

Northern Ireland Social Care Council Participation Partnership

Confirmed Minutes
Monday 3rd March 2025
Social Care Council Office, James House








3rd March

Members at the meeting:


Sarah Browne (Chair, Board Member)
Alan Ritchie (Co-Chair)
Mandy Cowden (Professional Advisor)
Andre McKeown (Business Support/Evaluation Manager)
Ronnie Patterson (Member)
Sandra Stranaghan (Interim Director of Registration and Corporate Services)
Gerard McWilliams (Member)
Susan Croy (Cedar Foundation)
Gerard Forrestal (Member)
Rita McCullagh (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement) (online)
Anne Mallon (Member) (online)
Declan McAllister (Interim Chief Executive) (online)
Rebecca Smyth (Note Taker)
Mervyn Bothwell (Social Care Council) (Agenda Item 8 only)

Apologies:



Nicholas Campbell (Graphic Designer and Animator)
David Hayes (Member, Board Member)
Grace Price (Member)
Joanne Sansome (Co-Chair)
David Gillen (Member)

1.		Welcome and Apologies	apologies 
1.1	Sarah Browne welcomed members and noted apologies from Grace Price, Nicholas Campbell, David Gillen, David Hayes and Joanne Sansome.		
1.2	Sarah welcomed Gerard Forrestal, who is returning to the Partnership, and members introduced themselves.		
2.		Previous Meeting's Minutes – Paper A, Minutes from previous meeting of 11th December 2024	
2.1	Sarah thanked Rebecca Smyth for the minutes from the previous meeting of 11 th December 2024. Susan Croy had sent Rebecca amendments to these minutes which have since been made. The previous minutes from 11 th December 2024 were signed off and agreed by everyone.		
2.2	In relation to Action 8.1, Rita McCullagh shared that she had contacted Sam Humphries (Stricklands Care Village) and Julie Ann Skinner (YMCA, Bangor) and was waiting to hear back from them. The Actions were closed from the previous meeting.		
3.		Matters Arising	
3.1	None.		
4.		Chair's Update	
4.1	<p>Sarah updated that on Tuesday 25th February 2025, the Board and Participation Partnership members met for a joint Equality, Diversity and Inclusion workshop, led by colleagues from Business Services Organisation (BSO). Sarah thanked Susan Croy, Gerard McWilliams and Alan Ritchie for attending on behalf of the Partnership.</p> <p>This productive workshop considered the Being Open Framework, the draft Social Care Council Business Plan 2025/2026 and how the Social Care Council could promote Equality Diversity and Inclusion. Helen McVicker (Interim Co-Director of Regulation and Standards) presented the Being Open Framework for discussion at this workshop and will prepare a response from the Social Care Council for circulation. Alan will prepare his own response to</p>		

	the Being Open Framework consultation in advance of the closing date (21 st March 2025). The workshop outcomes will be written up and shared.
4.2	The launch of the Social Care Workforce Strategy on 12 th December 2024 is on the meeting agenda.
4.3	Interviews have taken place for the Non-Executive Director appointments, and the decision is now with Mike Nesbitt (Minister for Health, Department of Health (DoH)). Sarah will keep members updated on the outcome.
4.4	<p>Sarah advised that the United Kingdom (UK) IMPACT project work is ongoing. Plans for 2025/2026 include 8 Demonstrators, 8 Facilitator Projects and 6 Networks. Updates for the UK project are provided on the IMPACT UK website at https://impact.bham.ac.uk/.</p> <p>Gerard McW is involved with IMPACT at a strategic level with Professor Deirdre Heanan (Ulster University, UU) and queried if the eight projects are linked with Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) and UU. He is involved with ongoing work with Inspire Wellbeing around services users with a learning disability and supported living projects, with aims to improve services for users.</p> <p>Sarah advised that there are several projects across the UK. Within Northern Ireland (NI), the Facilitator Project with Brain Injury Matters focuses on improving staff training and co-production. The Demonstrator is in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) implementing a self-directed support evidence-based outcomes tool.</p>
5.	<div data-bbox="328 1081 603 1252" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="770 1140 1051 1178" data-label="Section-Header"> <h3>Co-Chairs Update</h3> </div>
5.1	<p>a. Alan attended the Social Care Workforce Strategy and Care in Practice (CiP) Framework launch at Stormont on 12th December 2024. After the last Impact Assembly, conversations were taking place with Helga Sneddon around impact measurement.</p> <p>b. On 8th January 2025, Alan, Eileen McKay (Deputy Executive Director of Social Work, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)) and Tina Cullen (Extern) met to shortlist finalists for their assigned Social Work (SW) Awards category. Alan raised some concerns around the word count of some nominations but noted how good they were overall.</p> <p>Mandy Cowden added that learning from the applications/judging process would be shared with the planning team. Management of the overall awards is rotated between the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts and this is a learning journey.</p> <p>c. Alan shared that on 5th February 2025, he was involved in work with Patient Client Council and the DoH around a Regional Care Homes contract.</p>

	<p>Concerns were raised around challenges such as COVID, the approach and process of changing the schedule.</p> <p>d. On 14th February 2025, Alan and Sheina Rigg (Implementation Manager, Safeguarding Board NI (SBNI)) were involved in work around the revision of training materials. There is a difference between the trauma informed approach and what social work is meant to be, with Gerard McW adding that this is resource specific.</p> <p>e. Alan attended the Social Care Collaborative Forum (SCCF) Workstream 2: Social Care Workforce Development meeting on 24th February 2025 which involved an update on the Social Care Workforce Strategy and CiP Framework launch.</p>
6.	<div>  Members Updates </div>
6.1	Members discussed the issues affecting the workforce, including recruitment and retirement. The impact of Artificial intelligence (AI) is on the horizon and consultation is needed around this.
6.2	<p>a. Susan shared how worthwhile it was to attend the Board/Participation Partnership EDI workshop.</p> <p>b. Susan felt privileged to be a panel member for the Social Work Awards and gained good experience in doing this. She commended everyone for their hard work within social work.</p> <p>c. Cedar Foundation now have a podcast series, highlighting different stories from service users. The most recent is from the Chair of the Regional User Forum. Susan will send a link to these podcasts to Rebecca for sharing via email.</p> <p>ACTION: Susan Croy to send a link to the Cedar Foundation podcast series to Rebeca Smyth for sharing with members.</p>
6.3	<p>a. Gerard McW and colleagues within the School of Nursing and Midwifery, QUB are working on equity of outcome measures for people with learning disabilities. This ongoing work was launched by Mike Nesbitt and designed with the Public Health Agency and DoH. It focuses on service users knowing what health services they are entitled to and how to access them, community nursing, recognising the service user as being the centre of shaping services, engaging with parents and families to make them aware of the available services and how to access them, and raising awareness with multi-disciplinary teams around how care is delivered.</p> <p>b. Gerard shared that he had provided a quote on page 3 of the Social Care Workforce Strategy.</p>

	c. He is involved in ongoing work on the Special Olympics programme.
6.4	<p>a. Anne Mallon shared that she was a panel member for the Social Work Awards.</p> <p>b. She was involved in work with the School of Nursing and Midwifery, QUB on the challenges faced by people with learning disabilities when admitted to hospital with no specialist learning disability nurses on their ward.</p> <p>c. Anne updated that the SHSCT Chief Executive had stood down and Colm McCafferty is providing Interim cover in this role. Carers groups will likely be affected by these interim arrangements.</p> <p>d. Anne is also involved in ongoing work with carer groups and information sessions.</p>
6.5	<p>a. Gerard F shared that he had met Declan McAllister through the Homelessness Awareness Panel, led by Gerry Skelton. Gerard F was involved in this event as a result of having lived experience of being homeless.</p> <p>b. Gerard had been in contact with Extern Homes and hopes to have a draft homelessness strategy by June 2025. He noted the need to work together to achieve outcomes and shared that this Partnership is welcoming for everyone.</p>
6.6	<p>a. Declan shared that he is keen to stay connected with the Partnership. He is delighted to welcome Gerard F back and highlighted a potential event to be held later in year.</p> <p>b. Declan has taken over a Co-Chair role of the SCCF as Patricia Higgins (previous Social Care Council Chief Executive) is working on the Reform programme.</p> <p>c. In relation to the Fair Work Forum, Mike Nesbitt has identified that £50 million is required to bring the sector up to real living wage. There are 40,136 social care registrants across more than 400 providers in NI and this budget would bring a positive response.</p> <p>Gerard McW queried when the cost of living uplift will be announced, with Declan noting that the Fair Work Forum have been building a business case around this. Mike Nesbitt will bring the £50 million investment proposal, business case and evidence to the Assembly for approval.</p> <p>d. The SCCF is taking a different route to awareness raising and sharing information. A major achievement is the development of a new commissioning contract for nursing care which involved Trusts and partners within the nursing and residential care sector. The next area of focus is on consistency of commissioning within home care.</p> <p>Gerard McW queried if the 8 SCCF Workstreams are still in operation. Declan confirmed this and as part of the review as Co-Chair's with Peter Toogood,</p>

	<p>they have been engaging with Chairs of the Workstreams as some progress quicker than others. The annual SCCF report is coming out, and Gerard McW and Declan sit on the Homecare Forum.</p> <p>e. Sandra Stranaghan (Interim Director of Registration and Corporate Services) has taken over leadership of the Registration App development. The App was initially planned to be up and running by February 2025 but it is hoped the first phase will be out by the end of March/early April 2025. Registrants will have access to their account and a wealth of resources through their phone.</p> <p>f. The relevant Social Care Council interim arrangements are now in place for the Co-Directors of Regulation and Standards roles. Tricia Devlin (Professional Advisor) has taken on the Head of Workforce Development role and Gillian McAuley (Professional Advisor) the Head of Fitness to Practise role. Since these arrangements, recruitment has completed for Declan's previous role as Director of Registration and Corporate Standards, with Sandra taking up the post as interim Director on 17th February 2025.</p>
6.7	<p>Ronnie Patterson queried the money service users with lived experience receive for involvement with groups. Mandy noted that this sits with Patient Public Involvement (PPI) group. The paper for the PPI forum is going to Mike Nesbitt and it is important to remunerate individuals for their time and experience. This remains on the agenda for approval.</p> <p>Mandy added that at the previous PPI meeting, members considered the Terms of Reference (TOR). If someone misses a meeting, financial support is not offered. It is important to treat everyone on the same level as professionals.</p>
7.	<div>  </div> <p>Break</p>
7.1	Participants had their break.
8.	<div>  </div> <p>Social Care Workforce Strategy</p> <p>8.1. Presentation and discussion on strategy launch</p> <p>8.2. Discussion around National Occupational Standards for Social Care</p>
8.1	<p>Mervyn Bothwell thanked members for the opportunity to present on the CiP Framework and National Occupation Standards (NOS). Mervyn shared hard copies of the Social Care Workforce Strategy 2025-2035 with members and referred to the focus on Priority 3 (page 7), with the change of language from social care worker to social care practitioner.</p> <p>The CiP Framework has been in development for several years and required several events and consultation. The Framework is easy to understand, with career progressions represented in the form of a train map.</p>

Mervyn referred to the qualifications available for HSC in NI and advised that Mairead Harkin (Workforce Development Officer) is working on an interactive website graphic where people can click on the qualifications for more information. This should be ready by the end of March 2025. Mervyn referred to the Level 2 Qualifications, including the new Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice, which is available and optional for all new social care workforce registrants. The Level 2 Certificate includes topics such as safeguarding, moving of people, infection control and medications.

Sharon Foster (Workforce Development Officer) is working on the review of the Level 3 Qualification with the aim to review the Level 4 and 5 Qualifications by September 2026. The Qualifications should be reviewed every 5 years. With motivation, people can enter at Level 2 and work their way up and it is hoped that more people will undertake the Level 6 and 7 Qualifications to help them remain within social care.

Members discussed whether there was a link between qualifications and pay. Mervyn advised that in an ideal world, it would be good if salaries matched the level of qualification as people worked up these.

Mervyn noted the need to encourage employers to ensure that their workers are trained in the specialist area of care if they are providing these services, e.g. palliative care, dementia or mental health.

Gerard F noted that money isn't always a motivator, and if people lack understanding, they are not motivated. He added that the Social Care Workforce Strategy looks very professional and helps identify people who are in the job for the long term.

Gerard McW queried how the delivery of these qualifications is carried out, and whether there is effective monitoring for people who are unqualified. Mervyn advised that delivery is carried out by training organisations such as People First and colleges to provide the knowledge and experience, and that the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) approves the levels.

Anne noted that direct payments are not under this register and queried access to the training if required and whether there was potential for a list of qualified carers to help. Mervyn referred to the 13,000 people employed under direct payment who are not registered with the Social Care Council and noted that the Social Care Workforce Strategy refers to personal assistants. There is no reason why they should not be able to access this, and The Centre for Independent Living should be able to assist with the availability of personal assistants.

8.2	<p>Mervyn referred to the NOS Standards, which are reviewed every 5 years.</p> <p>These Standards are applicable in NI, Scotland and Wales, with the Scottish Social Services Council taking the lead. England no longer follows this model. The Social Care Council have been working on this over a year due to the high number of standards for review. There are 150 HSC standards and 62 childcare, learning and development themes to be reviewed in addition to some less urgent ones.</p> <p>Mervyn referred to the NI NOS Advisory Group where 50 standards have gone out. The Group plan to meet later in March 2025 to review the standards and upload them to the NOS database. Mervyn thanked Sharon and colleagues for working on this. It is hoped that there will be a formal consultation in September 2025 with an end date of December 2025, which will result in all the NOS being in place for the next 5 years. There are different themes for consideration, including language, avoiding duplication, working across children and adults' services, trauma informed practice, supervision and digital skills.</p> <p>It is important to engage with as many people as possible and there are two in person events on 2nd and 3rd April 2025 in Dunsilly Hotel and Seagoe Hotel, with the invite being issued to all Social Care registrants this week.</p> <p>Mervyn is happy to engage with Partnership members again around any gaps between now and the summer. Andre and Communications will be sending out the survey nationally over the summer with the final version ready by December 2025. Work is ongoing on a separate project to include people from the Republic of Ireland (RoI) and border counties.</p> <p>Members discussed and agreed that Mervyn would return to the June meeting to update them on the progress so far, Members thanked Mervyn for his presentation.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to arrange for Mervyn Bothwell to return to the June Partnership meeting to update members on the progress of the NOS review.</p>
9.	<div data-bbox="300 1615 539 1771" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="647 1644 1190 1722" data-label="Section-Header"> <h2>Review of draft Social Care Council Business Plan – 2025/2026</h2> </div>
9.1	<p>Sandra thanked members who attended the Board/Participation Partnership EDI Workshop on 25th February 2025. She shared the first draft of the 2025/2026 Business Plan and gave members an opportunity to contribute following this meeting. The Business Plan has also been shared with the DoH and Board members.</p>

As the 4-year strategic plan is going into its 3rd year. Sandra queried what the Social Care Council could do differently and noted ongoing resourcing challenges, with clarity needed around what the business plan can deliver.

The business plan will keep core strategic services at the centre, such as Fitness to Practise, Registration, Workforce Development and Communications, and help manage ambition and resources. At the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion workshop, it was noted that clarity is needed around this topic and a need to build an action plan. Work is ongoing with the social care and social work communication reform agenda, as well as with Rita and Communications around the engagement strategy. It is hoped this can be finalised by the end of 2025. Sandra noted the large amount of work and the need to develop a strategy people recognise, so Partnership members will be involved in the following business year for consultation.

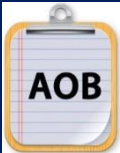
Sandra referred to some new areas of development within the Social Care Council. It has been 10 years since the Standards were last reviewed and while the core themes may remain the same, there have been changes within language (e.g. change to social care practitioner), and human rights implications. This will involve a public consultation and creating an easy read version.





Sarah queried if there was a time frame for review of the Standards and Sandra advised that there was no time frame, but 10 years was a long time and a lot has changed in practice, including areas needing amending following COVID, emerging policy changes and the introduction of CiP.

Another area for consideration is the registration fee structure, which was last reviewed 10 years ago. There are concerns around the economic environment and how any fee changes would impact on the workforce. A position paper has been developed to highlight the current situation and this will go to DoH this week.

Alan queried what work would be retained as the core programme. Sandra advised that Social Care Council are not a self-funding organisation, therefore funding must support the organisational pressures and reform work. Gerard F added that transparency is key and it makes a difference when it is clear why something is being carried out.

Sandra advised that careful consideration is needed around who is required to register with the Social Care Council. The Social Care Council take value and pride on being part of a registered profession. Gerard F referred to previous work within homelessness and disability which had a similar skill set, but the difference was in whether he had to be registered or not. Organisations who are registering people need to be protected. Sarah noted that the Social Care Workforce Strategy refers to who has to be registered, with Mandy adding that school workers and social care practitioners need registered.

	<p>Sandra referred to the programme of work to support social care career progression and reform, where the funding is non-recurring. Consideration is needed around key workstreams and partnerships. They will look at using technology, including testing AI in a safe, ethical way. Gerard F noted that it is important to know who owns the software and to consider the speed of its development.</p> <p>Members discussed involving Partnership members in future activities linked to the Social Care Council Health and Wellbeing charity fund raisers.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">AOB</p> <p style="text-align: center;">10.1. Update on Social Work Awards</p> <p style="text-align: center;">10.2. Update on Social Care Council interim arrangements</p> <p style="text-align: center;">10.3. Update on 2024/2025 Social Care campaign development</p> <p style="text-align: center;">10.4. Agreement of June meeting date</p>	
10.	
10.1	<p>a. Mandy thanked members for the time and effort they contributed to judging the large number of entries for the Social Work Awards. She encouraged members to attend the Awards ceremony on 26th March 2025 at Manor House Hotel, Enniskillen.</p> <p>b. In mid-June 2025, there will be a launch of the new loneliness learning resource and social work resource, including topics such as safeguarding and domestic abuse. This event is for social workers but is open for Participation Partnership members. Work is ongoing to update the social care practitioner resource from before COVID and Mandy will share a pilot feedback link on the resources when available.</p> <p>ACTION: Mandy Cowden to send Rebecca Smyth the feedback link for the social work and social care practitioner resources when available.</p>
10.2	The update on the SCC interim arrangements was addressed under Item 6.6F.
10.3	<p>Rita updated that the Social Work Degree Campaign finished the end of January 2025 with the launch of Social work Pathways videos. Applications for social work dates are going out, with the admissions committee looking at trends for the graduate and undergraduate routes to identify future learning. Rita requested that Rebecca share the link to the news story on why people want to pursue social work with members.</p> <p>Planning got underway in February 2025 for the March campaigns and a new digital story will be shared soon focusing on ways to engage with the social work workforce, including information for World Social Work Day on 18th March 2025. Rita requested that Rebecca share the link to this story with members.</p> <p>A new planning cycle is underway for the 2025 social care campaign and in January 2025, a Communications Workstream workshop was held. The campaign launch has been confirmed for the morning of 11th June 2025 with Mike Nesbitt and Aine Morrison (DoH) confirming attendance. Rita welcomed attendance from Partnership members, with Ronnie expressing interest in</p>

	<p>attending. The SC campaign will focus on story telling from volunteers in SC around their employment route, small SC providers, a podcast focusing on carers and the potential for involvement from Partnership members.</p> <p>In early February 2025, the focus was on social care practitioners from other countries who work in NI, e.g. India and Ukraine. This went out publicly for people from NI, RoI and the UK to support the workforce and people from other cultures and was discussed at Board/Participation Partnership Joint workshop. Members noted that approximately 16% of people within social care are from ethnic minority groups and to the importance of engaging with them. Rita added that following a meeting around this topic, people from over 100 countries had declared they were not from the RoI or UK.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to share the link for the news story on why people want to pursue social work with members.</p>								
10.4	<p>Sarah noted that the launch of the social care campaign was scheduled for 11th June 2025, which clashes with the next Participation Partnership meeting. Members discussed alternative June dates for the Partnership to meet and Sarah requested that Rebecca identify dates and share with members.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to identify alternative June meeting dates and share with members for agreement.</p>								
10.5	<p>In terms of AOB, Gerard F welcomed feedback or input from members for inclusion in the homelessness strategy. It is important to show the links between homelessness and health and wellbeing. Sarah requested that this is added to the agenda for the June meeting.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to add discussion of the homelessness strategy to the agenda for the June 2025 meeting.</p>								
10.6	Sarah thanked members for attending the meeting.								
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: space-between;">  <p>Dates of proposed meetings:</p> </div>									
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 40%;">Next meeting:</td><td>• Monday 23rd June 2025</td></tr> <tr> <td>Approved by:</td><td>Sarah Browne</td></tr> <tr> <td>Signature:</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Date of Approval:</td><td>23rd June 2025</td></tr> </table>		Next meeting:	• Monday 23 rd June 2025	Approved by:	Sarah Browne	Signature:		Date of Approval:	23 rd June 2025
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Annex I

Action List – date of meeting: 3rd March 2025

<u>Listing no:</u>	<u>Action:</u>	<u>Due Date:</u>	<u>Owner:</u>	<u>Status:</u>
6.2	Susan Croy to send a link to the Cedar Foundation podcast series to Rebeca Smyth for sharing with members.	23 rd June 2025	Susan Croy	Closed
8.2	Rebecca Smyth to arrange for Mervyn Bothwell to return to the June Partnership meeting to update members on the progress of the NOS review.	23 rd June 2025	Rebecca Smyth	Closed
10.1	Mandy Cowden to send Rebecca Smyth the feedback link for the social work and social care practitioner resources when available.	When link is available	Mandy Cowden	Closed
10.3	Rebecca Smyth to share the link for the news story on why people want to pursue social work with members.	23 rd June 2025	Rebecca Smyth	Closed
10.4	Rebecca Smyth to identify alternative June meeting dates and share with members for agreement.	ASAP	Rebecca Smyth	Closed
10.5	Rebecca Smyth to add discussion of the homelessness strategy to the agenda for the June 2025 meeting.	23 rd June 2025	Rebecca Smyth	Closed