

NI Community Relations Council
Finance and General Purposes Committee

7th October 2025 3pm

Online

Present: Mr M McDonald (Chair) & Ms N Tandon (Board Member)

In Attendance: Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr B McDonald (Director of Funding and Development), Mr P Garrity (Temporary Finance Manager), Ms N Maguire (Vouching and Verification Officer), Ms H George (Governance and Assistant Finance Manager).

Apologies: Ms A Simpson (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager).

1. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.

2. Matters Arising

The Chair reminded the Committee of one matter arising from the previous meeting, related to the CRCD grant refund. This matter will be discussed later in the meeting.

3. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were raised at this meeting.

4. Privacy Notice

Ms H George presented the Committee with CRC's updated Privacy Notice.

Changes have been made to the Private Notice, including updated language around rights, based on the ICO website. Details of CRC's Social Media and Cookies Policy have been added.

The Committee reviewed and approved the updates.

5. Service Continuity Plan

Ms H George presented the Committee with CRC's Service Continuity Plan.

The Plan was amended to include details of CRC's new banking arrangements, the name change of the accounting software administrators, and a general contact has been added for The Executive Office.

Details of the last test of the Plan was added, and the Single Points of Failure mitigations were expanded to include HR tasks and a number of Finance tasks.

The Committee approved the draft and thanked Ms H George for presenting.

6. Purchase Order

Ms H George presented the Committee with the annual NI Audit Office fee Purchase Order for £22,400. This fee reflects the costs NIAO presented earlier in the year in the Audit Plan.

The Committee approved this purchase order for £22,400.

7. Management Accounts

Mr P Garrity presented the Committee with the September 2025 Management Accounts. He drew the Committee's attention to the following highlights.

The September accounts variance sits at £32k favourable difference. This difference is in part due to over provision of salaries by TEO, and over provision of resource to the now closed pre-action to judicial review.

CRC have still not yet been notified of the outcome of the October Monitoring Round, which is making it difficult to forward plan as the small grants resource is now fully assigned. The bid asked for an additional £135k for small grants and £25k to cover the costs of an expert to assist with the completion of the Pension Business Case. The CEO added that if the small grants bid is not successful then CRC will ask TEO if the remainder of the Pathfinder resource can be veered to small grants.

Following the outcome of the June Monitoring Round CRC's have a resource allocation of £3,201k and a capital budget of £10k. £1.1m has already been paid out in grants in 2025/26.

The Board Pay Remits have been approved and implemented. Staff Pay Remits were submitted to TEO in June and Mr P Garrity is currently working through a number of TEO enquiries on the submission. These pay increases have been fully provided for in the accounts.

The Committee thanked Mr P Garrity and noted the Management Accounts.

8. Temporary Agency Working Purchase Orders

Ms H George presented the Committee with an update on the current totals for the one temporary staff member working at CRC, and the one agency worker whose employment at CRC came to an end in September.

The Committee noted the Purchase Orders.

9. CRCD Grant Refund

i) Background and Next Steps

Mr B McDonald presented the Committee with a paper updating on the background to the CRCD grant refund being sought. The group were awarded a grant in 2023/24 and were provided with half the value of the award upfront, as is the procedure. The group did not provide CRC with any claim forms to verify that the expense had been incurred and that the event for which the award was made had taken place. CRC wrote to the group, and contacted them on many occasions to ask for the refund to be processed. The group continue to withhold this refund.

Mr B McDonald presented the Committee with a draft letter for approval. The Committee agreed that the draft letter would be shared with Mr R Campbell, Board and Audit Committee member, for review. The letter would then be sent to the group in the Chair's name. If no refund has been issued by the date of the next Committee meeting, the Finance Manager and the Funding Director will present a follow up paper on next steps.

ACTION: The draft letter to be shared with Mr R Campbell for feedback. Following this feedback, the letter will be sent on behalf of the Chair to the group.

The CEO stated that CRC would raise this again with TEO and see if a report needs to be made to the Charity Commission.

ii) Draft Steps to be added to CRC Procedures

Mr B McDonald presented the Committee with draft procedures to be placed into the grant procedures, to follow if similar situations occur in the future.

The Committee approved the procedures and instructed Mr B McDonald to add these to the grant documents.

10. Vouching and Verification Report

Ms N Maguire presented the Committee with a report updating on the status of her vouching and verification work.

Ms N Maguire informed the Committee that all 2024/25 claims are now closed. One 2023/24 claim remains open, an update on which the Committee have already received.

The 2025/26 six month Core Fund claims are due in the next few weeks. Vouching of these claims will begin once received. The North Belfast claims differ from the Core

claims as they may consist of 1-5 submissions based on the number of workplans each group run. To date 5 of the 2025/26 CRCD grants have been fully completed and paid.

All verifications of newly funded groups have been completed, and Ms N Maguire has begun completing verification check-ins with all other groups.

The Committee thanked Ms N Maguire and noted the report.

11. Staffing

The CEO informed the Committee that there has been no change in CRC's staffing situation since the update provided at the September Board meeting.

12. Pension Business Case

The CEO informed the Committee that there has been no change in CRC's Pension Business Case situation since the update provided at the September Board meeting.

13. Disability Action Plan

The CEO presented the Committee with a paper on CRC's Disability Action Plan prepared by Ms J Adamson, and circulated ahead of this meeting.

The Disability Action Plan was recently subject to its 5-year review. All actions have been completed, with the exception of the final action which relates to CRC signing up to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's Mental Health Charter.

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

14. Mental Health Charter

The CEO presented the Committee with the draft Mental Health Charter. This is a voluntary initiative designed to help employers and service providers create mentally healthy workplaces.

The Charter asks organisations to commit to five key principles:

- Fostering an open and inclusive workplace culture that respects individuals with mental ill health.
- Promoting equality of opportunity and challenging discrimination.
- Ensuring fair recruitment and selection processes for individuals with mental ill health.
- Providing accessible information and support regarding mental ill health.
- Implementing recommendations from the 'Every Customer Counts' initiative to promote accessible services.

The Committee reviewed and approved the Mental Health Charter.

15. Quarter Two Sickness Statistics Report

The CEO presented the Committee with the quarter two sickness statistics, compiled by Ms J Adamson into this report.

Compared to the same quarter last year, both the number of long-term sickness absence days and the related costs have risen. The Committee noted that this is due to one person who was off on longer term sick leave. That person has now returned to work.

Short-term sickness absence has decreased from 18 days to 17 days, compared to the same quarter last year.

The Committee thanked the CEO for presented and noted the report.

16. Article 55

The CEO presented the Committee with a paper providing details on CRC's Article 55 review.

The Article 55 Review is a statutory process in Northern Ireland, requiring employers to assess whether their workforce composition reflects fair participation by members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities.

The HR Manager completed CRC's Article 5 Review for the period 2nd February 2021 to 1st February 2024. The CEO confirmed that no affirmative action is required following this review.

The Review is not required to be submitted to ECNI, however, is available to them on request.

The Committee noted this report and thanked the CEO.

17. Health and Safety Update

The CEO informed the Committee that all planned preventative maintenance is up to date. Staff have all completed Display Screen Equipment surveys.

A Health and Safety audit took place on 30th September 2025, a report on which will be presented to the Committee in due course.

18. Premises Committee Update

The CEO informed the Committee that the IT procurement for organisations in Equality House has now been completed, and a supplier has been appointed. Project management meetings will be held with the firm every three months to ensure that the contract is being delivered as per the specifications.

ECNI are completing a business case for a lease extension for Equality House. CRC are liaising with ECNI and TEO to find out what the next steps are to progress this.

The Committee thanked the CEO for this update.

19. Any Other Business

None

20. Date of Next Meeting

Mid January – to be confirmed.