

DIRECTORS' REPORT

A) Corporate Governance Report

i) Trustee's and Directors' Report

Structure, Governance and Management

The Northern Ireland Community Relations Council is a company limited by guarantee, with no share capital, and is registered as a charity by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

The company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the charitable company and is governed under its Articles of Association. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

These accounts have been prepared in accordance with the accounting and disclosure requirements of the Companies Act 2006, along with selected disclosures as recommended in the 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with Financial Reporting Standard FRS 102 (effective 2nd October 2019)'.

The Directors have complied with guidance published by the Charities Commission.

Organisational Structure

The Community Relations Council is governed by the Members of the Council. Where the Articles of Association refer to the Council, it can also be read as the Company, which shall mean the Members of the Council can also be read as the Directors of the Company.

The Council has capacity to register 24 members and there was a total of nine members in post during the year. The Council aims to meet every six weeks, holding at least six meetings during any 12-month period. A scheme of delegation is in place and day-to-day responsibility for provision of services rests with the Chief Executive Officer, Dr Jacqueline Irwin, supported by the Senior Management Team. The Senior Management Team consists of the Director of Funding and Development, Director of Community Engagement and Director of Finance, Administration and Personnel.

The Chief Executive Officer, with the assistance of the Senior Management Team, manages the day-to-day activities of the Council and reports directly to the Chairperson. The Chief Executive Officer and the Senior Management Team also provide progress reports to all Council meetings.

Directors

The directors of the company at 31st March 2025 were as follows:

Mr. Martin McDonald (Chair)	Mr. Michael McDonnell
Mr. Rory Campbell	Ms. Claire Harris
Ms. Audrey Simpson	Mr. John McCallister
Dr. Máire Braniff	Ms. Nisha Tandon
Ms Sheila McClelland	

Board members, including the Chair, are appointed by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service following a recruitment exercise led by The Executive Office in a manner intended to comply fully with guidance from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland (OCPANI). All current members took up their positions on 1st June 2019 and were appointed for three years. In the absence of Ministers, The Executive Office extended the term of office of all members effective from 1st June 2024.

Following appointment, all directors receive ‘On Board’ training conducted by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), Equality and Recruitment training, conducted by ECNI, induction into the role by The Executive Office as its Arm's Length Body and a full induction into the work of the Community Relations Council conducted by Community Relations Council staff. Induction training for new members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the Community Relations Council is also provided into the work of those committees.

Statement of Grant Making Policies

The Community Relations Council provides grant aid and advice to voluntary and community groups in support of projects which have a community relations purpose or value. The Council has a variety of funding schemes each tailored to promote certain aspects of community relations:

- The Community Relations and Cultural Diversity Small Grant Scheme is intended to help community/voluntary groups in Northern Ireland develop their capacity to engage in community relations work and to enhance the community relations potential of projects they undertake. The maximum award payable for this grant is £10,000.
- The Core Funding Grant Scheme is designed to support voluntary and community organisations to develop community relations work in a strategic manner, on a regional basis. Support is specifically targeted at work to combat sectarianism in Northern Ireland on a strategic long-term basis. The amount awarded normally ranges between £20,000 and £85,000.

- The Publications Grant Scheme aims to encourage the production and dissemination of publications that will contribute to greater understanding and better community relations in Northern Ireland. The maximum award payable for this grant is £5,000. This grant scheme did not operate during 2024-25 due to cuts in the budget received from The Executive Office.
- The Media Grant Scheme aims to assist with the dissemination of community relations priorities via print, broadcast or other widely accessible media. This grant scheme did not operate during 2024-25 due to cuts in the budget received from The Executive Office.
- The Pathfinder Scheme contributes towards the salary and running costs of organisations or projects which are considered of strategic importance in promoting community relations work in Northern Ireland. The Pathfinder Scheme is not an open scheme to which groups can apply; discussion with the Director of the Funding and Development Programme will precede any proposal made to this scheme. This scheme also supports emergency intervention funding through small project grants. This grant scheme did not operate during 2024-25 due to cuts in the budget received from The Executive Office.
- The North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme (NBSGRP) is a funding scheme administered by the Community Relations Council on behalf of The Executive Office. It is a Ministerial scheme, and its overall strategy remains with The Executive Office. The key aim of the Programme is to develop relations within and between communities in North Belfast. Responsibility for the administrative aspects of the Programme were transferred to the Community Relations Council during 2016-17. The programme made awards up to £100,000 during the 2024-25 financial year.

Details of the grants awarded during the 2024-25 financial year are shown on pages 91-102

Community Engagement

The Community Relations Council seeks to promote learning, best practice and good communication between all relevant sectors and government to assist effective implementation of the Programme for Government and T:BUC strategy by:

- providing development support and engagement opportunities as a hub for the exchange of learning and best practice among our funded groups and wider networks. The relationship between policy, practice and reflective evaluation remains at the heart of the work of the Community Relations Council, well-crafted public policy and effective service delivery depends on it;
- leading on the coordination and delivery of the T:BUC Engagement Forum events that bring together good relations practitioners, voluntary & community sector and

government to assist effective implementation of the Programme for Government and T:BUC strategy;

- co-ordinating the annual Good Relations Week which takes place annually in September. The week is designed to showcase good practice and encourage wide engagement;
- co-ordinating the Good Relations Awards to highlight exceptional achievement in promoting community relations, intercultural work and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland; and
- promoting the work and the activities of the Community Relations Council and others within the sector through monthly email newsletters, its website and social media channels.

Future plans

As an Arm's Length Body of The Executive Office our strategic direction, confirmed by Ministers, is to be a key delivery agent for departmental good relations policy, including the implementation of the aims and objectives of the T:BUC strategy and an outcome based approach to delivery. This includes promoting policy through positive engagement with relevant stakeholders in the community and establishing and implementing best practice.

- The Community Relations Council will finalise work on its next Strategic Plan, carry out a public consultation and seek approval of the final draft from The Executive Office ministers. The plan will align with the new Programme for Government and the revised T:BUC strategy subject to the timing of its publication. The Strategic Plan will build on the Community Relations Council's role as a trusted and critical link between government and all sections of society, continuing to promote good practice in building peace and good relations.
- The organisation will continue to take a co-ordinated approach to grant funding focused on T:BUC priorities and objectives. The organisation will continue to review the distribution of its grants and put in place any necessary mitigations to achieve the goals set out in the new Strategic Plan.
- The organisation will continue to develop its suite of key performance indicators and targets to enhance strategic decision making and better demonstrate the impact of the work undertaken by the Community Relations Council. The organisation will continue to emphasise an outcomes-based approach and incorporate the good relations indicators emerging from the revised T:BUC Strategy as the basis of its performance monitoring framework. The organisation will also continue to explore the value of other evaluation methods that align with the overall objectives of the strategy.
- The organisation will continue to deliver a programme of engagement and shared learning. It will also contribute to any new architecture and thematic groups emerging from the revised T:BUC strategy.
- During 2025-26 the Community Relations Council will continue to implement the *'Partnership Agreement'* with The Executive Office.

- The organisation will continue to operate agile working methods in a manner that is consistent with the needs of the organisation and public sector guidance.

Employee and Board involvement

The Board of the Community Relations Council is responsible for establishing the overall strategic direction of the Community Relations Council. In doing so it will approve the triennial strategic plan, the annual business plan, corporate policies and provide assurance to The Executive Office that appropriate action is being taken on strategic, financial, legal and governance matters. Employees are responsible for implementing the Board's decisions, including reporting and providing assurance to the Board on the Community Relations Council's performance in implementing the Board decisions. Staff involvement includes attendance at Board meetings, joint planning sessions with Board members, monthly staff meetings, the use of project teams and performance management tailored to support the achievement of strategic objectives.

Personal data related incidents

The Community Relations Council is required to report on personal data related incidents and accordingly have a control system to meet these responsibilities under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The control system has been established to ensure the appropriate handling of personal data and information used for operational and reporting purposes through the development of appropriate strategy and policy.

There were no breaches of personal data during 2024-25.

Freedom of Information

During 2024-25 year the Community Relations Council received no (2023-24: one) Freedom of Information (FOI) request. When received, request are handled in a timely way and in a manner consistent with the Community Relations Council's publication scheme.

Pensions

The Community Relations Council participates in a defined benefit pension scheme administered by the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) for all permanent staff. Further details are set out in the Remuneration Report on pages 50 to 54, the accounting policies on pages 67 to 71 and commitments under Defined Benefit Pension Scheme in Note 16 on pages 81 to 84.

Reporting of Complaints

The Community Relations Council received no complaints during 2024-25.

The Community Relations Council's Complaints Policy can be accessed via the [website \(https://www.community-relations.org.uk/contact-us\)](https://www.community-relations.org.uk/contact-us).

Prompt Payment Policy

The Community Relations Council is committed to the prompt payment of bills for goods and services received in accordance with the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. Unless otherwise stated in the contract, payment is due within 30 days of the receipt of the goods or services, or presentation of a valid invoice or similar demand, whichever is later. Regular reviews conducted during the year to measure how promptly the Community Relations Council paid its bills found that 98% (2023-24: 93%) of bills were paid within this standard. It was also noted that 91% (2023-24: 67%) of bills were paid within 10 days.

Related Parties

Details of the company's related parties are set out in note 17 to the Accounts.

Register of interests

The Chair, Board of Directors, Chief Executive Officer and Senior Management Team are required to register all interests, direct or indirect, which members of the public might reasonably think could influence their judgment. The register of interests is available on the Community Relations Council website or for public inspection by contacting the Director of Finance, Administration and Personnel, Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, Equality House, 7-9 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast. BT2 7DP.

Corporate Governance

The Governance Statement is set out on pages 36 to 49.

Auditors

The Comptroller and Auditor General has the statutory responsibility for the audit of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council under the Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013.