

**MINUTES OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY FIRST MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
COUNCIL BOARD HELD ON FRIDAY 8TH MARCH<sup>TH</sup> 2024 10:30AM  
AT CRC OFFICES.**

**3987/24**      **Present:** Mr M McDonald (Chair), Mr J McCallister (Board Member), Ms N Tandon (Board Member), Ms A Simpson (Board Member), Mr M McDonnell (Board Member), Mrs S McClelland (Board Member) Mr R. Campbell, Ms M Braniff

**3988/24**      In Attendance: Dr J Irwin (CEO), Mr P Day (Engagement Director), Ms U Kelly (DFAP Director), Mr P Garrity(Finance Manager), Mr B McDonald (Funding Director) Ms J Adamson (HR Manager) Ms N Woodside (EA to CEO and Board).

**3989/24**      **Observers:** Mr D Mercer (Boardroom Apprentice)

**Apologies:** none recorded

**3990/24**      **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*

Mr Campbell works at the same firm as CRC's legal advisors, assisting with the FOI set out in the Risk Register and the tribunal case. There is no conflict as Mr R Campbell was not involved in the procurement process and is not involved in these legal matters.

**3991/24**      **Welcome**

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**3992/24**      **Minutes**

Members reviewed the minutes of the 240<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board which took place on 26th January 2024. The Board approved these minutes.

**3993/24**      **Matters Arising**

On the matters arising document, 3 actions are completed and 2 are continuous. Members were reminded that Mr P Garrity has requested all members submit expense claims as soon as possible as we are close to year end.

The Chair reported the Peace Monitoring report was presented to the board on the Strategic Planning Day, that took place on 14th February 2024 at Lisburn Civic Centre.

The Chair thanked Ms N Woodside for collating all the completed appraisal and evaluation forms. The feedback was consistent excluding one response which the Chair would be happy to discuss with the member. The general overview is happy across the Board.

The Chair reminded Board members about the T:BUC Engagement Forum, which is being held at Mossley Mill on Tuesday 12th March 2024. It is anticipated that Ministers will be there.

**3994/24      Correspondence**

Correspondence received from The Executive Office in relation to nominations. Mrs N Tandon and Mr M McDonnell volunteered to discuss this with the Chair after the meeting.

**3995/24      Chair's Update**

The Chair provided an update on events he had been involved in since the previous meeting.

The last Board meeting was on 26th January 2024, since then on 5th February 2024 the Chair attended a virtual meeting on the Good Relations Awards, the Board/Staff Strategic Planning Day on 14<sup>th</sup> February and the Pension Sub-group meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> February.

Chair thanked all who participated and collated information for the Good Relations Awards and advised the awards will be presented next week at the T:BUC Forum.

**3996/24      Chief Executive Officer's Update**

The CEO's report had been circulated with the papers. The CEO highlighted several points from the report:

She reminded members that a first draft of the new Strategic Plan was agreed at the last Board meeting and CRC held the Strategic Planning Day on 14th February 2024. The CEO hoped that the presentations on evaluation methods, the newly published 6<sup>th</sup> Peace Monitor Report, the feedback from funded groups and the TEO review of the policy landscape had been helpful. The CEO noted that a summary of the day was included in the papers for this Board meeting and would be discussed in more detail under the next item on the agenda.

The CEO thanked everyone who participated on the day.

In relation to the operational plan which the Board approved at the last meeting on 26th January 2024, it was submitted to the Executive Office on 31st January 2024. No feedback has been received so far and TEO was reminded of this at the recent Accountability and Liaison meeting. Feedback will be provided to the Board once received.

At present there is no update available on the budget for the new financial year, this was also raised at the Accountability meeting, and we have been advised it is likely to be later in April before formal notification will be received. In the absence of a budget at the opening of the new financial year CRC will seek authorisation to incur expenditure.

On staffing the CEO reminded members that Ms U Kelly is leaving at the end of the month to take a new position in Omagh. The CEO reported that everyone was sorry to be losing Una but understood the importance of being closer to home. Mr P Garrity, albeit being a temporary agency worker, has advised he is happy to stay on with us. This will provide continuity in relation to our finance

department and his experience will ensure a high standard of financial reporting, including the annual accounts as was the case last year. The Board thanked Mr. Garrity for his continued commitment to the organisation.

The CEO reported that the recruitment exercise for the Core Fund Officer was underway, and she hoped there would be good news to report soon.

In the Funding and Development team Helen De Luca is now on maternity leave; the Board and staff wish her all the best and look forward to hearing good news about her in due course. Very unfortunately her colleague Jude Hamilton, who is the other small grant officer has just gone on sick leave, we don't know how long for yet. Brian McDonald now has only one member of staff, our evaluation officer Damien McNally. However, one temporary agency worker is due to start as a grant officer on 11<sup>th</sup> March.

Mrs S McClelland asked the CEO if CRC is behind on core grants due to the staffing levels. CEO advised that the assessment process had been delayed slightly whenever CRC lost a temporary agency worker who was helping with assessments but all is now back on track. The small grants scheme has now closed for 2023-24.

CEO informed the Board that the new Verification Officer, Niamh McGuire starts on Monday 11th March 2024.

CEO reports Ms N Woodside has settled in well as Ms H George's maternity leave cover and thanked her for her ongoing work.

The CEO noted that further details are included in the staffing report. She also noted that many other ALBs and public and private sector bodies are in a very similar position with respect to staffing difficulties. The CEO recorded her thanks to all staff and agencies workers for continuing to work hard together through this period of staff shortages.

The CEO reminded members that CRC and the Victim and Survivors Service have been asked to organise funders' form on behalf of TEO. An initial planning meeting took place on 7th February 2024 and the first full meeting of the group is planned for 3<sup>rd</sup> May. The Board will be updated on any progress that is made with this.

The CEO noted there is a correction on page 2 of her report as the meeting due to take place on 7th March 2024 with Paula Bradshaw, Chair of Committee of The Executive Office was cancelled. Her office has advised that this will be rearranged.

Due to our financial position this year, the media scheme remains closed and will now not open at all this year. A full report on other funding matters will be provided later in the meeting.

The CEO reminded members that the Engagement Forum is set for 12th March 2024 in Mossley Mill and the Good Relations Awards will take place at this event. All are welcome.

The Chair thanked CEO for her update and added to the comments on Ms U Kelly leaving CRC. He wished her very well for the future and recognised that it was a great opportunity.

The CEO referred members to the paper which she had circulated and thanked all members of Board who attended and all staff who helped organise the event. She hoped members had found the presentations interesting, and as a result were able to take a wider look at the issues funding groups are facing which included financial issues.

The CEO advised that a link to the presentations is provided in her paper for those who were unable to attend.

The CEO advised there is the great potential to use some ideas coming from the models that were discussed at the Strategic Planning Day. It has been agreed that Board member Mrs M Braniff would reconvene the Funding Subgroup to take the work on evaluation models forward. It is anticipated this will start after the Easter break.

It was agreed that as a small funder CRC should continue to maintain the balance of using its own funds but also the Engagement work to influence others to take forward some of these ideas as well.

The CEO invited anyone with any additional ideas to please forward them to be incorporated into discussions on the final draft of the strategy.

In relation to the presentation given by the Executive Office at the planning day, the CEO advised that TEO was hopeful to have a Programme for Government and the reviewed T:BUC strategy available by early May. If this timeline is correct, it was agreed that it would be appropriate to carrying out the consultation on CRC strategy after this to allow for any final amendments linked to the wider policy landscape.

The Chair noted, if we get a revised T:BUC strategy that has a different landscape, it may be worth considering a complete redo of our strategy. He noted that it would be useful if we could gather some more feedback from TEO around this.

The CEO reassured the Chair that regular contact is maintained and part of the reason for TEO being present at the Strategic Planning Day was to ensure CRC remains aligned and informed as the policy progresses.

The Chair thanked the CEO for the update.

## **3998/24            Funding and Development**

Mr B McDonald reported that the CRCD scheme closed on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024, and CRC increased the budget substantially have spent the majority of it. The focus of the next few months is to close grants down for 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

A number of reprofiles were requested and Mr McDonald took members through the issues that have emerged in this financially difficult year for some groups.

Mr McDonald proposed was to offer a small cost-of-living payment to Core Funded groups, subject to there being funds available in the last months of the financial year. To distribute this payment, we will accept invoices to the sum of one thousand pounds of their running cost budget. This will ensure that CRC is redeploying its full funds in the remainder of the year.

The Board agreed this was a reasonable, open and fair approach.

Mr B McDonald reported in terms 2024/25, the Core Fund Scheme was currently the focus. There are 33 applications to be reviewed. He was due to have peer reviews yesterday, but the temporary assessment officer had a family bereavement, and this has caused a delay. However, the intention is that the Board will have all relevant information by Friday 15th March 2024. There will be a few papers such as the agenda for the assessment day meeting which will be circulated the following week in advance of the Board meeting.

Mr B McDonald reported that CRC has had to use the written procedure more than usual, but it has been necessary due to the number of time determined decisions as we approach the end of year. Mr McDonald noted the paper he had provided for this Board meeting to provide reassurance on this matter. The Board thanked Mr McDonald for the paper and after discussion agreed that it was content. Further discussions could take place later in the year in relation to the percentage levels for virement requests; conditions in relation to virement requests; and the establishment of a group of Board members to approve emergency requests.

The Chair thanked Brian and his team for their work. Board members noted the challenge with having less staff than normal and recognised this was even more challenging because Brian is still new to the role.

### **3999/24          Community Engagement**

Mr P Day reported Good Relations Awards and Good Relations week planning is underway. Tuesday 12th March 2024 is the Engagement forum in Mossley Mill.

Mr Day advised a wider variety and greater number of nominations have come in this year. Last year we received 53 but this year 75.

ASG have been appointed to work alongside CRC for this year's Good Relations Week.

The feedback from previous years is that planning for Good Relations Week should start earlier, this has been considered and will help with targeting school engagement. With that in mind, the launch will take place on 9th April.

Mr Day also advised Board members that in June CRC will run an event to bring previous awards winners together to discuss the work we invest in and how we might engage them as ambassadors.

We have extended an invite to First and Deputy First Ministers to attend the award presentations so CRC hopes to see them at the event.

Good relations week is 16th – 22nd September, the theme is not yet agreed however Carl Frampton has been secured to join us at the event to raise the profile.

Mr P Day passed on his thanks to Martin McDonald, Nisha Tandon and John McCallister for their work on the awards selection panel.

**4000/24 Finance and General Purposes**  
**(1) Staffing**

Ms J Adamson advised a temporary member of staff Sophie Jones will be moving over from verification work to cover for Helen Di Duca's post from Monday 11th March 2024. She is familiar with the CRC procedures, and it is hoped it will therefore be relatively quick to train her for the role.

Ms J Adamson advised that she has received a further update from Judith Hamilton regarding the length of her sick leave which she will discuss with the CEO and Director of Funding and Development the Board agreed that if necessary temporary cover should be sought.

**4001/24**

**(ii) Management Accounts**

Mr P Garrity updated the Board on the accounts until the end of February which have been circulated.

He reported that at present CRC is likely to close the year well within the budget target of 1.5% tolerance set by TEO. Mr P Garrity advised he does not anticipate this to change that much between now and the end of March 2024.

Mr P Garrity reported working with TEO on the likely pay settlement for 2023/24. He noted that CRC had received an additional allocation at the start of this week of 46K within the resource budget. This is to cover 23/24 pay remit. At the moment the NICS pay negotiations are still ongoing in relation to a 5% increase, plus progression plus a non-consolidated payment of fifteen hundred pounds.

Mr P Garrity reported that CRC is in a clear, tidy position going into the new financial year compared to where it was last year.

Mr P Garrity reminded everyone about forwarding any outstanding expense claims before the close of business on Monday 11th March 2024 so they can be processed through the March payroll. Thereafter anything before 31<sup>st</sup> March, should be submitted before 9<sup>th</sup> April.

The Chair thanked Mr Garrity for the update.

Mrs Simpson questioned who will take on Ms Kelly's work once she has left the post.

The CEO advised that prior to Ms Kelly starting with CRC, she would have provided support to the DFAP team. The CEO advised that this arrangement would resume until the post is filled.

Mrs A Simpson thanked the CEO.

**4002/24****iii) Financial Update on Temp Staff PO**

The Chair noted the update which was included in the Board papers and asked if there were questions and if not, were Board members content not to discuss. The Board confirmed it was content.

**4003/24****iv) Penson Sub-Group Update**

Mrs U Kelly advised that she had submitted the updated business case on 24th January 2024 and that the pension subgroup had met on 29<sup>th</sup> February to discuss the feedback from TEO on this. The feedback from TEO was not very detailed or technical. She was awaiting one response from a member of the sub-group and would then submit the response and updated business case to TEO. If TEO is content, the next stage will be to complete the financial sections of the business case.

**4004/24****(i) Verbal update on the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting held on 22nd February 2024**

As Mr McCallister had to leave the Board meeting early, Mr M McDonnell provided a brief update, the internal audit is currently ongoing as the Audit and Risk Committee had reviewed and approved the Terms of Reference. Cavanagh Kelly are conducting the external audit on behalf of the NI Audit Office.

With regards to the Risk Register, Mr McDonnell noted that the staffing risk has been moved to red and the other substantial change was in relation to the IT support contract with ECNI which had been a matter of concern due to ECNI staff departures, however work is underway to ensure mitigations are in place.

**(ii) Minutes of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

The minutes were approved by the Board.

**4003/24 A.O.B.**

Due to availability of Board members, it was agreed that the date of the September meeting of the Board be moved to the week before or after.

**4004/24 Date of Next Meeting**

19<sup>th</sup> April 10:30am CRC Boardroom 6th floor.  
 24<sup>th</sup> May 10:30am CRC Boardroom 6th floor.  
 5<sup>th</sup> July 10:30am CRC Boardroom 6th floor.  
 13<sup>th</sup> September 10:30am CRC Boardroom 6th floor.

