

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY EIGHTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON FRIDAY 15th SEPTEMBER 2023 10:30AM
BOARDROOM, EQUALITY HOUSE**

3925/23 **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister (Board Member), Ms M Braniff (Board Member), Ms N Tandon (Board Member), Ms A Simpson (Board Member).

3926/23 **In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr P Day (Engagement Director), Ms U Kelly (DFAP Director), Ms J Adamson (Human Resources Manager), Mr D McNally (Core Fund Evaluation Officer), Mr M Hughes (Core Funding Officer), Ms H George (EA to CEO and Board).

3927/23 **Observers:** Mr D Mercer (Boardroom Apprentice)

3928/23 **Apologies:** Ms C Harris (Board Member) Ms S McClelland (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Mr R Campbell (Board Member),

3929/23 **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*

None declared.

3930/23 **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed Mr D Mercer, CRC's new Boardroom Apprentice to today's meeting. He also welcomed Mr M Hughes, who recently joined CRC as a temporary member of staff in the Core Funding Officer role.

3931/23 **Minutes**

Members reviewed the minutes of the 237th meeting of the Board which took place on 21st August 2023. The Board approved these minutes.

3932/23 **Matters Arising**

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

He highlighted one outstanding action related to statistics on the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme. The Chair stated that he would be meeting with Ms E Mullan and will ask for details on this and circulate at a future Board meeting.

3933/23 **Peace Plus**

The CEO provided the Board with a paper setting with background information on a recent request received to become lead partner in a Peace Plus bid.

At the previous meeting the Board asked CRC to speak to the local Council regarding the bid. Mr P Day spoke to the Council's Director of Community and Wellbeing. They stated that they could not act as a lead partner as they are already committed to a number of other applications.

The Board had also raised concerns about the financial risks of CRC taking on the lead partner position, and the strategic alignment. CRC held a meeting with TEO. TEO agreed with the analysis of the opportunities and risks associated with taking on the lead partner role. TEO raised issues around opportunity costs to CRC, the financial burden, and suggested that there would be other possible lead partners more strategically aligned with the bid.

The Board discussed the proposal and agreed that CRC should not take on the lead partner role. Instead, CRC could offer assistance with the test and learning aspect of the project. The CEO will contact the group and inform them of the Board's decision and suggest alternative lead partners if the group are interested.

A meeting with TEO and SEUPB will take place later in September to discuss collaboration opportunities.

ACTION: CEO to feedback Board's decision to the group seeking lead partner support.

3934/23

Birthday Honours

The Chair informed members that CRC received correspondence seeking King's Birthday Honours Nominations.

The Chair asked Board members to contact Ms H George with any nomination suggestions.

ACTION: Board members to inform Ms H George if they have any birthday honours nomination suggestions.

3935/23

Chair's Update

The Chair updated the Board on a number of meetings and events he recently attended.

On the 29th, 30th and 31st August the Chair attended several Good Relations Week photocalls with local Councils. He thanked Board members who were able to attend.

On 4th September the Chair and CEO attended a meeting of TEO's ALB Shared Funding Forum. This group's aim is to review TEO's funding streams to highlight areas of shared objectives and where savings can be made. The group are unsure how this initiative will progress now that Mr D McMahon is no longer TEO's Permanent Secretary. Mr D McMahon has moved on to the Permanent Secretary role at the Department for Infrastructure. The CEO, Chair and Board wished Mr D McMahon all the best in his new role.

On 11th September the Chair and CEO took part in a Good Relations Week promotional video with Mr T McGarry.

The Board thanked the Chair for his update.

3936/23

Chief Executive Officer's Update

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

i) Planning

CRC's Strategic Plan was extended to 2024 due to the delay in the TBUC Review and the absence of Ministers. The CEO will raise this again with TEO and seek their advice on whether to extend the Plan again, or to begin work on a new strategy. If TEO recommend a new strategy, the Strategy Development Meeting, held by the Board in 2022, will help inform the new draft,

ii) Finance

CRC are still awaiting updates from The Executive Office on CRC's capital grant allocation for 2023/24 and the 65% cash spend limit. TEO suggest a decision will be made by the end of September.

For this reason, the Audit Committee decided to increase the rating of the 2023/24 Resource risk from amber to red.

iii) Staffing

The Funding and Development Director post has now closed to applications. Shortlisting will take place later today, and interviews will take place in October.

Ms U Kelly is now working at CRC full time, and recruitment will begin shortly for the Finance Manager role.

Mr M Hughes joins the funding team as the temporary Core Funding Officer. He brings a wealth of experience to this role.

iv) Funding

CRC were able to open fund the Core Grant, North Belfast Grant, and CRCD Grant in this financial year, however, have not been able to open the Publication Grant, Pathfinder Grant, or Media Grant.

The finance team will be reviewing the budget this month and reallocate any additional funding to the CRCD grant which is facing great demand.

The team are keeping a note of all funding opportunity costs due to funding cuts and will feed these back to TEO.

v) Events and Meetings

The CEO reminded Board members that CRC's next TBUC Engagement Forum will be taking place on 19h September in The Ebrington Hotel.

Mr P Day circulated details of key Good Relations Week events to Board members, who are more than welcome to attend these events. The Chair reminded Board members that CRC's funded groups really appreciate when Board members engage in Good Relations Week, and encouraged them to get involved.

The final draft of the Peace Monitor Report has been circulated to Advisory Group members. A meeting of the Advisory group will take place in October, and the aim is for the report to be published in quarter three.

The Chair asked if a summary presentation of the report could be made to an upcoming Board meeting. The CEO said this could be arranged when the final version of the report is agreed by the Advisory Group. She reminded the Board that CRC facilitate the drafting of the Peace Monitor, but are not the authors. It is a report independent from CRC. A dissemination plan will be developed, including a launch event and presentations to relevant Government Committees. The CEO met with Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust in July to provide an update on the progress of the project. The CEO reminded members that CRC has already received a grant from JRCT for a seventh report.

ACTION: CRC to ask Peace Monitor authors to present the key findings at an upcoming Board meeting.

The CEO and Chair attended an introductory meeting with Sir Declan Morgan, the Commission on Reconciliation and Information Recovery's Chair. It is still unclear what areas of reconciliation the Commission will be involved in and how receptive funded groups would be to engage with the Commission.

The CEO made one update on what has been reported in her paper. She had a meeting planned with the new CEO of ECNI, however this has since been postponed.

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

3937/23

Core Funding Welcome Statements

Mr D McNally reminded the Board that at the last meeting he presented a report on the 2022/23 Core Funding Scheme, relevant sectarian and hate crime statistics, and how the grant can incorporate the 'everyday lives' priority.

The outcome of this was presented to The Executive Office at a meeting on evaluation in August. A follow up meeting with TEO will be taking place in October.

From these two sessions Mr D McNally and Mr M Hughes drafted a number of potential 'Welcome Statements' for the upcoming 2024/25 Core Fund year.

The Board discussed the draft Welcome Statements and agreed the following:

Geographic Welcome Statement areas for 2024/25:

- Ards and North Down
- Belfast South
- Lisburn and Castlereagh
- Mid Ulster
- Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon
- Causeway Coast and Glens

Thematic Welcome Statement for 2024/25:

Work which supports and develops the next generation of good relations practitioners as this relates to emerging challenges such as: sustainability; the environment; poverty; the changing nature of communities; and good relations from a global perspective.

Work which aims to engage communities on emerging issues of concern identified by applicant groups as requiring priority intervention. The need for such work will need to be clearly evidenced by applicant groups.

The Board thanked Mr D McNally for presenting.

3938/23 Core Fund Guidance Notes

Mr M Hughes presented the Board with an update to the Core Fund Guidance Notes.

He took them through the report and highlighted that changes have been made to the dates, the welcome statements, and the section on Covid-19 has been removed.

The CEO informed the Board that the Guidance had been shared with TEO for feedback. They have yet to provide any comments, but any feedback received will be report back to the Board.

The Board asked whether groups would undergo a financial check this year. Mr D McNally explained that the financial check would be moved forward and become part of the eligibility checks, as an action from the previous Core Funding Decision meeting.

The Board approved the draft Guidance.

3939/23 Funding Directorate Update

In the absence of a Funding Director the CEO updated the Board on the work of the team. She thanked Mr D McNally and Ms H DiDuca for their work on the update report provided to the Board today.

The CEO provided the Board with a report setting out the status of CRC's CRCD fund, Core Fund, and North Belfast fund.

A meeting of the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme groups will be taking place in September.

The CRCD Project Officer continue to attend TEO's Council Good Relations Programme meetings. The CEO passed feedback to TEO on these meetings, and a number of suggestions have been implemented. A series of subregional meetings will take place later this year and CRC, at the request of TEO, will run a plenary with all Good Relations Officers later in the year.

Mr M Hughes informed the Board that he had hoped to present a paper for Board decision setting out a number of virement requests from Core Groups, however, further information from the groups is needed. Some groups are feeling the effects of cuts from other funding sources, and have to reallocate their CRC funding to ensure workplans are completed. It was agreed that these virement requests would be handled by written procedure.

The Board thanked The CEO and Mr M Hughes for this update.

3940/23

Engagement Update

Mr P Day provided the Board with a report on the work of the Engagement Team.

He reminded the Board that the TBUC Engagement Forum will be taking place on Tuesday 19th September in the Ebrington Hotel. 140 people have registered to attend. A number of presentations and a panel session will take place in the morning, and site visits will take place in the afternoon. Board members are welcome to attend.

Good Relations Week begins this weekend, with over 210 events registered. All Councils have engaged this year, as well as CRC's Core Funded groups. The team have been following up on a number of PR opportunities and media requests.

The Good Relations Awards will open to nominations on the 17th October and close on the 14th November, with a possible extension until December. Mr P Day will ask the Board, at the next meeting to agree the Award Decision Panel membership.

CRC will be hosting an event during the upcoming One Young World conference on 4th October.

The Board thanked Mr P Day for this update and noted the report.

3941/23

Temporary Staff Purchase Orders

Ms H George reminded the Board of their decision to approve a number of Purchase Orders for temporary staff members, and to receive regular updates on the totals.

Ms H George informed the Board that the CRCD Admin temporary staff member's purchase order now totals £12,555. The work of this temp has now been completed, therefore they are no longer required.

The Vouching and Verification Admin temporary staff member's purchase order currently sits at £13,784.

The Finance Manager temporary staff member's purchase order currently sits at £37,235.

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

3942/23

Staffing Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Board with an update on a number of staffing issues in CRC.

The Funding and Development Director post has now closed to applications. The shortlisting will take place this afternoon and interviews will follow in October.

The Team will soon begin the recruitment of a Finance Manager. In the interim, Mr P Garrity continues to provide support to the DFAP Director.

As of the 1st September, the DFAP Director has been working full-time at CRC.

The Team have begun looking for a temporary replacement of the Executive Assistant to the CEO and Board, to cover during her maternity leave starting in December 2023.

Mr P Garrity and Ms U Kelly have begun work on CRC's 2022/23 Pay Remit, which will be submitted to TEO in due course.

3943/23

Finance and General Purposes Committee

i) Verbal Update on 14TH July F&GP Meeting

The Chair provided the Board with an update on the last meeting of CRC's Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The meeting received the first draft of CRC's 2022/23 Annual Report and Accounts. Mr P Garrity informed the Committee of CRC's Solvency and Liquidity position. The pension reserve now sits at a surplus of £194,000. The fieldwork on the audit took place in July and the final version will be presented to the Board and ARAC in October.

The Committee received CRC's Quarter Four 2022/23 and Quarter One 2023/24 Performance Report and Delivery Report.

The Committee received CRC's 2023/24 opening budget letter, which placed a 65% cap on cash spend, which the CEO and DFAP Director are in contact with TEO on.

The April, May and June Management Accounts were presented to the Committee.

The Committee reviewed and approved an update to CRC's Service Continuity Plan and a review of CRC's Staff Handbook. The HR Manager is looking at what updates should now be made to the Staff Handbook.

CRC's Quarter One 2023/24 Sickness Absence Report shows that sickness absence has decreased on the same period last year.

The HR Manager provided a paper to the Committee on CRC's staffing position, including on the recruitment of the Funding Director, an update on which has been provided to the Board today.

ii) 31st March 2023 Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes

The Chair presented the Board with the minutes of the March 2023 Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update and noted the minutes.

3944/23

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The Chair of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mr J McCallister, provided the Board with an update on the work of the Committee.

i) 31st August 2023 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Update

At the August meeting of CRC's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee members were updated on the progress of the Annual Report and Accounts audit from Mr A Allen from the NI Audit Office. CRC's audit field work is all complete. CRC and NIAO are considering how the IFRS16 Leases should be handled in these accounts. CRC are consulting with other ALBs in Equality House to ensure that the agreed upon treatment is consistent.

Mr P Garrity and Ms U Kelly are beginning work to update the Pay Remit spreadsheet and Business Case for 2022/23. This no longer requires the sign off of DoF, it will be submitted to and reviewed by TEO Accounting Officer in due course.

The Committee received an update on CRC's audit recommendations. Recommendations asking for the review of the Engagement policies and the Staff Handbook have both now been completed and this recommendation was removed from the register. Work on the recommendation for CRC to review updating the Accountancy software and Grant Management Database is underway, however, it is dependent on CRC's resource position. Work on

the recommendation to review CRC's governance and data management policies will begin now that the DFAP Director is in full time.

The Chair of the Committee drew Board members attention to a piece of guidance issued by the Department of Finance. DoF published a letter to all Departments, including TEO, indicating that an increase in Board members attendance rates and Chair's allowance could be implemented based on new guidance. However, it is up to each Department to decide if their own ALBs will receive this increase. Ms S Nicholson, TEO, explained at the meeting that, as CRC's Board attendance and Chair's allowance rates are ratified in CRC's Memorandum of Understanding, a Minister would need to be in place to make any changes to it, therefore this guidance will not affect CRC.

ii) Risk Register

Mr J McCallister presented the Board with a summary of CRC's Risk Register.

'Implementation of DoF Guidance' remains rated red as there has been no update on this issue. 'Staffing' remains rated red while the Funding Director position is unfilled.

'NIAO Audit Fee Increase' remains rated amber. The Chair will raise this at the upcoming ARAC Chair's ALB Forum in October, and the Committee will review again following this.

'NILGOSC Pension Case' remains rated amber as there has been no further developments on this issue.

'Resource' risk was upgraded to red rating. CRC received the budget letter, and it contained a 10% cut. The cash resource is also currently capped at 65% while the Secretary of State agrees the full NI Budget. CRC have not received detail of any capital budget for 2023/24. CRC continues to raise these issues with TEO.

iii) Minutes of ARAC June 2023

The Chair of the Audit Committee presented the Board with the approved minutes of the June 2023 meeting.

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

3945/23 Any Other Business

None

3946/23 Date of Next Meeting

Annual General Meeting - 19th October 2023 1pm – CRC's Office