

**NI Community Relations Council**  
**Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November**  
**2024 at 10:40am**  
**Ante Room Equality House**

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

**In Attendance:** Dr J Irwin (CEO), Ms J Adamson (HR Manager), Mr P Garrity (Finance Manager), Mr B McDonald (Funding Director), Ms N Maguire (Vouching and Verification Officer), Ms H George (EA to CEO)

**Apologies:** Mr M McDonald

**1. Welcome**

In the absence of the Chair, Mr M McDonald, Mr M McDonnell chaired the meeting.

**2. Conflict of Interest**

None recorded.

**3. Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.

**4. Matters Arising**

The CEO informed the Committee that CRC's Annual Report and Accounts have been approved by the Board and ARAC at last week's meeting. CRC are awaiting the final signed certificate from NIAO, and then will begin the submission process.

**5. Policies for approval**

Ms H George informed the Committee that the yearly review of policies was conducted during quarter two and early quarter three. These reviews looked at any updated Government Guidance and any update to current working practices and made a number of recommended amendments.

The following policy updates are being recommended to the Committee:

i) Procurement Policy and Procedures

Addition of DoF Procurement Policy Notes and link

Better Business Case NI added as the centre for expertise in business case drafting

Updated procurement control limits for goods updated and note added)  
EU replaced with UK  
Business Case templates added

ii) Financial Procedures Manual

Updated Logo  
Removal of Deputy CEO position  
Removal of Director of Comms and Learning  
Removal of Cultural Diversity  
Update on timings of Management Accounts (monthly rather than quarterly, and two days after month end, rather than 10). Added link about completing MA before Consumption Reports  
Removal of 'Govt Review of Financial Processes' as that is now complete.  
Date budget is received from TEO updated  
Removal of cheques as payment method  
Removal of Petty Cash section  
Updated Purchase Order Template

iii) Service Continuity Plan

Staff contact names and numbers updated  
Updated dates of Business Continuity testing  
Staff contact names and numbers updated  
Contact details update and Internal Audit firm blank  
Single Points of Failure updated based on current practice

iv) Fraud Prevention and Fraud Response Plan

Addition of Money Laundering to definition  
New 2.4 added and bribery act details removed  
Updated links  
Added regular monitoring of expenditure  
Updated phone number  
Removal of line on confidentiality  
Updated name of CRC Chair  
Updated contact name  
Updated contact name  
Removed name  
Updated contact details  
Removal of name

v) Information Security Plan

Updated name of policies  
Change name of IT providers to 'IT Support Providers'

vi) Records Management & Document Retention Policy and Procedures

Addition of details on email account retention following staff member resignation

Update on use of shared drive to save personal files.

vii) Staff Handbook

Removal of Infectious Disease Section

Tidy up of Document

Addition of allowance for two weeks Parental Bereavement leave. This leave entitles anyone employed from day one to take two weeks leave if their child dies before they turn 18, or they suffer a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

The Committee thanked Ms H George for presenting the reviews; and Ms J Adamson, Ms H George and all staff involved in the policy review process. Members approved the recommended updates.

**Action:** Ms J Adamson to update to the union on changes to the staff handbook

## 6. Quarter Two Performance Report

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's performance report for the period of July to September 2024.

The information set out in the document was accurate for that reporting period, but is now out of date, particularly the Risk Register. The latest version of the Risk Register was presented to the Board and Audit Committee during the AGM.

Updates to the risk register since the completion of this report includes the annual internal audit schedule following the unsuccessful internal audit tender. CRC will be conducting a second tender exercise, with an increased daily rate budget for auditors.

The Committee noted the report.

## 7. Delivery Report

The CEO presented the Committee with CRC's Delivery Report updated to the end of quarter two. At the end of quarter two all outcomes are on schedule to be completed by the end of the financial year.

The main issue from the Report is that the resource available for grants does not meet the level of demand. A bid has been made for extra funding for CRCD in the January Monitoring Round.

The Committee thanked the CEO for presenting and noted the report.

## **8. Management Accounts**

Mr P Garrity presented the Committee with CRC's Management Accounts up to October 2024.

There is currently a £47k surplus due to salaries, however this will be reassigned to grants.

The October Monitoring Round bid was partially successful. CRC was awarded an additional £90k for the Core Fund. But the CRCD bid for £45k was unsuccessful. CRC has made this request again as part of the January Monitoring Round. A bid for £15k for the procurement of a consultant to assist with the completion of the pension business case has also been made in the January Monitoring Round.

£1,025k grant spent has been made to date this year, and £101k accrued grants.

The 2022/23 Pay Remits were paid in September, and the 2023/24 Pay Remits will be paid to staff in November. The 2024/25 Pay Remit has not yet been agreed across government.

£4.1k has been spent on capital this year, with another £6k left in the budget still to spend.

Mr P Garrity has submitted all information to assist with the Whole of Government Accounts 6-month exercise.

Mr P Garrity is conducting a zero-based budget exercise for 2025/26 year. This will assist with the Board's recommendation to review the ratio of outward looking work compared to admin costs.

The Committee thanked Mr P Garrity for his report.

## **9. Temporary Staff Member Purchase Order Update**

The Committee reviewed the current cost set out in the already approved Purchase Orders for the Temporary Finance Manager and the Temporary CRCD Officer.

The totals were noted by the Committee.

## **10. Vouching and Verification Report**

Ms N Maguire presented the Committee with a report setting out the current vouching and verification position.

All 2023/24 grants are now closed off. A small refund of £600 is outstanding from a group who applied for a CRCDC grant.

26 out of 28 Core Fund first claims (2024/25) have now been received. 17 have been processed to date.

Two North Belfast grant claims for 2024//25 are now in for review.

41 projects have been awarded CRCDC funding to date, with 33 payments made.

Five new verification checks have been completed for groups new to the Core Fund scheme. Verifications will now be conducted for the two groups added to Core in September.

Mr B McDonald added that there may be budget to provide the Core Fund groups with a cost of living payment in quarter four, and for the CRCDC grant budget to increase to £200k. This is dependent on the outcoming of the January Monitoring Round.

The Committee thanked Ms N Maguire for this update and noted the report.

## **11. Staffing Update**

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that CRC's staff will receive their 2023/24 Pay Remit in November. All staff are now on their correct pay scale position.

The Board thanked Ms J Adamson for her report.

## **12. Pension Business Case**

On 9<sup>th</sup> September Board meeting the Board requested that the HR Manager contact other ALBs impacted by the pension problem for an update on how they are progressing the issue.

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with details of the ALBs situations. One ALB report that despite being urged to submit their business case by the end of 2023 ( their ninth version) they have yet to receive an update from the Department. This ALB also indicated that they suggested addressing all affected ALBs as a group, however their sponsor body rejected the proposal. Another affected ALB confirmed

that they had reached a settlement with their staff in 2013 following several legal issues linked to the administration of their scheme. A lateral change was made to affected staff's contracts.

Ms J Adamson advised that another ALB had not responded.

Ms J Adamson reminded the Committee that the Board had agreed for a tender exercise to be completed to find an expert to assist with the financial aspects of the business case. The tender Terms of Reference will be drafted and advertised at the end of November.

She added that due to a number of staff changes, the majority of staff are not in receipt of the 6% uplift, however the Business Case takes account of the equality issue which does affect newer staff too.

The CEO informed attendees that the Chair Martin McDonald and Mr J McCallister (in his capacity as Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee) have been asked to attend a meeting with Gareth Johnston TEO and the TEO Audit Committee.

The Committee thanked staff for this update and noted the report.

### **13. Finance Manager Business Case**

The CEO reminded the Committee of the background to this Business Case and CRC's recent attempts to recruit a Finance Manager and a DFAP Director which were unsuccessful. The paper circulated and under consideration sets out a number of potential options for the Committee to consider. The CEO presented these options:

i) Permanent Recruitment

This remains the preferred option but recent recruitments have been unsuccessful

ii) Continue with temporary cover

The Committee agreed to continue with the temporary cover provided by Mr P Garrity.

iii) Procure Managed Service

This option was rejected due to experience working with a firm on the 2021/22 accounts.

iv) Train current staff member to undertake finance duties

The Committee approved this option.

v) Shared Service

This option was agreed as a second reserve and will be explored if option four is unsuccessful. The CEO added that TEO had conducted a shared services project previously and found that smaller organisations received a better rate individually from firms than as a collective contract. It was agreed that if this option is explored in the future, it would look at shared services for larger tasks rather than everyday tasks.

In relation to the agreed options the Committee suggested that the Job Description and Specification for the Finance Manager and DFAP Director role be reviewed, and possibly reconstituted in relation to the distribution of tasks related to finance, governance and administration. The CEO agreed and it was agreed that she would meet with the Committee separately to work on this.

It was also agreed that CRC would raise the grading levels of posts in the organisation with TEO due to the competition in the recruitment market.

**ACTION:** CEO and Committee Members to meet regarding the unfilled Finance posts.

**ACTION:** CEO to raise staff grading levels of posts in the organisation with TEO

#### **14. Car Parking**

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that a recent piece of guidance from TEO stated that any ALB car parking has to be cost neutral. CRC had a number of paid for car parking spaces, however, following this guidance, these have been cancelled and now the organisation only holds three spaces which are included in the Service Level Agreement.

The Essential Car User policy is now redundant due to hybrid working practices. Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with a proposal to replace this policy. This new policy allows each space to be assigned to a Directorate, and the Director will be responsible for overseeing the use of the space by their team.

The Committee approved this proposal. Ms J Adamson will now go to the Union with this recommendation for review and approval.

**ACTION:** Ms J Adamson to update the Union on this proposed policy change.

## **15. Sick Absence Report**

Ms J Adamson presented the Committee with quarter two's Sick Absence Report.

She confirmed that the numbers are low and therefore there is no cause for concern or need for intervention.

The Committee thanked Ms J Adamson and noted the report.

## **16. Health and Safety Audit**

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that a Health and Safety Audit was completed on CRC's office in September 2024. The outcome of this audit was satisfactory, however a number of building wide recommendations were made which she is working with ECNI on to implement.

The Committee reviewed the outstanding recommendations including: the servicing of all building's fire safety equipment; mains gas equipment check and certification; maintenance of air conditioning units. They expressed their concern at the recommendations under the landlord's responsibility. Ms J Adamson will continue to raise this with ECNI.

**ACTION:** Ms J Adamson to ensure the completion of all outstanding recommendations.

## **17. Premises Committee**

Ms J Adamson updated attendees on recent items of discussion at the Premises Committee.

Aramark are currently trying to recruit permanent reception staff to ensure consistency in that position.

There is a procurement exercise taking place to find an IT provider, as the current contract nears its end. The tender documents are being reviewed by the bodies in Equality House, and the tender will go live following this. Ms J Adamson and Ms E Tomasso met with ECNI to ensure that CRC's needs are considered in this tender.

The Facilities Management Contract has been extended to align with the buildings lease up until July 2026. A discussion on the lease will take place in quarter one 2025/26.



ECNI has begun a project to replace the lighting with energy efficient LED lights. Energy use has already dropped by 20-30% due to this project.

## **18. Any Other Business**

### i) Equality Monitoring System

Ms J Adamson informed the Committee that CRC have now moved to a cloud based equality monitoring system which will improve the reporting function going forward.

### ii) Expenses

Mr P Garrity reminded members to submit their board Travel and Subsistence Forms promptly following meetings.

## **19. Date of Next Meeting**

Q4 2024/25 - to be confirmed