

NI Community Relations Council
Finance and General Purposes Committee
4th February 2026 11am
Online

Present: Mr M McDonald (Chair) & Ms N Tandon (Board Member) Ms A Simpson (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member),

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

Apologies: Mr P Garrity (Temporary Finance Manager)

1. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

2. Matters Arising

The CEO presented the Committee with one matter arising from the previous meeting, related to the CRDC refund. At the last meeting it was recommended that the draft letter due to go to the group be shared with Mr R Campbell for his review. The CEO confirmed that this review took place and the correspondence was sent to the group. An update on this issue will be provided later in the agenda.

3. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were raised at this meeting.

4. Performance Reporting

i) 2025/26 Operational Plan

The CEO presented the Committee with an update on the implementation of the 2025/26 Operational Plan.

She drew members' attention to the only action in the Operational Plan that is currently marked as 'delayed/not completed' which is the running of the newly merged Media and Publications Grant Scheme. CRC did not receive sufficient funding from TEO for this scheme to open in 2025/26. Some of the actions related to requests to assist with TEO grant assessments were not undertaken as those schemes did not carry out grant assessment in 2025/26.

CRC did have a concern about the financial position during the last quarter, however, due to in -year funding made available to CRC by TEO, CRC are in a more secure financial position in relation to grants going into quarter four.

ii) Quarter Three Performance Report

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's quarter three Performance Report.

The Report shows CRC's performance for the quarter, including a summary of any red or amber risks, financial position, sick leave statistics, and staffing position. The CEO highlighted the achievements section, which shows what outcomes CRC has accomplished in the quarter.

The CEO thanked Ms H George for compiling this report.

The CEO added that this Report has been submitted to TEO, who have raised no issues. This Report will form part of the discussion at the upcoming Accountability and Liaison meeting.

The Committee thanked the CEO for these updates and noted the Reports.

5. Data Protection Policy and Procedures

Ms H George presented the Committee with the Data Protection Policy and Procedures, and highlighted a number of proposed amendments.

These amendments relate broadly to the data breach procedures, guidance on preventing data breaches and updated language on responding to data protection access requests. Additional guidance has been added as an appendix on how to ensure documents do not contain hidden personal data.

The Committee thanked Ms H George for completing this review and approved the updated Policy and Procedure.

6. Vouching and Verification Procedures and Checklist

Ms H George presented the Committee with the Vouching and Verification Procedures and Checklist, and highlighted the proposed amendments.

These amendments relate to the updating of staff member job titles, a more detail added to the sections on verification checks and debt recovery. The policy also sees an additional requirement put in place for vouching staff to ensure that any documents shared through a third-party site are verified before opening. The Checklist has been updated to remove any duplicate questions, removed any questions which were not useful for financial governance assurance purposes, and add questions around pay software.

The Committee thanked Ms H George for presenting these updates and approved the Procedures and Checklist.

The Committee discussed the risk around invoices and the potential for double claims to other funders. Staff explained to the Committee the vouching process and how claims are checked from invoices stage to payment stage to ensure that everything being claimed for has been rightfully incurred expenditure. It was agreed that CRC would contact TEO and ask if they have any systems in place to ensure that when an invoice is submitted electronically to them as part of the vouching process, that it is not submitted for vouching to another funder too.

ACTION: Ms H George to contact TEO on their invoice vouching procedures.

7. Financial Procedures Manual

Ms H George presented the Committee with an updated Financial Procedures Manual. Changes made to the Manual relate to the banking arrangements, replacing the old bank providers name with the current provider.

The Committee thanked Ms H George for this update and approved the changes.

8. Health and Safety Audit

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with a paper updating on the outcome of the Health and Safety Audit.

The Audit found standard health and safety to be generally satisfactory. Four recommendations were made, of which three have already been implemented. One outstanding recommendation, to conduct Portable Appliance Testing, will be arranged by ECNI in due course.

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

9. Sickness Absence Statistics

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with an update on CRC's quarter three sickness absence statistics.

The Committee noted that, compared to the same quarter last year, both long-term and short-term sickness absence days and related costs have risen, from 26 to 63 days. Ms Adamson advised that the main factor in this increase was long term sickness absence which grew from 8 days last year to 21 days this year. That member of staff has since returned to work.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for presenting and noted the report.

10. Equalities Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with a Report updating on NICRC equality matters.

All actions on CRC's Disability Action Plan have now been implemented.

The HR Manager has engaged with ECNI for guidance on a CRC Audit of Inequalities. The Audit of Inequalities is usually aligned with a Strategic Plan, however, as CRC's Plan is delayed at the request of TEO, the HR Manager will complete this work in advance of the Strategic Plan preparation.

The Committee thanked the HR Manager and noted this report.

11. IT Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with an update on IT at CRC.

Ms J Adamson sits on the Equality House Operational Board overseeing the implementation of the IT contract. The January meeting of the Board saw presentations on the firm's compliance with the contract, their performance in the third quarter, the costs for that quarter, any risk management considerations, social value, and presentation of the Service Report.

Ms J Adamson assured the Committee that the work of the contract holders has been completed satisfactorily over the quarter.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for this Report.

12. Pension Business Case

Ms J Adamson provided the Committee with a verbal update on the pension business case.

TEO had contacted the Strategic Investment Board to ask if assistance could be provided in 2025/26 to complete the Business Case. The Strategic Investment Board came back to say that they would not have capacity this year to assist. TEO were to return to SIB and ask if they could provide assistance in the 2026/27 year. CRC awaits an update from TEO on this.

As previously reported, the "No-Better, No Worse" element of the pension payments is being taken forward in the normal pay-remit process.

The Committee noted this update.

13. Premises Committee Update

Ms J Adamson provided a verbal update to the Committee on the latest Premises Committee meeting.

Members were informed that all planned preventative maintenance is up to date.

The current lease of Equality House is due to expire in July 2026. ECNI have submitted a business case to TEO on behalf of the organisations in Equality House. CRC completed a benchmarking exercise, a paper on which was presented at the last Board meeting. The Premises Committee meet again on the 20th February, and hope to have an update on the TEO's review of the business case at this meeting.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for this update.

14. CRCD Refund

The CEO provided Committee members with background information in relation to this refund. A CRCD awardee received £600 for the completion of a project. The group submitted no claims documents to prove that the project took place. CRC wrote to the group to ask for this £600 to be refunded as it could not be vouched. CRC continued to pursue this refund, which was not been returned.

The Board and Committee agreed that the Chair should write to the group to request the return of the grant. This letter was sent in November 2025, and, following two extensions to the deadline, the grant has not been refunded.

Following a request for guidance on next steps, Mr B McDonald presented the Board with TEO's response. TEO advised that, if CRC have exhausted all debt recovery options, then consideration should be given to writing the debt off. TEO have requested further information related to the matter, which Mr B McDonald will respond to.

This matter will be taken to the next Board meeting for further discussion.

The Committee thanked the CEO and Mr B McDonald for this update.

In the meantime, the Chair suggested that a request be sent to the group for a meeting to discuss the issue.

ACTION: Ms H George to write to the group to request a meeting.

15. Vouching and Verification Report

Ms N Maguire presented the Committee with an update on the work of the Vouching and Verification team.

The 2025-26 first claims vouching process is underway. Claims have been received from all 28 Core Funded groups. All claims have been vouched and 26 first payments have been made.

The North Belfast Scheme claims are moving at a slower rate. Nine of the Ten groups have now submitted at least one claim, of which five have generated a payment.

Included in the report is the total of 14 CRCD awards fully completed. Following the circulation of the report, this total is now 16 awards.

All 2025-26 verifications with newly funded groups have been completed. Verification check-ins have also been completed with all other groups.

The Committee thanked Ms N Maguire and noted this Report.

16. Temporary Staff Member Purchase Order

The Committee reviewed and noted the total spend for the current temporary Finance Manager.

17. Management Accounts and Highlights

In the absence of Mr P Garrity the CEO presented the Committee with the January Management Accounts and Highlights.

The Report shows a favourable variance of £20k compared to the projected spend. This is due to savings made due to an overallocation to the judicial review budget and the pension business case. This variation is also attributed to a timing issue with grant payments.

The Report shows the in- year additional funds of £60k for CRCD and £56k for Core Fund that TEO have provided CRC. CRC's December Monitoring Round bid for £25k for assistance to complete the Pension Business Case was also approved. This resource has been veered into the grants budget.

Work has begun on drafting a 2026/27 zero based budget. The assumption for this draft budget is that CRC will receive no more than the 2025/26 opening budget allocation.

The Capital budget is projected to be spent in full.

The Pay Remit queries have all been responded to and the paperwork now sits with TEO Central Finance for sign off. Provision has been made in CRC's budget for this expenditure.

The Committee thanked the CEO for presenting this report, and thanked Mr. Garrity for his work, noting the positive position the budget is currently in.

18. Any Other Business

None

19. Date of Next Meeting

June 2026