

**INUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY-THIRD MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY  
RELATIONS COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025 at 2PM ONLINE**

**4344/25 Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister, Ms N Tandon, Ms C Harris, Mr M McDonnell, Mr R Campbell, Ms S McClelland.

**4345/25 In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr B McDonald (Director of Funding), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Garrity (Temporary Finance Manager), Ms H George (Governance, Admin & Assistant Finance Manager).

**4346/25 Observers:** None

**4347/25 Apologies:** Ms A Simpson & Mr P Day.

**4348/25 Welcome**

The Chair welcomed members and staff to the meeting.

**4349/25 Standard Checks**

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

**4350/25 Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.

**4351/25 Matters Arising**

The CEO presented the Board with the matters arising from the previous meeting.

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

**4352/25 Correspondence**

i) Pathfinder

The CEO presented the Board with correspondence from The Executive Office in response to CRC's request to veer the remaining Pathfinder resource to the CR/CD small grant scheme. TEO approved this request, and the remaining balance has been transferred to support the CR/CD scheme.

ii) ALB Forum Meeting Feedback

Following discussion at the last Board meeting, feedback was provided to TEO at the recent Accountability and Liaison meeting about their ALB Forum.

The feedback included a comment on the meetings being used more now for presentations and reporting rather than discussion and the work of the sub-groups previously established.

iii) CRC D Refund

The CEO presented the Board with several pieces of correspondence related to the outstanding CR/CD grant award refund. Following discussion at the Finance and General Purposes Committee, a letter was drafted and sent to the Directors of the organisation. That correspondence was provided to members as part of the papers for the Board meeting. Also included is the group's response, which apologises for the delay in repaying the grant, stating that they have had governance and finance issues over the last number of months. The group asked for an extension to the 31<sup>st</sup> December to pay this refund. The final piece of correspondence related to this matter is the response from the CEO accepting the extension, following the agreement of the Chair.

iv) Public Services Ombudsman

The CEO presented the Board with correspondence from the Public Service Ombudsman regarding the updating of their guidance on complaints handling. They have asked organisations to complete a survey regarding their current practices, and to attend a workshop in the New Year, which CRC have already registered to attend.

The Board thanked the CEO for presenting the correspondence and noted the updates.

**4353/25 Chair's Update**

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

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December the Chair attended CRC's Making a Difference Conference. He thanked the Board members who were able to attend, and the TEO Officials who stayed for the event. He noted that it was a very impressive event and commended staff on their hard work putting it together.

On 8<sup>th</sup> December the Chair attended the Funding Sub Group meeting. Ms C Harris, the new Chair of the Sub Group updated members on this meeting. The meeting discussed the future of CRC's funding streams, on which a paper will be presented to the Board in due course. A number of actions from the meeting will be taken forward, including speaking to TEO regarding the future of the MEDF fund.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update.

## 4354/25 Chief Executive Officer's Report

The CEO's report was included in the papers for the Board meeting and she updated the Board on a number of matters:

i) Board Recruitment

The CEO informed the Board that members due to end their terms in November 2025 have had these terms extended to April 2026. TEO aim to have their recruitment completed by this date.

TEO officials recently advised that they are going to be recruiting for the whole Board, rather than the posts which are about to become vacant. They will then stagger the appointments from their list of appointable candidates put together during this exercise.

The Board and CEO expressed their concern at the challenging deadline of April 2026.

ii) TEO

CRC attended an Accountability and Liaison meeting with TEO on 17<sup>th</sup> November. At this meeting TEO announced that the October Monitoring Round and the January Monitoring Round would be merged into one December Monitoring Round. They added that it would be unlikely that there would be additional funds for CRC in this exercise. The CEO explained that that would leave CRC underfunded and not able to keep the CR/CD fund open till the end of the financial year. Following the meeting TEO came back to offer an additional £56k for the CR/CD scheme and £60k for the Core scheme. This additional resource will leave CRC in a more secure position for the final quarter of the year.

A bid had already been made to the October Monitoring Round (carried forward to December) for the £25k resource for the pension business case, however, at the A&L meeting TEO stated that SIB are unable to assist in the current financial year. TEO will be speaking to SIB again to ask if they might be able to assist in 2026/27.

One aspect of the Pension Business Case which has now been resolved is the No Better No Worse Off payments to staff not in receipt of the 6% uplift. TEO have approved these payments for inclusion in the normal Pay Remit process and therefore they will be paid when the Pay Remits approval is in place. The Pension Business Case when taken forward will be updated to reflect this change.

iii) Planning

The CEO advised that three papers will be presented to the Board in due course, one looking at the future of CRC's funding streams, one looking at a development proposal, and the final paper defining CRC's role as the Centre of Excellence.

iv) Engagement

The CEO advised that as Mr P Day is unwell and not in attendance at the meeting, the Good Relations Week evaluation papers will be presented at the next Board meeting.

The CEO thanked staff, Board members, and members of the Steering Committee who worked on and attended the recent Making a Difference Conference. She noted that it was encouraging to have the Ministers and the Chair of TEO Committee attend the event.

**4354/25      Making a Difference Report**

As part of the Board packs members will have received the Making a Difference Report. This takes all the information included in the 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts regarding grants, and illustrates and summarises the achievements. This is a document CRC hope to compile annually. The CEO recommended members look at it in conjunction with the Annual Report and Accounts and the report on the work of the core groups.

She highlighted the statistics around social value and the return of £6 on every £1. The next steps with the Social Value project will be to carry out a deeper look at the value of the work of a sample of Core Funded groups and the impact of the Core fund on them.

The CEO asked members to send any feedback on the Report to Mr P Day.

**4355/25      Engagement Update**

In Mr P Day's absence the CEO presented the Board with the Engagement update prepared by Mr P Day. She highlighted the update on the Good Relations Awards, which are currently open to nominations with the deadline likely to be extended into January.

The Board noted the report.

**4356/25      Funding Update**

Mr B McDonald provided the Board with a report updating on the funding schemes.

The 2025/26 Core Fund first vouches are mostly all complete. It is looking unlikely that there will be significant underspends this year. The Team is looking into cost-of-living payments for groups, which if affordable will come to the Board for decision in January.

The 2026/27 Core Fund applications are under assessment. The list of ineligible applications will come to members for decision via written procedure in December. 45 applications have been received. The financial assessments are currently under way.

For the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme, one group is reporting an underspend of £10k. CRC are trying to resolve this issue with TEO, asking that they request the group formally decommit this underspend so it can be utilised elsewhere in the scheme.

**4357/25 Accommodation Benchmarking Paper**

Ms J Adamson presented the Board with a paper setting out a benchmarking exercise related to CRC's accommodation.

She reminded members that CRC had asked TEO for confirmation that CRC would not need to complete a separate Business Case related to accommodation but could instead be included in the Equality House tenants Business Case. TEO confirmed that a separate Business Case was not needed, however CRC would need to complete a benchmarking exercise.

Board members reviewed and approved the benchmarking exercise. Ms J Adamson thanked the board and advised that she would continue to report on progress with the wider premises business case.

**4358/25 Management Accounts**

Mr P Garrity presented the Board with the Management Accounts to the end of November 2025.

The report shows a favourable variance of £77k. This is related to a timing issue of the payment of grants, an over-allocation to the pre-action to judicial review, and TEO's overallocation to CRC's salaries.

Grants paid to date total £1.2mill, with £199k accrued.

The 2024/25 and 2025/26 Pay Remits have been submitted to TEO and all queries have now been responded to. CRC now await TEO's approval before payments can be made. The No Better No Worse Off payments will be paid to eligible staff in the December pay role.

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

**4359/25 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

Mr J McCallister, Chair of the ARA Committee, provided members with an update on the work of the Committee:

i) 25<sup>th</sup> November ARAC meeting

The Committee received an update on the work of Internal Audit. SCC presented the Committee with a review of the previous audit recommendations. All recommendations within CRC's control have been implemented. The only outstanding recommendation relates to the governance and risk training of new

Board members. SCC also presented the Terms of Reference of the Financial Controls audit which is currently underway. A review of IT Controls and Grants will take place in early 2026.

Three recommendations remain on CRC's Register of Audit Recommendations. One relating to CRC's pension issue, one relating to CRC's staffing issue, and one relating to CRC's training of new Board members.

There were no Direct Awards, no investigations into funded groups, and no purchases without a price check.

ii) Risk Register

Members were presented with CRC's Risk Register, reviewed and updated at the recent ARAC meeting.

Risk one related to the Pension Business Case remains rated red. TEO were pursuing SIB to assist CRC to complete the Business Case, however, they stated that they would not be able to help in 2025/26. TEO have gone back to SIB to ask if they could help in 2026/27 instead. In addition, TEO confirmed that CRC can move ahead with the 'No Better No Worse Off' payments in the normal pay remit process to allow those payments to be made to staff not in receipt of the 6% uplift.

Staffing remains rated red. Pay Remits responses have now been sent, and CRC await confirmation from TEO that these are okay to be paid.

NILGOSC pension case remains rated amber with no further legal update.

2025/26 resource was downgraded to an amber rating. TEO contacted CRC following an Accountability & Liaison meeting to offer additional resource for the CRCD and Core grants.

Board Members Terms remains rated amber.

iii) Mins 28<sup>th</sup> October Meeting

Mr J McCallister presented the Board with the approved minutes of the 28<sup>th</sup> October meeting.

The Board thanked Mr J McCallister for this update and noted the minutes.

**4360/25 Staffing Update**

Ms J Adamson updated the Board on CRC's staffing situation.

There have been no leavers or joiners in the last six months. Mr P Garrity continues to provide temporary cover for the Finance Manager position, and Ms H George continues in her temporary role as Governance, Admin and Assistant Finance Manager.

The Board thanked Ms J Adamson for this update.

**4361/25      Any Other Business**

The Chair and CEO wished members and staff a Happy Christmas and New Year.

**4362/25      Date of Next Meeting**

27<sup>th</sup> January 12 noon – closes session for Board members only on evaluation  
2pm – main board meeting