

Northern Ireland Social Care Council Participation Partnership

**Confirmed Minutes
Monday 8th June 2026
Social Care Council Office, James House**



8th June

Please note – this summary was drafted from the meeting transcript using Co-Pilot.

Members at the meeting:

Denise Hunt (Chair, Board Member)
Alan Ritchie (Co-Chair)
Andre McKeown (Head of Business Services)
Anne Mallon (Member)
Declan McAllister (Director of Registration and Corporate Services)
Geraldine McGuigan (Youth Engagement and Participation Manager)
Gerard McWilliams (Patient Client Council and Member)
Jenny McDonagh (Note Taker)
Mandy Cowden (Professional Advisor)
Martin McCrory (Regional Peer Mentor Lead)
Rita McCullagh (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement)
Ronnie Patterson (Member)

Apologies:

David Gillen (Member)

1.	 Welcome and Apologies	apologies 
1.1	Denise Hunt welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were noted.	
2.	 Previous Meeting - Paper A: Minutes from previous meeting of 9th March 2026	
2.1	Minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed and formally approved as accurate.	

3.	Matters Arising from the March Meeting: 3.1 Social Care Reform Board and the Real Living Wage 3.2 Annual report for the Participation Partnership 3.3 Update on Landscape Review 3.4 Social Work Awards 2026 3.5 Partnership Membership and Remuneration - Review of Terms of Reference
3.1	<u>Social Care Reform Board and Real Living Wage</u> Update provided following the March 2026 Social Care Reform Board meeting. Independent sector representatives had temporarily withdrawn due to concerns regarding non-implementation of the Real Living Wage but have now agreed to return, supporting a collective leadership approach to reform. Ministerial commitment is reaffirmed, subject to funding, with potential backdating to April 2026. Financial limitations remain a key constraint impacting delivery timelines. Members highlighted concerns regarding workforce expectations (e.g. skills development, system reform) not aligning with financial recognition, with risks to morale and workforce sustainability. <u>Social Care Fair Work Forum</u> Update provided following the Social Care Fair Work Forum meeting of 28th April 2026. Focus areas include improvement in pay and contractual conditions, and addressing inconsistencies across independent sector providers, alongside development of monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance. Members recognised that variability across providers creates inequity within the workforce. There was emphasis on the need for clear oversight and enforcement mechanisms, including potential involvement of regulatory bodies.
3.2	<u>Annual Report for the Participation Partnership for April 2025 to March 2026</u> Draft Annual Report presented for final review and members were invited to provide final amendments. Timeline confirmed for submission to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) (mid-June 2026), Board approval (late June 2026), and publication thereafter. Members acknowledged the breadth of activity, particularly contributions to: • Social Care Engagement Strategy • Participation Partnership activity • Training and operational projects ACTION: Members to provide final feedback on Annual Report prior to submission deadlines.

3.3	<u>Landscape Review of the Social Care Council</u> The Landscape Review of the Social Care Council is part of a regular check of public bodies that is taken every few years. The Partnership had contributed to the review earlier in the year. The report is drafted and being reviewed by the Department of Health. The Social Care Council is waiting to see the draft report. Members stressed the importance of reflecting stakeholder contributions and influencing content prior to finalisation. It was noted that report findings may have financial and service delivery implications. ACTION: Declan to circulate Landscape Review draft once available and gather feedback.
3.4	<u>Regional Social Work Awards 2026</u> Entries are open for the 2026 Regional Social Work awards. Closing date for nominations is 30 June 2026. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust are leading on the awards management for 2026 and will be hosting the awards event in December 2026. The Social Care Council is co-ordinating the online applications and checking all those nominated for awards are registered social workers. The Social Care Council is also co-ordinating the judging panels. It is important that the views of people with lived experience are reflected in the judging panels. Members of the Partnership have been very supportive with these panels in previous years and are very welcome to be involved this year. It is recognised that it is a big commitment to be part of the judging panels and any contributions from current members are appreciated..
3.5	<u>Partnership Membership and Remuneration</u> This item was discussed as part of Item 7.1 and 7.2 - presentation by Martin McCrory (Regional Peer Mentor Lead)
4.	 Chair's Update
4.1	No additional update beyond items covered under Matters Arising.
5.	 Co-Chair's Update
5.1	No additional update recorded.
6.	 Member Updates
6.1	Discussion focused on: • Workforce and resource pressures impacting service delivery • Variability across independent sector providers • Ongoing system access challenges affecting carers and service users.

7.	PPI Remuneration Update by Martin McCrory from PHA
7.1	<u>Remuneration for Service Users and Carers Update by Martin McCrory from PHA</u> Martin provided an update provided on work undertaken to develop a framework for remuneration to people contributing to PPI projects. Through a Task and Finish Group, an options paper was prepared and submitted to the Department of Health (DoH) in March 2024. It was noted that there are some existing reimbursement policies operated by organisations across NI, but there is no formal regional remuneration policy. <u>Key points:</u> • Strong agreement that remuneration is necessary for equity and recognition, with service users and carers contributing significant expertise at strategic level. Current position (unpaid contribution) viewed as inequitable, particularly when compared to paid professionals. Remuneration described as a matter of: ○ Respect ○ Recognition ○ Inclusion of wider voices • Barriers include the impact on benefits and taxation, the need for government departments to work together such as Department of Health and Department for Communities. There are also governance and legal considerations, and funding constraints. • Delays in implementation risk can lead to loss of engagement and trust among contributors and reduced participation from under-represented groups. Concern was raised regarding potential unintended consequences, including: ○ Perceived impact on independence ○ Risk of participation driven solely by payment (noted, but generally considered low risk) • Alternative ways to recognise volunteer contributions were discussed (training and skills development, volunteering certification schemes, pathways to employment). Members agreed remuneration is appropriate and necessary at a strategic participation level and is achievable with structured policy and phased implementation. It should be progressed, potentially via a pilot or task-based approach. ACTION: Mandy to share the PHA proposed remuneration model and policy paper with members for dreview and feedback.
7.2	<u>Extending membership of the Partnership</u> Members welcomed Geraldine McGuigan from Voices of Young People in Care (VOYPIC). Geraldine is a Youth Engagement and Participation Manager for VOYPIC. Moving forward, Geraldine will be a part of the Partnership and will provide valuable advice on involving young people in the work of the Partnership. Alicia Toal, VOYPIC Chief Executive will also be involved with the Partnership to help ensure the views of care experienced young people are included.

8.	 Break
8.1	Participants had their break.
9.	 Update on Impact Project on AI in Social Care
9.1	Update provided on regional contribution to IMPACT Network (UK-wide initiative) examining the role of AI in social care. Declan had co-chaired the regional group involving service users and carers from NI. Partnership members had participated in the meetings. network Declan presented findings from the. The focus was to: • Understand AI from a service user and carer perspective • Identify opportunities, risks and priorities • Develop a practical action plan for implementation <u>Key points arising from this work:</u> • <u>Opportunities from using AI:</u> improved efficiency in administration, reporting and analysis and support for practitioners in case management and communication. • <u>Risks that would need managed :</u> data protection and confidentiality, ethics, reduced human interaction, potential bias in AI systems. • <u>Principles agreed for future development work:</u> ✓ Transparency – make it clear when AI is being used ✓ Accountability – a named individual must remain responsible ✓ Human oversight – outputs must always be checked ✓ Purpose-driven use – AI should only be used where it improves outcomes Next steps include development of a “living resource”, potential access to funding to support development and continued engagement across regional and national networks. ACTION: AI for Social Care to be kept as a standing agenda item
10.	 Any Other Business?
10.1	<u>My Care and Encompass - Access to Systems and Data</u> Members reported concerns raised regarding inconsistent access to care information for carers, inconsistent system access across Trusts and the requirement to seek permission for information relating to dependants.

	Members highlighted the impact on: • Ability to support family members effectively • Transparency and trust in systems • Concerns also raised regarding inappropriate access by other staff, indicating potential governance issues.
10.2	<u>Workforce and Resource Pressures</u> Ongoing concerns regarding wider financial/resource constraints and their impact on care delivery/service provision.
10.3	The annual Professional in Practice Awards will be held at La Mon Hotel on 22nd September 2026. Participation Members will receive their invites shortly. It was noted that the location is not easily accessed by public transport and this may be a factor affecting members ability to attend. This will be kept under review.
10.4	Meeting closed with thanks to all contributors and presenters.
 Dates of next meetings:	
	• 28th September 2026 • 7th December 2026 • 8th March 2027 • 14th June 2027
Approved by:	Denise Hunt
Signature:	
Date of Approval:	28 th September 2026

Annex I

Action List – 8th June 2026

<u>Listing no:</u>	<u>Action:</u>	<u>Due Date:</u>	<u>Owner:</u>	<u>Status:</u>
3.3	Provide final feedback on Annual Report prior to submission deadlines.	June 2026	All members	Open
3.4	Circulate Landscape Review draft once available and gather feedback.	When available	Declan McAllister	Open
7.1	Share remuneration model and policy paper with members for detailed review.	Before next meeting	Mandy Cowden	Open
7.1	Members to review remuneration paper and provide feedback (including gaps or updates required)	Ongoing	All members	Open
7.2	Progress consideration of a remuneration Task and Finish Group.	Sept 2026 onwards	Participation Partnership / PHA	Open
9.2	Maintain AI in Social Care as a standing agenda item for updates.	Ongoing	Jenny McDonagh	Open