

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY FIFTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON MONDAY 9<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024 14:30  
ONLINE**

**4057/24 Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair) Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Ms M Braniff (Board Member) Ms N Tandon (Board Member), Ms S McClelland (Board Member), Mr J McCallister (Board Member), Mr R Campbell (Board Member)

**4058/24 In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr B McDonald (Funding Director), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Day (Engagement Director), Ms H George (EA to CEO and Board).

**4059/24 Observers:** None

**4060/24 Apologies:** Ms A Simpson (Board Member), Ms C Harris (Board Member), Mr P Garrity (Temporary Finance Manager).

**4061/24 Welcome**

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**4062/24 Minutes**

Members reviewed the minutes of the 244<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board which took place on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2024. The Board approved these minutes.

**4063/24 Matters Arising**

The Chair reminded the Board of one matter arising from a previous meeting that remains on the register. Following feedback from groups and from the Board's own evaluations it was agreed that members would try and increase their collective and individual visibility as CRC Board members by attending events run by funded groups.

The CEO recommended that Good Relations Week would be good opportunity for Board members to observe the work CRC funds by attending events.

**4064/23 Correspondence**

i) Letter to Mr D Malcolm TEO

The Chair presented the Board with correspondence he sent to Mr D Malcolm, the new Permanent Secretary for The Executive Office. The Correspondence welcomed him to the role and requested a meeting.

TEO arranged a meeting which they subsequently postponed. A new meeting will be arranged in due course for the Chair and CEO to meet Mr D Malcolm.

ii) Letter to Mr C Gardner TEO

The Chair presented attendees with correspondence sent to Mr C Gardner, TEO, regarding the delay in Board members receiving official notice of their new terms. As of today, still no official letters from Ministers have been received by Board, setting out the length of the new terms.

However, Mr C Gardner (TEO) sent a letter to the CEO the morning of the Board meeting, detailed below.

iii) Letter from Mr C Gardner TEO

The CEO presented the Board with correspondence received today from Mr C Gardner regarding members' terms of office.

The correspondence states that: "TEO would like to confirm in writing that Ministers have agreed to the reappointment of CRC Board Members for a second term, effective from 1 June 2024. Official letters to each Board Member are currently moving through the department clearing process and we will issue this as soon as possible. Until that point, I hope this correspondence provides clarity to Board Members and allows the Board to continue progressing CRC Business".

The Board welcomed this correspondence, while awaiting official Ministerial sign off.

**4065/24**

**Chair's Update**

The Chair updated attendees on events and meetings he attended, following the previous Board meeting.

24<sup>th</sup> July 2024 the Chair and CEO held a regular update meeting.

During the week of the 21<sup>st</sup> August the Chair attended a number of Good Relations Week District Council photocalls, including in Armagh and Banbridge, Lisburn, Newry, Mourne and Down.

22<sup>nd</sup> August the Chair attended the Belfast Mela Concert at the Mac.

23<sup>rd</sup> August CRC staff, CEO, Chair, and Ms M Braniff held a meeting to discuss evaluation and measuring impact of CRC's funding schemes. A number of actions came out of this meeting, which Mr B McDonald will present during the Funding update.

25<sup>th</sup> August the Chair attended the Belfast Mela in Botanic Gardens. The Chair suggested that CRC should consider taking a stall at the next Mela. The Board will return to this in 2025 for discussion.

28<sup>th</sup> August the Chair attended another Good Relations Week photocall in Mid and East Antrim.

9<sup>th</sup> September The Chair and CEO attended the regional Good Relations Week photocall in Belfast.

The Chair congratulated Board member Ms N Tandon on the programme of events during this week's Mela Festival. He commended the bravery she and her

organisation had in putting on such a tremendous series of events, in the shadow of recent racist violence and disorder in Northern Ireland. Ms N Tandon stated that while it was a very scary time, the community and of the PSNI were great support. She thanked CRC and Mr P Day for checking in during that period.

The Board thanked the Chair for his update.

**4066/24**

### **CEO's Report**

The CEO referred to her report in the papers for the meeting and provided the Board with an update on her work since the last Board meeting.

She commended Ms N Tandon on her courage during the recent racist disorder in Belfast. She stated that the Belfast Mela was an important push back against racist attacks and an opportunity for everyone in Northern Ireland to see that the recent racist attacks do not represent the views of the majority of people.

Following the disorder CRC reached out to the relevant District Council Good Relations staff and TEO's Racial Equality Team. She and other members of CRC staff met with representatives of the Racial Equality on 13<sup>th</sup> August. It was established during the meeting that TEO have introduced multi-year funding for the Minority Ethnic Fund, however, they have allocated the full budget already, and therefore have no money to allocate to hot-spot diversionary work in the wake of the disorder.

The CEO and Board discussed this issue further. Ms N Tandon noted that she was due to attend a meeting of the Minority Ethnic Sub-group led by TEO and she would keep in contact with the CEO on this to see how CRC can assist. It was also agreed that TEO should consider creating a multi-agency strategy to deal with incidents like this. The Chair suggested that, subject to feedback from Ms N Tandon on the TEO meeting, CRC might consider hosting a conference event on the experience of those in the ethnic minority communities on both sides of the border, considering that the disorder is not confined to Northern Ireland alone. At such an event PSNI could be called to establish their understanding of the disorder and whether they are aware of potential future incidents.

The CEO continued with her report noting the following:

i) Board Member Terms of Office

Following the recent correspondence, the CEO thanked members for their patience and support while awaiting official sign off from Ministers.

ii) Strategic Plan and Operational Plan

The CEO informed the Board that CRC has submitted a bid to TEO's October Monitoring Round.

iii) Staffing

The CEO informed attendees that, following a discussion and decision at the previous Board meeting, CRC has moved to try again to recruit a Finance Manager following the failure to recruit for the DFAP Director post. The job advertisement has gone out and will close later in September.

The CEO thanked Ms N Woodside for providing cover for Ms H George during her maternity leave, and welcomed Ms H George back to CRC.

iv) Pension Business Case

The CEO informed the Board that TEO have signed off the 2022/23 Pay Remit which Mr P Garrity and Ms J Adamson are now working towards paying to staff in September.

The 2023/24 Pay Remit has been submitted and should receive fewer queries from TEO as it does not require any historical background information, which delayed the 2022/23 Remit.

With regards the Pension issue, TEO recommended that CRC procure a consultant to assist with the completion of the business case in the absence of a DFAP Director. The Board discussed the difficulty CRC might face in finding a consultant who is an expert in human resources and pension legislation, which the Board agreed would need to be a requirement. The Board discussed this further and agreed that no decision would be made until the CEO and Chair had their meeting with the new Permanent Secretary, when they would raise this issue. In the meantime, the Board suggested that Ms J Adamson re-open up dialogue with the other ALBs affected by the pension issue.

**ACTION:** CEO and Chair to discuss pension issue with the new Permanent Secretary when meeting is convened.

**ACTION:** Ms J Adamson to open dialogue with other ALBs affected by the pension issue.

v) Meetings

The CEO referred to the list of meeting included in her written report and noted her meeting with the Northern Ireland Office on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

The CEO attended 29<sup>th</sup> August District Council Good Relations Week Photocalls, as no Board member was available and she also attended the 9<sup>th</sup> September regional photocall. She thanked Board members for their participation in these photocalls.

vi) Shared Space

The CEO informed the Board that it was initially thought that the Shared Spaces project would be ready to re-launch during Good Relations Week. However, as all submissions have not yet been returned this will likely be launched later in the year.

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

The CEO presented the Board with CRC's Section 75 Report. She highlighted that the team had hoped to conduct a review of the Section 75 policy statement of inequality, however, due to the DFAP Director role being vacant, this did not take place in 2024 and will be postponed until there is a member of staff in that position. This has been noted in the Section 75 Report.

The Board reviewed and approved the Report.

#### **4068/24 Funding and Development Sector Report**

Mr B McDonald presented the Board with an update on the work of the Funding and Development team.

The 2023/24 Core Fund is now closed off and all payments have been made. The 2024/25 first payments will have all been made by the end of September.

The CRCD budget for this year is £105k, however, applications totalling £175k have already been submitted. There is a huge demand for this scheme again this year. The team await the outcome of the monitoring round to see if any further resource will become available.

The 2023/24 North Belfast grant is now closed down and all payments made. The 2024/25 North Belfast first payments will have all been made by the end of September.

The Board had a discussion on the history of the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme, which used to be administered by TEO, and was reviewed some time ago by the department, the result of which CRC are still awaiting. The Chair recommended that CRC write to TEO to ask what the future of the scheme will look like, following the publication of the Programme for Government and following the review of the scheme.

**ACTION:** CRC to write to TEO stating that 'CRC have administered the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Scheme on TEO's behalf for six years now, and are asking what TEO's plans are for the scheme following their own review and the publication of the Programme for Government'.

Mr B McDonald then took the Board through the actions that were agreed during the recent meeting of the Funding sub-group attended by Ms M Braniff (CRC's Funding Sub Group Chair), the Funding Team, the CEO, and the Chair.

The Board thanked Mr B McDonald for his update and noted the report.

#### **4069/24 Core Funding 2025/26 Welcome Statements**

Mr B McDonald presented the Board with two recommended changes to CRC's 2025/26 Welcome Statements and the statistics that informed the decision.

The team recommended that Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon council area be removed from the statement, and the following areas be added: Belfast (East); Fermanagh & Omagh; Newry, Mourne and Down.

Mr B McDonald added that the welcome statements do not necessarily reflect areas where CRC does not get applications, sometimes they shows areas where few successful applications are submitted. The CEO added that feedback is provided to groups following unsuccessful applications and they are encouraged to strengthen their applications and apply again.

The Board discussed and approved the recommended changes to the 2025/26 Welcome Statements.

#### **4070/24 Core Fund 2024/25 - Funded Group Request**

Mr B McDonald presented the Board with a request from the 2024/25 Core Funded Group Harmony Trust regarding their second year budget.

Due to issues with recruitment in their organisation the group initially decommitted the first year of their Core Fund contracts resource. The group now believe they are in a position to recruit and are asking for the second half of their fund and their budget to be approved.

The Board discussed and agreed to move ahead with their second year budget with the condition that the posts are filled by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to allow for the budget to be spend by the end of the financial year.

#### **4071/24 Community Engagement Sector Report**

Mr P Day presented the Board with an update on the work of the Engagement Team.

He thanked the Chair and Board members for their attendance at the Good Relations Week photocalls over the last few weeks. Good Relations Week is estimated to have over 200 events registered. Mr P Day will put together a shortlist for Board members of events they may be interested in attending.

**ACTION:** Mr P Day to put together a shortlist of Good Relations Week events to circulate to Board members.

The Engagement Forum due to take place on 17<sup>th</sup> September will include a walking tour of significant sites around the Clifton House area of North Belfast. The event is completely booked, but room can be made for Board members if they wish to attend.

Full details of all Good Relations Week events are available at [goodrelations.com](http://goodrelations.com)

The Chair thanked Mr P Day and his team for their work on Good Relations Week, for which they should be very proud.

#### **4072/24 Management Accounts**

In Mr P Garrity's absence, the CEO presented a paper on CRC's Management Accounts.

She reminded the Board that CRC's budget is still capped at 65% until the NI Assembly pass their budget bill and it receives Royal Assent. This has not presented a problem for CRC yet.

CRC have made a £90k bid to TEO's October Monitoring round, and await the outcome of this.

The 2022/23 Pay Remits will be paid to staff in September. The CEO assured the Board that the resources for this has been accounted for already and noted in CRC's consumption reports so will have no impact on the 2024/25 budget. The 2023/24 Pay Remit has been submitted to TEO and the team await a response.

The Board thanked the CEO for this update and noted the reports.

#### **4073/24 CRC Temporary Staff Member Purchase Order Update**

The CEO presented the Board with an update on three purchase orders, over the £10k CEO delegated level of sign off.

Purchase Order One, for CRC's Temporary Finance Manager, has now reached £118,420.77 over 1.5 years of service.

Purchase Order Two, for Temporary EA maternity cover, has reached £20,234.322

Purchase Order Three, for CRC's Temporary Project Officer maternity cover, has reached £14,291.63.

The Board approved the new totals.

#### **4074/24 Staffing Update**

Ms J Adamson presented the Board with an update on CRC's Staffing issues.

She informed the Board that the advertisement for the Finance Manager role is currently open. As agreed at the last Board meeting CRC are asking for a qualified accountant. The recruitment will close on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

Ms J Adamson added that Ms N Woodside has moved on to a new role, and Ms H George has returned from her maternity leave.

The Board thanked Ms J Adamson for this update and noted the report.

#### **4075/24 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

##### **i) Verbal Update from Chair on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2024 Meeting**

Mr J McCallister updated the Board on the latest meeting of CRC's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, of which he is the Chair.

The meeting reviewed and agreed an updated version of the Committee's Terms of Reference. A number of requirements set out in the Terms of Reference will be

taken forward at an upcoming Committee meeting, including: review of the work of the Committee during 2023-24; a confidential meeting with 2023-24 internal and external auditors; and a review of relevant policies to the committee.

NIAO informed members that the audit of the Annual Report and Accounts is at an advanced stage.

In terms of the internal audit, members were informed that the current contract had come to an end, and therefore a new procurement will now begin. The Committee discussed the uncertainty around members ability to make financial decisions, due to the delay in receiving the official letters regarding their terms.

One item was removed from the Register of Audit Recommendations, following the review of the Finance and General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference. One item remains on the register related to the pension issue.

Two items appeared on CRC's Purchases Without a Price check report. The attendance of the CEO at the British Irish Association annual conference, and the travel costs to this conference. The latter was not a purchase without a price check in so far as the travel company are on the Government Framework, however, CRC are obligated to purchase through them.

#### ii) August Risk Register

Mr J McCallister highlighted to the Board CRC's Risk Register, which was presented and approved by the Committee during the August meeting.

Risk one relates to CRC's pension issue. It remains red on the register.

Risk two relates to CRC's staffing position and remains red on the register. CRC recruitment of the Finance Manager is underway. Mr P Garrity continues to provide excellent temporary cover for this role.

Risk three relates to the NILGOSC Pension scheme and remains amber on the register.

2024-25 resources risk was reduced to amber as the budget has been received. CRC made applications to the June and October Monitoring round.

Risk four is Board Member Terms of Office, and remains red on the register, due the affects the delay will have on board level financial decision making.

A new risk was added to the register 'Procurement of Internal Auditors'. This risk is rated green for the moment but will be reviewed at the next meeting along with all other risks.

#### iii) Approved Minutes of 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024 ARAC meeting

Mr J McCallister presented the approved minutes of the 20<sup>th</sup> June ARAC meeting.

The Board thanked Mr J McCallister for the update and noted the minutes and Risk Register.



4076/24

**Any Other Business**

i) Boardroom Apprentice Scheme 2025

The Chair informed the Board that CRC have been asked if they would like to participate in the 2025 Boardroom Apprentice Scheme, if it receives departmental funding. The Board agreed to take part in the scheme if it goes ahead.

ii) Draft Programme For Government

The CEO informed the Board that the Programme for Government has now been published. It is titled 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most 2024-2027'.

A consultation process will now run until 4<sup>th</sup> November. CRC will work on a draft response for the Board's consideration.

**ACTION:** CEO to work on response to Programme for Government Consultation.

4077/24

**Date of Next Meeting**

Ms H George to contact Board members regarding the date of the next meeting, which will be CRC's AGM.