

NI Community Relations Council

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Monday 8th April 2024 @ 2pm – Online

Present: Mr M McDonald (Chair), Ms A Simpson (Board Member)

In Attendance: Dr J Irwin (CEO), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Garrity (Finance Manager), Mr B McDonald (Funding Director), Ms N Maguire (Vouching and Verification Officer), Ms N Woodside (EA to CEO)

Apologies: Ms N Tandon (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member)

The Chair welcomed Niamh Maguire, the new Vouching and Verification Officer to her first Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting at CRC.

Conflict of Interest

None recorded.

Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated and approved.

Matters Arising

All matters arising from the previous meeting were reviewed and confirmed as completed.

Performance Management

The CEO took the committee through the Quarterly Performance Report, informing the committee that all points listed on the report, with the exception of the funding schemes that did not open due to the budget cut and those actions that had been superseded during the year had been successfully completed despite the ongoing staffing shortages. She thanked all staff members for the work that was completed in a challenging year.

The CEO highlighted on page 2 of the report, the areas marked in green relate to the 23/24 grant awards and noted that Mr B McDonald will update these figures once he has finalised his grant information for the year.

The CEO advised that as usual members will see the final sets of figures in the Annual Report and Accounts once completed.

The Chair thanked the team for their hard work throughout the year and acknowledged the ongoing staffing difficulty, he will raise this at the Board meeting on Friday 19th April 2024.

Finance and Procurement

Mr P Garrity referred members to the Management Accounts which had been circulated with the committee papers and took them through the points on appendix 4 – Management Account Highlights.

Mr Garrity advised the committee that CRC would close the year within the 1.5% tolerance level.

The Chair thanked Mr Garrity for his ongoing hard work.

In relation to the annual pay remit, the Chair noted that CRC now have three cycles open: 21/22 has been paid; 22/23 has been submitted but is outstanding; 23/24 negotiations are not finalised yet and there will shortly be a 24/25 pay remit.

Ms J Adamson advised the committee that the lack of a speedy process in relation to the pay remits is starting to effect recruitment. Whenever CRC is advertising for a role, it has to list salary as under review, but this still leaves us offering a lower salary than others.

The Chair agreed and suggested putting an agenda item together and presenting at the next ALB meeting.

ACTION: The pay-remit process to be suggested as an item for discussion at the next TEO ALB Forum

Ms A Simpson requested an updated organisational chart at the next board meeting, Ms Adamson confirmed it will be added into the next staffing update.

ACTION: Ms Adamson to provide Board members with an updated organisational chart.

Agency PO Update

The update on expenditure related to agency staff was circulated with the papers, presented, and approved at the meeting. The Chair advised that it was not necessary to present the update again at the Board.

Vouching and Verification Report

Mr B McDonald introduced Ms N Maguire and advised she will present these reports in the future, however due to her being new in her role he would provide the update at this meeting.

In terms of vouching, all core awards have completed the first cycle and payments have been completed.

For Core, year-end closing off claims, CRC anticipates £65K which will go out in payments within the next eight weeks as the claims come in.

North Belfast is in a similar situation, now awaiting the second cycle of claims anticipated between April and May 2024.

CRC small grant scheme remained open longer this year than what would normally be the case to enable CRC to use as much of its budget on grants as possible. This will mean that claims are likely to run later than normal too but staff are not anticipating issues, with the exception of Intercomm but the Board is already aware of this case.

Verification

At present CRC is up to date with the exception of Intercomm. Mr McDonald anticipates that similar arrangements to those agreed for the last two years will be appropriate for performing verification checks in 2024-25.

Mr B McDonald advised that a paper on this will come forward to the committee for approval.

The Chair advised that he was content with this due to CRC having limited resources and the approach had worked in the previous two years.

Pension Scheme

The CEO advised members that the recommendations approved at the last meeting of the pension subgroup were added into the revised version of the Business Case, this was then forwarded to The Executive Office before Ms Kelly left CRC. The next steps are the update of the financial elements of the business case. Prior to her departure Ms Kelly had provided TEO with the work she had done so far on this aspect. It is hoped this can be taken forward further when her replacement is appointed.

HR

Ms Adamson advised the Sexual Domestic Abuse policy and Menopause at work policy had been updated on the basis of the previous discussion and been sent to Peninsula for legal proofing. They are now finalised and will be added into the staffing handbook.

Staffing Update

Ms Adamson gave the committee an update on recruitment. The DFAP Director post has been advertised and shortlisting for a Core Funding Officer will be taking place this week. Ms Adamson advised there has been a decrease in overall sickness from last year to this year.

Agency – Finance Manager

Mr Garrity left the meeting during the discussion of the Finance Manager paper.

The paper was presented advising that due to the departure of Ms. Kelly, Mr Garrity would be completing tasks the Director of Finance, Admin and Personnel would normally have undertaken. The committee were advised for this to be successful Mr Garrity would need to liaise with third parties such as NILGOSC and have information such as confidential passwords. The committee approved this temporary measure.

The committee also approved the payment of Mr. Garrity's professional fees for the year as set out in the paper.

Mr Garrity returned to the meeting.

Premises

Ms Adamson advised there was nothing new to report in relation to Health and Safety or reports from the Premises Committee with the exception of changes in the IT support contract previously delivered by the ECNI IT staff team. The IT team that used to work for ECNI have started their own company. Following discussions with Central Procurement Directorate and a procurement exercise, ECNI has confirmed that this new company will be providing IT support for the next year as a contingency.

AOB

None recorded.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next F+GP meeting no longer suits the Chair. It was agreed it would be better to move the next scheduled F&GP meeting from 8th July to the previous week.

ACTION: Ms N Woodside to follow up with members on diary availability.