

Community Relations Council
3rd Meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee
27th October 2021 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 11th June 2021 Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting and agreed that they were a true and accurate reflection.

5. Matters Arising

Mr G McKeown informed the committee that, following the suggestion at the previous F&GP Committee meeting, the Annual Report and Accounts have been updated to provide further detail on the pension guidance compliance issue and the going concern.

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 Two 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 and the CEO drafted a suite of key performance indicators that can be used to measure these questions. The Score Card KPIs look at CRC's achievements in terms of

grant application processing, grant awards, media engagement, events held, financial management, risk management, compliance, and competencies.

Mr G McKeown stated that he is working with the Funding Team to consider possible KPI's for the 'Is Anyone Better Off' question. They will look at how to measure: the number of people have engaged with another community; how that engagement has improved understanding; and has that engagement led to long term relationships'.

The Committee agreed that it will be straightforward to collect the data to answer the quantitative questions, however, the qualitative will be difficult to measure in a meaningful way. CRC will engage with TEO, funded groups, and other data sources to compile response to this question.

The CEO added that CRC will report on Sections 1 and 2 of the Score Card quarterly, and on section 3 annually.

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

8. Employee Grading Query

The Committee had a confidential discussion relating to an employee grading issue. Ms H George and Ms T Wilson left the meeting for this discussion and returned once completed.

9. Annual Report and Accounts

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with CRC's 20/21 Annual Report and Accounts, following the completion of the audit by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Mr G McKeown presented the report, highlighting the following items:

- The Key Risks continue to be: Compliance with DoF Guidance; Covid-19; and Staff Morale
- Page 13 contain the Performance Report
- The status of projects and targets were set out on page 14 of the Report
- The Financial Summary on page 25 shows that there was an in-year adjustment of £1,700 which CRC identified
- Page 28 contains the Directors Reports
- Page 58 includes 'The Certificate of the Controller and Auditor General to Northern Ireland'.

Mr G McKeown added that CRC have received the 'Report to Those Charged With Governance' from the Northern Ireland Audit Office, which identified only one finding, around CRC's compliance with DoF Guidance. He assured the Committee that this was a positive outcome, as the only recommendation relates to an issue outside of CRC's control.

Ms T Wilson then presented the Committee with the Financial Report, set out in the Annual Report and Accounts. She highlighted the following points:

- CRC received an opening budget of £3.169mill during the year
- There was an underspend of £31k, which was within the £1.5 tolerance.
- The Report shows a salary increase on the previous year, due to the recruitment of a Project Officer and the creation of a new post: Vouching and Verification Officer. CRC also brought in an agency staff members to assist with the grants management for two months during 2020/21.
- Grant claw back during 20/21 was £20K, a reduction on the previous year.
- The Annual Report and Accounts also shows an accrual and deferred income of £133K, which has been set aside for payment of the outstanding Pay Remits.

The Committee congratulated Mr G McKeown and Ms T Wilson for their success over the year, demonstrated in the Annual Report and Account. The CEO thanked the DFAP Team and the Funding team for their work.

The Committee recommended the Annual Report and Accounts to the Board for approval. The Board will hold their Annual General Meeting on Friday 29th October, to review the Account.

10. Management Accounts

Ms T Wilson presented the committee with CRC's Management Accounts, up to the 31st March 2022.

CRC' had an opening budget of £3.312million with additional £41K through the June Monitoring Round.

The projected expenditure to 31st March 2022 is currently on track and line with the budget

There is a projected underspend of £15K which is within the 1.5% tolerance.

85% of the budget is projected to go towards direct delivery.

All procurement was conducted in line with CRC and CPD procurement policy.

The Committee thanked Ms T Wilson for this presentation and noted the Report.

11. Correspondence from TEO

Mr G McKeown informed the Committee that TEO were in contact today, asking CRC to provide financial projections to support a resource bid for the upcoming three financial years. TEO have asked for this piece of work to be returned by the end of the day.

The CEO reassured the Committee that CRC's response to this request will be based on the Strategic Plan and the Business Plan. The bids above baseline have to be linked to the Covid-

19 Recovery Plan's focus: Sustainable Economic Development; Green Growth and Sustainability; Tackling Inequalities; and Health of Population.

The CEO informed the Committee of how CRC will present their bids, linked to Community Relations and everyday lives:

- Sustainable Economic Development – Engaging with the private sector
- Green Growth and Sustainability – Community Relations and the environment
- Tackling Inequalities – Community Relations and minority ethnic social cohesion
- Health and Population – Community Relations and health.

The Committee welcomed this proposal by the CEO, and congratulated her for putting it together at such short notice.

12. Pay Remit

Mr G McKeown updated the Committee on the progress of CRC's outstanding Pay Remits.

The 2018/19 and 2019/20 Pay Remits were submitted to TEO earlier in the year. CRC have replied to all questions and comments related to these Remits, and await further updates from TEO.

The 2020/21 and 2021/22 Pay Remits have also been submitted to TEO. TEO have recently replied with a number of queries. Mr G McKeown will be responding to these within the next week.

The Committee thanked Mr G McKeown for this update.

13. Memorandum of Tenancy and Occupation

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with a contract of tenancy drafted by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The contract proposes that the tenancy is extended until 2026.

The Committee recommended the extension of the MOTO. Mr G McKeown will now draft a purchase order and present this at the upcoming Board meeting.

14. Vouching and Verification Report

Mr G McKeown presented the Committee with an update on the implementation of the new Vouching and Verification Procedures.

The majority of Core Funded Groups have completed their Verification Reports and have illustrated that they have reasonable controls in place. One Core Group will receive further correspondence from CRC, as they remain 'unrated'.

The finalised Project Spend Claim Forms have been circulated to funded groups, and training sessions have been held. The majority of claims have been submitted in a timely manner.

The Committee noted this report.

15. Dignity at Work Implementation Group Meeting

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with an update on the Dignity at Work Implementation.

A team building session is due to take place before the end of the calendar year. This session would preferably take place in person, however, is dependent on Covid-19 restrictions and case numbers.

The Dignity at Work Charter is now contained within CRC's Staff Handbook. A staff member recently felt comfortable raising an issue through the new procedures, which shows staff's confidence in the process.

Dignity at Work continues to be an item on all Staff Meeting agendas, and colleagues are free to come directly to the HR Manager or the Dignity at Work Champion with any concerns.

The Chair informed the Committee that, as the Dignity at Work Champion, he met with staff to discuss the current mood. Staff engaged well in the session and expressed their confidence in the new procedures. The Chair then spoke to M A Barrett, followed by a meeting with the CEO. The Chair will meet with individual Directors and then the full Management Team in due course.

He added that the Dignity at Work Champion will meet with staff every quarter, until the scheme is fully operational, and will then instead meet staff twice a year.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson and the Chair for this update.

16. Agile Working Policy

Mr G McKeown informed the Committee that CRC drafted an Agile Working Policy, and presented it to staff for consultation.

However, the Northern Ireland Civil Service has now produced a draft Hybrid Working Policy, which is out to consultation with the Union.

CRC will now compare the Agile Working Policy with the Civil Service's policy, for consistency and alignment.

The Committee noted this update.

17. Sickness Absence Report

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with CRC's Sickness Absence Report, up to 30th September.

There has been an increase in short-term and long-term absence compared to the same quarter last year. The total days lost per person has increased to 5.6 days. This increase is due to employee absence following the Covid-19 vaccine and Covid-19 related absences.

One member of staff is currently off on long term absence.

The Committee noted this report.

18. Disability Plan and Equality Scheme Update

Ms J Adamson updated the Committee on the implementation of CRC's Equality Scheme.

Staff have recently completed training on Equality Diversity and Inclusion, and Unconscious Bias.

The Engagement Team conducted work to ensure the inclusivity of events during Good Relations Week 2021. The team also carried out an accessibility review of CRC's website and an accessibility statement will be added in due course.

CRC's existing recruitment & selection practices have been reviewed, and CRC will now use the guaranteed interview scheme. Under the scheme CRC guarantee an interview to anyone with a disability whose application meets the minimum criteria for the job.

The implementation of the scheme will continue to be monitored.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for this update.

19. Microsoft 365 Implementation

Mr G McKeown informed the Committee that CRC continue to work on the implementation of new cloud based systems.

Phase one of the project is complete, and Phase two and three are underway.

A Phase Three Project Group has been established to oversee the migration of files to the new cloud bases system.

The Committee thanked Mr G McKeown for this update.

20. Health and Safety

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that a review of CRC's Covid-19 Action Plan took place recently, and showed that all measures continue to work well. CRC continue to following public guidance and guidance set out by ECNI on the use of Equality House.

Staff have completed two Display Screen Equipment questionnaires, to assess their working from home needs, and the results of this survey have been implemented.

Health and Safety continues to be an item on all Staff Meeting agendas.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson for this update.

21. Premises Committee

Ms J Adamson updated the Committee on the latest meeting of the Equality House Premises Committee.

The group was advised on the procurement progress for the Facilities Management contract specifically in respect of procurement strategy, tender, panel, data protection and risk assessments and noted all are progressing to plan.

Mr G McKeown added that he is working with the other Arm's Length Bodies in the building on reducing heating, lighting and electricity costs, and the possibility of a shared space for staff to work.

The Committee noted this report.

22. Any Other Business

None

23. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee will take place in January 2022.