

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDREDTH AND FIFTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY
RELATIONS COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON 16th JUNE 2026, 2PM, ONLINE**

4596/26 **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister, Ms N Tandon, Mr R Campbell, Mr M McDonnell, Ms A Simpson.

4597/26 **In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr B McDonald (Director of Funding), Mr P Day (Director of Engagement), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Garrity (Temporary Finance Manager), Ms H George (Governance, Admin & Assistant Finance Manager).

4598/26 **Observers:** None

4599/26 **Apologies:** Ms S McClelland, Ms C Harris.

The CEO informed the Board that Ms J Johnston from TEO had intended to attend today's Board meeting, however, due to another appointment she sends her apologies today.

4600/26 **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed attendees to today's meeting. Ms A Simpson was welcomed back following her period of illness.

4601/26 **Minutes**

The minutes of the 256th meeting of CRC's Board, held on 29th April were reviewed and approved.

4602/26 **Matters Arising**

The CEO provided Board members with an update on the matters arising from previous meetings. The CEO noted that the Race Relations Consultation response had been submitted following approval by the Chair and is included in the papers for the meeting..

4603/26 **Correspondence**

The CEO presented the Board with three pieces of correspondence.

i) Race Relations Consultation Response

The CEO presented the Board with CRC's response to the Executive Office's Race Relations Consultation. She thanked Ms G Attwood and Mr P Day for their assistance in drafting this response. Ms G Attwood engaged with many stakeholders to inform the response.

The CEO highlighted the following key points from CRC's response:

- Given the growing diversity in Northern Ireland, this framework is an opportunity to deal with the positive aspects of that diversity, but also the racial inequality across the region, such as in housing, educational attainment, and hate crime.
- CRC welcome the adoption of the public health model, and the need for cross-departmental cooperation.

- The Framework has limited analysis of the previous Racial Equality Strategy. No analysis of what has been achieved, the lessons learned, or the shortfalls.
- There is a concern across the Community and Voluntary sector that the framework had moved away from 'Race Equality' to 'Race Relations'. This move risks the perception that race inequality has been deprioritised.
- CRC hopes that the next draft has clearer accountability mechanisms, stronger place-based work and community approaches and more on how it will align with the new TBUC Strategy.
- CRC welcomes the victim-centric approaches.
- The Framework has insufficient rural or gender focus.
- CRC's response adds that our organisation is well positioned to help with the implementation of the framework.

The CEO added that this exercise was a good opportunity to update our policy feedback in this area and link in with stakeholders.

The Chair and Board commended the CEO, Mr P Day and Ms G Attwood for their work on this robust and thoughtful submission. The Chair added that he is proud to be a part of an organisation that expressed and represented these views so well.

Ms N Tandon stated that there has been concern expressed in the sector about the change from 'Race Equality' to 'Race Relations', they are also concerned that the Framework does not provide details of an attached budget and does not recognise that cohesion work has been going on in Northern Ireland for years.

ii) NI Affairs Committee Consultation on Reconciliation

The CEO presented the Board with CRC's response to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's consultation on Reconciliation. She thanked Ms G Attwood who engaged with stakeholders, and Mr P Day who assisted the CEO in drafting the response. When making the submission, CRC enquired as to whether they would be called upon to give evidence on the response to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. The Committee Clerk will be in touch to confirm this in due course.

The CEO highlighted the following key points from CRC's response:

- CRC's response was confined to those aspects of reconciliation with which it has been involved, including peacebuilding, community relations and good relations.
- The response refers to the useful lens that the Peace Monitor's four interconnected dimensions bring to monitoring peace more broadly (security, equality, political progress, and cohesion and sharing).
- Reconciliation should not be understood solely as a process of improving relationships between historically divided communities, rather it sits within the wider task of building and sustaining a peaceful, inclusive, and resilient society.
- While the Good Friday Agreement established the foundations for peace, reconciliation remains an ongoing process.
- The region faces emerging challenges such as racism, social inequality, political polarisation and economic insecurity.

- Reconciliation must be understood within a broader peacebuilding framework recognising that peaceful societies depend on positive relationships between communities, but also effective institutions, economic opportunity, social inclusion, democratic participation, equality and trust.
- CRC's response stresses that reconciliation must be voluntary, is complex and non-linear, and cannot be legislated into place. Governments face challenges in designing policies to support it, yet the absence of such policies leaves reconciliation vulnerable.
- Reconciliation processes must now be framed in the broader, contemporary context, considering the changing demographics in Northern Ireland.
- CRC believe a more coordinated approach across Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland institutions would be helpful.
- CRC's response highlights the sustainability concerns around Northern Ireland's peacebuilding infrastructure. It raises the issue of the impact of short-term funding, rather than sustained long-term processes.
- The response also highlights the flaws in the current evaluation output measures, focusing as they do, more on number of attendees and immediate feedback rather than the longer term changes in everyday life and trust.
- CRC's response concludes that a comprehensive Peacebuilding framework for Northern Ireland should be produced, which positions reconciliation, good relations, anti-racism, social inclusion, democratic participation, economic opportunity and institutional trust as interconnected components of a shared vision for a peaceful society.

The Board thanked the team for their work on this response and agreed that it was a very comprehensive and considered reply.

iii) Correspondence to TEO on CRCRD Refund

The CEO reminded Board members that CRC have been pursuing the return of £600 CRCRD award made to a group that did not complete the project they were funded to do.

Following a long period pursuing this issue, CRC asked TEO's advice about the next stage of closing it down. TEO asked CRC to answer several questions related to the grant, and include those responses in a draft letter to the Permanent Secretary. This letter has been provided to Board members in the pack for today's meeting.

This letter was shared with TEO Sponsorship Branch on the 20th May for their review. CRC awaits a response from TEO on this letter.

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

4604/26

Chair's Update

i) Board Chair's Update

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

On 13th May the Chair and CEO attended a meeting with the Strategic Investment Board regarding the Pension Business Case

On the 18th May the Chair attended CRC's Good Relations Week Launch and photocall.

On the 29th May the Chair attended an appraisal meeting with Mr G Johnston TEO.

A meeting of CRC's Funding Sub-Group took place on 4th June

ii) Audit Committee Chair's Update

Mr J McCallister, the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, updated members on the latest meeting, which took place on the 16th June.

At this meeting, members received the outcome of the Grant Management internal audit, which received a 'satisfactory' rating with no recommendations. The Internal Auditors also presented their 2026-27 Internal Audit Strategy, their internal quality assessment, and the annual progress report.

The Committee reviewed CRC's Risk Register and agreed the following ratings. The 'Pension Issue', 'Staffing', '2026-27 Resource' and 'Lease' risks remain rated red. The 'NILGOSC Case' and 'Board Terms' risks are rated amber. The Committee discussed their concern around the delay in TEO undertaking the Board recruitment and the risk that not including a staggered approach may bring.

The Chair concurred with the Audit Committee's concern about Board appointments. A meeting request has been sent to the new Permanent Secretary, and CRC will compile a list of issues that members would like raised at this meeting, when it is arranged.

ACTION: List to be compiled of issues to raise at meeting with Permanent Secretary to be compiled when date confirmed.

The Committee were presented with updates on CRC's register of audit recommendations and noted that a recommendation that Board members undertake refresher training in governance and risk will go forward this year, however, CRC cannot pursue it until the budget is confirmed.

There are currently no investigations into funded groups, and no Direct Awards were made during the period.

The Board thanked Mr J McCallister for this update and noted the agreed minutes of the previous Audit Committee meeting.

iii) Pension Business Case and Sub-Group Chair's Update

Mr J Adamson updated the Board on the recent developments on the Pension Business Case.

The Strategic Investment Board sent CRC a list of queries and information requests on the 29th May. The HR Manager and CEO drafted responses to these queries, and presented them at a meeting of the Pension Sub-Group on the 10th June. The Committee made some amendments to the response which was approved at the Sub-Group meeting and then emailed to SIB. CRC await a response from SIB.

The Chair thanked Mr R Campbell and Mr M McDonnell for their feedback at the meeting of the Sub-Group. Their additions helped refine the responses.

The Chair added that the Pension Sub-Group maintain that there should be a joined-up approach to the authorisation of these business cases that includes all affected ALBs.

The Board thanked Ms J Adamson for this update and noted the report.

4605/26

Chief Executive's Update

The CEO presented her report and updated the Board on a number of items in it.

i) Recent Unrest

The CEO informed Board members that staff followed the normal procedures developed to respond to these incidents. This process includes:

- Engaging with stakeholders, funded groups, and councils to find out what they are doing to support the communities, and if there is any support that CRC could offer.
- Release a press statement
- Follow up with TEO
- Temperature Check with groups
- Positive stories on CRC's social media.

The CEO attended an emergency meeting of Shared City Partnership to discuss the unrest. At this meeting the CEO highlighted that the Community and Voluntary sector are not being adequately recognised by strategic bodies in their emergency planning for their work when unrest occurs, these groups should be adequately resourced, supported and included in communication channels.

The CEO will be attending a meeting with TEO on 17th June to discuss positive messaging.

ii) Strategic and Operational Plan

The CEO reminded the Board that TEO had advised CRC to continue to hold off work on a new Strategy until the T:BUC review has been published. Bearing in mind that at the Board's Evaluation session, members agreed that they would like to recommence work on the strategy, the CEO informed TEO of this but has yet to hear back.

The third draft of the Operational Plan is with TEO Ministers for approval. The draft contains CRC's indicative budget, at TEO's request.

iii) The Executive Office

The CEO attended CRC's Accountability and Liaison meeting with Janet Johnston (who is Chris Gardners's cover during his absence), in TEO on the 18th May. Several issues were raised at this meeting, including the staggering of Board members' terms and the impact the budget delay is having. These issues were raised again at CRC's June Staff Meeting, which Ms Johnston attended.

iv) Board and Committee Meetings

A meeting of CRC's Finance and General Purposes Committee will be taking place on 25th June. This meeting will receive CRC's first draft of its Annual Report and Accounts 2025-26 and a number of policy updates. This meeting will also review the Governance post and current temporary DFAP structure, which has been in operation for a year. The CEO stated that she believes the arrangement has been working well and thanked Ms H George and Mr P Garrity for their work.

The CEO thanked members for attending the Pension Sub-Group meeting and for the useful discussion and feedback at that meeting.

The Funding Sub-Group met on 4th June 2026. Members were informed that CRC is unable to make any CRCD, North Belfast or Core 2026-27 awards until the budget has been confirmed. This matter continues to be raised with The Executive Office.

v) Events

The TBUC Engagement Forum is taking place on Thursday 18th June. This will be a temperature check with funded groups. The CEO stated that all Board members are welcome to attend this session.

The CEO thanked the Chair and all members who took part in CRC's Good Relations Week photo-launch.

vi) Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

The CEO stated that, along with submitting a response to the consultation on reconciliation, CRC also met with Mr G Spence, an academic engaged by the NI Affairs Committee on this subject. He stated that it may be useful for CRC to present to the Committee on the consultation response. He noted that the Clerk of the Committee will be in touch in due course if the Committee extend an invitation to CRC.

The Board thanked the CEO for this update and the work that it represents and noted her Report.

4606/26

Community Engagement Update

Mr P Day presented the Board with a Report on the Engagement activity over the last few months.

Mr P Day thanked Board members and TEO colleagues for attending the launch of Good Relations Week 2026. A workshop was held with groups to discuss how they can get involved this year. 45 individuals attended this session. The Good Relations Week 2026 theme is 'Include', which has been well received.

The next TBUC Engagement Forum will be taking place on 18th June in Newry. This meeting will hear presentations from Professor Peter Shirlow and CRC's funded groups working on the ground during recent unrest. The event will discuss youth, race and community approaches. Board members are welcome to attend this event. Ministers have been invited, although CRC has not received a confirmation of their attendance. 110 individuals have registered to attend this event.

CRC will be running a series of 'lunchtime learning' sessions over the year. These will involve a short event with presentations and discussions to facilitate the sharing of learning and best practice. This series developed from feedback received during the Making a Difference Conference. Board members asked for details of these lunchtime sessions to be circulated.

ACTION: Details of CRC's Lunchtime Learning sessions to be circulated to Board members.

Mr P Day informed the Board that CRC have begun work planning the Making a Difference Conference, due to take place on 21st September 2026. A Steering Group has been convened, with representatives from Peace Players, Forthspring, Londonderry Bands Forum, and Rural Community Network.

The Chair asked whether CRC could hold a launch event, the week before GR Week, at the Long Gallery. Mr P Day to explore this idea.

ACTION: Mr P Day to explore whether a launch event could be held in the Long Gallery the week before Good Relations Week 2026.

The Board thanked Mr P Day and his team for this report and the work that it represents.

4607/26

Funding and Development Update

Mr B McDonald presented the Board with a Report updating on the work of the Funding Team.

The team are well advanced with closing off the 2025-26 grants. This will likely be completed by the end of June 2026. Final payments have been delayed as CRC have not yet received the drawdown from TEO.

The Core Fund 2026-27 decisions were made at a meeting in March, however, with no budget confirmed from TEO, Letters of Offers and Contracts cannot be sent to groups. Groups have been made aware of the Core Fund decisions, and that it is dependent on TEO budgets being signed off.

The CRCD grant is open to applications, and currently have bids worth £150k, well over the £100k opening budget for the grant. The applications are being progressed to scoring stage, but no decision are being made in the absence of the budget. Mr B McDonald raised the concern that, if the budget is agreed soon and CRC are able to make CRCD awards, the resource available will likely be fully awarded before the Good Relations Week applications are received.

Mr B McDonald informed the Board that the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme Business Case has not yet been signed off by TEO. Groups are becoming concerned as they would usually be preparing for their summer diversionary work, however, the lack of clarity on the future of the Fund as well as the delayed funding is having an impact. CRC continue to raise this with TEO at all opportunities.

4609/26 Funding Sub-Group

In the absence of Ms C Harris, the Chair of the Sub-Group, Mr B McDonald updated members on the Funding Sub-Group meeting which took place on the 4th June.

At this meeting members received an update on the current budget position and the grant schemes.

Attendees were informed that a review of the full Core Fund process was underway. The team are looking at the scoring matrix, the guidance documents, and the application form. The team aim to have the updated documents with the Board in September for review, with a view to implementing ahead of the 2027-28 Core Fund process.

The meeting also discussed the potential for CRC to engage with academics and explore opportunities to work together. This engagement would be beneficial to both CRC and the academics themselves.

The Board thanked Mr B McDonald for this update.

4608/26 Purchase Orders

i) Strategic Investment Board

Ms H George presented the Board with a purchase order for £28,500 for the work to be undertaken by the Strategic Investment Board and their procured actuaries. She assured the Board that TEO have provided a letter of comfort to say that this expense

would be provided to CRC by The Executive Office from its own budget. The total is a projection by SIB, and the final cost may be less than this among.

The Board approved this Purchase Order.

ii) IT Service Level Agreement

Ms H George presented the Board with a purchase order for £23,040. This purchase order covers the IT Service Level Agreement for Quarter 1 2026-27. She assured the Board that this PO represents a portion of a contract which CRC are already in for the contract holders to provide IT Services for 2026-27 and beyond.

The Board approved the Purchase Order.

4609/26 May 2026 Management Accounts

Mr P Garrity presented the Board with the Management Accounts up to 31st May 2026.

He reminded the Board that CRC are operating on an Indicative Budget and not the final approved budget. The £3.143m Indicative Budget reflects CRC's opening position in 2025-26, however, it is £333k less than the closing position for that year. In addition, a 45% cash cap has been placed on all spend.

TEO have already made CRC aware that there will be an in-year Monitoring Round which CRC will need to bid to for the Pension Business Case resource, as well as additional resource for grants.

Mr P Garrity has compiled a 'zero based' budget, showing CRC anticipated resource needs for the 2026-27 year.

In terms of grants, there has been £0 2026-27 grant payments made this year. CRC are holding 2025-26 grant accruals totalling £321,834. The payment of these will be managed to ensure compliance with the 45% cap. In addition, CRC have yet to receive the June drawdown so have not been in a position to make any grant payments to date.

Staff are now on their correct pay scales. While the NICS 2026 pay scales have not yet been agreed, Mr P Garrity is accruing for an assumed 3.6% increase.

CRC's IFRS depreciation included £4.2k for the period. Rent for 2025-26 has been estimated at £50,410 as the lease business case has not yet been approved by TEO.

The Chair thanked Ms P Garrity for his work and stated that CRC are in as comfortable a position as could be in the current circumstances.

4610/26 Any Other Business

None

4611/26

Date of Next Meeting

16th September