

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON 29th APRIL 2026, 10:30AM, ONLINE.**

4580/26 **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister, Ms N Tandon, Mr R Campbell, Mr M McDonnell

4581/26 **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).

4582/26 **Observers:** None

4583/26 **Apologies:** Ms S McClelland, Ms C Harris, Ms A Simpson,

4584/26 **Welcome**

The CEO expressed condolences on the passing of TEO colleague Ms S Nicholson. She noted that Ms S Nicholson was always a helpful and thoughtful colleague in TEO and will be missed. She attended the funeral on Friday 17th April on CRC's behalf. Mr J McCallister, the Chair of the Audit Committee, which Ms S Nicholson attended regularly, expressed his shock on hearing of her passing, and mirrored the CEO's sentiments.

4585/26 **Minutes**

The minutes of the 11th March 2026 Board Meeting were reviewed and approved

The minutes of the 11th March 2026 Board Core Fund Assessment meeting were reviewed and approved.

4586/26 **Matters Arising**

The CEO presented the Board with updates to the matters arising report.

Matter one relates to CRC's plan to organise sustainability training for Board members and staff. Jacqueline asked members to let Ms H George know if they would be interested in taking part.

Matter two relates to CRC's request to TEO that a colleague present the details of the Public Office Bill to the Board. TEO confirmed that they were not available to conduct this presentation at today's meeting but would be in touch with their availability.

Matter three relates to an action to write to the new Permanent Secretary and request a meeting. The CEO confirmed that that correspondence was sent to the new Permanent Secretary, who acknowledged the letter. The new Permanent Secretary is open to meeting with CRC in due course, and in the meantime in relation to the more urgent issue of the Pension Business Case offered CRC a meeting with Mr G Johnston, TEO. This meeting took place on 22nd April.

The CEO presented the actions coming out of the Board's Evaluation Session.

Action one asks that during the next review of the Partnership Agreement, consideration is given to requiring TEO to attend two CRC Board meetings per year.

The CEO informed the Board that no review has taken place since this action was agreed, and when a review is conducted this will be raised.

Action three asks CRC to be innovative with the drafting of the Operational Plan. The CEO informed the Board that the three development papers had previously been added to the Operational Plan which now sits with Ministers for sign off. This action can now be removed from the Register.

Action four relates to the Board's desire to finalise the new Strategic Plan. The CEO reminded members that CRC was asked to delay the drafting of the Strategic Plan while the TBUC Review is outstanding. The CEO provided feedback to TEO that the Board wishes to recommence work on the draft Strategic Plan. No response has been received from TEO on this. The Chair stated that he would raise this with TEO at his upcoming appraisal meeting.

Action five relates to the better promotion of CRC at festivals and in the media. This feedback has been provided to the Engagement Team to incorporate into their 2026/27 planning.

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

4587/26

Correspondence

The CEO presented the Board with a number of pieces of correspondence:

i) Inescapable Expenditure

On the 30th March 2026, CRC received correspondence from TEO stating that, while the budget is outstanding, CRC has the authority to incur business as usual expenditure from 1st April 2026. This includes spend related to the close of 2025/26 grants and anything currently in contract to pay.

ii) Indicative Budget

On 13th April 2026 CRC received correspondence from TEO setting out the 2026/27 Indicative Budget. This budget assumes the rollover of the 2025/26 opening budget; however, it is subject to change based on the decisions of the Executive. CRC cash spend is restricted to 45% while the budget bill is outstanding.

In response to TEO's correspondence the CEO replied to indicate several pressures in relation to the budget allocation, and the opportunity to make more Core Fund Awards in 2026/27 if additional resource is provided in the Opening Budget.

The Board thanked the CEO for presenting this correspondence.

Chair's Update**i) Board Chair's Update**

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

On 18th March the Chair attended a meeting with the Strategic Investment Board on the Pension Business Case.

On 24th March the Chair attended CRC's TBUC Engagement Forum and Award presentation. He noted that Ministers were ultimately unable to attend the event, however it did get good media attention, and was a very good event.

On 13th April the Chair, CEO and Mr B McDonald attended a meeting with Intercomm, to provide feedback on their Core Fund application. Feedback was provided and the group were reminded that they were welcome to apply to CRC's CRCD grant in 2026/27.

On 22nd April the Chair, CEO and Ms H George attended a meeting with Mr G Johnston TEO to discuss the Pension Business Case.

The Chair is due to attend a meeting with Mr G Johnston again on 1st May to conduct his annual Chair's appraisal.

ii) Audit Committee Chair's Update

Mr J McCallister provided the Board with an update on the 15th April ARAC meeting.

This meeting received and approved the Terms of Reference for the upcoming Grants Management internal audit. The Report on the IT Controls Audit was presented at this meeting. It received a 'Satisfactory rating' with three priority three recommendations being made.

The Risk Register was reviewed, and a number of amendments were made. The Board Appointments risk was upgraded to a red rating. Two new risks were added to the Register: CRC Premises Business Case; and 2026/27 Resource. These are currently rated red.

The CEO informed the Board that since this meeting of the Audit Committee on the 29th April 2026, CRC received correspondence from TEO stating that Mr R Campbell, Ms S McClelland, and Ms A Simpson's second terms had been extended by Ministers to align with all other CRC Board Members, expiring on 31st May 2027. The CEO confirmed that that now means there is no staggering of recruitments as all Board members final terms come to an

end on the same date, unless TEO extend further in 2027. She reminded the Board that initially TEO began working on recruitment documents and decided that a full Board recruitment exercise would be conducted at the end of 2025, and members replaced in a staggered manner. This exercise was not signed off by Ministers, and therefore TEO asked if members would be open to this further extension. The Board noted that the risk associated with the expiring of Board members terms on the same date still exists, as all institutional memory at Board level would be lost with completely new members. The Board also noted that the next Assembly elections are due to take place in May 2027, and therefore there may be further delays to signing off a recruitment process if this is not completed before the pre-election period.

The Chair informed the Board that at the last ARAC meeting it was agreed that if the members terms were extended further, the risk and governance training would be completed. Now that the extension has come through, this will be organised for members. In addition to this Audit Recommendation, the Finance team are working on guidance and updates to the payment process, which will be returned to once the year end work is complete.

The Board thanked Mr J McCallister for this update and noted the agreed minutes of the 25th February ARAC meeting.

iii) Pension Sub-Group Meeting Chair's Update

The Chair informed members that a meeting of CRC's Pension Sub-Group took place on 1st April. At this meeting the draft Memorandum of Understanding and Data Sharing Agreement with SIB was reviewed and approved, in principle. The Chair reminded the Board that these cannot be officially signed off until CRC's budget is confirmed. Members asked for further detail from SIB on how the 30 days would be used and whether they include consultation work with staff and the Union.

An action arising from the Sub-Group meeting was to remind the Permanent Secretary of the meeting request, and raise with her this pension issue. The Permanent Secretary welcomed a meeting in due course, and suggested that a meeting take place with Mr G Johnston in the meantime. This meeting took place on 22nd April. At this meeting the Chair raised the issue of the Board's appetite to move this issue along, the length of time that TEO and the Board have been engaged on finding a solution to this matter, and that a consistent approach across all affected ALBs would be the Board's preference.

At this meeting the CEO reminded TEO that the work with SIB could not progress until CRC had confirmation of the budget cover. Mr G Johnston

stated that he would speak to his TEO colleagues about getting a letter of comfort sent to CRC.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update and noted the minutes of the meeting.

4589/26 Operational Plan

The Board were presented with the Operational Plan, which now includes details of the Indicative Budget. This draft has gone back to TEO as requested noting that the Board had not had an opportunity to review it, and awaits Ministerial approval. The Board approved the revised draft and thanked the CEO for this update.

4590/26 Chief Executive Officer's Update

The CEO presented her report and updated the Board on a number of the items in it. She highlighted that this report includes activity up to the February period as she was unable to present a report at the March Board meeting due to her recent bereavement.

i) Extension of Board Members Terms

The CEO expressed her thanks again to Mr R Campbell, Ms A Simpson, and Ms S McClelland who agreed to the extension of their second terms. As this extension has now been confirmed by TEO, she looked forward to continuing to work with the current Board members.

She assured the Board that she would continue to raise the risk of not staggering term lengths.

ii) Operational Plan and Strategic Plan

As stated earlier in the meeting, the CEO has informed TEO that the Board wish to move ahead with completing the new Strategic Plan, and she will raise this again at the upcoming A&L meeting.

iii) Finance

The CEO informed the Board that CRC's staff are currently working on the preparation of the 2025/26 Annual Report and Accounts. She thanked Mr P Garrity for his year-end work, including the Accounts, the Whole of Government Accounts, the Audit, and normal month end reporting. She also thanked all other staff who have been involved in these processes.

iv) Pension Business Case

The CEO added to the earlier discussion around the Business Case, stating that Mr G Johnsnton explained that all business cases relating to this pension issue would ultimately go to DoF for sign off. At this meeting CRC had expressed that their preference would be to bring all the effected ALBs together and agree a consistent approach early in the process.

The CEO added that, at the meeting with SIB on 18th March, they stated that they did not have the in-house expertise to complete the pension actuary work within the Business Case, and therefore external assistance would need to be procured. No further progress on this can be made until the budget is agreed or CRC have confirmation that the resource will be provided through in-year monitoring rounds.

v) Grant Schemes

The CEO informed the Board that the Core Fund assessment process and appeals process is now complete. She thanked Board members for their engagement in this year's decisions. A letter has gone to TEO setting out details of groups that received a fundable score but could not be supported due to the resources available.

vi) Engagement

The CEO thanked Board members for their engagement in the Good Relations Awards decisions and attendance at the presentation of the awards. It was a very good event, and the presentations from the groups were very inspiring.

She also thanked the Engagement Team for their work on this event.

vii) Other Meetings

The CEO informed the Board of a number of other events and meetings she attended.

On 10th April the CEO attended and spoke at the exhibition marking the 60th anniversary of Corrymeela. This exhibit will be hosted at the Linen Hall Library for a few weeks, and the CEO recommend it to members.

The CEO and Mr B McDonald met with the new Director of the East Belfast Mission on 22nd April. She noted that this was an encouraging meeting and that relations had improved and returned to what they had been previously.

The group was offered an opportunity to get feedback on their 2026-27 Core Fund application and informed that it is welcome to apply to CRC's CRCD scheme for a variety of projects in 2026-27.

viii) Governance

Since the production of this CEO's Report, the date of the next Finance and General Purposes Committee has changed. This meeting was due to receive the first draft of CRC's Annual Report and Account, however, based on the timings last year and the fact that the pension reports are still outstanding, which are required to produce the Annual Report, it was agreed, with agreement from NIAO, that the ARA would be produced for June rather than May.

The Chair thanked the CEO for this updated and noted the report. He expressed his thanks to the CEO for everything she does at CRC, noting this Report is a clear representation of the breadth and reach of her work as CEO.

4591/26 Engagement Report

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

The Good Relations Awards took place on the 24th March, which Mr P Day was delighted to receive positive feedback on at this meeting. The annual survey reflects the positive feedback received at this meeting. He thanked Board members who took part in the decision panel, as well as those who attend the presentation. He noted that a link to the videos produced on each of the winners can be found in the Report. Mr P Day is pursuing a new award partner for the 2027 awards.

Work has begun on Good Relations Week 2026. The Steering Group are considering a theme of 'Include', which hopes to reflect aspects of good relations, including: identity; shared spaces; communication; welcoming of new communities; and young people.

The Good Relations Week launch and photocall will be taking place on 18th May. Peter added that it would be great to see CRC Board well represented at this event.

The Chair thanked Mr P Day for this update and encouraged Board members to get involved with the Good Relations Week promotion and events.

4592/26 Management Accounts

Mr P Garrity presented Board members with CRC's 31st March Management Accounts, which are effectively the Financial Accounts for 2025/26.

The Accounts show a slight underspend of £6.9k which reflects 0.2% of the budget, well within the 1.5% tolerance.

The 2025/26 Whole of Government Accounts data was submitted to TEO on 18th April. This version does not contain the pension benefit information, which CRC awaits from NILGOSC. Once this NILGOSC Report has been received the Whole of Government data will be updated and sent back to TEO.

The 2026/27 Indicative Budget includes £3,143k less £67k depreciation. The 45% cap on cap on cash spend will be a challenge as the final 2025/26 Core and North Belfast payments are due to be made over the coming months. The budget will continue to be monitored closely.

Mr P Garrity informed the Board that TEO approved the 2024/25 and 2025/26 Pay Remits, which were implemented in March 2026. Backpay was paid to staff in the April salary run. No details have been provided yet on the 2026/27 NICS pay scales, but Mr P Garrity is accruing for an assumed 3% increase.

The Board asked what the pension report is showing for 2025/26. Mr P Garrity stated that the Report is showing a small loss this year, but not of a material figure.

The Board thanked Mr P Garrity for this Report and all the work he does at CRC.

4593/26

Funding and Development

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

For the first quarter of 2026/27 the team will be focusing on reducing the 2025/26 accruals and closing off the awards. 80% of claims have been submitted and are currently being vouched. The team aims to pay out the final claims this quarter.

The 2026/27 13 new Core awards have been notified of their fundable position but have been told that Letters of Offer cannot be issued until the official Opening Budget has been provided to CRC. The appeals period has now closed, with one appeal being submitted and the original decision being upheld.

The Community Relations/Cultural Diversity grant is now open to applications. However, like the Core Fund, Letters of Offer cannot be issued until the budget has been received. 20 applications were submitted in the first ten days of the grant opening.

The 45% cap on cash spend is as always proving a challenge. Mr B McDonald and Mr P Garrity are managing payments closely and will priorities groups who are experiencing financial pressure.

Mr B McDonald reminded the Board of CRC's outstanding CRCD grant refund. CRC sought guidance from TEO on the next steps, and are due to meet TEO in the coming weeks to discuss further.

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

4594/26

Any Other Business

i) Race Relations Consultation

Ms N Tandon asked whether CRC would be contributing to the Race Relations Consultation. Peter informed the Board that CRC's Engagement Team has been speaking to stakeholders about the consultation and will be making a submission. Jacqueline asked if Ms N Tandon would be open to discussing CRC's response before it is submitted. Ms N Tandon stated she would be glad to help.

ACTION: Ms N Tandon to be consulted in relation to CRC's response to the TEO Race Relations Consultation.

ii) TEO

The CEO informed Board members that Mr C Gardner, TEO, has been temporary moved from Good Relations to a project related to the conflict in the Middle East. This is likely to be for several months. CRC has not been notified if his position in Good Relations will be temporarily filled.

4595/26

Date of Next Meeting

10th June 10:30am