

Community Relations Council
First Meeting of the reinstated Finance and General Purposes Committee
10th March 2021 2:30pm
Via online video conferencing software

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

In attendance: Ms J Irwin (CRC CEO), Mr G McKeown (CRC Director of Finance, Admin and Personnel), Ms J Adamson (CRC HR Manager), Ms T Wilson (CRC Finance), Ms H George (CRC PA to CEO and Board).

Apologies: None

1. Welcome

CRC Chair, and Chair of the newly reinstated Finance and General Purposes Committee welcomed members to this committee.

He reminded attendees that the aim of this Committee is to review any finance, governance, or HR issues, and make recommendations to the Board.

2. Matters Arising

None

3. Conflicts of Interest

The Chair asked Board members to make any declarations of interest that may be in conflict with any items on the agenda.

No Board members had any conflicts to declare.

4. Finance and General Purposes Training

The Chair stated that, following appraisal meetings in 2020, it was drawn to the Chair's attention that Board members would welcome and benefit from further financial training.

Mr G McKeown stated that he would be putting together a presentation on finance, and deliver that to Board members in due course. A similar presentation will be made to Board members on HR and Governance. The Chair asked for the financial training to particularly focus on the scrutiny of Management Accounts.

5. Closed Session

The Committee held a closed session to discuss a staff member's grading query. Ms H George and Ms T Wilson left the meeting, and returned once this discussion ended.

6. Finance and General Purposes Overview

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with the draft Committee Terms of Reference. The Chair queried the wording around the membership of the Committee, and whether

the Chair should always Chair this Committee. Mr G McKeown stated that he would review this issue and feedback at the next Committee meeting.

ACTION: Mr G McKeown to review the wording of the Terms of Reference, specifically around the membership of the Committee.

Members agreed that the F&GP Committee would take on the function of the Pension Sub-Group, and the Sub-Group would come to an end.

Mr G McKeown then presented the Committee with a document setting out the schedule of items to be discussed at the Committee meetings, which will be held quarterly.

The Committee noted these papers.

7. Quarterly Delivery Plan

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with CRC's Quarterly Delivery Plan. The Plan shows CRC's progress in delivering the 2020/21 Business Plan.

The summary page sets out CRC's three corporate objectives, and uses RAG indicators to show that all 74 targets have been met, or are on schedule to be met by the end of the financial year.

Mr G McKeown informed the Committee that four targets within the Plan have not been met. These four targets, however, have all been suspended due to changes in policy or the objectives, and therefore are no longer applicable.

The Committee then discussed the outcomes and how CRC can better highlight the impact they are having in the sector, and region wide.

The CEO reminded the Committee that detail on the impact CRC has on the sector and regionally are collected by the Funding and Development Team and regularly included in their Board updates, but this information is not included in the quarterly reports.

Mr G McKeown informed the Committee that, as part of the development of CRC's 2021/22 Business Plan, the Senior Management Team, in consultation with their staff, have developed a suite of Key Performance Indicators. This Draft Plan will be presented to the Board on 11th March.

The CEO added that, at the Committees request, CRC will convert the details on the Delivery Plan into an OBA (Outcomes Based Accountability) scorecard, highlighting where the gaps lie, and feed this into the 2021/22 data capturing exercise.

ACTION: CRC to produce an OBA scorecard for 2021/22 business plan delivery for future F&GP Committee meetings.

The Committee thanked Mr G McKeown for presented, and noted this paper.

8. Management Accounts

Ms T Wilson presented the Committee with CRC's Management Accounts for the 2020/21 financial year, up to the January 2021, and projections up to 31st March 2021.

She highlighted to the Committee that CRC's budget for the year is £3.186million. There is currently a projected underspend of £25K which is within the 1.5% tolerance. She stated that these are resource and accrual based accounts.

Mr T Wilson added that all procurement has been completed in line with CRC, DoF, and CPD guidance.

The Committee enquired as to why the percentage underspends for some areas was high. Ms T Wilson explained that the underspends in CRC's accounts mainly relate to Covid-19. These underspends were similarly felt by funded groups. CRC reallocated these underspend to other areas of the budget, including Pathfinder, Publication, and Media Grants. Mr G McKeown assured the Committee that this reallocation is allowed as they are within the DEL – Resource budget line.

Mr G McKeown added that CRC's projected spend on overheads is currently 15.6%.

The Committee thanks Ms T Wilson for presenting and noted this paper.

9. Vouching and Verifications Procedures

Mr G McKeown informed the Committee that CRC have drafted new procedures for vouching and verification. He presented these new procedures to the Committee. These procedures were produced following a review as part of the 2019 external audit. The Northern Ireland Audit Office included a recommendation to review and update the procedures in The Report to Those Charged with Governance.

The new procedures include: a move of the vouching function from the Funding Directorate to the Finance Directorate; the segregation of duties; more clarity on the rules for funded groups; efficient claims verification process; and improving the customer service for grant awardees.

These procedures will be reviewed by internal audit in March.

The Committee thanked Mr G McKeown for presenting these robust new procedures.

10. Business Cases

i) DOF 10/20 Pay Remit Approval Process and Guidance

Mr G McKeown provided the Committee with an update on CRC's Business Case to resolve CRC's compliance with DOF 10/20 Pay Remit Approval Process and Guidance.

The Pension Sub-group met in January and asked for the following updates: an analysis comparing the cost of the preferred option included in the July 2020 business case with the exemption option; legal advice on the exemption option; an analysis of those currently in receipt and those not in receipt of the 6% pension allowance by gender, age and headcount.

Mr G McKeown provided the Committee with these details in a closed session.

The Chair met with Mr M Browne, TEO, to discuss this issue. The Chair and CEO will continue to liaise with TEO to see how to move this issue forward.

The Committee noted the paper.

ii) Accommodation

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with a Business Case setting out the options when CRC's Memorandum of Tenancy and Occupancy with Equality Commission for Northern Ireland ends in July 2021.

Mr G McKeown set out the two options, and informed the Committee that the preferred choice is that CRC remains in Equality House until 2024.

The Committee suggested Mr G McKeown update the Business Case's risk assessment to explain that ECNI may not be the landlords of Equality House after 2024.

The Committee noted the paper.

11. LRA Implementation Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with a paper updating on the implementation of the recommendations following the LRA report.

The LRA Implementation Sub Group Met on the 5th February where a discussion on the Terms of Reference took place. It was agreed that the Terms of Reference should be updated to include only the remaining work to be completed from the original LRA report, and the work to be completed arising from the LRA Temperature Check.

The Meeting discussed the role of the 'Dignity at Work Champion' and decided to revise responsibilities of the position and include that the role would be rotating.

A revised Dignity at Work Implementation plan has been shared with the Union for comment. No feedback has been received.

Mr J Adamson, in conjunction with HeadsTogether has drafted a new Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure. This is currently out for staff consultation. HR is considering how best to deliver training on this policy, due to the current Covid-19 restrictions.

The Senior Management Team continue to receive training and coaching sessions with HeadsTogether.

Ms J Adamson assured the Board that all staff are given the opportunity to raise any issues at all staff meetings and team meetings, and can raise anything with the HR Manager, the CEO, and the Chair.

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that the next Staff Meeting will discuss how to implement a number of goals set out in the Dignity at Work Charter

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

12. Sickness Absence Report

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with the Sickness Absence up to December 2020. The papers shows a large reduction in sick absences in 2020, compared to the previous year.

The number of days lost per person due to sickness decreased from 7.3 days (up to December 2019) down to 4 days (up to December 2020). The total cost of sickness has decreased from £32.5K (December 2019) to £14k (December 2020).

The Committee noted this paper.

13. Disability Plan and Equality Scheme Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with and update on CRC's Disability Action Plan and Equality Scheme.

The Committee discussed accessibility issues related to online working and hosting of events. They asked the DFAP Team to consider this as part of the 2021/22 Plan and Strategy.

The Committee noted this paper.

14. Health and Safety

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that CRC recently underwent an annual health and safety audit, including a review of the Covid-19 health and safety procedures. A satisfactory rating was given.

The Committee asked how CRC can guarantee health and safety at home. Ms J Adamson stated that health and safety is still the responsibility of the employer while working from home. A risk assessment was carried out and consultations with staff on equipment needs took place.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for this update.

15. Premises Committee Update

Ms J Adamson presented attendees with details of Equality House's Premises Committee meeting.

The organisations are working toward a move to online cloud servers, and planning for the return to the office. Ms J Adamson and Mr G McKeown are making preparations for the return to the office, however, this is not imminent and is dependent on public guidance.

16. Any Other Business

None

17. Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed