

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FOURTY SIXTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON THURSDAY 14th NOVEMBER 2024 14:00
BOARDROOM, EQUALITY HOUSE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

4078/24 **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Ms N Tandon, Ms A Simpson, Mr R Campbell, Mr J McCallister

4079/24 **In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr P Day (Director of Engagement), Mr B McDonald (Director of Funding), Mr P Garrity (Finance Manager), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Ms H George (EA to CEO and Board)

4080/24 **Observers:** None

4081/24 **Apologies:** Ms S McClelland, Ms C Harris, Ms M Braniff, Mr M McDonnell.

4082/24 **Welcome & Standard Checks**

The Chair welcomed members to the Annual General Meeting. He asked Board to declare any Conflicts of Interest or gifts and hospitality received to the meeting.

No conflicts were raised and no gifts have been received

4083/24 **Minutes**

Members reviewed and approved the minutes of the 245th meeting of CRC's Board, which took place on 9th September 2024.

4084/24 **Matters Arising**

The Chair presented members with an update on a number of matters arising from previous Board meetings.

Ms J Adamson has been in contact with a number of Arms Lenth Bodies affected by the pension issue. One organisation was not compliant with HMRC regulations and therefore received a fine and an amendment to staff's contracts was implemented. Another organisation is awaiting Department feedback on their most recent Business Case submission. Ms J Adamson is awaiting feedback from one further Arms Lenth Body. The board will take this discussion forward later in the meeting.

Following the previous Board meeting, the CEO wrote to TEO to ask for an update on their review into the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme, and what the future of the scheme will look like. CRC are still awaiting a response to this correspondence.

4085/24 **Correspondence**

i) TEO to Chair re: Pension Issue

The Chair presented the Committee with a piece of correspondence from the TEO'S Permanent Secretary dated 22nd October 2024. The correspondence requested a timeline setting out the approximate completion date for the submission of the final business case.

The Chair's response to this correspondence was then presented to the Board. It highlighted the Board's concern that the decoupling of Pay Remits and the pension issue has now been revoked. The letter states that the Board will discuss TEO's proposal that a consultant be brought on to assist with the completion of the Business Case.

The Chair and Mr J McCallister have been requested to attend an upcoming meeting of the TEO's Audit Committee, and a meeting with Mr G Johnston to discuss next steps.

The Board then discussed the proposal to tender for external assistance to complete the financial aspects of the Business Case. The Board instructed staff to begin the tender process by drawing up the tender document and terms or reference for the work.

ACTION: Ms J Adamson to draft a tender document and terms of reference for procurement exercise to find an external consultant to compile the financial outturns of the options set out in the pension business case.

The Board then asked Mr P Garrity to make an additional bid through the January Monitoring Round for £15k to cover the costs of this work.

ACTION: Mr P Garrity to make an additional January Monitoring Round bid for £15k for the pension scheme consultancy work.

The Pension Sub Group will meet in due course to discuss the next steps.

4086/24 Annual Report and Accounts

The CEO presented the 2023/24 Annual Report and Accounts to attendees.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee reviewed the Annual Report and Accounts on Thursday 14th November and recommended that the Board approve the document.

Mr P Garrity highlighted the financial statements in the accounts. He added that there was an issue this year with the pension report which had to be redone to apply public accounting guidance to not recognise the surplus.

The Board approved the 2023/24 Annual Report and Accounts. The document will now be signed by the CEO and the Chair, and then submitted to NI Audit Office.

The Annual Report and Accounts were produced to comply with Companies House guidance, Charity Commission guidance, and Public Sector guidance.

The CEO thanked staff, and CRC's Board for their work over the year, which was presented in the Annual Report and Accounts. She also added her thanks to the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Cavanagh Kelly for their work.

The Chair thanked Mr P Garrity and the team, and noted that the Report provides the Board with great assurance.

The CEO informed the Board that CRC will begin an exercise to produce a zero based budget for the 2024/25 year. This will involve projecting spend across Directorates and across all budget lines for the year. This will allow CRC to have a better picture of their value for money, and the ratio between forward facing work and administration. That figure for 2023/24 is 12% of resources used for the running of the organisation, and 88% towards forward facing Good Relations work.

4087/24 Solvency and Liquidity Report

Mr P Garrity presented the Board with CRC's Solvency and Liquidity Report.

He assured the Board that CRC continue to be solvent and liquid. The analysis, as of the 31st March 2024, report a deficit in reserves of £241,733. This deficit is due to the accounting treatment CRC must follow as expenditure is recognised on an accrual's basis, however the income to fund this expenditure can only be recognised when received. This timing gives rise to this perceived deficit.

The restricted pension reserve reflects a surplus in the pension scheme and is a long-term asset/liability.

The Board thanked Mr P Garrity and noted the report.

4088/24 Risk Register and Depository

The CEO presented the Board with CRC's full Risk Register which contains details of all risks rated red to green.

Risk one relates to 'Compliance with DoF Guidance FD (DFP 08/14'. This risk remains rated red. An update was provided on this risk earlier in the meeting.

Risk two, rated red, relates to CRC's Finance Staffing levels. A paper will be presented at the upcoming Finance and General Purposes Committee with options for discussion.

Risk three, rated amber, relates to the ongoing NILGOSC pension scheme case. There have been no recent updates on this issue.

Risk four, rated amber, relates to CRC's resources for the year. CRC are still awaiting a response to the recent January Monitoring Round. The October Monitoring Round provided CRC with some but not all additional funding requested.

Risk five, rated red, relates to CRC's Board member's terms of office, and the delay in receiving official confirmation from TEO of their second term.

Risk six, rated red, relates to the tender exercise to fill the Internal Audit contract. A second tender exercise is currently ongoing.

The Board noted the Risk Register and thanked the CEO for presenting.

4089/24 Risk Strategy

The CEO presented the Board with CRC's current Risk Strategy. This was received at today's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, and no changes were recommended.

The Board approved the continuation of the current Risk Strategy.

4090/24 Chair's Item

i) Programme for Government Consultation Response

The CEO informed members that a response to the current Programme for Government consultation was drafted and presented to the Chair for approval. It has been submitted in survey form and letter form to TEO.

The CEO presented the full consultation response to Board members, who approved the draft.

The Chair thanked the CEO for her work on this.

4091/24 CEO's Report

The CEO presented the Board with a report updating on a number of matters

i) Strategic Plan

The CEO hopes that CRC can finalise the Strategic Plan once the outcome of the TBUC review takes place.

ii) Staffing

CRC's recent recruitment exercise for the Finance Manager was unsuccessful. A paper will be presented at the upcoming Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting with a number of options for discussion.

Following the implementation of the 20023/24 Pay Remit, CRC's staff pay scales are now all up to date.

iii) TEO

A meeting of the TEO Funders Forum is taking place on Monday 25th November. A paper has been drafted highlighting the learning from the previous meetings and setting out a number of short and long term recommendations.

The CEO was approached to TEO to discuss the proposal for CRC to be a delivery route for the 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' fund. However, TEO returned to say that "it looks like we do not have the legal powers to go with the Community Relations Council for grant delivery. EVAWG is not clearly considered good relations, within the original intention of the legislation".

iv) Department of Foreign Affairs

The CEO gave a presentation to a group from Ethiopia at the request of the DFA Reconciliation Fund on 10th September 2024.

v) Funding

A meeting of the Core Fund Shared Learning Forum took place on 24th October. Another meeting of the Forum will take place on 12th December. Board members are welcome to attend.

The CEO informed the Board that Ms A Chada has left Springboard. She congratulated her on her long service at Springboard. It will be a loss to the organisation and the sector.

vi) Engagement

The CEO thanked Mr P Day and his team for their work on Good Relations Week 2024. The team are reviewing the draft evaluation which will be presented at a future Board meeting.

4092/24 Funding and Development Report

Mr B McDonald presented the Board with a report on the work of the Funding Team.

Following the success of the October Monitoring Round, CRC were able to make awards to all of the groups who were deemed fundable at this year's Core Funding Decision Meeting. That means a total of 32 awards were made as part of the scheme.

At a recent Shared Learning Forum meeting some Core Groups raised their concerns about the effect of the National Insurance contributions increase. If additional resource is available, the team will consider a way to assist groups with this cost of living issue.

The CRCD October Monitoring Round bid was unsuccessful, however, resource has become available to increase the budget to £200k.

The Core Fund is open to applications, closing on Friday 15th November. There are currently 50 applications in progress on the system. The 2025/26 Core budget is estimated to be £750,000 for new awards.

A meeting of the Core Shared Learning Forum will take place on 12th December, and an invitation will be issued to Board members in due course.

A meeting of the Funding Sub Group will take place this month, with the actions from the previous meeting set out in this Report.

The Board discussed the issues raised by the groups at the recent Forum, and suggested that a conference could be held to highlight the good relations work conducted by the ethnic minority sector in Northern Ireland. Showcasing how Good Relations encompasses more than the traditional two communities.

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

4093/24 Community Engagement Report

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

The draft Good Relations Week evaluation is with the team and will be presented, along with recommendations, at the next Board meeting. Positive feedback has been received on The Engagement Forum and the involvement of Mr Jeffers and Ministers.

Good Relations Awards opened for nominations on 17th October. A new award in partnership with the Housing Executive will be made this year, and there are plans to expand further next year.

The Board thanked Mr P Day and noted his report.

4094/24 ‘Making a Difference 2023-24’ Report

Mr P Day presented the draft Making a Difference 2023-24 Report. This is a culmination of work of the Engagement team and Funding team.

Mr P Day and the CEO highlighted the Social Value figure for 2021/22 which indicates that for every £1.00 invested by the Core Fund, there is a return of £5.69. This is an exercise CRC hope to be able to complete every year.

The Board commended Mr P Day on the report, and all the work that it showcases. He stated that he would send it on to the TEO Permanent Secretary, to highlight the work of CRC and the social value return on investment.

4095/24 IT SLA Purchase Order

Mr P Garrity presented the Board with CRC’s IT Service Level Agreement 2024-25 Purchase Order for £23,760. The Board approved the purchase order.

4096/24 October 2024 Management Accounts

Mr P Garrity presented a summary of the October Management Accounts, setting out CRC's current position.

He drew members attention to the lifting of the 65% restriction which has been in place since the beginning of the year. He reminded the Board of the January Monitoring Round bid, and the current £47k saving in salaries which will be moved to provide extra funding resources.

The Board thanked Mr P Garrity for this update and noted the paper.

4097/24 Staffing Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Board with a report on the current staffing situation at CRC.

CRC staff are now all on the current pay scales following the implementation of the 2023/24 Pay Remit.

The Finance Manager and DFAP Director posts remain vacant. A paper will be presented to the F&GP Committee setting out a number of options to mitigate this issue.

The Board thanked Ms J Adamson and noted the report.

4098/24 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

i) Verbal Update on 14th November Meeting

Mr J McCallister provided the Board with an update on the Audit Committee meeting which took place this morning.

The Committee received a paper setting out all of the policies related to audit, and their review dates. A number of amendments have been made to the policies which will be presented at the upcoming F&GP Committee meeting.

The Annual Report and Accounts and the Report to Those Charged with Governance were reviewed and approved at the Committee.

The Risk Register was reviewed and the ratings approved.

ii) Approved Minutes of 29th August Meeting

The minutes of the 29th Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting were noted by the Board.

4099/24 AOB

i) Boardroom Apprentice Scheme Update

The Chair informed the Board that the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme has not received funding for the 2024 or 2025 year.

4100/24

Date of Next Meeting

28th January 2025 2pm

10th March 2025 2pm

29th April 2025 2pm