

NI Community Relations Council

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Monday 15th January 2024 @ 2pm - Online

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

In Attendance: Dr J Irwin (CEO), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Garrity (Finance Manager), Ms U Kelly (DFAP Director)

Apologies: None

Conflict of Interest

None

Minutes

The minutes of the 11th October 2023 Finance & General Purpose Committee were approved

Matters Arising

The Chair updated the Committee on a number of actions discussed at the last meeting:

The Board intend to organise to meet funded groups during the year to get feedback

The Peace Monitor Report was published in December. The launch event in December was very well supported. A presentation on the report will be made to Board in a future meeting post February or at the Board / Staff Strategic Planning day.

There is no update on the progress of return of Board appraisals due to the vacancy in the post of EA to CEO and Board, the Chair gave reminder to members to submit their appraisals.

ACTION: a reminder to be sent to all Board members.

The Board / Staff planning day is now likely to take place in February. In the meantime the CEO will be bringing a paper on the review of the last Strategic Plan to the Board meeting at the end of January.

Action: Board/Staff Strategic Planning date to be confirmed.

The annual meeting of the Board for Core Fund Assessments is being organised for March.

Performance Management

The CEO took the Committee through the quarterly performance return by CRC to TEO. Progress has been on track despite the staff shortages. The funding schemes which did not open due to the reduction in CRC's budget for 2023-23 are still closed.

Mr McDonnell queried if an amber re audit recommendation on policies needed revised to green. The CEO confirmed the policy papers were brought to this meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee and advised on the timing lag between the Assurance submission which relate to the previous quarter (up to December 2023) so therefore doesn't include recent activity or decisions.

Mr. McDonnell pointed out that the footer needed to be updated for the correct quarter.

Finance & Procurement

Mr Garrity took members through the Management Accounts & highlight report.

The Chair and committee members noted appreciation for the narrative provided to support the calculations and workings.

Mr. Garrity noted that CRC had received a positive response to its request for additional in-year funds to the value of £51K for IFRS16 (Depreciation), £30K for capital expenditure and an increase to £3,384 in resource for the year. Mr. Garrity noted that it will be challenging to achieve the capital expenditure at this late stage in the financial year but work is underway.

Mr. Garrity also noted that he is already providing quarterly information to TEO to ensure that CRC's input to the Whole of Government Fast Closure timetable is achieved.

Mr McDonnell enquired as to whether in relation to 2024/25 planning any financial scenarios had been requested yet – the CEO and Mr Garrity confirmed there was nothing received by CRC yet.

Recruitment PO

Ms Kelly took the members through the current PO value which was approved by the committee. The CEO reminded the members that this PO comes before the committee at each meeting with the updated amount to allow the committee to review the overall total amount as it is expended.

Vouching & Verification

Ms Kelly verbally updated members on the Vouching & Verification position:

Vouching is progressing on Core Fund first payments claims. There are some de-commitments which are being reallocated. This is a symptom of budget cuts which are affecting some groups capacity to utilise the grant we have made to them as they are unable to sustain with the wider cuts. Some also have staffing issues including difficulty sourcing new staff.

North Belfast claims are in now too, some earlier than previous years which suggest cash requirements.

CR/CD claims are also ongoing.

TEO has revised CRC's Cash allocation as requested and this has resolved fear that some claims might not be payable before the year end

The Chair expressed concerned re the cuts and the lack of staff and consistent contacts for some groups. The CEO advised that the Funding & Development Director will be bringing an update to the

Board on this. The CEO confirmed that at the moment this related to 2 groups in particular and advised that small grants may be able to absorb any decommitments.

Ms Tandon expressed concerns regarding group staffing and if alternative contacts were available? The CEO noted that where there are concerns about grants CRC will normally request to meet a member of the Board as well as staff. Ms Kelly confirmed that the bank of contacts was simply causing a response timing issue, groups are simply overstretched.

Ms Simpson and the Chair noted that the current pressure on voluntary organisations is very concerning.

Pension Business Case

Ms Kelly advised that there had been no feedback from TEO yet on the draft Business Case however the next meeting with TEO was due to take place tomorrow, Tues 16th January, to go through the draft Business Case submission on 2nd January 2024, and the next update would be at the Board meeting on the 26th January 2024.

Members were advised that UNITE is planning to discuss this matter with NIPSA which is the representative union for some other affected Arms-Length Bodies.

Record Management Policy

Ms Kelly took members through the changes to the policy. She advised that there were no significant changes at this point, some contact details have been updated, but she advised that a new policy will be required when CRC completes its move to Cloud based filing.

Members approved the reviewed policy.

Data Protection Policy

Ms Kelly took members through the main changes to the policies which is now more aligned to the NICS policy. Reporting mechanisms for specific issues have been streamlined as the previous policy covered a number of areas which have now been separated along with the appendix forms.

Mr. McDonnell queried the lack of contact information for the Information Commissioner Office in Northern Ireland, and requested it was amended as the draft currently only includes the UK office.

Subject to this addition, members approved the revised policy.

The Chair queried if the updated policies are normally brought to the Board and the CEO confirmed that the Chair normally provides a verbal update to the Board at its next meeting and the approved minutes go to the subsequent Board but these papers could go to the next meeting if the committee requested. The committee advised that they did not require this.

Policy Review Update & Policies

Ms Adamson took members through the updated HR policies:

She confirmed that the amendments had been introduced as requested at the last Finance & General Purposes Committee, including the flowchart for the Domestic & Sexual Abuse Policy.

She reminded members that no amendments had been requested to the Menopause Policy.

She confirmed that both policies had been approved by the Union after one amendment that was requested was included in the updated draft. She advised that subject to the approval of the drafts they will now go to Peninsula for review.

ACTION: when approved HR Manager to liaise with Peninsula on the draft

Ms Simpson sought reassurance that in line with the recently published Rochdale Report, their policy included a reminder that relevant departments including Social Services must be notified in the event that there is a concern and there is knowledge of other victims at risk for example children. Ms Kelly agreed to check and confirm after this meeting.

ACTION: Ms Kelly/Ms Adamson to review the policy and confirm that social services notification has been adequately covered in the revised policy.

Subject to this, members approved the policies.

Agile Working Policy

Ms Adamson advised members that the updated Agile Working Policy had now been reviewed against the NICS policy.

She reminded members that the Staff Review concluded that staff are very happy to maintain current system.

Members approved the reviewed policy

Staffing Update

Ms Adamson verbally updated members on staffing. She apologised that her Update paper had been missed in submission with the committee papers prior to the meeting.

Verification Officer – this post is now with external recruitment agency as the previous competition resulted in no shortlisted candidates. This competition with VanRath is closing this week on Thurs 18th January

Finance Manager – Mr Garrity currently in post and recruitment therefore not a priority given that excellent cover is in place and there are other significant gaps to be filled

Core Funding Officer – Ms Dennison, who has been on a career break for almost two years, resigned in January. Recruitment for this post is in progress.

EA to CEO & Board – The previous cover for this post is no longer with CRC. However, Nicola Woodside has taken up the role and started today.

Funding Officer Maternity cover – this is being advertised on Thurs 18th Jan with a closing date 5th February.

Sickness & Absence Report

Ms Adamson took members through her report:

She noted that there were no concerns given that the numbers of long term absences and costs were down from £18k to £11k for same period last year.

Days per person is now averaging 1.3.

Ms Adamson also advised members that Return to Work meetings, trigger meetings, referral processes are all in place and working well.

Health & Safety

Ms Adamson noted that there was nothing to report since the last meeting. She note however that this item is kept on the agenda as a reminder in case there are new matters to report subsequent to the issue of committee papers.

Premises Committee

Ms Adamson verbally updated members on the most recent Equality House Premises Meeting:

The building is due to have a new tenant.

Security measures are to be reviewed and strengthened, linked to recent events. Staff have been reminded that all incidents are to be reported to HR, ECNI and if appropriate to PSNI to ensure everyone's safety and vigilance.

An external signage exercise is underway. All are being updated, and ECNI are trailing televisions/digital method to assess impact and gauge opinion.

AOB

The CEO recorded her thanks to staff for maintaining steady delivery in times of significant staffing issues.

Mr Garrity reminded members to submit outstanding expenses claims by 8th March and for the month ending March 2024 by 9th April to ensure CRC is able to facilitate the new faster closure requirements.

Date of Next Meeting

Mr McDonnell advised Monday mornings do not suit him and members agreed that the agreed future Finance & General Purposes committee meetings would take place at 2.00pm on Monday afternoons.