

Social Care Council Board Meeting
Confirmed Minutes
10:00am on Wednesday 17th December 2025
Room 1.7, James House

Present:

Gerard Guckian, Acting Chair
Sarah Browne, Board Member
Roslyn Dougherty, Board Member
Professor David Hayes, Board Member
Jacqueline McGarvey, Board Member- MS Teams
Denise Hunt, Board Member
Bria Mongan, Board Member
Carol Diffin, Board Member

In Attendance:

Tracy Reid, Chief Executive, Social Care Council
Tricia Devlin, Interim Co-Head of Workforce Development, Social Care Council
Declan McAllister, Director of Registration & Corporate Services, Social Care Council
Catherine Maguire, Interim Co-Director of Regulation and Standards, Social Care Council
Gillian McAuley, Interim Co-Head of Workforce Development, Social Care Council
Rita McCullagh, Head of Strategic Communications & Engagement, Social Care Council
Anne McGlade, Social Care Research Lead, Social Care Council
Helen McVicker, Interim Co-Director of Regulation and Standards, Social Care Council
Maureen Martin, Secretariat, Social Care Council

Observer(s):

Pauline Coulter, Department of Health – via MS Teams at 10: 30a.m

Apologies:

Sandra Stranaghan, Head of Corporate Services, Social Care Council

Formalities

Item	Agenda
1.	Welcome and apologies
1.1	The Acting Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies as listed above.
2.	Declarations of Interest
2.1	There were no Declarations of Interest to note.
3.0	Board Minutes - for approval
3.1	<i>Minutes of the previous meeting of 8th October 2025</i>
3.1.1	The minutes of 8 th October 2025 were approved by the Board as a true and accurate record.
3.1.2	There were no Matters Arising for note.

Chair and Chief Executive Reports

4.	Chair's Business – verbal
4.1	<p>The Acting Chair thanked Roslyn Dougherty for deputising at the Board Strategic session on 12th November. The draft Engagement Strategy was noted as a substantive item on the meeting agenda for final Board approval.</p> <p>The Acting Chair and Chief Executive had attended a Midyear Accountability meeting on 11th December. Discussion covered a range of matters, including the financial challenges going forward and pressures on the Fitness to Practice function.</p> <p>Additional meetings and events attended by the Acting Chair are outlined in the Chief Executive's report.</p>
4.2	<p>The Acting Chair reported that he had addressed staff at an event on 11th December to officially commend colleagues on the successful achievement of the European Social Network award for innovation for the Care in Practice framework. The Care in Practice framework is the first framework to recognise the value of social care and will help raise standards of care and practice and develop a professional development route for the social care workforce.</p>

4.3	The Acting Chair noted that a farewell event had taken place on 15 th December to celebrate the service and contribution of long-standing Participation Partnership members, Joanne Sansome and Grace Price as they are standing down membership from the Committee. ACTION - Acting Chair to write a formal letter of thanks to Ms Price and Ms Sansome.
5.	Chief Executive's Report – Paper B
5.1	<p>The Chief Executive presented her Board report which outlines emergent risks and activity undertaken during the period 01 October – 10 December 2025. She drew the Boards attention to key meetings and activities summarised as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data Cleansing Exercise update is detailed in the Risk Progress report and will be discussed under agenda item 14; - Individual meetings have been attended with five teams to date and remainder planned for in the new year. Feedback from the meetings has been positive overall and is indicative of a strong organisational culture of leadership and shared values which was also reflected in the Happy Raspberry report. A summary report will be provided for Board information once the remainder of meetings have been concluded; - Accountability and Governance Training for Accounting Officers was completed on 2nd December as part of induction requirements and an Accounting Officer meeting with the Permanent Secretary was attended on 11th October; - An Accountability meeting was attended on 5th December with the Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership Chair and Professional Officer. Work is underway to strengthen the Partnership's governance and continuity arrangements; - The Department of Health has commissioned a Landscape review that is due for completion by the end of March 2026. The appointed consultant will be in contact in due course to complete a desk top review and to schedule interviews. ACTION: Landscape Review Terms of Reference to be shared with Board members <p>The Board noted the Chief Executive's Report.</p>
Partnership Updates	
6.	Professional in Practise Partnership - verbal update
6.1	<p>The Chair of the Professional in Practise Partnership, Roslyn Dougherty gave an update on key matters and activity as discussed at the Partnership meeting of 11th December 2025. Notes from the meeting will be shared once available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report has been compiled following the review of programs by independent visitors in compliance with a recommendation arising from Revalidation of Professional Development under the Professional in Practice framework in 2023. The Interim Co-Head of Fitness to Practise

	<p>and the Interim Co-Director of Regulation & Standards have met with the Program teams to discuss the report findings and to agree an action plan required with those that did not meet the required standards. The Board noted the importance of the Social Care Council’s oversight of the programs to ensure robust governance and effective product quality assurance are in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An External Assessor report on the Professional in Practice framework that confirms the high standard of quality assurance and partnership working delivered with national and international focus. ACTION: External Assessor Report 2025 to be shared with Board members; • Update reports were received from Panel Chairs for Individual Assessment Route (IAR), Information and Development and Approved Programs Approval Panel and it was confirmed that systems are in place to address those programs that are not currently meeting expected standards. The Board noted the commitment and partnership working demonstrated by external agencies and academic partnerships. • Date for diary noted for Annual Professional in Practice Awards ceremony on 22nd September 2026 – venue to be confirmed; <p>The Board noted the update on the Professional in Practise Partnership meeting on 11th December 2025.</p>
6.2	Research and Evidence Partnership update – Paper C for information
6.2.1	<p>The Chair of the Research and Evidence Partnership, presented a progress update paper on the work of the Partnership and the following key information was highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save the date noted for the Research & Evidence conference on Wednesday 11th March 2026 at Riddell Hall, Belfast; • Board members Carol Diffin and Bria Mongan had attended the Partnership meeting as part of the Board induction process; • In order to maximise attendance, Partnership members agreed a balance of face to face and online meetings would be scheduled going forward; • The Research Community sub-group chaired by Helen McVicker and Professor Lisa Bunting, QUB remains a key part of the research infrastructure as an advice and networking source; • An excellent response was received to the Doctoral Level Education scoping exercise that was conducted in August/September for PhDs related to social work and social care research. Details are available on the Social Care Council website - link PhD Themes table. A scoping exercise is planned for social care PhD students; • European Conference for Social Work Research is to be held 15 – 17

	<p>April.</p> <p>The Chief Executive highlighted the importance of the Partnership in supporting practice and education and providing a forum to align research with the challenges and lived experience of social workers.</p> <p>Anne McGlade, Research and Evidence lead was commended for delivering significant outcomes with limited resources and budget.</p> <p>The Board noted the Research and Evidence Partnership update.</p>
6.3	Participation Partnership Update
6.3.1	<p>The Chair of the Participation Partnership, Sarah Browne gave a verbal update on the meeting of 15th December and noted the following key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carol Diffin had attended the Partnership meeting as part of the Board induction program; • A collective response has been submitted to the Learning Disability services model consultation and two members have also submitted an individual response; • A Partnership member has joined the Research & Evidence Partnership with the AI agenda as a main focus and this work will align with the working group chaired by the Director of Registration & Corporate Services. The working group explores the use of AI in social care and key areas where AI could be implemented to support care and service delivery; • An update on the NOS review delivered by Mervyn Bothwell, Professional Advisor; • The Director of Registration & Corporate Services gave an update on the changes around the Social Care Collaborative Forum and the 10-year Strategy and 3-year Implementation Plan; • Discussion took place around the challenges on remuneration for service users and carers as Partnership members; • Discussion took place around the refresh of Partnership membership key recruitment areas; • The Partnership meeting was followed by a farewell event for members Joanne Sansome and Grace Price. <p>The Board noted the Participation Partnership update.</p>
6.4	Leaders in Social Care Partnership update
6.4.1	The Partnership Chair advised that no further meetings had taken place since the last Board meeting.

Business Matters

7.	Business Performance Reports- Month 7 & Month 8 – Papers D1 & D2
7.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services gave an overview of the Business Performance reports and noted the following key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The majority of KPI targets are being met.• Customer Support and call handling KPIs are being maintained but with budget restrictions, the number of hours outsourced from Hub NI, call management service will need to be reduced from January 2026 which will impact on the registration KPI's. This will be monitored closely to year end.• Fitness to Practise Committee and Hearings KPI's are as a direct result of increasing activity with no additional funded resource. It is anticipated that the ability to meet KPI's in this area will be challenging as we approach year end, but will continue to be monitored;• Absence and finance KPI's remain stable, but increased activity with no attributable increase in resource will inevitably challenge the Council and its staff as March 2026 approaches. <p>Following discussion, it was agreed that going forward, the KPI report should be refined to include benchmarking and trends and to provide more detail on expected changes to KPIs and actions implemented to ensure targets are met:</p> <p>ACTION: National Regulator KPI's to be incorporated where possible as a bench mark for FTP and Registration along with forecasted trends for KPI's to year end.</p> <p>The Board noted the Business Performance Reports for Month 7 and Month 8.</p>
8.	Financial Performance Report
8.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services presented the Month 5 Financial Performance report for information and gave an overview of key information in the report. The following were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The report gives the current financial position at 31 October 2025;• A letter was received from the Department of Health in October regarding an additional non – recurrent allocation of £19,800 in relation to the Case for Change – Staff retention and Recruitment in the Independent Sector which supports the work of the DoH Fair Work Forum;• At the recent Staff Townhall meeting followed up with a staff communication has been issued to bring attention to the challenging

	<p>budget position for the organisation as yearend approaches. Staff were asked to be mindful of taking forward any procurement that would be outside business as usual and prudence was requested with respect to expenditure on hospitality, training and travel. All requests for expenditure in these areas must be pre-approved by the Senior Leadership team;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an overspend in Legal services due to an increase in Fitness to Practise and Committee Hearings activity. <p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services noted the current year to date and forecasted breakeven position of - £90k at month 7. The Board was informed that the figures did not include the pay award allocation of £122k as it is assumed that the pay award will be fully funded, however notification has just been received that the DOH would be allocating only 33% of the total pay award cost (£40,651) and that the remaining 67% (£81,294) would be identified as the new deficit breakeven target for year end with cash funding for the full award to staff funded from 2026/27. This was new territory in terms of financial breakeven and will be monitored very closely as the organisation approaches year end.</p> <p>The Board noted the Financial Performance Report at October 2025.</p>
9.	Policy Review
9.1	<i>Adult Safeguarding Policy - Paper F for approval</i>
9.1.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services presented the Adult Safeguarding Policy for Board approval. It was confirmed that two Adult Safeguarding champions have been appointed and training will be arranged and rolled out to all staff in due course</p> <p>The Board approved the Adult Safeguarding Policy subject to the addition of a glossary.</p>
9.2	<i>Gifts and Hospitality Policy – Paper G for approval</i>
9.2.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services presented the Gifts and Hospitality Policy for Board approval. The Policy has been updated to reflect the increase of the gift threshold to £50.00 in line with the Department of Health guidance and departmental circular.</p> <p>It was noted that the reference to the Prevention of Corruption Act 1916 at section 6.4 should be amended to reflect that this has been replaced by the Bribery Act.</p>

	The Board approved the Gifts and Hospitality Policy subject to the recommended amendment above.
9.3	<i>Travel and Subsistence Policy- Paper G for approval</i>
9.3.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services presented the Travel and Subsistence Policy for Board approval. The policy has been revised in line with the Department of Health Finance circular which specified an increase in the car mileage rate to 58p per mile up to 4,300 miles (was previously 56p up to 3,300 miles).</p> <p>The Board approved the Travel and Subsistence Policy.</p>
10.	Annual Regulation and Development of Education and Training and the Social Work Workforce Accountability Report – Paper I for approval
10.1	<p>Tricia Devlin, Co-Head of Workforce Development presented the Regulation and Development of Education and Training and the Social Work Workforce Accountability Report. Following discussion, it was agreed that the report provides comprehensive and robust assurance on the monitoring and quality assurance of the social work workforce in undertaking on-going learning and development in support of meeting required standards of conduct and practice.</p> <p>The Board approved the Annual Regulation and Development of Education and Training and the Social Work Workforce Accountability Report.</p>
11.	Draft Engagement Strategy – Paper J for approval
11.1	<p>Rita McCullagh, Head of Strategic Engagement and Communications presented the draft Engagement Strategy for Board approval.</p> <p>Since the Board Strategic session in November, a period of targeted consultation has been completed with partnerships, committees and advisory groups with positive feedback received on the content, format and design. Feedback is awaited from the Equality Unit around screening however as this has been previously reviewed, it is expected that minimal amendments will be required before publication.</p> <p>Following a recent review by the Senior Leadership team, it had been agreed that the time period and duration of the Strategy should align with the Corporate Plan. An implementation plan will be developed with the Operational Leadership team by the end of March 2026 with a view to launching and promoting the final version of the Engagement Strategy in April 2026.</p> <p>It was noted that future system, environmental and operational changes may</p>

	<p>impact the implementation plan going forward.</p> <p>The Board approved the draft Engagement Strategy.</p>
12.	Happy Raspberry Report – Paper K for review
12.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services presented an overview of the key findings in the Happy Raspberry Report.</p> <p>The report gave an overview of development steps and considerations around succession planning, training and development, the current workforce challenges, requirements going forward to deliver on the organisation’s statutory functions and how to address challenges in recruitment alongside an increased register and overall activity and challenging financial landscape</p> <p>It was suggested that whilst the report may be useful externally, it does not deliver sufficient granular detail, analysis and evaluation for internal use, however it is regarded as providing a level of independent assurance on the challenges, gaps and recommendations for the future social care council workforce.</p> <p>In response to a concern raised on the reference to ‘over capacity’ in the report, the Chief Executive confirmed that the Senior Leadership team have commenced a workforce load analysis of the Fitness to Practice function which will be followed by other key areas and the challenge position will be discussed with Sponsor Branch. The Senior Leadership team have started to review team structures and have engaged with the HSC Leadership centre on the development of a Leadership and Development strategy.</p> <p>The Board noted the Happy Raspberry report.</p>
Governance	
13.	Updated Statement of Delegated Authority – Paper L for approval
13.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services presented the updated Statement of Delegated Authority for Board approval. The document has been amended to reflect the the change to the job designation for Sandra Stranaghan from Interim Director of Registration & Corporate Services to Head of Corporate Services.</p> <p>The Board approved the updated Statement of Delegated Authority.</p>
14.	Risk Progress Report – Paper M for information
14.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services presented the Risk Progress report and highlighted the following key information:</p>

- Data cleanse update – a further 7220 records have been cleansed and it is expected that the remaining 825 records will be cleansed by early January 2026;
- An exercise to individually review and rectify an additional 1600 records identified under separate criteria is expected to be completed by the mid-March 2026. A detailed update on the characteristics of the identified records will be brought to the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee meeting and Board meeting in April 2026.

The Board noted the Risk Progress Report.

Closing Formalities

15.	Any other business
15.1	The Acting Chair recommended that Partnership updates are listed at the beginning of the agenda on a quarterly rotational basis going forward to facilitate fuller discussion.
15.2	The Acting Chair expressed his appreciation for the continued support and contribution of colleagues and extended best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.
16.	Date of next meetings
16.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Strategic Session - 10:00a.m Wednesday 4 February 2026 • Board Meeting - 10:00a.m Wednesday 25 March 2026

Approved by: Gerry Guckian, Acting Chair

Signature:



Date of approval: 25th March 2026

ANNEX 1 – ACTION LIST

ITEM	NEW ACTIONS 17th December 2025	OWNER	PROGRESS
4.3	Letter of appreciation to be issued to Grace Price and Joanne Sansome on behalf of the Board and Social Care Council in recognition of their contribution as long-standing members of the Participation Partnership	<i>Acting Chair</i>	<i>Completed</i>
5.1	Landscape Review Terms of Reference to be shared with Board members.	<i>Secretariat</i>	<i>Open</i>
6.1	External Assessor Report 2025 to be shared with Board members	<i>Secretariat</i>	<i>Completed</i>
7.1	National Regulator KPI's to be incorporated where possible as a bench mark for FTP and Registration along with forecasted trends for KPI's to year end	<i>Director of Registration & Corporate Services</i>	<i>Open</i>