

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY SIXTH MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY
RELATIONS COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON FRIDAY 10th DECEMBER 2021 10:30AM
VIA VIDEO CALLING SOFTWARE**

3671/21 Present: Chair Mr M McDonald, Ms M Braniff , Mr R Campbell, Mr J McCallister, Mr M McDonnell, Ms A Simpson, Ms N Tandon.

3672/21 In Attendance: Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr G McKeown (Director of Finance, Admin, and Personnel), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Ms H George (PA to CEO and Board),

3673/21 Observers: Mr D Johnston (CRC's Boardroom Apprentice).

3674/21 Apologies: Ms S McClelland, Ms C Harris, Mr P Day (Director of Engagement).

3675/21 Closed Session with TEO Permanent Secretary Dr D McMahon & Mr R Cushnie

3676/21 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

3677/21 Welcome

The Chair welcomed all attendees to today's meeting.

3678/21 Minutes

Attendees reviewed the minutes of the 225th Board meeting which took place on the 29th October 2021. The Board approved the minutes.

3679/21 Matters Arising

The Chair informed members that there are no outstanding actions or matters arising.

3680/21 Correspondence

The Chair presented the Board with a piece of correspondence he received from The Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland. They have developed a mentoring scheme for students, to shadow an organisation's Board.

The Board reviewed the correspondence and agreed that the Community Relations Council should take part this Public Board Mentoring Scheme.

3681/21 Chair's Update

The Chair informed attendees of a number of meetings he attended, following the previous Board meeting.

The Chair and the CEO attended the first meeting of the Peace Monitoring Report Advisory Group on 4th November. The group are considering their membership, with a view to adding new career academics, more female representation and those from minority ethnic communities to the panel.

On 24th November the Chair and CEO attended an event which presented the learning from a recent report into the RQIA Board resignations.

The Chair met with each CRC Director on the 7th December as part of the Dignity at Work process. The Chair will now arrange to meet with the full Senior Management Team.

The Board thanked the Chair for this update.

3682/21 Board Evaluations and Appraisals

The Chair thanked Board members for submitting their evaluations and appraisals.

Mr G McKeown has conducted a review of the evaluations and will present this at January's Board meeting. The feedback from these evaluations is an opportunity for CRC to learn and understand Board members' views.

The Chair will review the Board Appraisals and issue comments in due course. The appraisals will then be shared with TEO, who will then conduct an appraisal of the Chair.

3683/21 CEO's Update

The CEO thanked the new Permanent Secretary for attending today's meeting, and thanked the Board for their kind words during the session.

i) Covid-19

CRC staff continue to work from home, as the Government guidance advises.

The renewed focus on home working may have an effect on the funded groups as they had begun to hold face-to-face events again. However, the groups have been asked to consider a 'Plan B' in the case of further restrictions being reintroduced. The funding team will continue to monitor this situation.

ii) Government Departments and Committees

The CEO met with Mr R Cushnie on the 2nd December to discuss CRC's Development Paper. TEO have a particular interest in the research element of the proposal. They have not yet issued a formal response.

The CEO and Mr G McKeown met with TEO on 30th November regarding the draft Covid Recovery Plan. Initially 'Good Relations' was not present in the report, however, TEO are working to rectify this. It is likely that this Plan will form the basis of the next Programme for Government, so is important that Good Relations is included.

TEO and CRC met to discuss the Partnership Agreement on 2nd December. When the draft is prepared this will be taken to the Board to review. The Chair added that the current draft is available for Board members, if they wish to review it.

CRC were due to give evidence to the House of Lords Committee on the Protocol in November. Due to the introduction of restrictions in Westminster, the panel session has been postponed.

iii) Funding

The Core Funding Assessment stage has now begun. Board members are asked to avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest with the applicants. Paul Jordan has shared the names of the organisations whose applications are currently being assessed.

The CEO informed the Board that a review is taking place of the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme. The review is currently at the field work stage.

iv) Engagement

The next TBUC Engagement Forum is due to take place on 9th February 2022. The theme of this event will be 'Good Relations and the Private Sector'. All Board members are welcome to attend.

The Good Relations Week Evaluation is now complete. The CEO thanked ASG for their work on this report.

The Good Relations Awards are now open to nominations. Board members were asked to encourage the submission of applications. The Board will discuss the membership of this committee later in this meeting.

CRC and Heritage Lottery Fund will be holding an event on the 22nd February to mark ten years of the Decade of Commemoration Project. This is an opportunity to take a look back at the work and examine what might be applicable to future commemorations, particularly those in living memory.

The Peace Monitoring Report Advisory Group met on the 4th November where the writers presented their plan for the Report. Professor A Guelke has agreed to remain on the Panel as the Chair. The writers aim to have the bulk of the work completed by the 2022 elections, and will allow time following this to make any additions to the Report, before completion later in the year.

The Chair and CEO attended a session setting out the 'Lessons for ALBs following the independent review of RQIA'. The report is available online, and Ms H George will circulate this to Board members.

ACTION: Ms H George to circulate a link to the Report: "The Lessons for ALBs: Independent Review into the circumstances of RQIA Board member resignations."

v) Governance

CRC's Annual Report and Accounts have now been laid with the NI Assembly. They have also been lodged with Companies House and the Charity Commission.

The CEO informed the Board that CRC have begun the recruitment of a Policy Officer, as a temporary position while a member of staff is on secondment with the Communities in Transition Project. The CEO wished the member of staff well in her placement.

vi) Other

The CEO informed the Board that the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition published their report last week. CRC raised the possibility with TEO for an event to be held to discuss the findings, however, TEO advised that the Ministers have not completed their own discussions on the Report yet.

The CEO informed members that a case officer has not yet been assigned by the Information Commissioner regarding the complaint into CRC's response to a Freedom of Information Request. CRC had a meeting with the legal adviser to discuss and prepare all evidence in advance of a request being made. The Board will be kept up to date on all developments related to this case.

The CEO wished Board members a happy and peaceful Christmas break.

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

3684/21

Good Relations Awards 2022 – Membership of Panel

In Mr P Day's absence the CEO informed the Board that the Engagement Team have been discussing adding an independent member to the Good Relations Decision Panel.

The Board discussed this and agreed that a representative from TEO should be added to the panel, along with an independent member from the private sector.

At January's meeting the Board will decide which Board members will sit on this panel.

3685/21

Good Relations Week Evaluation

The Board briefly discussed the Good Relation Week Evaluation. They asked that Mr P Day present a paper at the next Board meeting, setting out the recommendations. The paper should also state whether the recommendation has been accepted or declined, and what the resource/staffing implications might be for the recommendation.

ACTION: Mr P Day to present a paper at the next Board meeting, setting out the recommendations made regarding Good Relations Week 2022, whether CRC have accepted or declined the recommendation, and what the resource/staffing implications are for the recommendation.

The Board noted the Evaluation Report.

3686/21 Community Engagement Sector Update

The Board noted the Community Engagement Sector Report.

3687/21 Purchase Order – Northern Ireland Audit Office Fee

Mr G McKeown presented the Board with a purchase order to cover the fees associated with the Northern Ireland Audit Office's 2020/21 audit of the Community Relations Council.

The fee totals £22,000 and is set out in the Audit Strategy which was approved by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee earlier in the year. This audit has been completed.

This purchase order requires the approval of the Board due to the value of the fee.

The Board approved the purchase order.

Mr G McKeown added that the Annual Report and Accounts have been filed with the NI Assembly, Companies House, and the Charity Commission.

3688/21 Dignity at Work

Ms J Adamson provided the Board with an update on the Dignity at Work project.

A face to face team building session was due to take place in December, however, due to health guidance, the session has been postponed until the New Year.

HeadsTogether drafted and circulated an information sheet to staff, setting out the Dignity at Work accomplishments to date. This includes: the drafting of a Dignity at Work Charter and Policy; management training; workshops for staff members; and the production of a toolkit.

The Chair added that he met with Directors one-to-one this week. He will then meet with the CEO, and the Senior Management Team regarding next steps.

Ms J Adamson added that no further Dignity at Work issues have been raised.

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

3689/21 Pay Remit

Mr G McKeown informed the Board that no further progress has been made on CRC's outstanding Pay Remits. All Pay Remits have been submitted to The Executive Office, and all queries have been responded to.

The Executive Office are to find out if the Pay Remits can be progressed without being reviewed by the Department of Finance. The Board will be notified when there are any further updates.

3690/21 Assurance Statement

Mr G McKeown informed the Board that, as part of the new Partnership Agreement, The Executive Office have revised the processes for ALBs to submit their quarterly Assurance Statements.

Currently the Statements are drafted by the Finance Director, following discussion with the Accounting Officer and Directors. TEO are proposing that the Statements be approved by the Accounting Officer, the Chair of the Board, and the Audit Committee.

This proposal would not ensure reasonable time for the completion of the Assurance Statement, so Mr G McKeown proposed that CRC receive approval of the Statements by the Accounting Officer and then the Chair, then share with the Board once submitted to TEO. If the Chair has any issues with the Statement, it will then be taken to the Audit Committee and the Board for approval. He assured the Board that this proposed approach is within the guidelines.

The Board approved this approach.

3691/21 Core Funding Decision Panels

Mr P Jordan informed the Board that the Core Funding Decision Panel will be meeting on 16th February 2022 to review and score the applications.

There were 33 applications, four of which were ineligible.

Mr R Campbell and Mr M McDonnell volunteered to sit on the review panel.

Mr M McDonald, Ms N Tandon, Mr J McCallister, Ms M Braniff, Ms A Simpson, Ms S McClelland, and Ms C Harris, will therefore sit on the Core Decision Panel.

The Board approved this membership.

Mr P Jordan reminded Board members to complete their Declaration of Interest Forms and return to Ms H George as soon as possible.

ACTION: Board Members to complete their Declaration of Interest Forms and return to Ms H George

3692/21 Funding and Development Update

Mr P Jordan presented an update to Board members on items under the Funding and Development directorate.

The Community Relations/Cultural Diversity grant has approved 74 bids this year. The deadline for submitting applications is the 14th January and all projects will need to be completed by the 31st March.

Mr P Jordan presented the Board with examples of two projects run under the CRCD grant scheme.

On the 18th November CRC ran a Shared Learning Forum event for Core Funded groups and the District Council Good Relations Officers. This meeting allowed GROs the opportunity to hear about projects that could potentially be replicated in their own areas. Attendees also discussed the issues and challenges associated with Good Relations work in the current climate.

The Media Grant application process has now closed. Seven bids were made, which are currently being reviewed by panel members. Members will meet on the 15th December to score the applications and agree who would receive the award.

Mr P Jordan attended an information event held by the Newry, Mourne and Down Council on 9th December. This event was held online with over 70 people in attendance.

The Chair thanked Mr P Jordan and the Funding Team for their work. He suggested that, when the current Covid-19 circumstances change, CRC could invite recipients of the Community Relations,/Cultural Diversity grant to present to the Board.

3693/21 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

i) Update from Chair

Mr J McCallister updated the Board on the recent Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting, which took place on the 25th November.

The Committee reviewed the Risk Register, and agreed that: 'Staff Morale' remains amber; 'Compliance with DoF Guidance FD (DFP) 08/14, 09/18' remains red'; 'Covid-19' remains amber; 'Implementation of cloud based systems' remain amber; and 'FOI' risk remains rated amber.

Mr J McCallister added that there are currently no ongoing fraud investigations.

ii) Minutes

The Board noted the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee minutes for the meetings which took place on the 26th August 2021 and the 19th October 2021.

3694/21 Any Other Business

The Chair thanked the Board and staff for their work over the last year.

He wished all a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year.

3695/21 Date of Next Meeting

2nd February 2022