

**NI Community Relations Council**  
**Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> April**  
**11:30am CRC's Office, Equality House**

**Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair of Committee and Board), 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), Ms N Maguire (Vouching and Verification Officer), Ms H George (Governance Manager )

**Apologies: None**

**1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed Board members and staff to today's meeting. He congratulated Ms H George on her new job role.

**2. Minutes**

The Committee reviewed and approved the minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025 meeting.

**3. Matters Arising**

The CEO presented the Committee with two items arising from the previous meeting.

- i) Ms J Adamson was asked to speak to the accountancy firms to get feedback on the recent procurement. Ms J Adamson spoke to these firms and provided feedback to the Board at the last meeting. Firms expressed that the allocated budget would not be sufficient to cover their own costs associated with the equality and legal aspects of the Pension Business Case.
- ii) Ms J Adamson was to enquire about permanent passes for Board members. These passes have been produced and distributed to members.

**4. Conflicts of Interest**

No conflicts were declared.

**5. Policy Updates**

Ms H George presented the Committee with a paper regarding a recent policy review. She explained that a number of recent developments precipitated the need to review and update many policies. These developments included: F&GP Committee's decision regarding the DFAP Directorate restructure; Government Procurement Act amendment to control limits; and the successful procurement of Internal Auditors.

The Committee were presented with the following Policies;

- Procurement Policy
- Fraud Prevention Policy & Response Plan
- Service Continuity Plan
- Information Security Policy
- Records Management Policy
- Financial Procedures Manual

The Committee reviewed the updates and approved the policies. They thanked Ms H George for her work on this.

## **6. Performance Report & Delivery Report**

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's Quarter Four Performance Report.

The Report shows that CRC delivered all projected objectives in year, apart from the delivery of the Publication, Pathfinder, and Media Grant which have been suspended for a number of years due to insufficient funding.

The Performance Report includes CRC's Risk Register as it was on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, an update on the staffing position, detail on the year end expenditure, a list of the quarter four achievements, and details of CRC's yearly staff sickness report.

The information for this Report was taken from CRC's Delivery Report, which the CEO then presented to the Committee.

The CEO thanked Ms H George for compiling this report.

The Committee noted the Report and thanked the CEO for presenting.

## **7. Management Accounts**

Mr P Garrity presented the Committee with CRC's 2024/25 year end Management Accounts, along with a summary of the key points.

CRC's accounts show a £15k underspend which is well within the 1.5%, sitting around 0.47% underspend.

These accounts were prepared at year end and form the basis of CRC's Whole of Government Account submission and Annual Report and Accounts. The pension report has now been received therefore the final accounts model is complete and will now be populated.

The 2024/25 3% and 2025/26 6% Pay Remit was agreed by the NICS union. Mr P Garrity advised that he will complete the work on this and submit it to TEO. At a meeting with TEO the Permanent Secretary stated that they would not be progressing CRC's pay remit until the pension issue was resolved, however the Chair has since written to TEO and asked them consider CRC's actions showing continued commitment to progressing this issue as complying with the guidance, and allow the pay remits to progress. TEO did not provide a response to this aspect of the letter in their follow up correspondence. The Chair assured the Committee that he will be raising this issue again at his upcoming appraisal meeting with TEO.

Mr P Garrity informed the Committee that the formal audit process will begin on 29<sup>th</sup> May, however work has already begun reviewing the grants for 2024/25.

Mr P Garrity stated that CRC have made a June Monitoring Round bid for Pathfinder and partial National Insurance Contributions. TEO stated that they would provide resources to partially cover the National Insurance increases during this monitoring round. TEO also provided correspondence asking CRC to open the Pathfinder grant scheme this year and indicating that they would be making an in-year award of £60k to cover this emergency funding scheme, through the Monitoring Round.

CRC's CRCD scheme is currently open for applications with a reduced budget compared to the previous year. Bids will be made in year to increase the resource for this grant.

CRC's cash spend is currently capped at 45% until TEO lift this limit. The budget is being tightly monitored to ensure we stay within this limit.

The CEO and Committee thanked Mr P Garrity for his report, and for his work on the accounts.

## **8. Temporary Staff Purchase Order**

Ms H George presented the Committee with an update on the current totals for the two temporary staff members working at CRC.

The Committee noted the Purchase Orders.

## **9. Vouching and Verification Report**

Ms N Maguire presented the Committee with the Vouching and Verification Report.

For the 2024/25 year, all Core April-Oct claims have been vouched. 27 April-March claims have now been submitted and the team are processing these. One North Belfast contract holder has submitted their 2024/25 claims, with 9 outstanding. 46 CRCD payments have been made.

For the 2025/26 year there are four new groups in the Core Scheme. Ms N Maguire has conducted verification visits for three of the groups with one to be completed in the next few weeks.

CRC are still awaiting one 2023/24 small refund to be returned. The team continue to pursue this. Ms N Tandon noted that the group may have moved to new premises and Ms N Maguire agreed to check this.

The Committee thanked Ms N Maguire for this update and noted the report.

## **10. Staffing Update**

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with a paper updating on CRC's current staffing position.

She stated that, as part of the last NIAO audit, it was recommended that CRC continue to pursue filing the Finance Manager role permanently. Ms J Adamson

asked the Committee to consider advertising the job as 'Staff Officer Accountant'. The CEO explained that the Committee had considered this previously, but as the DFAP Director was a qualified Accountant, there was no need for both finance positions to be qualified. Now that the DFAP Director position is vacant and the Board has approved a new temporary DFAP structure, it would be recommended that the Finance Manager must be a qualified accountant, or pursuing certification to ensure that CRC has at least one accountant. The Committee reviewed the Job Specification and Job Description and agreed the following:

- The job will be advertised as 'Staff Officer Accountant'
- The word 'preferably' will be removed from the sentence regarding public sector experience
- The candidate would need to be qualified or in their final year of certification. If they are in their final year of certification, their probation period would be extended until after the qualification is obtained.

The Committee approved the Job Spec and Job Descriptions based on these updates, and noted the Staffing Report.

## **11. Pension Business Case Update**

Ms J Adamson provided the Committee with an update on CRC's Pension Business Case.

TEO recommended that CRC pursue employing temps to complete this work. CRC reached out to the framework agencies and two candidates were recommended. A meeting just prior to the Committee took place with one of the candidates, while the other candidate cancelled. A follow up meeting will be held with the candidate tomorrow.

The CEO added that the work on the finance aspects of the Business Case could move ahead with this one temp but HR will assess the position tomorrow after the follow up meeting.

CRC would require June Monitoring Round resource to complete the Business Case and awaits TEO confirmation that this resource will be provided.

The Chair recommended that, if this avenue is not successful, then CRC should consider going back to the firms who submitted responses to the tender exercise earlier in the year, and ask them if they would be interested in completing just the financial aspects of the Business Case.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson and the CEO for this update.

## **12. Quarter Four Sickness Absence Report**

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with CRC's Sickness Absence Report for quarter four, which contains details of the full year's statistics.

Compared to the same quarter in 2023/24, there has been a significant reduction in both the total number of sickness absence days and the associated costs. In Q4 2023/24 the total number of sick days was 73.5 and in 2024/25 Q4 that total was 33.

The Committee noted this significant improvement and thanked Ms J Adamson for the Report.

### **13. Health and Safety**

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that there are no outstanding Health and Safety recommendations, and all planned Preventative Maintenance is up to date.

### **14. Premises Committee Update**

Ms J Adamson updated members on the latest meeting of the Equality House Premises Committee.

ECNI are currently leading on procuring a new IT provider for Equality House organisations. The Business Case for this was completed and submitted to TEO last year, however, due to TEO's delays, the work will have to be completed again. New requirements for ALBs mean that the provider will have to hold a certain qualification to be awarded the contract. Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that this same requirement is not placed on the NI Civil Service's IT providers, IT Assist.

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that the lease of Equality House will be up in 2026. ECNI have drafted a Business Case proposing to stay in Equality House for a 5 year period. They did speak to estate agents to test the market, however, office leasing is so unstable at the moment, a market test was not possible. The CEO added that the original NICS Project 25 proposal to move all the ALBs in Equality House into Civil Service buildings (e.g. the Gasworks) seems to have been abandoned.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson and the CEO for this update.

### **15. Any Other Business**

#### **i) Union Update**

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that the Union had been notified of the suspension of the Secondment Policy. They accepted these changes, and asked for an update on the Pension Business Case, which was then provided to them.

### **16. Date of Next Meeting**

Ms H George explained that the date of the next meeting will be dependent on when the first draft of the Annual Report and Accounts is completed. She will be in touch with the Committee in due course to arrange a date for this meeting.