommended that it be downgraded to 'green' as CRC have a number of mitigations in place which have been proven to be effective during the last two years.

'Resignation of DFAP Staff' remains rated red. The CEO informed the Committee that another recruitment process has begun to find a new DFAP Director. The Finance Manager post was advertised again, and the interview process is underway.

The Committee discussed the risks and agreed with the recommended ratings.

The CEO informed the Committee that TEO had recently been in contact to ask how CRC was managing any data protection issues, in the absence of a DFAP Director. The CEO informed TEO that the temporary arrangements involve Ms H George receiving any communication on this topic, the CEO would review any issues along with the assistance of Board Member Mr R Campbell, given his expertise in this area. The CEO assured the Committee that no issues have been raised in the period since the departure of the DFAP Director.

7. Investigations into Funded Groups

The CEO informed the Committee that there are currently no live investigations into funded groups.

TEO is currently conducting an investigation into one funded group and liaising with Mr P Jordan. The department will inform CRC if any action is required relating to this grant.

8. Audit Recommendations

The CEO presented the Committee with the updated Audit Recommendations Tracker.

The 'Implementation of Pay Remit Guidance' is still ongoing. CRC have received no further correspondence from the Department of this issue.

The HR audit and Engagement audit recommendations have been added to the Tracker.

The recommendation to create an approval process for website and social media posts has now been implemented.

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

9. Department of Finance Guidance

Ms H George presented the Committee with a number of pieces of guidance, released following the previous Committee meeting.

The first letter presents the 2019-2020 Annual Theft and Fraud Report. This report was delayed by the Department due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report sets out the reported cases of actual, attempted, and suspected thefts and frauds reported by NI Departments, their agencies, and Arm's Length Bodies.

Two pieces of correspondence set out a number of updates to the Financial Reporting Manual, specifically on the Remuneration Report and HR policies.

The final Guidance informs Departments and ALBs that the Covid-19 processes in place from submitting the Annual Report and Accounts to the NI Assembly remain in place. Only a digital copy is required for submission.

The Committee noted the report.

10. Direct Awards

No direct awards were made during this period.

11. Purchases without a Price Check

Since the previous meeting three purchases were made which did not require a price check: CIPD, NICVA, Chief Executive's Forum membership fees.

The Committee noted this report.

12. Any Other Business

None

13. Date of Next Meeting

24th October 2022 11am