

Northern Ireland Social Care Council Participation Partnership

Confirmed Minutes
Monday 23rd June 2025
Social Care Council Office, James House







23rd June

Members at the meeting:

Sarah Browne (Chair, Board Member)
Alan Ritchie (Co-Chair)
Joanne Sansome (Co-Chair) (online)
Andre McKeown (Head of Business Services)
Anne Mallon (Member)
David Gillen (Member) (online)
Declan McAllister (Interim Chief Executive) (Items 1, 2 and 3 only)
Gerard Forrestal (Member)
Gerard McWilliams (Member)
Mandy Cowden (Professional Advisor)
Nicholas Campbell (Graphic Designer and Animator)
Rebecca Smyth (Note Taker)
Rita McCullagh (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement)
Ronnie Patterson (Member)
Sandra Stranaghan (Interim Director of Registration and Corporate Services)
Susan Croy (Member)
Mervyn Bothwell (Social Care Council) (from Agenda Item 10)
Mary McColgan (Queen's University, Belfast) (from Agenda Item 11)


Apologies:

David Hayes (Member, Board Member)
Grace Price (Member)

1.		<p>apologies</p> 
1.1	Sarah Browne welcomed members and noted apologies from Davy Hayes and Grace Price.	
2.		<p>Previous Meeting's Minutes – Paper A, Minutes from previous meeting of 3rd March 2025</p>
2.1	<p>In relation to Action 10.1 of the previous minutes of 3rd March 2025, the link to the Learning Zone Loneliness and social work resource is now available. There is an opportunity within the link for feedback, which Mandy welcomed from members.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to share link to Loneliness Resource with members.</p>	
2.2	Sarah thanked Rebecca for the minutes of the previous meeting. Members agreed and signed off the previous minutes.	
3.		<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>3.1. Progress update on Social Care Council Business Plan 2025/2026</p> <p>3.2. Progress update on registrant app</p>
3.1	<p>Sandra Stranaghan updated members on the Social Care Council Business Plan 2025/2026. Members had viewed the draft plan in March 2025. The plan has now been approved by the Department of Health (DoH) and the Board, and the Business Plan on a page was shared, outlining what is to be achieved by the Social Care Council.</p> <p>There have been some small changes made to the Business Plan since the members reviewed it, including an action to review registration fees. This has been deferred from 2025/2026 plans to allow further time to engage with the DoH.</p> <p>Gerard McWilliams queried whether an increase in fees would be justified to registrants as value for money. Declan McAllister noted that the first priority for the Social Care Council would be gathering evidence to establish options and assess the workforce impact. Nothing would be taken forward without engagement and consultation with registrants and stakeholders. Any changes to fees are a strategic decision requiring approval by the Board and DoH.</p> <p>Sandra informed members that the Social Care Council will be commencing reviewing the Standards of Conduct and Practice for social work and social care next year. This large piece of work will involve all our stakeholders. During 2025-2026, the team will begin gathering information and feedback in</p>	



	<p>preparation for consulting on the Standards in 2026-2027. Helen McVicker (Interim Co-Director of Regulation and Standards) will attend a future meeting to discuss this.</p>
3.2	<p>Sandra was pleased to report that the Social Care Council Registration mobile App is now available for Android and Apple. Currently, the registration functionality is for those already registered and there has been positive feedback so far. There will be a soft launch of the App at the end of June/early July 2025. The option to pay registration fees through the App will be available by the end of June. Registrants can amend their details, upload ID documents and view learning resources through the App.</p> <p>Declan added that anyone can access the App to view the Social Care Council's learning resources without logging in, even if they are not registered. He asked members to consider if there were any other resources to include on the App that would be beneficial.</p> <p>Sandra reported that the current Registration IT system (SOCRATES) will require review in the next 1-2 years, as this system is almost 10 years old. An easy to use registration fee system is necessary with the right technology to support it.</p> <p>Consideration will also be needed around the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the business, particularly around what this means across functions and how it adds value in a tangible way. Members discussed the topic of AI, including benefits for grammar improvement and report writing, but raised concerns around the potential risk of losing professional relationships when using technology. Social work and social care are built around relationships, and it is important to remember that we are working with individual people.</p> <p>Sarah added that the use of AI should be discussed by all the partnerships and committees. Declan noted the importance of ethical use of AI and queried how ethical AI is for relationship based social work. Contacts in Ulster University (UU) are engaging with regulators around this. Gerard Forrestal raised concerns around job security, highlighting that most jobs will disappear within the near future due to AI. Communication is therefore essential around the impacts of its use.</p>
4.	<div data-bbox="308 1536 520 1780" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="780 1637 1016 1675" data-label="Section-Header"> <h4>Chair's Update</h4> </div>
4.1	<p>Sarah updated that Mike Nesbitt (Minister of Health) has appointed 3 Non-Executive Directors, who took up post in May 2025; Bria Mongan (Non-Executive Registrant Member), Carol Diffin (Non-Executive Stakeholder Member) and Denise Hunt (Non-Executive Lay Member). Sarah requested that Denise is invited to the September 2025 Participation Partnership</p>


	<p>meeting. Denise will be Chairing the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) meetings from October.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to invite Denise Hunt to the Participation Partnership meeting on 15th September 2025.</p>
4.2	Tracy Reid (current Executive Director of Social Work, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT)) has been appointed as incoming Social Care Council Chief Executive. Sarah acknowledged the excellent job Declan has done as Interim Chief Executive over the past year. Declan will continue this Interim post while Tracy serves her notice period.
4.3	Sarah congratulated all those involved in the successful launch of the Social Care Campaign at Camphill Community, Clanabogan on 11 th June 2025. Joanne Sansome chaired the event, which was attended by Gerard McW and the Health Minister.
4.4	Sarah attended the Improving Adult Care Together (IMPACT) Northern Ireland (NI) briefing webinar (13 th June 2025). This outlined the networks set up for carers of adults with learning disabilities (LD) and the direct payments projects which are in place for adults with Learning Disability. Mervyn Bothwell (Professional Adviser) also attended.
5.	<div data-bbox="327 904 601 1075" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Co-Chairs Update</p>
5.1	Alan Ritchie continues to work with the NI Confederation for Health and Social Care (NICON) and the Impact Assembly. The April Impact Assembly had low attendance. A further joint workforce session took place on 29 th May 2025, which involved bringing together different organisations and resources to review social care issues. The project is limited because outcomes have not been transferable outside of the network and there is a lack of structure to take it beyond 2 or 3 years of funding. The Impact Assembly is similar to Collaborative Networking, which are unique mixtures of resources focused on specific issues. There are challenges around scalability and transferability due to the uniqueness of these resources.
5.2	Joanne reported that the Campaign launch at Camphill Community was an excellent event. She was impressed by the calibre of the staff who work there; it felt like a community as staff, volunteers and service users live and work together. There was a host of people with different disabilities and abilities in attendance. This links to her work at Stormont around human rights and it gave her encouragement.
6.	<div data-bbox="327 1794 478 1951" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Members Updates</p> <p>6.1. Update on the homelessness strategy</p>

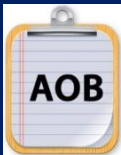
6.1	<p>Gerard F updated on his advocacy work on housing issues and homelessness. He had contacted the Department for Communities and other Departmental bodies with a Freedom of Information (FOI) request regarding housing. Pressures arising in local communities are strongly linked to pressures on housing availability. The recent protests are being linked to frustration around lack of transparency around housing allocation. Work within the homelessness sector has been ongoing for 8 years and it affects all areas of life, with levels of mistrust and misinformation increasing.</p> <p>Ronnie Patterson queried if derelict buildings in Belfast could be renovated, with Gerard advising that there are long waiting lists. Homelessness is not being considered properly and education is necessary in schools to inform individuals of its impact at an earlier age.</p>
6.2	Anne Mallon referred to the shortage of staff in domiciliary, respite and residential care, which is a common issue across the system.
6.3	<p>a. Susan Croy updated that Cedar Foundation is involved in planning the Learning Disability Pride events.</p> <p>b. The Cedar User Forum is taking part in a study along with UU, which is considering pain and Cerebral Palsy. Service users have the opportunity to engage in this.</p>
6.4	<p>Ronnie is considering getting involved in a campaign around Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and he encouraged members to also get involved. Joanne added that there is a “hashtag” for the campaign, called “#TakingThePIP”.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to share the link to the “#TakingThePIP” campaign webpage with members.</p>
6.5	David has completed work supporting Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) social workers. He is also supporting a private children’s home with their PIP. David is involved in a number of Judicial Reviews in the High Court relating to children with Learning Disability who have not received any respite and have had poor service provision.
6.6	Gerard McW referred to the excellent Social Care Campaign launch and thanked Camphill Community for their hard work. He was involved in a Care to Chat podcast for carers week which went well. Gerard participated in an event at Queen’s University, Belfast (QUB) with Joanne and Joe Duffy (QUB) to encourage students to become social workers. Gerard is also involved in work with Open University (OU) around social work teaching. Within his role at Patient Client Council (PCC), Gerard continues to support Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) on a regional perspective.
7.	 <p>Break</p>
7.1	Participants had a short break.



8.1	<p>Rita McCullagh reiterated on the positive feedback on the Social Care Campaign launch, noting how appropriate the venue was and how supportive everyone was at Camphill. It was good to bring the event to a service in the Western HSCT area, and there was a good turnout at the launch, which had previously been held at Stormont.</p> <p>The Campaign will continue throughout the summer and 3 stories were shared as part of the launch; Megha Acharya (social care practitioner, Nazareth House Care Village), Mark Espina (social care practitioner, Hutchinson Care Homes) and Louise Breen (Community Support Worker, Positive Futures). Megha's story will promoted this week. James McCallion (Western HSCT) and Jessica Carson (Triangle Housing) discussed the diversity of the social care workforce, showcasing smaller community care providers such as Nazareth House Care Village.</p> <p>The launch was an opportunity to promote the positive and caring environment at Camphill. It is safe, private, and respectful of people who live and work there. There has been fantastic feedback from people working there about the rewarding career opportunities, and Rita noted Joanne's fantastic job as Chair of the event. Mike Nesbitt took a tour around Camphill and the DoH recorded a video snapshot of the event. Rita thanked everyone for their input and will include this feedback in the end of year report.</p> <p>A 4-year review of the social care campaign is in progress. Surveys and interviews will be carried out over the summer to get feedback from those involved in the Campaign in previous years. Data will be compiled in September 2025, with recommendations going to the Social Care Collaborative Forum. The review will also look at adult social care campaigns delivered elsewhere in the United Kingdom (UK), and a key theme will be around scale and capacity. Ronnie noted that consideration could be given to what the Channel Islands and Isle of Man are doing around social care.</p>
8.2	<p>A new Care to Chat podcast featuring the Care in Practice (CIP) Framework will be released on Wednesday 2nd July 2025. The recent podcast focusing on carers involved Gerard McW, Áine Magee (formerly of Carers NI), Agnes Lunny and Liam Dorrian (both of Positive Futures).</p> <p>A podcast is being developed with Triangle Housing around supported living and how they provide social care services, with the involvement of a social care practitioner. The 23rd June 2025 is the last day of recording for the current podcast series. It will focus on how racism is affecting the social care and social work workforce. Aine Morrison (Chief Social Worker), a representative from The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), a nurse from a care home with a lived experience of racism and John Patrick</p>

	Clayton (Unison) are involved in this podcast to consider the ongoing approach and broader strategy around racism.
8.3	The Social Care Council logo has been changed to the Pride logo for June.
8.4	<p>Rita updated that a film named “Lollipop”, produced by Daisy-Mae Hudson and involving Emilia Rose Porter with lived-experience, has been released. This film highlights the realities of the social care system and is being shown in the Queen’s Film Theatre from 30th June 2025 to 3rd July 2025. Rita requested that Rebecca share the link to the news article with members.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to share the link to the “Lollipop” film news article with members.</p>
9.	 <p>Discussion around Participation Partnership webpage content</p>
9.1	<p>Rebecca advised that she regularly updates the Participation Partnership section of the Social Care Council website with notes from meetings and dates of upcoming meetings. Notes on updating the current webpage have been shared with members. Sarah requested that members send Rebecca any comments for the webpage as soon as possible. A group photo will also be taken at the meeting today which will be added to the webpage and used in the Annual Report PPI section.</p> <p>ACTION: Members to send Rebecca Smyth any comments or amendments to the webpage suggestions document ASAP.</p>
10.	 <p>Progress update on National Occupational Standards review</p>
10.1	<p>Mervyn Bothwell provided an update on work carried out on the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Health and Social Care (HSC) review since the previous Participation meeting on 3rd March 2025.</p> <p>NOS are statements of good practice which describe what workers should be able to do, the standard they should be meeting and knowledge they should be aware of. NOS are normally reviewed every 5 years. There are 212 NOS included in this review, with statements covering HSC, and childcare L&D.</p> <p>The total number of NOS have been reduced to 147, and 4 new NOS have been introduced around promoting play, supervision and support, leading effective teams and leading the use of digital technology. 43 NOS were combined and 22 archived that were irrelevant. The updated NOS statements are on track to be completed by January 2026.</p> <p>The NOS review team will be surveying all registrants and stakeholders across the UK. People with lived experience are included in the consultation and the NOS apply to training organisations as well. The survey will ask for views on</p>

	<p>the proposed changes to improve the NOS. Mervyn advised that a single response from the Participation Partnership would be sufficient, and he will share the survey link through Mandy. The survey will be open between 4th August 2025 and 19th September 2025, and outcomes from the consultation will be published in October 2025.</p> <p>Mervyn shared some learning from the review engagement so far. In April 2025, there were 2 engagement sessions with social care providers in Dunsilly Hotel and Seagoe Hotel for feedback on the NOS. Additional learning includes the need for less duplication, less confusing language and to provide a glossary of terms.</p> <p>Gerard McW queried whether the survey will be shared with the PCC and whether the questions will be general, and Mervyn confirmed this. Alan noted that rather than the term “glossary”, a “schedule of definitions” could be used.</p> <p>ACTION: Mandy Cowden to share the link to the NOS consultation with members when published on 4th August 2025.</p>
10.2	<p>Mandy referred to the remuneration report regarding payment for participation at meetings. She is linking in with Martin Quinn (Regional PPI Lead, HSC) and Sarah requested that this topic is added to the agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to add discussion of remuneration for members participating in meetings to the agenda for the 15th September 2025 meeting.</p>
11.	<div>  <p>Discussion around Department of Health Children’s Social Care Reform Workstream recording framework</p> </div>
11.1	<p>Sarah welcomed Professor Mary McColgan to the meeting to discuss the DoH Children’s Social Care Reform Workstream recording framework. This workstream is taking forward a recommendation from the Ray Jones Review of Children’s Services to improve language, recording and reporting of social work assessments.</p> <p>Mary thanked members for the opportunity to attend. Mary introduced herself as a registered social worker who worked previously at UU and is now working at QUB as a tutor on the social work programme. She is also studying Children’s Rights part time at QUB and is involved with Praxis Care and Social Care Council.</p> <p>Mary is working on this project with colleagues from UU and DoH. Mary and Mandy will be leading on engagement with people with experience of childrens social work services. They have already met with one group and are scheduled to meet another group of families next week. Mandy added that this is an opportunity to talk to people with experience of looking at their records to see what the social worker had recorded, the terminology used and what they</p>

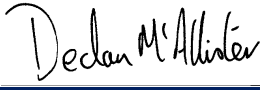
	<p>would like to see recorded. Consideration is needed around gathering feedback on a 1-1 basis or in a group setting to gather ideas on what should or should not be recorded and whether there are ways to gather more succinct information.</p> <p>Susan referred to Mervyn's work and queried if there were any NOS around social work report writing. Mandy and Joanne noted variations in how information is recorded. Mary advised that the student practice placement preparation and assessment includes guidance on recording information. Practice placement assessment include 3 direct observations of the student leading a meeting and formally writing up a report of their assessment. All students are required to pass the practice teaching model.</p> <p>Susan noted that having an understanding of why the information is recorded would be helpful, with Joanne adding that the social worker should be explaining why they record certain information.</p> <p>Alan raised that two social workers could have different experiences of the same event which may lead to inconsistency. This depends on evidence versus observation and training is required on logical and critical thinking. There may also be changes in staffing over time which may cause further inconsistencies. Mary noted the need for clarity around what is recorded, why and how it is requested. The process involved in collecting the information is as important as the language and purpose.</p> <p>Joanne noted that within some special schools, some people are 18-19 years of age, i.e. they are adults and could potentially be included in the engagement.</p> <p>Mary noted how helpful the discussion with members was with a need for further focus on a more complex system and clarity around legal mandates. She will report back to members on the findings of the project alongside Mandy.</p>
12.	<div>  <div> <div>AOB</div> <div> 12.1. Annual Report 2024/2025 – key highlights 12.2. Update on Social Care Collaborative Forum </div> </div> </div>
12.1	<p>Andre McKeown provided copies of the current PPI report for the Annual Report and Accounts 2024-2025. She thanked members for their contributions in preparing such a comprehensive account of all the activities undertaken towards social work and social care standards, education and training. Andre requested that any member amendments are sent to her by Friday 27th June 2025. The Annual Report is scheduled for review by the Board in early July and then will be formally submitted to the Audit Office for certification.</p> <p>ACTION: Members to send any amendments to the Patient Public Involvement report to Andre McKeown by Friday 27th June 2025.</p>

12.2	<p>a. Declan provided members with an update on Item 12.2, the Social Care Collaborative Forum.</p> <p>The Social Care Collaborative Forum is due to publish its second annual report. The Programme Board oversees the programme of review and development to support transformation of adult social care. The Social Care Workforce Strategy has been published, with 22 actions within the 10-year Programme for Reform of Adult Social Care. These fall under 7 key pillars including raising recognition of social care practitioners and other potential registration areas of the workforce. The Strategy's vision for the next 10 years is encouraging and supporting the different providers, with a 3-year delivery plan.</p> <p>There are 8 different workstreams and an early review shows teams in place from HSCT implementing changes. More staffing resource is required to deliver Home Care services. HSCT introduced a specialist assessor model, which streamlined allocation of care packages and has improved hospital discharge times. This model is available on a 5-day basis but work is ongoing to build a business case to have the model available 7 days per week. It is hoped that a new nursing home contract will be available in the Autumn. This is a delay to the original timescales, but it is important to get the commissioning contract correct. Gerard McW queried whether the new contract was universal for all HSCT service providers commissioning services and whether this was a set payment for the private and voluntary sector. Declan advised that this contract was only for nursing and residential care provision and there is a second process for home care. There is one single contract for sector providers with separate work needed on tariffs around the rate paid.</p> <p>There is a new IT system in HSCT for home care services, working with key social care leaders and NICON to build leadership trust and confidence at all levels, although this is challenging when finance is involved.</p> <p>Sarah queried whether a new workstream has been set up to address the recent unrest around migrants. Declan advised that there is a working group set up by the Social Care Collaborative Forum which has looked into the serious untoward events which occurred in Summer 2024. It is important to raise awareness of the vital role played by people from outside NI. A draft set of guidance and some podcasts will be shared. This work is connected to Raising the Profile activities and it is hoped this will be ready to promote in early July 2025.</p> <p>Gerard McW queried whether the top priorities for the NI Executive included social care. Declan advised that the Social Care Workforce Strategy is aligned to the Programme for Government. Currently, there is a focus on delivering technology into HSC and promoting IT investment. Encompass has been rolled out across the HSCT. This effectively co-ordinates an individual's healthcare record but it is not yet clear how this system will fit for social care support.</p>
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	<p>Gerard McW queried where service users sit in relation to championing the importance of social care, with concern around not getting enough people interested in the career. Declan noted that England, Scotland and Wales are in a different position to NI, where we have the Strategy and recognise social care practitioners. England is undertaking a 3-year review and NI are developing the CIP Framework action plan to make social care a career choice by improving pay, support, career pathways and the qualifications framework.</p> <p>Members raised concern around the immigration policy and staff shortages, with Joanne noting that individuals with sponsorship visas are now having difficulties getting their right to work honoured. There is a lot of work with DoH to get to the threshold for sponsorship, with some individuals not meeting the criteria. It can be hard to encourage people into social care as a career.</p> <p>Declan noted the importance of changing the perception of what social care is. Social care has moved on but is still not recognised as a career. Joanne noted the need to collaborate as a partnership to speak to local government around removing some of the associated costs. Declan noted that 23% people on the full register do not have English as their first language and there is concern around not having enough workers in the workforce.</p> <p>b. In relation to the Fair Work Forum, Mike Nesbitt has stated publicly that he is committed to adding £50 million to support movement on social care workers pay rates to meet the levels set out in The Real Living Wage by October 2025. This will be challenging to implement within the current financial limitations.</p> <p>Sarah queried whether the commitment to the real living wage only related to adult social care, with Declan advising that the Minister's initial commitment only relates to those registered with the Social Care Council. Some people employed within children's services are not required to be registered and further consideration is needed for the children's social care practitioner workforce.</p> <p>Alan queried whether The Real Living Wage applies to the statutory sector. Declan advised that statutory sector employees are already paid Real Living Wage rates and this change in policy aims to give parity across all registered social care practitioners.</p>
12.3	<p>Members discussed and agreed the below dates for the 2025/2026 meetings. Sarah requested that Rebecca update Hollie Bishop (Social Care Council) on the confirmed dates for updating the Board schedule.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to update Hollie Bishop on the confirmed Participation Partnership 2025/2026 dates for updating the Board schedule.</p>
12.4	<p>Sarah thanked members for attending the meeting, which ended at 1:15pm.</p>



Dates of proposed meetings:

Next meeting:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 15th September 2025• 15th December 2025• 9th March 2026• 8th June 2026
Approved by:	Declan McAllister (Interim Chair)
Signature:	
Date of Approval:	15/09/2025

Annex I

Action List – date of meeting: 23rd June 2025

<u>Listing no:</u>	<u>Action:</u>	<u>Due Date:</u>	<u>Owner:</u>	<u>Status:</u>
2.1	Rebecca Smyth to share link to Loneliness Resource with members.	ASAP	Rebecca Smyth	Closed
4.1	Rebecca Smyth to invite Denise Hunt to the Participation Partnership meeting on 15 th September 2025.	ASAP	Rebecca Smyth	Closed
6.4	Rebecca Smyth to share the link to the “#TakingThePIP” campaign webpage with members.	ASAP	Rebecca Smyth	Closed
8.4	Rebecca Smyth to share the link to the “Lollipop” film news article with members.	ASAP	Rebecca Smyth	Closed
9.1	Members to send Rebecca Smyth any comments or amendments to the webpage suggestions document ASAP.	ASAP	Members	Closed
10.1	Mandy Cowden to share the link to the NOS consultation with members when published on 4 th August 2025.	ASAP after Monday 4 th August 2025	Mandy Cowden	Closed
10.2	Rebecca Smyth to add discussion of remuneration for members participating in meetings to the agenda for the 15 th September 2025 meeting.	Monday 15 th September 2025	Rebecca Smyth	Item deferred to 15 th December 2025 meeting
12.1	Members to send any amendments to the Patient Public Involvement report to	Friday 27 th June 2025	Members	Closed

	Andre McKeown by Friday 27th June 2025.			
12.3	Rebecca Smyth to update Hollie Bishop on the confirmed Participation Partnership 2025/2026 dates for updating the Board schedule.	ASAP	Rebecca Smyth	Closed