

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWELFTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY
RELATIONS COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON TUESDAY 21ST APRIL 2020, 12 NOON,
VIA VIDEO CALLING SOFTWARE**

2284/20 Closed Session

The Board held a closed session to discuss the Pay Remit and Pension issue.

Staff joined the meeting.

2285/20 Present: Chair Martin McDonald, Máire Braniff, Rory Campbell, Claire Harris, John McCallister, Sheila McClelland, Michael McDonnell, Audrey Simpson, Nisha Tandon.

2286/20 In attendance: Jacqueline Irwin(CEO), Jo Adamson (HR Manager), Peter Day (Engagement), Hannah George (PA), Paul Jordan (Funding and Development), Gerard McKeown (Finance, Admin, and Personnel), Ellana Tomasso (IT).

2287/20 Apologies: None

2288/20 Welcome

The Chair welcomed Board members and staff to the first virtual meeting of the Community Relations Council Board. Prior to the meeting the Chair reviewed CRC's governance arrangements to ensure there was provision for a meeting to be held virtually. He confirmed that the governance arrangements had been checked and do allow for this type of meeting, however, any AGMs and EGMs have to be held in person.

2289/20 Standard Checks

- (a) *Members should declare any conflict of interests in any discussions where decisions were required.*
- (b) *Members need to register any offers of gifts or hospitality since the last Council meeting*

Board members had nothing to declare

2290/20 Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting, which took place on the 5th March. They approved the minutes, agreeing that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

2291/20 Actions and Matters Arising

The Chair highlighted a number of actions following the previous Board meeting.

He stated that following the previous meeting he spoke to Ms S McClelland who stated that although she had difficulty with attendance recently she was still interested in continuing on as a Board member.

He reminded the Board that they had asked the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to review the minutes from their January meeting. The Chair confirmed that this had been completed.

The CEO added that, at the last meeting the Board approved the Finance and General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference. The Chair suggested that this Committee would sit when the self-isolation restrictions have been lifted. This was agreed.

2291/20

Correspondence

i) Strategic Plan

The CEO presented to the Board feedback CRC received during the Strategic Plan consultation period. The feedback received from another Northern Ireland community funder, contained positive comments and suggestions. The CEO stated that the feedback would be used to strengthen the wording of the Strategic Plan. She added that CRC responded, thanking them for the feedback and seeking clarity on one of the comments. An invitation to meet was extended to the organisation when restrictions are lifted.

The Chair stated that the feedback contained helpful comments about promotion of the good work that CRC does and funds. The CEO stated that detail of positive examples of CRC work would be added to the Strategic Plan.

The CEO added that after CRC receives further feedback from the respondent and work on the design and presentation of the strategy has been completed, the final draft will return to the Board at a future meeting. .

ii) CRC's 2020/21 Budget

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with guidance received from Mr C Gardner, TEO confirming that essential payments could be made. He stated that the guidance attached to the email was internal for TEO staff, and it sets out how to process drawdowns. The guidance does not include information directly to ALBs.

The TEO email informed CRC that they can continue to pay salaries and essential bills. CRC will receive the formal budget in due course.

The Chair added that his correspondence with Mr. Browne TEO, indicates that Mr Toogood and Mr Browne, will be presenting budgets to the Finance Committee in due course and CRC are likely to be updated about the 20/21 budget following this.

Mr P Jordan asked whether TEO had informed CRC that 2020/21 Core Funding first payments could be made. Mr G McKeown stated he would look into this.

ACTION: Mr G McKeown to review TEO's correspondence and update Mr P Jordan and the CEO on 20/21 grant payments.

2292/20 Chair's Business

The Chair presented a verbal update on developments and events he attended following the previous Board meeting. He stated that he attended the CRC Award decision Sub- group meeting and the Pay/Pension Remit Sub-Group meeting prior to the virus restrictions. He added that he is in regular contact with the CEO and TEO.

2293/20 Chief Executive Officer's Report

The CEO presented an update to Board members on CRC's Covid-19 emergency arrangements that have been in place since 19th March. CRC had planned to complete a test run of these arrangements but the government announced restrictions before this could be completed. However, all staff are now working from home and implementation went smoothly with only a small number of initial IT issues which were quickly resolved. CRC are regularly updating information on the website. The office phone number and all email contacts remains the same. Staff have all been equipped with laptops and simple mobile phones to deal with external calls that come via reception which Ms H. George is operating. The CEO thanked all staff involved in the implementation of the emergency arrangements including the Grants Management System. She said CRC was fortunate as it had already placed grants processes online. The CEO added that to support internal communication and morale staff and Board members have been receiving a weekly newsletter which includes staff updates, light relief, and useful links including guidance.

She noted that staff have begun using video-conferencing software and later in the month will run Shared Learning Forum using the same method.

The CEO asked Board members who are regularly using video-conferencing software for their work, to forward any tips or suggestions for better utilising the software for meetings to Ms J Irwin or Ms H George.

ACTION: Board members with suggestions to improve video conferencing, please pass these on to Ms J Irwin and Ms H George.

The CEO stated that CRC's 2019/20 expenditure has been affected by the Covid-19 situation, including impact on supplies which were not received and small grant events which could not be completed. This has been reported to TEO. She noted that setting those aside, CRC was within its target expenditure and Mr. G. McKeown would be reporting in detail on the budget later in the meeting.

She thanked staff for enabling work to continue and the Chair and the Board for maintaining contact and support during the Coronavirus emergency.

The CEO informed the Board that she and the Chair were due to appear before the Executive Office Committee, to brief Members on the work of CRC. However, this has been postponed due to the current situation.

CRC events such as the Good Relations award, Shared Learning Forum on wellbeing, and the T:BUC Engagement Forum have also been postponed. However, Mr P Jordan will be hosting a Shared Learning Forum with North Belfast groups online on 23rd April.

The CEO recorded her thanks to Ms J Adamson and Heads Together for their work putting together the draft Dignity at Work Charter. This draft is currently with staff for comment. She added that CRC are following all Government guidance in relation to staff sick absences.

The Board noted the CEO's update.

2294/20 Continuity Arrangements

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with a paper setting out CRC's continuity arrangements.

The Chair thanked Mr G McKeown for this paper, adding that it is very comprehensive, and that CRC appear to have a high level of preparedness.

Mr R Campbell asked if this paper would be reviewed by the internal auditors. The CEO advised that it may be reviewed at some point and the Chair stated that the continuity work completed by CRC is well documented.

2295/20 Core Funding Review Meeting

Mr P Jordan informed the Board that a review meeting took place on the 2nd April to assess the two Core Funding appeals submitted to CRC. The review panel included two Board members, Ms M Braniff and Mr R Campbell. The

meeting was chaired by Mr D Russell, Director of the Human Rights Commission.

The first appeal received stating that it was unreasonable for the Board to not fully take account of section 4 of their application. The review panel considered all the evidence and agreed that as the group did not provide evidence of end beneficiaries in section 4, the original score of 77 was appropriate. The review panel recommend declining the appeal.

The second appeal received stated that it was unreasonable to rule the application ineligible and that there was a substantial breach of CRC's policies, procedures and criteria as set out in the guidance notes for the relevant programme. Mr P Jordan stated that the review panel agreed:

- CRC's policy states that it does not advocate one single model for education. The review plan decided that this does not mean that the Core Fund is prevented for supporting a range of approaches.
- The application was not seeking support for a campaign but was seeking support towards delivering good relations activity.
- The guidelines did not include exclusions which would have prevented the group from applying and the policy position paper was not available at the point of application.

Therefore, the review panel recommend upholding the appeal.

Mr P Jordan stated that the Board is being asked to consider the review panel's recommendations.

The Board considered the recommendations and were content to accept the review panel's decisions.

The Chair added that in due course CRC will review the organisation taking policy positions on issues.

ACTION: The Board to review the organisation taking policy positions.

2296/20 Covid-19 Funding Arrangements Update

Mr P Jordan presented the Board with an update on arrangements in place for funded groups during the Covid-19 situation. He explained that the funding team are maintaining a connection with groups through email and telephone. The website has been updated with guidance, and flexibility is being given to groups unable to complete planned events. He added that some funded organisations are aiming to host events online.

He thanked Ms E Tomasso and Ms F Dennison for their work getting the Grant Management System up and running.

The 2020/21 Core Funding and North Belfast Scheme beneficiaries have been agreed in principle, while CRC await details of the budget. A meeting of the Core funded groups will be held virtually on the 23rd April. Payments for the CRCD grants are currently being processed and systems are being put in place.

The Funding team are analysing grants data and will have a complete picture to present to the Board in June.

Mr P Jordan informed the Board that groups will be submitting claim documents and supporting evidence online. This evidence will be vouched. Once the current situation returns to normal the groups will submit their evidence in hard copy and that will be vouched again to ensure that payments are issued safely.

The Chair thanked the funding team for being as flexible as possible and for keeping the groups engaged.

The Board asked whether the current situation will have an effect on the usual summer activities.

Mr P Jordan stated that he would be meeting with the North Belfast groups in April and will know more in due course.

The Board noted the paper.

2297/20 Funding and Development Update

Mr P Jordan presented the Board with an update on funding directorate. He stated that the team are holding regular meetings to keep in touch. CRC have received enquiries about the 20/21 funding schemes, guiding groups on how to operate in the current circumstances. The team are putting together a set of resources to guide groups and have written to all Core funded organisations. The team are processing and payments in the usual way.

The Board noted the paper.

2298/20 North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme

Mr P Jordan presented the Board with an update on the North Belfast Scheme. He stated that the groups have been told to articulate who they will be partnering with, as they have been instructed to work in collaboration. The groups are interested in presenting at a future Board meeting.

The Board noted the paper.

2299/20 2020/21 Budget

Mr G McKeown presented the draft budget to the Board for the year 2020/21. He informed attendees that the maximum amount of resources has been allocated to grants.

The Board asked if it is likely that in the current situation, CRC will be asked to take a cut in the budget. The Chair and the CEO stated that there is no clear indication as to what CRC's budget will be.

The Board stated that, if there are long periods of lock down, there will be a big residual effect on mental health and that good relations work will be very important during this time. They stated that CRC should encourage groups to be imaginative, to think of other ways to host events. Groups which CRC have developed and supported may be struggling to survive in the current situation. Flexibility and guidance should be provided to allow work to continue, in whatever form that may be.

Mr P Jordan stated that the funding team are looking into this and will put together guidance for current and potential groups. This guidance will be shared with Board members and then the Board and CRC staff will discuss the next steps.

ACTIONS: The Funding Team to draft guidance for groups regarding conducting Good Relations work in the current situation, and then discuss next steps with the Board.

The Board noted this paper.

2300/20 Management Accounts up to March 31st 2020

Mr G McKeown presented the updated Management Accounts to the Board. He highlighted that due to the Covid-19 situation CRC's underspend totalled £88k. £75k was planned spending that could not proceed due to Covid-19 disruptions. The other £13k underspend is within the 1.5% allowance.

The Board noted this paper.

2301/20 Labour Relations Agency Report Implementation

Ms J Adamson presented the Board with an update on the implementation of the Labour Relations Agency Report. She informed the Board that a draft Dignity at Work Charter was compiled by Heads Together and circulated to all staff for comment. Staff have had their deadline for comments extended

until the 30th April. A fifth session with Heads Together will take place once restrictions are lifted. She added that Union members and CRC teams will be meeting to discuss the draft.

The Chair added that, following his phone call with Heads Together, he believes that have a good grasp of the issues at CRC. Ms J Adamson agreed. The Chair stated that the implementation of the Charter will be key.

The Board asked whether evaluations of the training sessions have taken place. Ms J Adamson stated that the training was provided by CAL, who issued their own evaluation forms after the sessions. She stated that the training was completed and shortly after CRC staff went into isolation. The CEO added that the last Heads Together session will contain an evaluation, and discussion of next steps.

The Board noted the paper.

2302/20 Sick Absence Report

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with the Sick Absence Report up to the 31st March 2020. He highlighted that two members of staff had over ten days sick leave due to Covid-19 or virus precautions. CRC completed all checks and complied with all health and safety and public health guidance.

The Board noted this paper.

2303/20 Pay Remit

The Chair informed the meeting that during the closed session, Mr G McKeown stated that the Sub Group and TEO have received a copy of the Pay Remit Business Case. Following comments from TEO, CRC are considering revisions and seeking legal advice.

The Chair added that the real discussions are still to come with union and non-union staff.

2304/20 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Mr R Campbell presented the Board with the minutes of the 20th March ARAC meeting. He informed the Board that the Committee did not meet in April, due to the current situation, instead papers were circulated and no decisions were needed. Mr R Campbell stated that, with regards the investigation into a previously funded group, the Group Fraud Investigation Services completed their investigation. Their report did not conclude whether the funding provided to the group was used for its intended purposes. CRC are seeking a meeting with TEO regarding this.

He added that an operational red risk was added to the Risk Register, to account for the Covid-19 situation.

The Board noted the minutes.

2305/20 Community Engagement Report

Mr P Day presented the Board with an update on items under his directorate. He stated that he is disappointed that a number of events had to be postponed.

Mr P Day thanked the Chair, Ms N Tandon, and Mr J McCallister for participating in the Good Relations Award panel. A winner has been chosen, however, the award presentation will likely take place during Good Relations week after being postponed due to the Covid-19 restrictions. The Engagement team are working on ideas to keep connected with funded groups and potential applicants. Groups are leading on how to innovate with technology, and host events online.

He stated that a number of Good Relations Week events are likely to go online. He asked the Board to consider Good Relations Week, and what CRC should do regarding rescheduling and hosting events online.

ACTION: Board members to pass on their views of hosting Good Relations Week to Mr P Day.

The Chair added that engagement should focus on protecting the investment CRC has already made in groups. He stated his concern about the impact isolation will have on Good Relations.

The Board stated that this is an opportunity to progress community relations. Community groups that would ordinarily receive CRC funding are innovating and showing kindness across communities. New problems are emerging and groups should be supported to respond to them.

The Chair suggested CRC should meet with the Department for Communities regarding the Department's survival agenda, and how important Good relations is in the current situation.

ACTION: The CEO and the Chair to request a meeting with the Department for Communities to discuss the importance of Good Relations.

The Chair asked Mr P Day and Mr P Jordan to establish a sub-group to discuss and develop guidance and ideas to help groups imagine new ways to sustain their work. Ms J Irwin added that it is important to look at other methods of

delivery and how that is being done in other areas of the world too. Ms N. Tandon said she would be happy to be part of the sub-group.

ACTION: Mr P Day and Mr P Jordan to establish a sub-group on how groups can innovate Good Relations work during the Covid-19 restrictions.

2306/20 Any Other Business

The CEO reminded Board members to provide feedback on this video-conferencing meeting, and any suggestions on improving the process.

The CEO and Chair thanked Board and staff members for attending, and in particular Ms H George and Ms E Tomasso for their work organising the meeting.

2307/20 Date of next meeting

27th May 11am