

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWELFTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY
RELATIONS COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON FRIDAY 29th MAY,
VIA VIDEO CALLING SOFTWARE**

2308/20 **Present:** Chair Martin McDonald, Máire Braniff, Rory Campbell, Claire Harris, John McCallister, Michael McDonnell, Audrey Simpson, Nisha Tandon.

2309/20 **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).

2310/20 **Apologies:** Sheila McClelland (Board Member)

2311/20 **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

2312/20 **Minutes**

The Board reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting, which took place on the 21st April 2020. Members approved the minutes, agreeing that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

2313/20 **Matters Arising**

The Chair presented the Board with updates on actions following the previous Board meeting.

He stated that CRC will organise a representative from the Charity Commission to speak at a future Board meeting.

As requested at the previous Board meeting, Mr P Day informed Board members that he reviewed the attendee list of previous TBUC Engagement Forums, and found that no members of the current Committee for The Executive Office have attended in the past.

The Chair reminded Board members that it was suggested previously that CRC request a meeting with the Department for Communities. He explained that, since that meeting, the Department have announced their own grant system, and therefore CRC no longer need to meet with them.

The Chair drew the Board's attention to the final action following the previous meeting. CRC was to establish a Funding Delivery Working -Group. The Chair confirmed that this group has been established and a first meeting has taken place. More detail on this meeting will be presented later in the agenda.

2314/20 Chair's Update

The Chair provided a verbal update to Board members on events and meeting he has attended.

He informed the Board that he spoke with TEO regarding the authorisation of CRC's expenditure. TEO offered assurances that CRC is not the only ALB who has yet to receive its budget, this is the case across the Department. The Chair reminded members that CRC have been told by TEO to work from the base line in the 2019/20s budget. The Chair stated that further to this discussion, he and the CEO met with TEO to prepare for the briefing to the Committee for the Executive Office. The Chair stated that the briefing went well, and that the CEO will speak further on it in her update.

He Chair noted again that CRC had convened the first meeting of a Funding Delivery working Group. This meeting was very useful. He added that Mr P Jordan would speak further on that meeting, later in the agenda.

2315/20 CEO's Report

The CEO presented the Board with her update.

She informed the meeting that so far CRC's Covid-19 emergency procedures have been successful, robust, and secure. She advised that CRC was now able to turn to future planning on how to hold large events like Good Relations Week and the T;BUC Engagement Forum. She noted that details of this would be presented later in the meeting in the Engagement Team update.

The CEO updated the Board on the progress of the Strategic Plan. She stated that following CRC's correspondence with the organisation that submitted comments previously there had been no additional feedback to the query raised.. Having discussed it with the Chair, she recommended that CRC proceed with the other amendment to the Plan and prepare for publication. If feedback arrives from this organisation, it can be added at a later date. This was agreed.

She informed the meeting that, due to the outstanding budget, the final draft of CRC's Operational Plan cannot be completed. She added that, once the budget has been received the Operational Plan will be finalised and the first quarter delivery reviewed.

The CEO then updated the Board on staff recruitment. She stated that, previous to the Covid-19 restrictions, CRC were preparing to recruit a Vouching and Verification Officer. However, this was put on hold due to the social restrictions. Mr G McKeown and Ms J Adamson are now considering how to recruit this position in the current circumstances.

The CEO stated that the CRC briefing to the Committee for the Executive Office took place on the 20th May. She informed the Board that three follow up questions were received from the Committee, to which CRC will reply before the deadline of 9th June. She presented the questions to the Board:

- The Community Relation Council's view on whether the focus of funding in the Belfast area is to the detriment of projects in Mid Ulster and places like Derry.
- A geographical break down of funded groups/posts/projects, with the exception of the North Belfast scheme.
- Details of the processes the Community Relations Council applies when assessing funding applications, for example, Section 75 duties and the allocation of funding based on objective need.

She informed the Board that the questions at the committee were mainly focused on the balance of funding made available to the Greater Belfast area as compared with other regions of Northern Ireland, in particular Mid Ulster and Derry/Londonderry.

The CEO added that CRC will take this opportunity to review how funding could be targeted at particular geographical areas on a evidential basis, reviewing the intersectionality of community relations work with other areas of social concern, such as poverty, the environment and mental health.

The Chair informed the Board that the argument put forward at the Committee for the Executive Office, explaining the geographical spread, is that while the balance of funding looks like it is focused in Belfast, these groups funded have a wide geographic scope. For example, Tides Training, based in Belfast, are currently conducting work in Lurgan.

In addition, he informed the Committee that the overall amount of funding available, across the sector, has reduced over the years. This includes CRC funding, IFI funding, and European funding.

He stated that the CRC response at the Committee meeting explained that CRC currently allocate funding based on open calls and the applications submitted, rather than narrow calls reacting to need. At the meeting, the Chair stated that CRC would welcome a meeting with any MLA to discuss the issue further.

Ms M Braniff joined the meeting

The Chair thanked the CEO and staff for preparing the TEO Committee briefing. The Chair of the TEO Committee commended the detail in the briefing.

The Board asked if the criticism of geographical spread was valid. The Chair explained that, while there are explanations for the apparent lack of geographical spread, there may be an element of validity to the criticism. He reiterated that when the funding schemes open, the funding approved is dependent on organisations applying.

The CEO added that, an obstacle preventing rural groups from applying is capacity. As funding has declined groups such as the Rural Community Network have reported a gap in the capacity of groups to deliver the projects in rural areas. CRC should look to ensure there are no barriers to participation. Currently there is no unequal access to the fund, but there may be an unequal impact.

She added that in recent years CRC's grants include a 'Welcome Statement' particularly seeking applications from areas where the gaps have been identified. These gaps are identified in conjunction with TEO.

The CEO stated that she and the Chair will be meeting with TEO again on the 8th June to discuss the issues raised, the responses to the questions and any potential future action.

The Chair suggested CRC speak to and review TEO, local councils, and other funders implementing the TBUC policy, as well as DAERA's, experiences of funding in rural areas. Mr P Jordan stated that Mr D McNally has completed a piece of work, reviewing council's Good Relations Strategies and reviewing the work of Core Funded groups, geographically. The Chair asked for this to be reviewed and then CRC and the Board can discuss whether a strategic programme could meet this need. The Board agreed with this approach.

The Chair also suggested CRC speak to groups like RCN, to discover what funding streams used to be, but are no longer available to rural communities.

ACTION: CRC to speak to TEO, local councils and other funders implementing the TBUC agenda, and DAERA, to discover their experience of funding in rural areas. CRC will take the outcome of these conversations, as well as the funding gap analysis completed by Damien, review these findings, and consider whether a strategic programme could meet this need.

ACTION: CRC speak to groups like RCN, to discover what funding streams used to be, but are no longer available to rural communities.

The CEO returned to her paper, drawing the Board's attention to page three, which sets out the events CRC have organised following the last meeting. This includes the North Belfast and Core Funding Shared Learning Forum on the 22nd May, and the Funding Delivery working Group meeting on the 19th May.

She added that a meeting of the Decade of Anniversaries Roundtable will take place on Thursday 4th June. Mr J McMaster will be speaking at this meeting. She said that Board members would be welcome to attend and asked that, if members are interested, they should let Mr P Day or Ms H George know.

ACTION: Board members to let Ms H George or Mr P Day know if they are interested in attending the Decade Roundtable Meeting,

With regards the CRC's audits, the CEO explained that CRC's 2019/20 NI Audit Office audit strategy and CRC's 2020/21 internal audit strategy have been approved by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. She noted that the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee would speak about this later in the meeting.

The CEO drew the Board's attention to page four of the report, stating that CRC is continuing work with Heads Together, and that regular Management Team and Staff Team meetings are taking place.

The Board noted this report and thanked the CEO for her update.

2316/20 Fair Employment Monitoring Return

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with CRC's annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return. He informed the Board that, the current profile, set out in the Report, shows that CRC do not need to take any affirmative action.

The Board approved the Return and recommended its submission to Equality Commission NI.

2317/20 Whistleblowing Policy

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with a summary of a review conducted by TEO, into their own Whistleblowing policy. He explained that, as an Arms Length Body of the Executive Office, CRC's own policy is linked to TEOs.

He highlighted the key changes to TEO's arrangements, including adding a process map to the policy, adding detail on the process for handling concerns, provide details on how the fraud and whistleblowing policy are connected, and a new column to be added to the reporting template showing through what medium the issue was raised.

Mr G McKeown stated that he would now conduct a review of CRC's Whistleblowing Policy, draft any necessary changes, and bring an updated draft to a future Board meeting for approval.

The Chair added that 'Whistleblowing' sounds like a formal process that brings up negative connotations. He stated that it should be closely linked with CRC's Dignity at Work Charter, and should include the idea that 'if you see something, say something', making the process seem less formal.

ACTION: Mr G McKeown to consider how the policy could be better operationalised by using the strapline: See something Say something

2318/20 Purchase Order

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with a Purchase Order, setting out CRC's payment due to ECNI for IT Support. This Purchase Order totals £16,280 therefore it requires the Board's approval.

He stated that there was no procurement exercise necessary for this Purchase Order.

Mr G McKeown explained that this contract was put in place in 2017 following a robust business case approval process by The Executive Office and the Department of Finance. He added that this is the final year of the business case, and CRC will begin working on a new business case in due course.

The Board approved this Purchase Order.

2319/20 Management Statement and Financial Memorandum

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with paper outlining proposed changes to CRC's Management Statement and Financial Memorandum. He reminded the Board that, during the December meeting, there was a request that an amendment be made to the MSFM, delegating authority to sign off purchase orders up to £5K to the Chair, in the event of the CEO being off work for more than two weeks.

Mr G McKeown explained that he spoke to TEO regarding this, and they were not content. They thought that the authority should stay within the staffing team.

Mr G McKeown stated that the proposed change is a compromise. The authority to approve purchase orders up to £5K would sit with CRC's Director of Finance, Admin, and Personnel, however, only after review and approval by the Chair.

The Board approved the proposed changes.

2320/20 Financial Position

Mr G McKeown provided the Board with an update on CRC's financial position. He explained that CRC's Management Accounts will be completed at the end of June 2020 and shared with the Board in July. He provided the Board with assurances that all expenditure was in line with the indicative 2020/21 budget and compliant with all CRC procurement procedures.

2321/20 LRA Report Implementation Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Board with a paper outlining the progress to date for the implementation of the LRA Report. She highlighted that a draft Dignity at Work Charter was shared with staff and the Union for comments. These comments were passed on to Heads Together and added to the Charter.

She informed the meeting that the feedback on the draft Charter centred around the implementation, including how actions would be developed.

Ms J Adamson explained that the next steps would be organising a meeting of the LRA Implementation Group and following that the final session with Heads Together.

The Chair asked that, when a complete draft has been approved, that it be shared with the Board.

The Board asked whether Heads Together could hold a closed session with them, at the beginning of a future Board Meeting.

ACTION: Ms J Adamson to ask Heads Together if they could hold a quick session with the Board in a closed session at the beginning of a future Board meeting.

The Chair asked when the LRA would be conducting their temperature check. Ms J Adamson stated that, previous to Covid-19 restrictions, the LRA had indicated that the temperature check would be conducted in July 2020. However, she suspects that this might have changed given the current situation. She stated that she would contact the LRA regarding this issue.

ACTION: Ms J Adamson to contact The LRA to ask when their temperature check would be taking place.

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

2321/20

Pay Remit

Mr G McKeown spoke to Board members about the outstanding Pay Remit and Pension issue. He reminded them that they had discussed the draft Business Case at the last meeting. He stated that he would now contact the Sub-Group to organise a meeting to discuss the revised Business Case.

ACTION: Mr G McKeown to organise a meeting of the Pension Sub-Group.

He added that CRC raised a number of questions with TEO on the Business Case but have not yet received an answer.

Mr G McKeown informed the Board that the 2019/20 Pay Scales have been approved and published by the Department of Finance. These have not been applied to CRC yet.

Mr G McKeown stated that he had contacted TEO asking whether or not, having prepared a Business Case following the Sub-Group review of the 'No Better, No Worse' and 'Equal Pay' issues, whether that would be enough for the 2018/19 Pay Remit to be submitted. No response has been received yet.

The Chair asked Mr G McKeown to put together a list of question submitted to TEO, to which no answer has been received.

ACTION: Mr G McKeown to put together a list of questions submitted to TEO, to which no answer has been received.

The Board thanked Mr G McKeown for this update.

2322/20 **2020/21 Budget Position.**

Mr G McKeown provided the Board with a verbal update on CRC's 2020/21 Budget position.

The Chair stated that he has spoken to TEO regarding the outstanding budget and has asked for formal email assurances. He added that he was content that the correspondence received does provide this assurance.

The Board asked when CRC would expect to draw down money for the CRCD grant. Mr P Jordan stated that the CRCD application assessment process will take at least six weeks from first submission. He added that the groups have been made aware that, at this stage, CRC would not make any awards until the budget is confirmed.

The Board thanked Mr G McKeown for this update.

2323/20 **Community Engagement Update**

Mr P Day provided the Board with a paper updating them on areas in the Community Engagement Directorate.

He informed the Board that CRC facilitated a Shared Learning Forum meeting for Core and North Belfast Funded groups through the Zoom platform. CRC is now reasonably confident at using this format to host meetings. He stated that the Shared Learning Forum had 53 participants and colleagues from TEO

present. The meeting discussed how groups are able to conduct work at the moment, and the obstacles.

He informed the Board that the Engagement Team is considering how to host the next TBUC Engagement Forum online. This may involve for example the use of virtual breakout rooms and the use of the “chat” function. He added that the initial discussions with TEO about hosting this meeting online have been positive.

The Chair stated that he had taken the opportunity to review the work the Engagement Team are putting on the web-site on how groups are continuing to work during the pandemic and found it very enlightening. Mr P Day added that this information is being added to CRC’s social media as it gives organisations examples of how other groups are innovating.

Mr P Day informed attendees that CRC has been increasing online output. This monthly bulletin had more engagement than the previous bulletins. He explained that Mail Chimp has the ability to track who, on the mailing list, has reviewed the bulletin. In response to a question from a Board member, he explained that details of this tracking is included in the terms and conditions, which mailing list members agreed to when they signed up. He stated that this function is useful in discovering what content is most read, and what content is not being read but is used for no other purpose.

2324/20

Good Relations Week

Mr P Day presented the Board with a paper outlining the approach CRC will be taking to hosting Good Relations week in September 2020. Following a conversation with TEO, local Councils, and the GR Week Steering Group, Mr P Day informed the meeting that the Good Relations Week would be taken online, and hosted digitally. The proposed theme is ‘Celebrating Our Journey, Embracing Our Future’.

Mr P Day drew the Board’s attention to the section of the paper setting out the two elements of GR week: archive material/ online resources/online exhibitions; opportunity for new content to be produced. He added that meetings of the Decade Roundtable, the TBUC Engagement Forum, and the GR Awards will all be taking place during Good Relations Week.

Mr P Day informed the Board that registration for GR Week would launch the week beginning 8th June.

The Board thanked Mr P Day for this paper, adding that they were impressed with the plan. They stated that the Covid-19 restrictions may ease by

September, so CRC should have a contingency plan in case some face-to-face events can take place.

A Board member asked what assurances CRC would have that they have the right to use groups IP addresses and that those participating in the events have consented. Mr P Day stated that his would be included in the registration agreement. Mr R Campbell offered to review the registration agreement.

ACTION: When drafting the GR Week registration information, Peter Day to consult with Mr R Campbell around the wording of the registration consent agreement.

2325/20 Funding and Development Update

Mr P Jordan provided the Board with a paper updating on CRC's Funding and Development Directorate.

i) Grants

He informed the Board that CRC's Community Relations/Cultural Diversity Grant has opened for applications. The CRCD Project Officers have already received a number of inquiries from interested groups. Ms H Di Duca and Ms J Hamilton are currently working to close down the 2019/20 grants.

Mr P Jordan informed the meeting that the contracts are being prepared for the Core Fund. Additions were made to the contract regarding Covid-19 restrictions.

Mr P Jordan stated that a Shared Learning Forum took place on the 22nd June. This meeting provided very helpful feedback from funded groups.

Mr D McNally has been working on evaluating the end of year reports from funded groups, discussing issues with funded organisations, and breaking down their work into geographic and thematic areas. The Board asked Mr P Jordan to share Mr D McNally's evaluations with them.

ACTION: Mr P Jordan to share Mr D McNally's Core Funding evaluations with Board members

Mr P Jordan noted that North Belfast groups were demonstrating examples of how CRC's investment has enabled the groups to conduct work with the homeless and most vulnerable, including the setting up of foodbanks and delivery of food parcels. The Chair added that the work of the North Belfast groups is remarkable in the current context, and is a great reflection of the strategic investment CRC has made prior to the pandemic.

ii) Work with TEO

Mr P Jordan informed Board members that he has been working with The Executive Office scoring the District Council Good Relations Plans, and adjudicating on the Central Fund applications.

iii) Development Work

Mr P Jordan stated that the Funding Team is reviewing what has been learnt from the previous funding period, what issues groups have identified, and whether the small grants should be more strategic.

CRC is considering, in partnership with TEO, the possibility of including a welcome statement, specific to council areas, for a more strategic small grant intervention. This is particularly relevant in the light of the queries from the Committee for The Executive Office.

2326/20 Funding Delivery Sub-Group Meeting Update

Mr P Jordan presented the Board with a paper outlining the outcome of CRC's Funding Delivery working Group meeting. He informed the Board that five points emerged from the meeting:

- i) Cataloguing collective experiences – how to affect Good Relations work in the current circumstances and how it will impact the future.
- ii) Finding 'Common Cause'
- iii) Online and Digital Exclusion – keep traditional methods and contact open
- iv) The impact of the current situation of individuals in the sector – stresses and strains. What support can CRC provide to maintain the work and prevent burnout.
- v) What is the intersectionality between Good Relations work and other sectors, such as health, environment.

The CEO stated that these discussions have been very useful, and that Ms H George is currently arranging the next meeting, which will be in June.

2327/20 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mr R Campbell, presented the Board with an update on May's ARAC meeting.

He stated that The Northern Ireland Audit Office presented their 19/20 Audit Strategy. He highlighted that the Committee were concerned that the cost of audit has increased by 10%. The Audit Office had various justifications for this increase, however, the Committee were not content.

Mr R Campbell informed the Board that the Internal Audit 2020/21 Strategy was approved by the Committee. This audit will include: Board effectiveness and corporate governance; Covid-19 arrangements; grant administration and distribution; and a follow up review of 2019/20 recommendations.

He informed the meeting that CRC's 2019/20 internal audit has received a satisfactory rating.

Mr R Campbell explained that the Risk Register will continue to classify 'Resources' as red, as the budget has not been confirmed. Mr C Gardner, TEO, attended the meeting and assured CRC that the email correspondence regarding the budget should provide enough assurances, however, the Committee asked for further official assurances.

The CEO informed the Board that, in the absence of a budget, CRC have been contacting TEO to approve expenditure as it comes up. The Chair added that he is content that CRC have enough cover to proceed in the way they are.

2327/20 Any Other Business

None

2328/20 Date of Next Meeting

The Board discussed whether another meeting should be held before the AGM in September 2020. Members agreed that another meeting should be held at the end of June.

The CEO added that the September AGM meeting will include the signing off of the Annual Report and Accounts, and the conclusion of CRC's annual NIAO audit. She stated that Mr G McKeown will liaise with NIAO to confirm a date for this meeting in due course.

Mr G McKeown added that the Accounts will be complete at the end of July, and will be circulated to Board members. He stated that there is no legal requirement for the Accounts to be signed off by the Board, however, it is good practice.

The CEO reminded the Board that the Board had also agreed to hold a Risk Workshop. Board members agreed that the agenda for the next meeting should include these matters

ACTION: Ms H George to confirm a date with Board members for the next meeting.