

MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIRST MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON 22nd SEPTEMBER 2025 at 1PM EQUALITY HOUSE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

4186/25 Present: Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister, Ms N Tandon, Ms C Harris, Mr M McDonnell, Mr R Campbell.

4187/25 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), Ms K Pieterse (Core Fund Officer), Mr D McNally (Evaluation Officer)

4188/25 Observers: None

4189/25 Apologies: Ms S McClelland & Ms A Simpson.

4190/25 Welcome

The Chair welcomed members and staff to today's Annual General Meeting of the Board.

He informed the Board that Ms A Simpson has recently had an accident that will leave her unable to participate in the Board for a period of time. The Board sent their best wishes to Ms A Simpson.

Due to the risk of becoming inquorate, the Chair advised that he would take the items on the agenda that require a decision first and return to the other items thereafter.

4191/25 Standard Checks

No conflicts of interest were raised, and no gifts have been received.

4192/25 Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.

4193/25 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts

The CEO presented the 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts to Board members. The Finance and General Purposes Committee approved the first draft presented in July 2025 prior to the audit. Since then, no substantial changes had occurred to the draft during the audit. She highlighted various narrative sections of the report, including the Governance Report, Directors Report, and Performance Overview. She noted that most of the content would be familiar to the Committee members due to the various routine papers to the Board during the year, including the Operational Plan and delivery updates.

The CEO informed the Board that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee received this draft at their meeting this morning and recommended it for approval.

Mr P Garrity highlighted the financial aspects of the Report, including the total resource budget for the 2024/25 year of £3,198,000 and the capital spend of £9,909.

CRC have also received the Report to Those Charged with Governance which set out the unqualified audit opinion of these accounts, along with one recommendation related to the pension issue. The CEO thanked Mr P Garrity, Ms H George and the full CRC staff team for their work on this Report, as well as the work in 2024/25 that the Report represents. She then thanked the staff at NIAO and Cavanagh Kelly for their work on the audit.

The Board approved the 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts.

4194/25

Risk Strategy

The CEO presented the Board with CRC's Risk Strategy. This Strategy was reviewed and recommended for approval by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee prior to this meeting. The Strategy is subject to an annual review. Updates have been made to the Strategy to align with TEO's own recent amendments to their strategy, which was precipitated by the updates to the HM Orange Book.

Updates include the addition of a document control table, update to the Risk and Risk Management definitions, details of the Three Lines Model, Risk Matrices added, details of when the strategy is reviewed, updated outdated language, and a number of appendices added.

The Board thanked the CEO for presenting this updated Strategy and approved the document.

4195/25

Section 75 Report

The CEO presented the Board with CRC's Section 75 Report. The Report has been submitted to ECNI in August to meet the deadline, and notice of the Board's approval or amendments of the document will be sent following this meeting.

The Report sets out how CRC are meeting our equality and Good Relations duties. Information on CRC's policy reviews, equality screenings, and good relations activities are set out in the document.

The CEO thanked CRC staff for their contributions to the report, and all the work that the report represents.

The Board thanked the CEO for preparing the Report and presenting today and approved the document.

4196/25

2026/27 Core Fund

i) Guidance

Ms K Pieterse presented the Board with recommendations to update the Core Fund Guidance for the 2026/27 year. The following amendments were proposed:

- Advising applicants to read the Core Fund FAQs document together with the application guidance notes
- Providing an explanation on the difference between Strategic Plan and an Operational or Action Plan
- The FAQs have been updated to include as many questions as possible that potential applicants may have.

The Board thanked Ms K Pieterse for presenting these updates and approved the document.

ii) Welcome Statements

Mr D McNally presented the Board with the proposed Welcome Statements for the 2026/27 Core Fund. These Welcome Statements relate to the geographic reach and thematic reach of the types of work it would like to see for the 2026/27 period.

The draft Welcome Statements propose the following geographic areas:

- Ards and North Down
- Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon
- Belfast East
- Fermanagh & Omagh
- Lisburn and Castlereagh
- Mid & East Antrim
- Newry, Mourne & Down

This would see Belfast South, Causeway Coast & Glens, and Mid Ulster removed from the geographic Welcome Statement.

The draft Thematic Welcome Statements would like to see applications which focus on:

- Work which supports and develops the next generation of good relations practitioners as this relates to emerging challenges.
- Work which aims to engage communities on emerging issues of concern identified by applicant groups as requiring priority intervention

The Board thanked Mr D McNally for this report and approved the thematic Welcome Statements.

Ms K Pieterse informed the Board that the Core Fund would open to applications on 1st October and will close on 12th November.

4197/25

Pathfinder

Mr B McDonald informed the Board that, as part of the June Monitoring Round, CRC were awarded an extra £60k in resource to enable the opening of the Pathfinder grant and funding for any awards it made. To date the grant has had one application, which will be reviewed by the Board.

Mr B McDonald took members through the papers provided for the meeting. He noted that the application from the Community Relations Forum received a 30 out of 35 score following a peer reviewed assessment process. It was recommended that the group be awarded a £23,643.23 grant for the 2025/26 year. This grant will cover a portion of the cost for their Project Manager. The group have secured funding from the Council to cover running costs.

The Board reviewed the recommendation and approved the grant award.

4198/25

Recommendation for Audit Committee

Mr J McCallister informed the Board that, during a closed session of the Audit Committee this morning, it was agreed that the Committee would recommend to the Board offering an extension to the contract to the Internal Audit firm for one additional year, to cover the 2026/27 financial year, there being provision for this in the original contract. The Board were informed that the Committee and staff are happy with the work of the firm which has already completed the first year of their contract, and presented an internal audit plan for the second year.

The Board thanked Mr J McCallister for presenting this recommendation and approved the decision.

4199/25

Matters Arising

The CEO presented the Board with the ongoing Matters Arising from previous Board meetings.

Item one relates to the continued invitation for Board members to attend CRC events.

Item two relates to the Carbon Literacy Training opportunity presented to Board members.

Item three relates to Board Member second terms. The CEO drew the Board's attention to correspondence from TEO included within the papers for today's meeting. TEO informed CRC that they are now seeking a meeting with HR Connect in order to begin the recruitment process. They have also drafted official letters setting out the recent extensions, which are with Ministers for sign off.

The Board reiterated their frustration at the delay to recruit members, and expressed their concern about CRC's quorum levels. CRC will continue to raise this issue with TEO at all opportunities.

4200/25 2025/26 Operational Plan

The CEO presented the Board with correspondence from TEO stating that the 2025/26 Operational Plan has now been approved by Ministers.

4201/25 Management Accounts

Mr P Garrity presented the Board with CRC's August Management Accounts.

CRC received a revised budget allocation following the June Monitoring Round outcome. CRC's resource allocation is now £3,201k with a capital budget of £10k.

The year-to-date variance shows a saving in the budget of £26,666. This is due to the over allocation of resource to the Pre Action to Judicial Review legal fees, and a timing issue related to the payment of Core Fund first payments. There is projected to be a saving in salaries due to TEO over-allocating resource to this area.

£773k has already been paid out in grants in 2025/26. CRC's Pay Remits have been fully accounted for in the Management Accounts.

The Board thanked Mr P Garrity for this report and the work that he continues to do at CRC.

4202/25 Solvency and Liquidity Statement

Mr P Garrity presented the Board with a paper showing that CRC is both solvent and liquid. It can reasonably be expected to remain so for the foreseeable future and at the least for expenditure incurred until 31st March 2026.

The valuation of CRC's pension scheme at 31st March 2025 sits at a £289,617 deficit, however for the purposes of IAS19 is fully restricted to zero.

The Board thanked Mr P Garrity and noted the report.

4203/25 Risk Register and Full Risk Repository

Having dealt with the Risk strategy earlier in the meeting the CEO presented the Board with CRC's full Risk Repository and a summary of the high level risks.

The full Risk Repository includes all risks rated green, amber or red. Board members were content with the Risk Repository. The CEO then moved to the high level risks:

Risk one relating to the pension issue remains rated red. CRC await an update from TEO on their proposal to procure the assistance of Strategic Investment Board. While CRC await an update from TEO the request with Temp Agencies remains open.

Risk Two relates to CRC's staffing position and remains rated red. The Board will be aware that an unsuccessful recruitment exercise took place in May to find a Finance Manager. CRC will attempt to recruit again when the outstanding Pay Remits have been implemented. These Pay Remits were submitted to TEO in June and Mr P Garrity is currently responding to a number of TEO enquiries related to the submission.

Risk three relates to the ongoing NILGOSC Pension case and is rated as amber. There has been no change to this risk and no updates on the case.

Risk Four relates to CRC's 2024/25 and 2025/26 Resource. As the 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts audit is now complete and have been approved by the Board today, it will now be removed from this risk. The 2025/26 revised budget has been received and the 45% cap has now been lifted. CRC's budget is still below the 2024/25 closing budget level, and being monitored closely. CRC await the outcome of the October Monitoring Round bid. The bid included additional resource for the CRCD grant as well as the expenditure for the procurement of an expert to assist with the completion of the Pension Business Case.

Risk Five relates to the Board second terms. This risk remains rated red. An update has already been provided at this meeting.

The CEO informed the Board that the risk related to the Pre Action to Judicial Review has now been removed from the Register as the case has been closed due to the lack of follow up correspondence from the group pursuing the matter.

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

4204/25

Chair's Update

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

On 24th August the Chair attended Ms N Tandon's ArtsEkta Mela. This was a very successful event following a summer of incidents targeted at the immigrant and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. Ms N Tandon added that she herself and her organisation had been subject to threats and had to close the office for a period. The Board discussed this issue and agreed that it further highlights the need for good relations work to encompass more communities in Northern Ireland. The Board agreed that it was important that CRC operate a Pathfinder grant so that we can be agile to respond to need in the case of incidents and similar issues.

The Chair informed the meeting that Ms C Harris has agreed to take over the Chair of the Funding Sub Group, following the resignation of Ms M Braniff.

Throughout August the Chair attended a number of Good Relations photocalls in Derry, Causeway Coast and Glens, Lisburn and Castlereagh, Mid Ulster, and Antrim & Newtownabbey.

The Chair attended the TBUC Engagement forum on 16th September. This event focused on Social Media and its influence on Good Relations. There was a very good input from Factcheck NI who fact check statements made to the public.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update and the work conducted over the period.

4205/25 Chief Executive Officer's Report

The CEO updated the Board on a number of matters contained in her CEO Update Report, circulated with the Board papers prior to this meeting:

i) Recent Incidents

The CEO thanked the Board for the useful discussion earlier in the meeting regarding recent incidents in Northern Ireland. In the summer CRC drafted a plan setting out how a set of steps the organisation will take routinely in respond to future incidents. This includes checking in with Council Good Relations Officers, offering support to the groups working in those areas and drafting a public statement. Members will see examples of this in practice in the Engagement Report and the Funding Report.

ii) Strategic Plan and Operational Plan

The CEO informed members that the TBUC Review has still not been published which continues to have an impact on the production of CRC's next Strategic Plan. The CEO will raise this issue with TEO again.

The 2025/26 Operational Plan has now been approved by Ministers.

iii) Publications

The Engagement Team are currently working on the 2024/25 Making a Difference document which provides details of CRC's accomplishments during the year, along with useful infographics.

iv) Staffing

The temporary DFAP staffing structure continues to work well. Separation of responsibilities and tasks continues to be followed. Ms H George has begun her Accountant Technician course. The CEO thanked Mr P Garrity for his work ensuring CRC continue to meet all financial deadlines and making official submissions.

A meeting with the Union Reps took place in September. Ms T Traynor has now retired from Unite the Union. The CEO wished her well in her retirement and thanked her for all the support she has provided to CRC staff over the years.

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

4206/25 Funding and Development Update

Mr B McDonald presented 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 2024/25 Core grants have all been closed off and all payments have been made. The 2025/26 45% cap has been lifted and all Core groups and North Belfast groups who have returned their paperwork have received their first payments.

Core Groups will now begin to submit their six-month claims for vouching.

The CRCD grant had an opening budget of £75k, 40 applications have been received with bids in excess of £200k, exceeding available resource. Awards totalling £86k were able to be made, however, the budget has now been exhausted. The scheme will remain open while CRC await the outcome of the October Monitoring Round bid. The Board agreed that, if no additional funding is made available through the Monitoring Round, then CRC would send a request to TEO asking for the remaining Pathfinder resource to be veered to CRCD grant.

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

4207/25

Engagement Update

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

The TBUC Engagement Forum took place on 16th September in Omagh. The theme of the event was social media and its impact on good relations. The event had presentations from Fact Check NI, and CRC's Core funded group Springboard. It was a positive and engaging event.

Mr M McGlade has been working with CRC's Core Funded groups, producing videos and written content, to help the group share their good news stories on social media.

The next TBUC Engagement Forum will be taking place on 24th March 2026. As always, this event will include the distribution of the Good Relations Awards.

Good Relations Week runs this year from 13th October to 19th October. Mr P Day thanked Board members for their involvement in the photocalls which took place in August. 75 events have been registered so far and the team are actively pursuing all Core groups and usual participants to register their events.

CRC will be holding a 'Making a Difference' Conference on 2nd December. Details of this event will be circulated in due course.

Mr M McGlade is working with the Funding Team on the 2024/25 Making a Difference Document as well as a specific document on the Core Fund, mapping the impact that grant award has on groups.

The Chair thanked Mr P Day for this report. He noted how important the engagement work is to showcase CRC's work, the impact of the grants, and the dissemination of positive messages.

4208/25 Staffing Update

Ms J Adamson provided the Board with a paper updating on CRC's Staffing position, this paper was circulated prior, and details of the staffing situation were presented earlier in the meeting

The Board noted the report.

4209/25 Pension Update

Ms J Adamson provided the Board with a paper updating on CRC's pension issue. This paper was circulated prior, and details of the pension issue were presented earlier in the meeting.

The Board noted the report.

4210/25 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Mr J McCallister noted that the Board had received the minutes of the July 2025 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee with their papers.

He noted that the proceeding of the Committee meeting held today were discussed with the Board earlier in the meeting.

The Board thanked Mr J McCallister and the Committee members for their work, and noted the minutes.

4211/25 Any Other Business

None

4212/25 Date of Next Meeting

5th November 2pm

10th Dec 2pm

27th Jan 2pm

9th March 2pm