

## **NI Community Relations Council**

### **Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024 at 14:30PM Online**

**Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Ms A Simpson (Board Member), Ms N Tandon (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (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:** none

#### **Conflict of Interest**

None recorded.

#### **Minutes**

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

#### **Matters Arising**

None

#### **Committee Terms of Reference**

In CRC own procedure, every three years the terms of reference must be reviewed. We have waited until the audit has been completed in case there were any recommendations from the audit however none were raised.

The CEO reminded members that the Audit and Risk Committee Terms of Reference have been reviewed. The CEO asked members if they had any views, they wish to express on this. None were raised.

The Chair thanked the CEO. The Chair asked the CEO if there had been any developments on Board members terms being extended. The CEO advised she contacted TEO prior to this meeting for some resolution. There was a pre-arranged meeting with TEO this morning, the issue was raised at this meeting and TEO advised there is no update available, it's still with ministers.

#### **Performance Management**

##### Quarterly Performance Report

The CEO took the committee through the paper, advising everything is on track. As of last week, we have received a letter with the opening position on the budget. Beyond this update this is a steady first quarter. We have been delayed in getting grants payments out as we didn't have a budget in place, but colleagues have been working hard to get these out.

The Chair thanked the CEO for her input and asked if the issue around the 65% has been removed. The CEO advised this is included in the letter.

Mr P Garrity informed the Chair the 65% would offer us a ceiling of 2.2 million to spend from now until the end of September 2024. From September onto October, we would be stretching to spend 1.2 million. The hope is come September time, we should have everything up and running again and we would have a new budget.

The Chair thanked Mr Garrity and opened the conversation for questions, none raised.

## **Finance and Procurement**

### Annual Report and Accounts

The CEO thanked everyone who had an input in the annual accounts and thanked Mr Garrity for his extensive work on this. The CEO informed the committee, the full report once audited will come to the board, this is anticipated around October 2024.

Mr Garrity advised the committee the Annual Report and Accounts was presented to NIAO and Cavanagh Kelly on 19<sup>th</sup> June. There is still some audit work being carried out which we anticipate ending around September time, but we must wait for confirmation from Cavanagh Kelly on this.

Mr Garrity informed the committee this year we are in a positive territory.

Mr Garrity advised the clearance date is set for 3<sup>rd</sup> October, we then have a signed letter of representation on 10<sup>th</sup> October which is certificated by C&G on 15<sup>th</sup> October, and we aim for the final report to be issued on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

The Chair thanked Mr Garrity for his extensive work around the Annual Report and Accounts. The Chair noted its remarkable to end up in the position that we are in, especially due to facing such staff shortages.

## **Solvency and Liquidity Report**

Mr Garrity advised the Chair a lot of the information gathered and presented in this report is represented in the Annual Report and Accounts.

Mr McDonnell advised when he started, the guarantee to the pension scheme was not explicit, so this is why this report was started. Mr McDonnell advised we are now in a position that the pension scheme is explicit, so we may be able to reduce this report down to one page just to offer assurance to the board members as it largely duplicates Mr Garrity's workload.

The Chair agreed and thanked Mr McDonnell for his input.

### June 2024 Management Accounts

Mr Garrity took the committee through the June 2024 Management Accounts highlights, Mr Garrity advised we received our opening allocation letter at the end of June 2024. Mr Garrity advised the committee we have been restricted to £2,229K, which is 65% of the final budget.

Mr Garrity advises we submitted the monitoring round on 16<sup>th</sup> May, this was to cover three core projects.

The CEO informed the committee, if they receive any indication the monitoring round will be coming in at anything less than expected an immediate correction will need to be made to this, but Mr Garrity and the CEO are working closely over the summer on this.

Mr Garrity informed the committee due to another company moving into the fourth floor on Equality House we have been given a reduction on the lease charges.

Mr Garrity advised the original pay remit was submitted 39 weeks ago. We received 26 further queries from TEO. We still haven't heard anything from TEO since responding to these queries.

The CEO had emailed Chris Gardner at TEO on this, and Chris Gardner has informed he hopes to have an update tomorrow, 5<sup>th</sup> July on this. The hope is we receive a positive communication tomorrow from TEO.

The Chair thanked Mr Garrity and informed the committee that he is not happy with the response from TEO, neither is the CEO.

The CEO advised that in the last correspondence received from TEO, we have been advised we are able to submit the 23/24 remit when we are ready.

Mr Garrity advised the work on this is complete, once it has been double checked it will be submitted the morning of Monday 8<sup>th</sup> July.

The Chair thanked Mr Garrity and asked the committee for any questions, none raised.

### Recruitment PO Update

The chair informed these are noted.

## **Funding**

### Vouching and Verification Report

Ms Maguire has asked the committee if the number of signatures on CRC verification risks can be reduced to two instead of three, it's a process that can prolong things being submitted and won't cause any additional risk.

The Chair thanked Ms Maguire for bringing this to his attention and has agreed to reduce the number of signatures required.

The CEO advised this will be raised at the board tomorrow.

## **HR**

### Staffing Update

Ms Adamson asked for any questions on the staffing update paper, none raised.

### Response to Union queries

Ms Adamson advised the committee we had met with the union regarding the pension queries. Ms Adamson advised she has drafted answers to the questions and asked if the committee wished for any of these to be changed/amended in any way.

The Chair advised he is happy with these answers.

### DFAP Director Recruitment

Ms Adamson went through the options listed in the papers; the first suggestion was to use agency. Ms Adamson advised she feels this isn't the best use of funds, its expensive and we don't always get the right candidate for the role.

The second suggestion was some external mentoring, this may be a success from CRC.

The third suggestion was grading, we are unable to change the grade of this if we did this we may experience some other operational issues.

Ms Adamson took the committee through the historical organisational structure as the job title being changed had been explored, Ms Adamson advised there are two members of staff at present with this job title, we would need to discuss with them before we considered this change.

Ms Adamsons recommendation is to change the job title to a Programme Manager, and to change the requirements from a fully qualified accountant to a part qualified accountant.

The Chair thanked Ms Adamson and advised he has no issue with changing the job title, he opened it up to a conversation within the committee.

Mr McDonnell advised we may lose interest if the job title changes as a director has a certain attraction to it. Mr McDonnell advised he agrees with the change from fully qualified to part qualified and explore the idea of someone who may be qualified in another area, HR, or IT.

Ms Simpson raised if it's appropriate to have this conversation in front of staff present on the call whose job may be affected if this change takes place.

Ms Simpson advised she feels the job specification is asking for a lot and it isn't realistic to ask someone so qualified to take a salary that isn't competitive.

The Chair thanked Ms Simpson for her input and advised as we are not discussing anything that directly affects anyone's title or salary, there is no difficulty with this.

Ms Adamson advised when candidates are looking for a new role, they look at the job title first. The salary second, and when they realise the salary doesn't match a director post – they move onto the next job advert.

Mr Garrity advised as this isn't an accountancy position, there is no need for an accountancy qualification. Mr Garrity advised the accountancy qualification doesn't truly reflect the work that you do in this role. If we were to reduce the specification, it would widen the net.

The Chair asked the CEO, are we obliged by the Executive Office to have a qualified accountant working in CRC? If we do, we are unable to change the description of the post. If we do not, we are able to widen the scope on this job and hopefully be more successful in our recruitment process.

The CEO advised she doesn't think there is anything in our partnership to say its mandatory, but due to the fact we are issuing payments it would be very unusual to not have at least one qualified accountant.

Mr Garrity questioned if its better recruiting for the Finance Manager first, to ensure the right person is in post – which can then be mentored by Mr Garrity, to then recruit for a DFAP Director?

The CEO advised she is not against this, and it might be an avenue worth exploring.

Mr Garrity advised, if someone was to take the Finance Manager role, and Mr Garrity was to take on the role of DFAP Director temporarily while this individual gets settled in, it is an option and it would take less pressure of the recruitment process.

The Chair advised, if there's an opportunity with the board members and the CEO, to meet separately to have the discussion outside the board meeting and to agree a way forward. The CEO confirmed this is fine.

The Chair thanked Mr Garrity and Ms Adamson for their input.

#### Q1 sick absence report for 2024-25

Ms Adamson advised slight increase from this time last year but still a low average. All members who had reported for long term sick have since returned to work. No questions raised by the committee.

#### **Premises**

##### Health & Safety Update

Ms Adamson advised a site visit will hopefully be arranged for summer, once this is completed an update will be provided.

The landlord of equality house wants to speak to ECNI regarding the lease of the building, the landlord is keen to secure ECNI and others as tenants. Ms Adamson will keep the committee updated once these discussions have happened and nothing will be agreed without TEO/Committee/Board approval.

Strategic investment board are holding a meeting with CRC IT in advance of the tender document being drawn up to ensure all our IT needs are covered in the contracts.

#### **AOB**

None recorded.

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

The Chair has informed the committee the date of the next meeting will be confirmed in the next few weeks.