

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FOURTY NINTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON TUESDAY 6<sup>th</sup> MAY 11:30AM  
CRC's OFFICE, EQUALITY HOUSE**

- 4143/25**      **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister, Ms M Braniff. Ms S McClelland, Ms N Tandon, Ms A Simpson
- 4144/25**      **In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr P Day (Director of Engagement), Mr B McDonald (Director of Funding), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Garrity (Interim Finance Manager) Ms H George (Governance Manager)
- 4145/25**      **Observers:** None
- 4146/25**      **Apologies:** Ms C Harris, Mr M McDonnell, Mr R Campbell.
- 4147/25**      **Welcome**
- The Chair welcomed members and staff to today's meeting.
- 4148/25**      **Standard Checks**
- No conflicts were raised, and no gifts have been received
- 4149/25**      **Minutes**
- The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.
- 4150/25**      **Matters Arising**
- The Chair presented attendees with two matters arising from the previous Board meeting.
- In relation to the first matter, the Chair reminded Board members of the need to return their Appraisals and Evaluation forms as soon as possible, or they will have to be reported as incomplete in the Annual Report and Accounts.
- The second matter arising relates to a report on the Core Fund opportunity costs of not having sufficient funds to support all fundable applications. Mr B McDonald has provided this as a paper for today's meeting.
- 4151/25**      **North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme**
- Ms B McDonald presented the Board with a paper setting out the outcome of the recent North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme scoring meeting, which CRC attended along with staff from The Executive Office. The applications were scored and awards agreed.
- The paper set out the scores and the awards. This is coming to the Board for authorisation as the payment levels are above the CEO's level of delegated authority and require the Board's approval.

Members approved the awards and thanked Mr B McDonald for the report.

**4152/25 Carbon Literacy Project**

Ms H George presented the Committee with a paper setting out a proposal to seek Carbon Literacy accreditation, through the participation in formal training.

She explained that, as part of CRC's commitment to improving sustainability and environmental credentials, a representative from Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful was invited to present at a recent Staff Meeting. Staff were informed of current sustainability and environmental statistics, and how CRC can continue to grow our own learning and make improvements. Ms H George's paper recommended that CRC pursue accreditation and take part in carbon literacy training. This would require participation from Board members.

Board members approved the proposal and instructed Ms H George to explore the bronze or silver accreditation, which is dependent on the number of staff and Board members who complete the training. The Chair expressed his interest in taking part in the training. Ms H George will be in touch with Board members in due course to ask for volunteers to take part in the training.

**ACTION:** Ms H George to contact Board members seeking volunteers to take part in the Carbon Literacy Training.

**4153/25 Board Code of Good Practice**

Ms H George presented the Board with a recent update to the Department's Code of Good Practice. This precipitated the need to review CRC's own Board Code of Good Practice.

A review was carried out, and Ms H George presented the Board with a number of recommended amendments. These amendments include the updating of the Nolan Principles, and the replacing of references to 'The Office of First and Deputy First Minister' with 'The Executive Office'.

The Board approved the recommended changes, and thanked Ms H George for conducting the review and presenting the recommended changes .

**4154/25 Correspondence**

i) 2025/26 Revised Opening Budget Allocation

The CEO presented the Board with correspondence from TEO setting out the 2025/26 opening budget allocation which was included in the papers for this Board meeting. While this reflects an increase on the 2024/25 Opening Budget it is significant less than CRC's 2024/25 closing position. CRC will

apply to in-year monitoring rounds for additional resource. At a recent ALB Forum meeting TEO gave assurance that partial costs for the National Insurance Contribution increase will be provided during the June Monitoring Round, to which CRC have already submitted a bid.

The Board discussed this correspondence and expressed their disappointment that CRC continue to receive a reduced budget. The Board would welcome additional in-year funding through Monitoring Rounds but would prefer to see this resource provided at the beginning of the year, when it would be most useful.

ii) Pathfinder Grant

The CEO presented the Board with correspondence from TEO included in the papers for this Board meeting regarding the Pathfinder Grant Scheme. She reminded the Board that this grant scheme has not run for the last few years due to CRC having insufficient resources. TEO are requesting that the Pathfinder grant open in 2025/26 and that £60k will be provided during the June Monitoring Round to fund this grant scheme.

The CEO assured the Board that the process for Pathfinder will not change and any applications to the grant should cover only up to a one-year emergency period to ensure a group in jeopardy can survive until they are able to apply to other funding schemes. The work undertaken by the group would have to be considered strategically important to be considered. She informed the Board that TEO have been contacted by a group interested in the scheme, and CRC have also been contacted by a different group interested in the scheme.

The Board discussed this correspondence and agreed that the Chair should respond to TEO stating that the Pathfinder Grant is not currently open due to resource issues, and that the position will be reviewed following the outcome of the June Monitoring Round. The correspondence should inform TEO that CRC expect a lot of interest in the Pathfinder Scheme if it is opened in 2025/26.

**ACTION:** Chair to respond to TEO's Pathfinder letter, indicating that CRC will wait until the resource is confirmed before opening the scheme, and that there is likely to be great interest in the programme when opened.

**4155/25**

**Chair's Update**

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

25<sup>th</sup> March the Chair attended the Engagement Forum and Good Relations Awards. The Chair suggested that in the future winners should be notified of who will be in the photocalls, and if they wish they can opt out prior to the event.

9<sup>th</sup> April the Chair attended the TEO's ALB Forum. The head of Civil Service Jayne Brady presented on the new Programme for Government, and a good financial overview for the year was also provided in another presentation. However, attendees were rarely given the opportunity to feed into the event and provide their views and perspectives. The Chair stated that at the next Forum meeting he will request a review be undertaken of the Terms of Reference, to ensure that the Forum is a useful medium for ALBs.

The Chair attended the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 29<sup>th</sup> April. The Chair congratulated Ms H George on her new position at CRC.

The Chair was invited to a celebration of Ms K Wolff's Good Relations Award win. The Chair cannot attend, the invitation will be circulated to Board members in his absence.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update.

#### **4156/25**

#### **Chief Executive Officer's Update**

The CEO presented the Board with an update on a number of matters in her report which had been circulated with the papers for this meeting:

i) TEO

The CEO noted that the Board members letters setting out their second term of office are still outstanding. This item remains on CRC's Risk Register rated red, and therefore also sits on TEO's Risk Register. Members were reminded that Mr C Gardner, TEO, stated at the last Board meeting that he would raise this again with Minister's Private Offices.

ii) Planning

The CEO informed the Board that the 2025/26 Operational Plan was submitted to TEO on 26<sup>th</sup> March, and no feedback has been provided.

CRC's Strategic Plan is still on hold, at TEO's request, until the TBUC Policy Review is complete.

iii) Staffing

The DFAP temporary structure changes were introduced on the 1<sup>st</sup> April. They are already working well, as demonstrated by the large policy review conducted by Ms H George, with papers presented to the Audit Committee, the Finance & General Purposes Committee, and later at today's Board meeting. The CEO thanked Ms H George for her work on these policy papers.

The CEO reminded the Board that as a recommendation from the last NIAO Audit, CRC is required to continue to attempt to fill the Finance Manager position with a permanent staff member. The F&GP Committee reviewed the Job Description and Job Spec for the post, approved a number of changes, and the job will be advertised this week. The Committee agreed that, in the absence of a Finance, Admin and Personnel Director with an accountancy qualification, the Finance Manager position would be advertised as Staff Officer Accountant, to ensure that the Finance Team has a qualified member of staff. Mr P Garrity continues to provide experienced financial support.

Ms G Attwood has returned from her secondment with TEO and is settling in well.

iv) Funders Forum

A meeting with TEO grade 5s was convened on 31<sup>st</sup> March. This meeting was called to update them on the work of the Forum and to ask for their continued support, including asking them to volunteer members of their teams to the working groups, and asking them to attend the plenary sessions of the Funders Forum. Three working groups were established: Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group; Process Working Group; and Comms Working Group. These groups will now meet to begin implementing the short-term actions coming out of the report from the first phase of the project. Feedback will be provided in quarter three this year.

v) Pension Business Case

The CEO reminded the Board that recent correspondence from TEO recommended that CRC pursue employing agency temps to complete this Business Case. CRC reached out to framework agencies and two candidates were recommended. A positive meeting was held with a prospective temp, however, following this they withdrew themselves from consideration as they felt they were not appropriate for the work. They believed that, due to the nature of the Business Case, it would take up a large amount of CRC staff time to bring the temp up to date and would require constant back and forth between the temp and CRC.

The Board noted that CRC are continuing to pursue this matter and that they hoped this set back will not delay the Pay Remit process. The Chair will raise this with TEO at his appraisal meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> May.

vi) Meetings and Events

The CEO was invited, and attended, a reception on 19<sup>th</sup> March hosted by the Prime Minister of the UK to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

The CEO and Mr B McDonald met with MLA Mr P Brett regarding the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme and the community development needs of the Shore Road area.

The CEO attended the TBUC Engagement Forum and GR Awards on 25<sup>th</sup> March.

vi) Funding

The CEO reminded the Board that, as part of the 2025/26 Operational Plan, it was agreed that CRC will begin looking at amalgamating the Publications Grant and the Media Grant into one fund that deals with GR Resource Development. CRC will review the paperwork for these schemes this year in the hope that there will be resource to open this scheme in due course.

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

Ms M Braniff left the meeting

**4156/25      Funding Update**

Mr B McDonald presented the Committee with a paper updating on the work of the Funding Team.

The team are currently working to close off the 2024/25 year, pursuing claims and processing payments.

The 2025/26 Core Fund Letters of Offer have been sent and 20 have been returned to date.

The 2025/26 CRCD grant will open with a reduced budget compared to last year due to cuts in TEO funding. There are already £60k of applications in progress on the system, which would mean the scheme's current budget of £75k was fully committed by June.

Mr B McDonald reminded the Board about CRC's ongoing response to a Pre-Action to Judicial Review, which was brought by a group which applied for Core Funding but was unsuccessful. CRC submitted a response and a brief to the legal correspondence through its legal representatives. The appellant has until Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May to issue a response to the submission. He reminded the Board that if the group's legal case was successful, that would simply put them back into the process for their application to be assessed and would not guarantee that they score high enough to be fundable.

The team are working with Ms M Braniff to agree a date of the next Funding Sub-Group.

The next Board meeting will take place on 24<sup>th</sup> June at the premises of the Belfast YMCA, a Core Funded group. This event will also act as the launch of the Core Fund awards.

The Board thanked Mr B McDonald and noted his Report.

**4157/25      Core Fund Opportunity Cost**

Mr B McDonald presented the Board with a paper showing the opportunity cost due to the underfunding of the Core Fund Grant by TEO. The paper showed what groups

received a fundable score during the Core Fund assessment but were not able to be awarded a grant due to the lack of resource.

The Board asked if there was a way to find out what that loss would be to the groups in terms of other funding not secured because of CRC's underfunding. The CEO stated that this would be difficult to determine but an indication could be drawn from the information provided in their applications.

**ACTION:** Mr B McDonald to review what the other funding implications might be for fundable Core Fund applicants that CRC could not support due to lack of resources.

#### **4158/25      Engagement Report**

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

The Engagement Forum and Good Relations Awards took place on 25<sup>th</sup> March, at Shankill Women's Centre. Over 140 people attended, Mr M Simpson from BBC NI hosted, with Junior Ministers in attendance. Mr P Day thanked Board members who were able to attend this event. Videos were produced demonstrating the work of each of the winners. These are available on CRC's social media platforms. The 2026 Good Relations Awards may see CRC work with an additional partner to deliver a new award category.

The Chair commended Mr P Day and his team for their delivery of this event and the production of the videos.

This year's TBUC Engagement Forums are due to take place on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025, and 24<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

Mr P Day reminded the Board that Good Relations Week 2025 has been moved from September to 13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> October. This was due to recommendations coming from the last evaluation report. The theme of this years Week will be 'Connect – People, Planet, Prosperity'.

A Shared Learning Forum met on 6<sup>th</sup> March with presentations from Belfast Exposed and Oh Yeah Centre on measuring social value.

Ms G Attwood has returned to CRC following her secondment with TEO. She is settling in well and is focusing on a stakeholder engagement project.

The Board thanked Mr P Day and noted his Report.

#### **4159/25      Management Accounts**

Mr P Garrity provided the Board with the April Management Accounts and summary, as well as an update on the 2024/25 March Accounts.

The 2024/25 year end accounts show a £15k underspend, which represents a 0.47% underspend, well below the 1.5% tolerance. These accounts informed CRC's Whole

of Government Accounts submission and the schedules for the Annual Report and Accounts. The NIAO have already begun their work reviewing grants as part of their 2024/25 audit.

Mr P Garrity explained that the 2025/26 accounts show a £3,580 variance in April. This is due to the timing of overhead expenditure compared with the profiling of the 2025/26 budget and is not a cause for concern.

The opening budget letter shows a £94k increase on the 2024/25 opening budget, however this is significantly lower than CRC 2024/25 closing budget. The letter states that cash spending is restricted to 45% of the Grant in Aid. Mr P Garrity will work to ensure that cash drawdowns are carefully monitored and cannot go above this limit until TEO have lifted it.

A bid has been made to the June Monitoring Round which includes a request for partial cover of CRC's increase in National Insurance costs, which TEO state they would provide in this Monitoring Round. Correspondence in relation to the Pathfinder Scheme has also been received as discussed earlier in the meeting.

The 2024/25 3% and 2025/26 6% Pay Remit was agreed by the NICS union. Mr P Garrity advised that he complete the work on this and submit it to TEO. These pay increases have been fully provided for in the budget and accounts.

The Chair thanked Mr P Garrity for his work and noted the report.

#### **4160/25**

#### **Finance and General Purposes Committee**

##### **i) Verbal Update from Chair**

The Chair of the Board and Finance & General Purposes Committee provided members with an update on the 29<sup>th</sup> April meeting.

An extensive policy review was conducted due to a number of developments, including: DFAP Directorate restructure; Government Procurement Act amendments; and the successful procurement of Internal Auditors. These policies were presented at the Committee meeting and approved.

The Committee received the quarter four Delivery Report and Performance Report, which showed all outcomes have been delivered in year, with the exception of the Pathfinder, Publication Grant and Media Grant as there was insufficient funding from TEO to run these.

A Vouching and Verification report showed that there is one outstanding refund of £600 which CRC continue to pursue.

The Committee reviewed and approved an updated Finance Manager Job Spec and Job Description with a view to the job being advertised this week.

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with the quarter four sickness absence statistics which show a significant reduction in the number of short term and long-term sickness.



The organisations in Equality House are working on a Business Case proposing to remain in the building for a further five years following the end of the lease in 2026.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update.

ii) Minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> January Meeting

The Board noted the approved minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025 Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting.

**4161/25      Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

i) Verbal Update from Chair

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee updated the Board on the most recent meeting, which took place on 24<sup>th</sup> April.

At this meeting the internal auditors presented the report on their review of Grants Administration and Distribution. This review received a satisfactory rating and no recommendations were made. A review of Governance and Risk Management is currently underway, and a review of the Engagement Teams administration of the Good Relations Awards will take place in May.

Three audit recommendations remain on CRC's register. There are currently no investigations into funded groups, and no direct awards were made in this period.

The Committee received details of two pieces of guidance. The Code of Good Practice Update precipitated the earlier review and approval of CRC's Board's Code of Practice. A second piece of Guidance on the new Internal Audit Standards was presented to the Committee and resulted in an update to the Terms of Reference.

The Committee received a report setting out four items which were purchased during this period that did not require a price check. Purchases include social value engine software license, GR Award sculpture, Adobe software, and NICVA membership.

ii) Risk Register

Mr J McCallister presented the Board with the Risk Register which contains five ongoing risk and one new risk.

Implementation of DoF Guidance on Pension – remains rated red. An update on this was provide earlier in the meeting.

Staffing remains rated red. Following the F&GP Committee and Board's approval of the temporary DFAP restructure, one staff member applied and was appointed to the position, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April. This arrangement is too new to consider changing the risk rating but will be kept under review.

NILGOSC Pension Scheme – this risk remains rated amber as there have been no updates on this case

2024/25 & 2025/26 Resource – remains rated amber. CRC’s budget letter from TEO indicated an increase on 2023/24 opening budget, however, this is well below the closing position for 2024/25. CRC will bid into the in-year monitoring processes for additional resources. The CEO informed the Committee that TEO had been in touch to recommend the Pathfinder grant open in 2025/26, and to advise that they have secured £60K for this purpose. This money will be made available in the June Monitoring Round.

Board Members Terms of Office – remains rated red.

Pre-Action to Judicial Review – this is a new risk, the Committee agreed that it should be rated red. An update on this was provided earlier in the meeting.

ii) Minutes of 6<sup>th</sup> March ARAC

The Board noted the minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> March ARAC meeting

The Board thanked Mr J McCallister for this update.

**4162/25 Any Other Business**

Board members reminded attendees that some members’ terms are up at the end of the year and TEO’s recruitment of new members should begin swiftly. The Chair stated that he would raise this issue at his meeting with Mr G Johnston on 7<sup>th</sup> May.

**4163/25 Date of Next Meeting**

24<sup>th</sup> June 2025 11:30am