

Community Relations Council 109th Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
Tuesday 25th November 2025 11am
Online

Present: Mr John McCallister (Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Mr R Campbell (Board Member)

In attendance: Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr P Garrity (Finance Manager), Mr A Allen (NIAO), Mr B McKindry (Cavanagh Kelly), Mr C Telford (SCC), Mr N Lynas (TEO), Mr C McNickle (TEO) Ms H George (Governance Manager).

Apologies: None

1. Welcome

The Chair of the Committee, Mr J McCallister welcomed everyone to today's meeting.

2. Conflict of Interests

Mr R Campbell works at the same firm as CRC's legal advisors assisting with the NILGOSC pension case and pre-action to judicial review set out in the Risk Register. There is no conflict as Mr R Campbell was not involved in the procurement process and is not involved in these legal matters.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the 108th Audit and Risk Assurance Committee were reviewed and approved.

4. Matters Arising

None

5. External Audit

Mr A Allen informed the Committee that the 2024/25 External Audit is now complete. Approval of the designed copy of the report has been provided and can now be published.

A planning meeting will be taking place with CRC in December to discuss the upcoming 2025/26 audit.

The CEO added that all official filings have been made of the 2024/25 ARA.

The Committee thanked Mr A Allen and the CEO for this update.

6. Internal Audit

i) Recommendation Review

Mr C Telford presented the Committee with the outcome of their review into the implementation of CRC's audit recommendations.

The report confirms that all recommendations have been implanted, with the exception of the recommendation that CRC's Board should undertake refresher governance and risk training. The report noted that this recommendation will be completed when CRC's new Board members have been appointed.

ii) Terms of Reference for Financial Controls Audit

Mr C Telford presented the Committee with the Terms of Reference for the upcoming review of CRC's financial controls. The review will look at business improvement areas in CRC's payments process, payroll process, and training plans.

The Committee asked Mr C Telford to look particularly at the roles and responsibility, to ensure there are no gaps with the current staffing issues in the DFAP team.

iii) Progress Report

Mr C Telford presented the Committee with an update on the 2025/26 reviews. The review of audit recommendations is now complete. The Financial Controls review will begin in December. The review of IT controls will take place in January, and the final review into Grant Management will take place in March 2026.

The Committee thanked Mr C Telford for presenting these reports, update and the work done to date.

7. Risk Register

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's Risk Register which sets out all of the amber and red risks.

Risk one 'Implementation of DoF Guidance' remains rated red. At an Accountability and Liaison meeting with TEO on 17th Nov, CRC were informed that following a number of initial positive meetings with Strategic Investment Board, they informed TEO that they would not be able to assist in the current financial year, and wished us well. TEO were not content with this response and will pursue SIB to assist with the Business Case in the next financial year. In addition, the CEO informed the Board that TEO have approved the payment of the 'No Better No Worse Off' aspect of the Pension Business Case, which applies to the staff members not in receipt of the 6%. This will now be removed from the draft Business Case.

Risk two 'Staffing' remains rated red. Mr P Garrity is working on responses to TEO Pay Remit enquiries. Once the Pay Remits have been implemented CRC will conduct another recruitment process to fill the Finance Manager position.

Risk three 'NILGOSC' case remains rated amber, as there have been no recent updates.

Risk Four '2025/26 Resource was reviewed by the Committee, who agreed that it should be decreased to an amber rating. On the 6th November CRC were informed that there would be no October Monitoring Round or December Monitoring Round. Instead they would be combined, and TEO indicated that CRC would be unlikely to receive additional funding. However, following the Accountability and Liaison meeting TEO contacted CRC to ask how much resource CRC would need to ensure the CRCD grant can remain open until the end of the year. They followed up by asking what resource CRC could use in the Core Fund grant. Mr P Garrity discussed with Mr B McDonald and responded to TEO requesting £56k for CRCD and £60k. TEO confirmed that this resource would be made available.

Risk five 'Board Members Terms' was reviewed remains rated amber. The Committee noted that TEO confirmed that Ministers have now approved the extension of the three members' terms, who were due to leave in November 2025, to April 2026, Members have not received official letter from Ministers confirming that extension. TEO have confirmed the recruitment panel and approved their supporting documents. The Board positions have not yet been advertised on the Public Appointments website.

The Committee thanked the CEO for presenting this report.

8. Register of Audit Recommendations

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's Register of Audit Recommendations.

Recommendation one relates to the outstanding pension issue. An update on this was provided earlier in the meeting.

Recommendation two relates to the staffing issues in the DFAP Team. An update on this was provided earlier in the meeting.

Recommendation three suggests CRC staff and Board take part in refresher training on governance and risk. The CEO confirmed that staff have undertaken this training. Board members will undertake this training when new Board members are recruited in 2026.

Recommendation five proposes that a document be compiled setting out the Good Relations Award process. The Engagement Team drafted this document and it was approved by the Board at the last meeting. This has been provided to the Internal Auditors who have marked it as complete, and will now be removed from the Register.

The Committee thanked the CEO for presenting and noted this report.

9. Investigations into Funded Groups

The CEO updated the Committee on the current process to recover £600 CRCD grant payment. This is not an investigation into a funded group, however, an update is provided to the Committee for their information.

Following instruction from the Finance and General Purposes Committee the Chair wrote to the group reminding them of the refund request, and asking them to process the payment as soon as possible. The group have replied, explaining that the delay in paying the refund was due to financial and governance issues within the organisation which they are working to resolve. The group asked for an extension to the 31st December 2025, which the Chair has approved.

The Committee thanked the CEO for this update.

10. Department of Finance Guidance

Ms H George presented the Committee with the latest Department of Finance Guidance.

One piece of guidance issued recently by the Department of Finance. This guidance titled 'Judicial Review Guidance Note to Client Departments' highlights the good practice identified in the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on 'The Judicial Review process in Northern'. It provides high level guidance on the management of judicial review based on best practice to try and bring consistency to the public sector.

The Committee noted the guidance.

11. Direct Awards

Ms H George informed the Committee that there have no direct awards made following the previous ARAC meeting.

12. Small Purchases without a Price Check

Ms H George informed the Committee that there have been no small purchases which did not require a price check since the last meeting.

13. Any Other Business

None

14. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee agreed to move the next meeting to the afternoon of the 12th January at 2pm.

15. Closed Session

The CEO, Mr P Garrity, Mr A Allen, Mr B McKindry, Mr C Telford, Mr N Lynas and Mr C McNickle left the meeting, and Members held a closed session to discuss matters arising from the previous meeting.