

Northern Ireland Social Care Council Participation Partnership

Confirmed Minutes
Monday 15th September 2025
Social Care Council Office, James House







15th September

Members at the meeting:



Alan Ritchie (Co-Chair)
Joanne Sansome (Co-Chair)
Andre McKeown (Head of Business Services)
Anne Mallon (Member)
Bria Mongan (Board Member)
Declan McAllister (Interim Chair)
Denise Hunt (Board Member)
Grace Price (Member)
Mandy Cowden (Professional Advisor)
Rebecca Smyth (Note Taker)
Rita McCullagh (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement)
Ronnie Patterson (Member)
Tracy Reid (Chief Executive)
Mervyn Bothwell (Agenda Item 7 only)


Apologies:


Sarah Browne (Chair, Board Member)
David Gillen (Member)
David Hayes (Member, Board Member)
Gerard Forrestal (Member)
Gerard McWilliams (Member)
Nicholas Campbell (Graphic Designer and Animator)
Sandra Stranaghan (Interim Director of Registration and Corporate Services)
Susan Croy (Cedar Foundation)

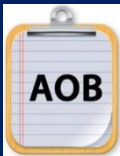


1.		apologies 
1.1	Declan McAllister welcomed members to the meeting, including Tracy Reid (Chief Executive, Social Care Council), Denise Hunt and Bria Mongan (Social Care Council Board Members).	
2.		Previous Meeting's Minutes – Paper A, Minutes from previous meeting of 23rd June 2025
2.1	Members agreed and signed off the previous minutes from 23 rd June 2025.	
3.		Member introductions - new Social Care Council Chief Executive and Board Members 3.1. Overview and discussion of Participation Partnership to include: 3.1.1. Chair's Update 3.1.2. Co-Chairs Update including DoH Learning Disability Service Model Consultation 3.1.3. Members Updates including update on Social Care Collaborative Forum and Fair Work Forum
3.1	Declan provided a brief overview of the Participation Partnership and invited member introductions.	
3.1.1.	Declan provided a Chair's Update under Item 5.	
3.1.2.	<p>Alan Ritchie introduced himself and shared his career journey. He explained his lived experience as a carer meant he has a special interest in Learning Disability Standards. He has previously reported inconsistencies with the Department of Health (DoH) Learning Disability Service Model – in particular around guidance and practices being used. DoH currently has a consultation open relating to Learning Disability services which can be accessed here: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/learning-disability-service-model.</p> <p>Mandy Cowden advised members that they can respond individually or as a Participation Partnership subgroup which would be included as part of the Social Care Council's response. The online consultation is open until 25th November 2025.</p>	

	<p>Joanne Sansome shared her experience in research and disability activism. This meeting will be her last as a member because she is stepping back from Participation Partnership to focus on research implementation.</p> <p>Joanne shared how she had kept a diary throughout lockdown which was shared as a testimony to the COVID Enquiry All-Party Group (APG) and she is recording her story as someone with lived experience. She has been invited to remain involved with the enquiry and is passionate about delivering democracy and legislation.</p> <p>Joanne will be a lead researcher in the Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) Ignite Network programme in October 2025 alongside Queen's University Belfast (QUB), who are joining as a Northern Ireland (NI) partner.</p>
3.1.3.	<p>Grace Price's experience relates to homelessness, mental health and learning disability. She has worked closely with Gerry Skelton on Homelessness Awareness and social work training. Grace is also stepping back from Participation Partnership due to health. Grace expressed disappointment that the Social Care Council did not focus more on addressing homelessness. Declan noted that the Social Care Council will continue to promote homelessness as part of the workforce education and training activities and within the remit of regulating and developing the workforce. Gerard Forrestal will also continue to represent issues relating to homelessness on the Partnership.</p> <p>Ronnie Patterson introduced himself as a person with lived experience of learning disability. He works part time at The Mac and advised that there is an exhibition running to display artwork by Steve McQueen, focusing on Grenfell and homelessness. Ronnie will be attending the Social Care Council Professional in Practice (PiP) Awards on 17th September 2025.</p> <p>Anne Mallon introduced herself as an older parent carer and member of a parent support group. The group advocate to raise awareness of the needs of families and people with disabilities with local Trusts and representatives. There are a number of issues impacting on families with disabled children and adults, particularly the lack of respite or cancellation of respite at short notice. Anne has shared these experiences directly with Mike Nesbitt (Health Minister, DoH) to ensure carers voices are listened to and responded to.</p> <p>Tracy Reid introduced herself as the new Chief Executive. She has a long career in social work, with experience in physical and sensory disability and adult safeguarding as well as personal experience of being a carer.</p> <p>Denise Hunt previously worked as a barrister, with experience as a Social Services representative. She is a parent carer and has joined the Social Care Council Board as a lay member.</p> <p>Bria Mongan has joined the Social Care Council Board as a Registrant Board member and is attending this meeting as an observer. She has worked across social work, children's services, mental health systems, the</p>

	<p>prison service and as a Health and Social Care (HSC) associate consultant. Bria has maintained her registration post-retirement.</p> <p>Declan welcomed questions for Tracy, Denise and Bria. Ronnie queried from them if they thought there had been improvements in disability services over the years. Tracy noted a better understanding of inclusion and the importance of caring roles and responsibilities. Service demand has increased with an older and growing population, possibly resulting in poorer service delivery and quality.</p> <p>Members discussed challenges within social work and social care and the impact on the sector. These include difficulty accessing information, the demand on General Practitioner (GP) services and associated pay rates, frustrations and delays around accessing and being allocated a social worker due to staff shortages and retention issues. The group discussed the need for person centred care, early intervention and forward planning of services. Members acknowledged the hard work and dedication of social workers and social care workers.</p> <p>Alan added that while social care is guided by medical models, clear guidelines are required to address these challenges. Some doctors are spending additional time working on administrative tasks, resulting in longer working hours or seeing fewer patients. Denise acknowledged the burn out faced by staff in the sector. Bria highlighted the importance of relationship-based systems and advocacy from social care workers, with the Social Care Council reinforcing standards of good practice.</p> <p>Grace noted the need for social workers and social care workers to be informed about homelessness and housing services.</p>
4.	 <p>Break</p>
4.1	Participants had their break.
5.	 <p>Matters Arising</p>

5.1	<p>Declan updated that Social Work England (SWE) and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) have increased their registration fees, following public consultation. Wales is considering a consultation at this point. The Social Care Council has previously considered engaging with the sector to assess whether fees in NI should change. At the accountability meeting with the DoH in August, the Social Care Council and DoH agreed that current levels of registration fees in NI will remain. However, circumstances may change and any future changes to fees will be taken forward in consultation with registrants and stakeholders.</p> <p>Mandy referred to feedback to the SWE survey, with approximately 8000 responses against fee increases. Rita McCullagh added the need for traction from the government to progress this matter.</p>
5.2	The Social Care Council Business Plan 2025/2026 contains objectives to address the review of the Standards of Conduct and Practice for social work and social care. This is a large piece of work and will require an initial scoping to plan for a full review and consultation. This will take quite a bit of time and is likely to be moved on into the plans for 2026/2027 business year.
5.3	The Social Care Council Registration mobile app is now available, providing information on training, events and support, and account access to pay fees. Declan encouraged members to share any other resources for including on the app, such as key links.
5.4	A review of the Registration Information Technology (IT) System has been undertaken. The business case is being developed and will be submitted to Digital Health and Care NI (DHCNI) for approval.
5.5	The anti-racism guidance is now finalised, with the Social Care Collaborative Forum (SCCF) progressing responses on attacks. A sub-group was created with guidance released for employers and registrants and the Office of Social Services (OSS) are working with Catherine Maguire (Interim Co-Director of Regulation and Standards, Social Care Council) on this.
5.6	Andre McKeown updated that the Social Care Council Annual Report 2024/2025 is now laid in the assembly and published on the Social Care Council website. Mandy noted thanks from Gerry Guckian (Acting Chair, Social Care Council) to Participation Partnership members for their contributions to the Annual Report 2024/2025.
5.7	The discussion around remuneration for members participating in meetings has been deferred to the 15 th December 2025 meeting.
5.8	Members agreed all actions were closed from the previous meeting of 23 rd June 2025.
6.	 <p>1-page overview of Engagement Strategy progress</p>

6.1	<p>Members referred to the one-page Engagement Strategy summary which was shared on behalf of Rita McCullagh prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Rita updated that Comms are working on the Engagement Strategy exposure draft, highlighting the scale of collaboration by the Social Care Council. This strategy will assist the organisation in consultation and the Comms team welcome feedback and different approaches. Rita highlighted timeliness as a new principle, where it is important to engage with stakeholders early in order to tailor information, with the strategy reflecting each principle. The Social Care Council Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Operational Leadership Team (OLT) will consider the strategy and then it will be shared with Participation Partnership members.</p> <p>Rita highlighted the importance of equal opportunity for all, referring to National Inclusion Week across the United Kingdom (UK) (15th to 21st September 2025). This includes ensuring individuals feel listened to and have opportunities for training and development. It is hoped that members can see the value of their input, with the achievements held accountable to the Social Care Council Board. Declan thanked Rita for her update.</p>
7.	<div data-bbox="336 835 496 1003">  </div> <div data-bbox="496 835 1428 1003"> 1-page overview on the review of the National Occupational Standards </div>
7.1	<p>Declan welcomed Mervyn Bothwell to the meeting. Members referred to the one-page National Occupational Standards (NOS) summary which was shared on behalf of Mervyn prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Mervyn updated that the Social Care Council is part of the UK Partners Group alongside SSSC, Social Care Wales (SCW) and SWE. A review is underway of NOS for HSC and Children's Care to reduce duplication, ensure they are current and provide the necessary skills. The reviews should happen every 5 years; however, it has been 10 years since the last review. Around 147 draft NOS were submitted to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) for approval, including 103 HSC revised NOS, 44 Children's Care Learning and Development revised NOS and 4 new HSC NOS. 23 NOS were archived due to low or no uptake.</p> <p>A local group of stakeholders from the adult's and children's sectors has been established and a formal consultation was launched on 4th August 2025, in collaboration with Andre and the Comms team. There have been 264 responses from Scotland, 85 from NI, 23 from Wales and 17 from England, which is encouraging. The consultation closes on Friday 19th September 2025 and Mervyn encouraged members to respond.</p> <p>The Progressive Partnership will consider the results in October 2025 with the surveys undergoing review in November 2025. It is hoped the final NOS will be submitted by the end of December 2025 for approval and the</p>

	<p>Standards published early 2026. The Standards will be translated into Welsh for stakeholders linked to SCW.</p> <p>Mervyn agreed to attend a future meeting in early 2026 to update members on achievements. There are links into the children's services through Early Years (EY) and Childcare Youth Work Partnership. Members thanked Mervyn for his update.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to invite Mervyn Bothwell to a meeting in early 2026 for an update on the National Occupational Standards achievements.</p>	
8.		AOB
8.1	<p>Mandy agreed to email members for contributions to the Social Care Council response of the DoH Learning Disability Service Model Consultation. Members can also respond individually if preferred.</p> <p>ACTION: Mandy Cowden to email members for contributions to the Social Care Council response of the Department of Health Learning Disability Service Model Consultation.</p>	
8.2	<p>On behalf of the Participation Partnership and Social Care Council, Declan thanked Joanne and Grace for their contributions over the years. Members reflected on Joanne's achievements and Grace's experience as a service user of frontline services.</p> <p>Declan advised that the Social Care Council will hold a farewell event for Joanne and Grace.</p> <p>ACTION: Rebecca Smyth to identify a date for a farewell event for Joanne Sansome and Grace Price and share with members/the wider organisation.</p>	
8.3	Declan thanked members for attending the meeting.	
		Dates of proposed meetings:
Next meeting:		• 15 th December 2025
Approved by:		Sarah Browne
Signature:		
Date of Approval:		15 th December 2025

Annex I

Action List – date of meeting: 15th September 2025

<u>Listing no:</u>	<u>Action:</u>	<u>Due Date:</u>	<u>Owner:</u>	<u>Status:</u>
7.1	Rebecca Smyth to invite Mervyn Bothwell to a meeting in early 2026 for an update on the National Occupational Standards achievements.	15 th December 2025	Rebecca Smyth	Closed
8.1	Mandy Cowden to email members for contributions to the Social Care Council response of the Department of Health Learning Disability Service Model Consultation.	ASAP	Mandy Cowden	Closed
8.2	Rebecca Smyth to identify a date for a farewell event for Joanne Sansome and Grace Price and share with members/the wider organisation.	ASAP	Rebecca Smyth	Closed