

Community Relations Council
20th January 2022 10am
Via online video software

1. **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair of CRC Board), Ms A Simpson (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Ms N Tandon (Board Member)
2. **In Attendance:** Ms J Irwin (CEO), Mr G McKeown (Director of Finance, Admin, and Personnel), Ms T Wilson (Finance Manager), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager) Ms H George (PA to CEO and Board)
3. **Apologies:** None

4. Minutes

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the 27th October 2021 Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting and agreed that they were a true and accurate reflection.

5. Matters Arising

None

6. Conflict of Interests

The Committee were asked to bring to attendees' attention any conflicts relating to the agenda items.

No conflicts were raised.

7. Quarterly Delivery Report

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with CRC's 2021/22 Quarter Three Delivery Report.

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with the overview showing CRC's performance against the corporate outcomes. He stated that all outcomes are on target to be completed by the end of the financial year.

He presented the Committee with a Balanced Score Card, which shows: 'How Much CRC Did'; 'How Well CRC Did It; and 'If Anyone is Better Off'. Mr G McKeown is working with the Funding Team and TEO to help develop the qualitative section of the Score Card. CRC already collect relevant data and are considering what else could be asked of groups at application stage to assist with the completion of the Balanced Score Card.

Mr G McKeown added that all Key Performance Indicators set out in the Balanced Score Card are in line, with the exception of the indicator related to CRC's subscriber list. There was a 0.04% decrease in Newsletter subscribers over the last quarter. This was due to a technical process that removed inactive users.

The Chair informed the Committee that at an Arm's Length Body forum, held by The Executive Office on Wednesday 19th January, the issue of data collection and measuring outcomes was raised.

The Committee thanked Mr G McKeown for presenting this update and noted the paper.

8. Management Accounts

Ms T Wilson presented the Committee with CRC's Management Accounts up to 31st December 2021.

Ms T Wilson informed the Committee that the total budget at the start of the financial year was £3.312million, with a successful in year monitoring round bid of £75K.

The current projected underspend is £14.5k which is within the 1.5% tolerance.

CRC are on target to direct 85% of the budget to front line good relations activity.

She assured the Committee that all procurement and spending was in line with the procurement policy and grant Letters of Offer conditions.

The Committee thanked Ms T Wilson for presenting and noted the Management Accounts.

9. Pay Remit

Mr G McKeown informed the Committee that CRC have received no further updated from The Executive Office on the progress of the Pay Remit process.

All Pay Remits have been submitted to TEO for review. A query was passed on to CRC in November, which was answered immediately.

TEO are seeking a response from the Department of Finance, asking who has responsibility for approving the four outstanding Pay Remits.

The Committee expressed concern for this continued delay. The Chair agreed to write to TEO again, to raise this issue. Mr G McKeown will draft a letter for the Chair to review.

ACTION: Mr G McKeown to draft a letter on behalf of the Chair, raising the Committee's concern for the delay in approving the four outstanding Pay Remits.

The Committee thanked Mr G McKeown for this update.

10. Vouching and Verification Procedure Updates

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with a number of proposed changes to the Vouching and Verification Procedures

The procedures were implemented in 2021 and have been working well. Following a review with the Vouching and Verification Team and feedback from the Fund Team, a number of improvements were identified.

The Committee approved the amendments to the Vouching and Verification Procedures.

11. Staff Handbook

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with a number of proposed amendments to CRC's Staff Handbook.

These changes have been proposed to align with best practice.

The paper sets out the major and minor changes proposed.

An informal consultation with the Union has taken place, and they indicate that they have no concerns with the changes.

The Committee recommended the Board review and approve the amendments to the Staff Handbook.

The document will be presented at the next Board meeting.

Following the documents presentation to the Board, the Staff Handbook will then go to Unite the Union for formal consultation.

12. Dignity at Work Implementation Group Update

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with an update on CRC's Dignity at Work Implementation Plan.

Staff are due to complete team building training, however, this has been delayed due to Covid restriction.

Staff have an opportunity at every Staff Meeting to raise any issues or concerns, and are able to speak to the HR Manager about issues at any time. Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that no issues have been raised.

The CEO added that during Team Meeting, Directors check staff's morale and feedback at Senior Management Team Meetings.

The Chair reminded the Committee that he met with each Director and then the whole Management Team to discuss staff morale, and intends to meet with staff again in due course.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for presenting this update.

13. Hybrid Working Policy

Mr G McKeown presented CRC's Hybrid Working Policy.

This policy is in line with the NI Civil Service's policy, and was produced in consultation with staff. The policy has been discussed with the Union.

The Committee approved the Hybrid Working Policy and thanked Mr G McKeown for presenting.

The paper will now go to Unite the Union for formal consultation.

14. Sustainability at CRC

Ms H George presented the Committee with a paper setting out a proposal for CRC to become more sustainable and environmentally conscious.

She reminded the Committee that the Board asked for the environment to be included in CRC's current Strategic Plan.

Ms N Tandon welcomed this paper, informing the Committee that her organisation is similarly reviewing their environmental responsibility. The CEO asked if Ms N Tandon could work with CRC in the future to help encourage other funded groups to implement an environmental pledge. Ms N Tandon said she would be happy to do so.

Mr M McDonnell added that there is a direct link between CRC's Hybrid Working Policy, particularly around the reduction in staff commuting to the office, and this environment paper.

The Committee recommended the Sustainability at CRC paper be presented to and approved by the Board at the upcoming meeting.

The paper will be presented to the Board in February 2022.

The CEO added that, with the approval of the Board, Ms H George will begin meeting with relevant organisations in the sector to discuss further actions CRC could take, and discuss the interconnectedness of Good Relations and the environment.

15. Sickness Absence Report

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with CRC's Sickness and Absence Report, up to December 2021.

She highlighted that two staff off on long term sick have now returned to work.

The sickness absence for December 2021 has increased compared to the previous period. This can be attributed to Covid-19.

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

16. Mobile Device Policy

Mr G McKeown presented to the Committee CRC's updated Mobile Device Policy.

This policy supports CRC's new Microsoft 365 services and Hybrid Working Policy, and is aligned to the NICS policy.

Mr G McKeown assured the Committee that the policy update complies with current best practice.

The Committee approved the Mobile Device Policy and thanked Mr G McKeown for presenting.

17. Microsoft 365 Implementation Update

Mr G McKeown provided the Committee with an update on the implementation of Microsoft 365 services.

Phase one, related to the move of emails onto the cloud, is complete. Phase two, related to the telephony systems moving online, is underway. A contract has been awarded to a telecommunications business, with training for staff taking place next week.

Phase three relates to the move of files from CRC's servers. CRC have completed files maps and have now implemented a consistent file naming convention. The Microsoft 365 Project Team meet regularly to discuss the implementation of this file move.

CRCs is working closely within colleagues in ECNI to progress the project. CRC is update to with its actions.

The Committee asked Mr G McKeown to explain the benefits of this change. Mr G McKeown stated that the move will enable staff to access their files wherever they are without the use of VPN. The changes will assist with the paperless office move, and the Hybrid Working Policy. Microsoft Team also offers more staff collaboration functions than the current system.

The Committee thanked Mr G McKeown for this update.

18. Health and Safety Update

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that staff have the opportunity to raise any Health and Safety concerns during Staff Meetings, and to the HR Manager at any time.

A review of the Covid-19 procedures is completed regularly and updated when necessary. CRC work with colleagues in ECNI to ensure compliance with all public health guidance.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for this update.

19. Premises Committee Update

Ms J Adamson updated the Committee on the work on the Equality House Premises Committee.

All maintenance needs are up to date and the group are considering installing additional air conditioning units in Equality House meetings rooms.

After an open tender, Aramark have been awarded the contract for Equality House building services.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for this update.

20. Updates to Freedom of Information Policy and Model Publication Scheme

Mr G McKeown informed the Committee that a review of the Freedom of Information Policy and the Model Publication Scheme was conducted, and a number of proposed amendments presented to attendees.

Mr G McKeown confirmed that the policy is consistent with guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office and the Publication Scheme is aligned to Information Commissioner's Model Publication scheme.

The changes were summarised by Mr G. McKeown, including updates to addresses, contact details, cost of FOI applications, making alternative formats available for free for those with an impairment and ensuing consistency between both documents.

The Committee reviewed the updates to the Freedom of Information Policy and the Model Publication Scheme and approved the amendments.

21. Any Other Business

The Chair, the Committee, and the CEO thanked Mr G McKeown for his work over the last six years. They congratulated him on his new job, and wished him well for the future.

The CEO added that processes have been put in place to oversee the transition and recruitment of a new Director of Finance, Admin, and Personnel.

Mr. G McKeown noted his thanks to the support he has received from the other members of the DFAP team and for the guidance provided the F&GP Committee.

22. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee will take place the first quarter of the next financial year.

23. Closed Session – Accountancy Allowance Policy

Staff members left the meeting and the Committee held a closed session to review a draft Accountancy Allowance Policy.