

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY THIRD MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY
RELATIONS COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON FRIDAY 24TH MAY 2024 10:30AM
AT CRC OFFICES.**

4024/24 Present: Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Ms M Braniff (Board Member) Mr R Campbell (Board Member)

4025/24 In Attendance: Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr P Day (Engagement Director), Mr B McDonald (Funding Director), Mr P Garrity (Finance Manager), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Ms N Woodside (EA to CEO and Board).

4026/24 Observers: none

Apologies: Ms N Tandon (Board Member), Ms S McClelland (Board Member), Ms A Simpson (Board Member)

4027/24 Standard Checks

Mr Campbell works at the same firm as CRC's legal advisors, assisting with the FOI set out in the Risk Register and the tribunal case. There is no conflict as Mr R Campbell was not involved in the procurement process and is not involved in these legal matters.

4028/24 Welcome

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

4029/24 Minutes

Members reviewed the minutes of the 242nd meeting of the Board which took place on 19th April 2024. The Board approved these minutes.

4030/24 Matters Arising

The Board reviewed the list of Matters Arising circulated with the Board papers.

4031/24 Correspondence

The CEO shared an updated Partnership Agreement that was received from the Executive Office and circulated with the Board papers. The main changes were highlighted in yellow and related to the use of pronouns. TEO has adopted 'they' in favour of 'he' or 'she'. There were no questions in relation to the updated Partnership Agreement which was approved.

Mr R Campbell asked the CEO how long he was going to remain a CRC Board member as he had not yet received correspondence from TEO in relation to his term of office which is due to expire at the end of May, as is the case with all Board members. The CEO advised the Board that a meeting with TEO, herself and the Chair took place in March 2024 around this issue, albeit this query in relation to Board members' term of office had also been raised before March.

The CEO advised that Chris Gardner (TEO) reported the issue was with Ministers and TEO had not received a response. This matter was also raised at the Accountability and Liaison meeting that took place on 14th May 2024. The CEO inform the Board TEO had asked for contact information for Board members last night so perhaps an update will be arriving shortly.

4032/24 Chair's Update

The Chair noted that he had raised the issue of Board members' term of office in his appraisal in April 2024 with Gareth Johnson. He reported to the Board that he had highlighted his desire to get this resolved quickly as it is hard to keep Board members motivated and interested with such uncertainty.

The Chair told the Board that TEO had advised that if Ministers agreed with the submission some members would be appointed for 18 months and some for 36 months. For example, Ms McClelland and Mr Campbell would be more likely to have an 18-month extension as they are the longest serving Board members.

The Chair asked Ms Woodside to send an email to all Board members to establish if an extension would be accepted if offered.

4033/24 Chief Executive Officer's Update

The CEO referred members to her report which had been circulated with the Board papers and advised that the draft CRC Strategic plan is still waiting on the publication of the Programme for Government and the revised T:BUC strategy. This was raised at the Accountability meeting.

In relation to her report and the section on staffing the CEO informed the Board that the attempt to recruit for the DFAP Director position had been unsuccessful. The recruitment for the Funding and Development Officer position was successful and Karina Pieteron will be starting with CRC on 10th June 2024. This will leave CRC almost back to full strength again, albeit that there in relation to governance there is still an important post vacant. This was discussed in the ARAC Committee in detail and it was agreed this should remain as red on the risk register.

The CEO noted that she jointly chaired a meeting of the Funders Forum that took place on 3rd May in CRC offices. These meetings are working well, albeit that they started in uninspiring circumstances. There is overall agreement that we need to improve communication to create more joined up procedures and outcomes for all TEO grant service users. The Funders Forum plans to have 5 information gathering sessions that will take place over the summer.

On 2nd May 2024, the CEO, Mr P Day, and Mr B McDonald met with The Executive office in relation to the small grants programmes in Peace Plus which will be launching soon. TEO agrees that it may be more useful to bid to deliver a small grant project than to be simply administering the scheme. TEO is interested in exploring a joint bid in which CRC would be lead partner. The CEO will keep the Board updated on this.

The CEO noted that on 14th May 2024 she had an Accountability meeting with TEO. In this meeting the Board members' Terms of Office were discussed and TEO advised the issue had been submitted to Ministers with the idea of moving daily rates away from fixed amounts to being regularised in line with other ALBs. The Chair advised this was raised in his appraisal with Gareth Johnson and he is in favour of this approach.

The CEO noted that CRC had just received a fourth set of queries in relation to the pay remit. She expressed concern about the inefficient and drawn-out way in which queries have been raised. The Chair noted that he had raised the pay-remit in his appraisal and the CEO thanked the Chair for raising this issue with TEO.

Mr P Garrity informed the Chair he felt the rate at which the requests from TEO come in are unacceptable as the responses can take a significant amount of time and work. Mr Garrity told the Board the Pay remit was submitted 35 weeks ago and this was the fourth set of queries received; dealing with these can take up to one full working week.

Mr Garrity advised TEO are asking him to reflect back and comment on the previous Pay Remit that was submitted over two years ago, by a member of staff who no longer works for CRC. He felt it was impossible to comment on some of the points raised and making his position untenable.

Mr Campbell noted he understands the frustration Mr Garrity has and asked the Board if at the next ARAC meeting, CRC should be looking at a potential breach of the Partnership Agreement and he noted this as an amber/red risk.

The Board agreed. The Chair suggested to the Board that CRC should call a meeting with Gareth Johnson, TEO and clearly state the stress this is causing.

ACTION: It was agreed that the Chair would write to TEO seeking a meeting in relation to the Board members' term of office and the pay-remit.

In relation to her report the CEO noted that due to the fact that there is not yet a budget from TEO CRC is not in the position to decide if in 2024-25 it can open the funding schemes which were closed last year due to funding cuts.

The CEO reported that CRC has received all internal audit reports for the 2023-24 year and all have received a satisfactory overall assurance rating. There was only one priority 3 recommendation for a review of the Terms of Reference of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and this was due to take place at the next committee meeting. At the ARAC Committee it was agreed that the Terms of Reference of that committee would also be reviewed as best practice over the coming months.

The Chair informed the Board he normally does not attend the ARAC Committee meetings but feels for good practice he should attend one if all Board members are content. All Board members agreed. The CEO suggested that the Chair might wish to attend the ARAC meeting at which the annual Report to those Charged with Governance is received, normally in September or October.

In relation to the internal audits, the CEO expressed thanks to Mr B McDonald and the Funding and Development team, as he was very new to the position whenever the audit work started and the team had a number of vacancies. She was impressed that the results of the audit were so good under these conditions.

The Chair thanked the CEO for her report.

Mr B McDonald advised that his team is closing 2023/34 grants and processing forward with 2024/25 grants. 23/24 Core grants are mostly closed with one still experiencing reporting issues. The Cost-of-living payment has been taken up by approximately 50% of grant recipients.

CRC has withheld Letters of Offer for Core grant awards until we have a budget. Mr. B. McDonald and his team are engaging with the groups on a regularly basis. There is a risk of some organisations losing staff due to funding uncertainty.

Mr. B. McDonald noted that the CRCD small grants 2023-24 are in the advanced stages of close off. As some awards were made late into the year with the extra money that became available, its anticipated they will all be closed in quarter one.

At present there are 9 grants in development now under the 2024-25 small grant scheme which opened in May. Any activity is self-funding until CRC has its budget. As North Belfast is a closed scheme, the same ten groups as last year will continue into this year following the review of their plans and subject to CRC receiving the necessary budget for this.

Karina Peterson will be joining CRC as the Funding and Development Officer. She is experienced and comes from a funding background.

The Chair thanked Mr. B. McDonald for his report.

4035/24 Community Engagement

Mr. Day referred to his report and advised that the T:BUC Engagement Forum will be held at Craigavon Civic Centre on 4th June 2024. 120 people are registered at present and there are still ten days to go.

Mr. Day reported the programme for this event includes speakers that are in line with the theme of Peace and Prosperity.

Mr. Day advised the feedback that has been received from previous Forum meetings has been taken into consideration so the agenda now reflects more time for networking and conversations at tables especially with colleagues that might not normally get to opportunity to engage with each other.

Chris Gardner and Gareth Johnson (TEO) are confirmed as attending. Ministers have been invited but with the upcoming election it is unlikely they will attend.

The Chair thanked Mr. Day for his report.

4036/24 HR and staffing

Ms Adamson tabled a paper outlining the difficulties CRC is facing on recruitment of the Director of Finance, Admin and Personnel. Board members agreed that the following should be investigated:

- (i) Essential criteria

The Board agreed that specific points outlined in the essential criteria should be reviewed to ensure they do not close the options for suitable recruitment.

- (ii) Salary

The Board agreed the salary is low for the job, almost an entire grade below other ALBs. Ms Adamson advised when she is advertising for this role, the salary has not changed in over two years due to the delay in pay remit authorisations. However, a change in pay would require approval of TEO. She noted that this could be pursued in the longer run but a grading exercise should apply to all posts. In the meantime, it may be speedier to focus on the job title.

(iii) Job title

The Board agreed the title is misleading and together with the criteria this could explain why there are so few applications for the post.

In discussion the idea of mentorship was also considered to be a suitable method of attracting a potential candidate. This could mean a change the scope of the job to allow someone less experienced to join CRC, gaining the knowledge and the experience they would need to progress. CRC would run the risk of then losing them, but this is always a risk with employees at an early stage in their career.

Mr J McCallister advised that the staffing issue has been ongoing for a long time. Mr McCallister advised CRC would be in a very difficult situation if Mr Garrity decided to move on from CRC, so it was important to try whatever options possible to fill the post.

The CEO advised that all the ideas discussed would be taken forward at the next Finance and General Purposes Committee due to be held on 8th July 2024.

The Chair thanked Ms. Adamson for her report.

In relation to staffing Mr Campbell and Ms M Braniff extended thanks to Ms Woodside for her ongoing hard work and organisation.

4037/24 Management accounts

Mr Garrity advised the Board that CRC has now received its pension report from NILGOS for 23/24 which has allowed him to prepare the full accounts for the year. TEO asked Mr. Garrity to provide information on the pension report which he has submitted to them. The good news from this report is that CRC is in a surplus. Mr Garrity progressed the 2023/24 Annual Accounts substantially this week.

A comprehensive piece of work for the June monitoring round was also completed over the past few days, albeit that CRC still has no budget. Mr. Garrity stated that if CRC gets what has been asked for in respect of the budget, the organisation will be in a reasonably comfortable position for 2024/25.

In relation to the accounts for April, which were included in the Board papers, Mr Garrity has constructed a budget that falls in line with the June monitoring round. Taking into account grant accruals that have been released in April, there is now an outstanding balance of 206K for accrued grants at the end of 2023/24.

The Chair thanked Mr Garrity for his report.

Mr Garrity circulated two purchase orders for approval. The first related to the combined costs of the premises. Due to another body now operating out of the building, CRC has had a 1.74%

reduction for the year. Mr Garrity requested Board approval for 98.7K for the premises costs. The Board approved.

The second purchase order related to the cost for a temporary agency worker that has now reached the £10K threshold. This was approved.

4038/24 Verbal update on the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting held on 9th May 2024

Mr J McCallister provided the Board with a verbal update and noted the following:

- I. External Audit: the NIAO advised that the audit strategy has been approved previously and the next step will be information requests around grant payments to provide assurance for TEO accounts. Cavanagh Kelly will be undertaking that work at the end of this month.
- II. Internal Audit: 4 internal audit reports were presented at the meeting. The Committee is pleased to report that the annual assurance report gave a satisfactory assurance rating based on the internal audits undertaken this year. The two reviews that were undertaken during the year (review of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and review of grant administration) provided satisfactory ratings as did the follow up review as all prior year recommendations have been implemented. As reported by the CEO earlier in the Board meeting there was only one priority 3 recommendation which was that the Terms of Reference of the F+GP committee should be reviewed every three years. This was planned to take place when the audit was completed anyway to allow for any recommendations to be taken into account and will be undertaken at the next meeting of the F+GP committee due to take place in June. The ARAC committee agreed to also review its own Terms of Reference.
- III. Internal audit contract: The three-year contract with ASM for internal audit work is now completed so CRC will need to tender again for this work. The committee thanked Mr Clerkin and his team for the work they had done with CRC over the last three years.
- IV. Risk Register: Mr. McCallister noted that at present CRC has two red related to the Pay Remit DoF Guidance issue and staffing. Although CRC is now down to one unfilled post; it is the DFAP Director, which is very important post in terms of wider governance in the organisation, so it was agreed to keep this risk at red and discuss the recruitment problem at the Board meeting and this has taken place at this Board meeting. In the meantime, the committee was assured that the operational risks related to this unfilled post are mitigated at this stage and CRC financial procedures were reviewed by internal audit last year and received a satisfactory audit rating. CRC also has two amber risks which are the NILGOSC pension case where there is no change and resources due to the lack of a confirmed budget for 2024-25. However, CRC has received communication to allow it to open the new financial year based on last year's base line. ARAC committee members expressed concern about the lack of information coming from TEO in relation to the Board members' term of office which are due to end at the end of May. It was agreed that this be added to the risk register with a red status.
- V. Register of Audit Recommendations: This is now down to one item which is the DOF pay remit guidance. The new internal audit recommendation in relation to

reviewing the Terms of Reference of the Finance and General Purposes Committee will be added to the register albeit that it will be completed at the next Finance and General Purposes Committee in June.

4039/24 Minutes of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 11th April 2024

The minutes were noted.

4040/24 Risk Register May 2024

The risk register was noted.

4041/24 A.O.B.

None.

4042/24 Date of Next Meeting

5th July 10:30am CRC offices.

13th September 10:30am CRC offices.

Mr McCallister advised he is unavailable for 5th July board meeting, as is Mr R Campbell.