

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON TUESDAY 24th JUNE 2025 at 11:30AM
BELFAST YMCA**

4164/25 **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister, Ms M Braniff., Ms N Tandon, Ms C Harris, Mr M McDonnell, Mr R Campbell.

4165/25 **In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr P Day (Director of Engagement), Mr B McDonald (Director of Funding), Mr P Garrity (Interim Finance Manager) Ms H George (Governance Manager)

4166/25 **Observers:** None

4167/25 **Apologies:** Ms S McClelland & Ms A Simpson.

4168/25 **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed members and staff to today's meeting.

4169/25 **Presentation from Belfast YMCA**

Mr C Couples and Mr P McNiece from Belfast YMCA presented to Board members on the Belfast YMCA's Good Relations work. The organisation recently celebrated its 175th anniversary and reviewing their archives uncovered a legacy of peace building in Belfast. The organisation runs as a social enterprise which ensures its sustainability. It works with young people across the whole of Belfast, and runs programmes in schools and youth clubs throughout the city. Their vision is that community relations work is a golden thread that runs through everything the organisation does.

The Chair thanked Mr Couples and Mr McNiece for presenting. He highlighted that CRC's vision too is that Community Relations runs through every part of peoples lives. He commended the organisation on their social enterprise, which keeps them sustainable. CRC's Core fund aims to support groups with the running costs, which enables them to undertake their Community Relations work. The fund received a large number of fundable applications, however, due to under resourcing all of the good work cannot be supported.

4170/25 **Standard Checks**

No conflicts were raised, and no gifts have been received

4171/25 **Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.

4172/25 **Matters Arising**

Two items on the Matters Arising report are complete, there relate to the completion of the Board evaluation pro forma, and the Pathfinder correspondence.

Mr B McDonald will update the Board in his report on an action around unsuccessful Core Fund applications.

Two actions remains on the register, one regarding the regular reporting to Board members of CRC events. In relation to the other, Ms H George is to contact Board members over the summer seeking volunteers to take part in the Carbon Literacy Training.

4173/25

Correspondence

The Chair presented the Board with his correspondence to Mr C Gardner TEO regarding the Pathfinder Grant, which was circulated with the papers for this meeting.

Mr B McDonald informed the Board that, on the instruction of TEO, CRC opened the Pathfinder Grant Scheme. One organisation has been in touch with CRC directly and is in the process of submitting an application. One organisation is in contact with TEO, however, have not yet reached out to CRC about an application.

CRC have not yet received the outcome of the June Monitoring Round, so this £60k Pathfinder Fund remains notional until that approval is received.

The Chair noted that TEO have been kept up to date through this whole process.

The Board thanked the Chair and Mr B McDonald for this update, and noted the correspondence.

4174/25

Chair's Update

The Chair updated the Board on a number of meetings and events he attended following the previous meeting.

On the 7th May the Chair attended a meeting with Mr G Thompson TEO to conduct his annual appraisal. The Chair raised the Pension Business Case issue at this meeting. TEO proposed that they explore whether a member of the Strategic Investment Board might be able to complete the Business Case for CRC. TEO raised this proposal again with the CEO at the Accountability and Liaison meeting. CRC has received no update from TEO on this.

On 22nd May the Chair attended the Good Relations Week launch. It was a very successful day with the actor James Martin in attendance.

The Chair attended CRC's Funding Sub-Group meeting on 4th June.

17th June the Chair attended CRC'S TBUC Engagement Forum. This event included great presentations from people working on the ground during the recent disorder. The Deputy First Minister and Junior Minister O'Reilly were in attendance and both condemned the recent violence.

A meeting of CRC's Finance and General Purposes Committee took place on 23rd June.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update.

4175/25 IT Service Business Case

Ms H George presented the Committee with a business case, prepared by ECNI on behalf of the organisations in Equality House, for the provision of IT Services. The Business Case proposed a 7 year (with a break clause after three years and then another two years). The figure provided for CRC's contribution is based on the number of staff working at CRC, as well as the number of IT devices that services will be provided for.

The Committee reviewed and approved the Business Case.

The CEO added that a recent quality assurance requirement for IT Services has placed an extra criterion on the procurement of this service, which is not placed with this provider yet but they are working on it. It is also not in place with central government's own IT Assist provision.

4176/25 Board Evaluation

Ms H George presented the Board with a paper showing the outcome of the recent Board Evaluation Process, which was circulated with the papers prior to the meeting.

The new evaluation pro forma was created to allow Board members to provide more qualitative feedback instead of the quantitative pro forma used previously.

From the responses that CRC received, the following recommendations were made:

- Hold an annual meeting with board members only to review
 - o the strategy and Board objectives
 - o look at CRC's performance and impact of work over time
 - o hold annual Board Evaluation Process in person. An action list coming from this evaluation process be added to the 'matters Arising' document
 - o Review Board Terms of Reference
- Risk assurance statement
 - o when the risk register is being presented at all board and audit committee meetings – a statement will be included in the Report stating that 'The Risk Register is reviewed at all CRC Management Team meetings and assurance is now being provided that all information is accurate in this form, and all current and potential risks have been included'
- At the next Partnership Agreement review, CRC request a requirement that TEO attend a predetermined number of CRC Board meetings every year (two annually).

The Board reviewed the evaluation outcome and approved the recommendations. The Chair and CEO thanked Ms H George for her work on this.

The Chair suggested that the annual board only meeting would include a presentation of an evaluation completed by Ms H George. This would then be discussed at the meeting, along with the Strategy and performance of CRC.

4177/25 Operational Plan 2025/26

The CEO presented the Board with an updated version of CRC's 2025/26 Operational Plan which was circulated to members prior to this meeting. She reminded the Board that the second draft of the plan was presented to the Board in March 2025, then submitted to TEO for feedback. TEO provided feedback on 3rd June, which has now been incorporated into the new draft.

Updates to the document include: further details on a number of measurements; addition of the newly agreed Programme for Government targets; detail about how CRC conduct the gap and trend analysis; and CRC's 2025/26 budget details which were provided by TEO after the previous draft of the Operational Plan had been submitted. She highlighted that the 'Senior Responsible Owner' in the DFAP section has also been updated to reflect the new staffing structure in that Department.

The Board approved the updated draft and thanked the CEO for her work on this.

4178/25 CEO's Update

The CEO reported on a number of matters contained in her CEO Update paper, circulated prior to this meeting:

i) Board appointments

Board members have now received their official letters setting out the details of their second terms. The CEO pointed out that the letters backdate appointments so these second terms commenced on 1st June 2024, therefore members are already one year into these terms.

In addition to the three Board members due to end their second terms at the end of November 2025, CRC has since also received notice that, due to work commitments, one Board member will be leaving the board on 1st July 2025, and another in December 2025. This would leave CRC's Board below quorum from December 2025.

At the recent Accountability and Liaison meeting TEO stated that they have not yet begun the recruitment to replace these members. This is likely to mean that the process of appointing new Board members will not be completed by December 2025. CRC is therefore asking those due to leave at the end of the year if they would consider extending their terms until the recruitment is complete. Two Board members present

stated that they would be content to stay on until this recruitment was complete. The CEO thanked these members, and the member of the F&GP Committee who, yesterday at the Committee meeting, also agreed to stay on. Subject to checking the position of the one other Board member due to leave but not present at the meeting, the CEO will now, on behalf of the Chair, draft a letter to TEO updating them on this issue.

ACTION: CEO to draft a letter on behalf of the Chair, notifying TEO of the members due to leave at the end of 2025 that would be content to stay on until the Board member recruitment exercise is complete.

The CEO and Chair expressed thanks to Ms M Braniff who is leaving at the end of this month for her contribution to the Board. They hoped she would continue to be a supporter of the work that CRC do, and expressed the hoped to work with her again in the future.

Ms M Braniff stated that it has been her pleasure to serve on the Board, and get to know the staff and members. She hopes to continue her good relationship with the organisation.

The Board then discussed the quorum figure and the potential for the Board to have more than the current 9 members. The CEO agreed to speak to TEO at the next opportunity about the challenges of achieving a quorum of 5 with the number of Board members at 9.

ACTION: CEO to speak to TEO about the challenge of achieving a quorum with the number of members on the Board currently at 9.

ii) Staffing

As noted in her report, the CEO advised that the new DFAP structure is working well. It will be reviewed in a year or earlier if needed.

The CEO informed the Board that, while TEO are pursuing the proposal to involve SIB in the Pension Business Case, the search does remain open with the recruitment agencies.

iii) Funding

The CEO informed the Board that the CRCD grant is already under pressure. This, along with the 45% cash cap is putting a lot of pressure on CRC's funding. This is being continuously monitored by Mr P Garrity and Mr B McDonald.

iv) Engagement

The CEO commended and thanked the Engagement Team for their work on the recent TBUC Engagement Forum. There was good discussion at

the tables and connections made. It was clear from the presentations and the discussions that there is a need to consider community cohesion in terms of ethnic minority communities in the next TBUC strategy.

The CEO prepared a statement for the 21st June Day of Reflection, which is now on CRC's website.

v) TEO

A review of CRC is due to be conducted on behalf of TEO as part of the reintroduction of landscape reviews and also in relation to the TBUC Strategy review. TEO has not yet begun a scoping exercise and therefore has not yet shared any details of what the review will entail. .

The Board thanked the CEO for this update, and the work reflected in the report.

4179/25 Funding and Development

Mr B McDonald presented the Board with a paper updating on a number of funding matters, which was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

He highlighted from the report the current funding situation. The Community Relations/Cultural Diversity Grant has applications in worth over £150k, which means that the grant is now oversubscribed.

The 45% spend cap will become a problem for the processing of first payments in the next 8 weeks. Groups are entitled to receive their first payments once they have completed their 2024/25 claims and have returned their 2025/26 Letters of Offer. CRC are currently not pursuing groups to complete these two tasks, as a means to reduce the pressure caused by the 45% cap. Mr B McDonald and Mr P Garrity are meeting regularly to monitor this spend. Mr P Garrity added that CRC's spend is now at 23%.

The CEO advised the Board that CRC had raised the 45% cap with TEO querying why it was reduced compared to last year's level. TEO has advised that it should always have been 45%. Mr B McDonald added that the Funding team are considering how procedures can be changed to deal with this issue in the next financial year if budgets are subject to the 45% spend cap again.

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

4180/25 Social Value Engine Report

Mr P Day presented the Board with a Report on the outcome of CRC's recent Social Value Engine reviews.

The previous report found that for every £1 invested into the Core Fund there was a £5.76 return in social value. The Engagement Team decided to complete the

same exercise for the Good Relations Awards 2025 and for Good Relations Week 2024. The review found that for Good Relations Week 2024 for every £1 invested there was a return in social value of £4.32. This is considered a very high return rate by the Treasury Handbook. The review found that for Good Relations Awards 2025 for every £1 invested there was a return in social value of £3.86, which is considered a high rate based on the Treasury Handbook.

These reports generated a number of recommendations that the Board were asked to consider:

- 1) The attendance figures at Good Relations Week events should be recorded
- 2) Good Relations Week should be assessed for its impact over a longer period of time. This could look at the distance travelled.
- 3) A piece of work should be undertaken to look at the impact of winning a Good Relations Award on past winners.
- 4) CRC should purchase the software and imbed the social value methodology into funding work.

The Board welcomed the positive results of this Report and approved the recommendations. They noted that social value impact is a very valuable measurement.

The CEO noted that in addition, Mr P Garrity and Ms H George have been working on an internal v external costs ratio, which has informed the budget section of this year's Operational Plan. The CEO added that this work had been undertaken following a Board recommendation at last year's Operational Plan discussions.

4181/25 Engagement Update

Mr P Day presented the Board with his report on the work of the Engagement Team, which was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

The TBUC Engagement Forum took place on 17th June, with 186 individuals in attendance. The theme of this event was the recent racial incidents and a temperature check-in with groups. There were speeches from the Chair, the Deputy First Minister and Junior Minister O'Reilly, as well as representatives from community groups working on the ground, and the PSNI. TEO provided a presentation at the end of the event on structural changes in their areas of work. In relation to the temperature checks, the CEO asked Board members to keep CRC informed if they hear anything from their own networks on gaps or areas of concern.

The next TBUC Engagement Forum will be taking place on 16th September.

On the 22nd May Good Relations Week 2025 was launched. An event was also held on 6th June encouraging groups to get involved in the Week. The team will focus for the next few months on pushing registrations.

The Good Relations Awards will open to nominations in October.

The Board thanked Mr P Day for his update and noted the report.

4182/25

Management Accounts

Mr P Garrity provided the Committee with CRC's May Management Accounts and a summary of activity to date.

The 2025/26 Opening Budget Letter and Revised Budget Letter were received, and showed a £94k increase on the previous year's opening budget. However, it is significantly lower than the 2024/25 closing budget.

Mr P Garrity submitted the June Monitoring Round bid on 14th April, and is yet to hear the outcome of this.

The 2024/25 and 2025/26 staff Pay Remits were submitted to TEO in June, along with the Board members' fee increases Pay Remits following the receipt of their letters of appointment.

The CEO noted that the Pay Remit submissions require a lot of work in addition to the other financial tasks underway at this time including the preparation of the annual accounts. She thanked Mr P Garrity for this work.

The Board also thanked Mr P Garrity and noted this report.

4183/25

Finance and General Purposes Committee

i) 23rd June 2025 F&GP Committee meeting

The Chair provided the Board with a verbal update on the latest meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts were received and approved by the Committee. These will now go to NIAO for review. Mr P Garrity added that a review of the grants has already been undertaken and no issues were raised. The CEO thanked Mr P Garrity and Ms H George, as well as all the teams at CRC for their work on the Accounts. She noted that following the audit the final version will come to the Board at the AGM later in the year.

At the Committee meeting Mr P Garrity provided a report to members that showed CRC is currently both solvent and liquid.

Ms H George presented the Committee with a new Gifts and Hospitality Policy, which was imposed on CRC by a wider NICS requirement. The policy puts tight restrictions on what and when hospitality and gifts are appropriate. The Committee approved the draft but expressed their discontentment with the policy, considering CRC's hospitality spend is very low and largely consists of catering for TEO TBUC Engagement Forums.

The Committee also received CRC's annual Fair Employment Monitoring Forum, The May Management Accounts, and an update on the Staffing situation and Pension Business Case issue.

ii) Minutes of the 29th April 2025 Finance & General Purposes Committee.

The Board noted the April Finance & General Purposes Committee minutes, and thanked the Chair for his verbal update on the recent meeting.

4184/25 Any Other Business

None

4185/25 Date of Next Meeting

11th September 2025 11:30am – venue to be confirmed.