

Social Care Council Board Meeting
Confirmed Minutes
10:00am on Wednesday 2nd July 2025
James House, Council Suite 1

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Declan McAllister, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Social Care Council
Helen McVicker, Interim Co-Director of Regulation and Standards, Social Care Council
Catherine Maguire, Interim Co-Director of Regulation and Standards, Social Care Council
Rita McCullagh, Head of Strategic Communications & Engagement, Social Care Council
Andre McKeown, Evaluations Manager and Head of Business Services, Social Care Council
Anne McGlade, Social Care Research Lead, Social Care Council
Hollie Bishop, Business Support, Social Care Council
Maureen Martin, Business Support, Social Care Council

Observer(s):

None

Apologies:

Pauline Coulter, Department of Health
Sandra Stranaghan, Interim Director of Registration and 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 above.
1.2	The Interim Chair welcomed the new Board appointments to their first meeting.
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 Board Meeting of 30th April 2025</i>
3.1.1	The minutes of 30 th April 2025 were approved by the Board as a true and accurate record.
4.	Matters Arising
4.1	<p><u><i>Board Self-Assessment</i></u></p> <p>The Interim Chief Executive presented the Board Self-Assessment with the recommendation that the Board vacancies remains amber/green in light of the outstanding Chair and Deputy Chair positions. Additionally, there is still no Board member with qualified financial experience. Members agreed that a further assessment should be completed to assess skills gaps following the recent appointments.</p> <p><i>Members agreed the Self-Assessment which will be circulated and signed by the Chair.</i></p>
5.	Acting Chair's Report – verbal
5.1	<p>The Acting Chair noted the following key updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Executive appointments have been confirmed with new members already assigned to their partnership and committees. Thanks were extended to new members for being so quick to take on responsibility and get involved. Bria will be joining Professional in Practice Partnership, Carol will join Leaders in Social Care Partnership and Denise will join both Participation partnership and take over as Chair for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. • A skills gap analysis should be completed in advance of any future appointments to review representation for Social Care and financial expertise.

	<p>The Chief Executive competition has concluded with Tracy Reid appointed to the post. There has been no formal announcement at this time due to ongoing formalities and pre-employment checks. It is projected she will commence post on 1st September and Declan McAllister will continue in post until such time. Members expressed their thanks and gratitude to Declan McAllister for navigating the last 9-months with such professionalism and leadership. His dedication to the organisation and stability is greatly appreciated and recognised by the Board. The Acting Chair also thanked Roslyn and Sarah for their participation in the recruitment process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended a number of engagements with all major political parties to spread the message of NI Social Care Council, the work undertaken and the ambitions of the organisation. These engagements provided an opportunity to re-enforce the economic impact of social care on the community and looking towards securing support for the real living wage. • The annual Social Care Campaign Launch took place on 11th June at Clanabogan. This was a wonderfully positive day with the Minister in attendance to show his support for Social Care. The event was excellently chaired by Joanne Sansome from the Participation Partnership. The event shown a truly positive and uplifting light on Social Care with some very inspirational videos shared. <p><i>ACTION: Members agreed it would be appropriate to express thanks to Joanne Sansome with a formal letter of thanks for leading such a positive and important day at the Social Care campaign launch.</i></p>
Chief Executives Report	
6.	Interim Chief Executive's Report
6.1	<p>The Interim Chief Executive advised that the report outlined key activity undertaken during the period May to June 2025 and noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted the first ever Social Care Council work student placement from Ulster University. This was very positive experience and a great opportunity to showcase the work of the organisation. • Monthly townhalls have continued, with the May session focusing on the health and wellbeing of staff. • Completed a series of engagements with universities which gave great insight to some of the challenges that institutes are facing. • The political engagement with local political parties gave an opportunity to share the Strategic Plan of the organisation in relation to how social care and social work are developing. One political party invited the Social

	<p>Care Council to engage with the Economic Committee to speak about where Social Care is as part of the wider economic development within Northern Ireland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Spring Social Care Managers Forums took place in May. These run twice a year and engage with 400-600 Social Care Managers and provide an opportunity to come together to discuss issues, connect and find solutions from those with shared experience. • The Social Care Council hosted visitors from Saudi Arabia to demonstrate what Northern Ireland delivers social care services. • Looking forward to upcoming events; an accountability meeting with Mike Farrar is scheduled for August to set out an agenda and highlight projected challenges for the next 6-8 months with a focus on the financial climate and how this will be navigated. <p>The Interim Chief Executive thanked Board members for the opportunity to lead the organisation as Chief Executive and for their support over the last several months. He noted that he is looking forward to engaging with Tracy and supporting her transition into the organisation.</p> <p>The Board noted the Chief Executive's Report.</p>
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Business Matters

7.	Annual Report and Accounts 2024/24
7.1	<p>The Acting Chair informed members that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has considered the Annual Accounts and Report to Those Charged with Governance and recommended these to the Board. The Annual Report and Accounts are now seeking Board approval before being sent to the NI Audit Office for review and certification before being laid at Assembly.</p> <p>Andre McKeown presented the Annual Report and Accounts with the following key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal and Public Involvement Report reflects the work of partnerships, particularly Participation Partnership who connect with other networks and remain active in other groups within the sector. • The Performance Analysis and risks are clearly laid out having been reviewed in detail by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Board previously. This analysis identifies trends and comparators in activity and strategic objectives. • Last year there were 12 KPIs with 11 met or exceeded. Concluding 100% of Interim Orders did not meet the agreed deadline by a very small margin, this was due to the complexity of scheduling with all required parties.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 6 other strategic objectives not fully met, these are clearly laid out from page 47 aligning the strategic and business plan. These objectives have been brought forward to the current year for completion. • The soft launch of the Registration app is scheduled for 3rd July. • The Social Care 'Still' Matters Report has been drafted with the final report due to be finished in the next quarter. <p>Members approved the Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25. The Acting Chair thanked all internal staff for their part in contributing to the breakeven achieved with special thanks to Andre McKeown for producing the Annual Report and Accounts.</p> <p>ACTION: Previous Fieldfisher Fitness to Practise Audit to be shared with Non-Executive Directors.</p>
Business Briefings	
8.0	Business Performance Report – Month 2
8.1	<p>The Interim Chief Executive presented an overview of the Business Performance Report with the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 12 KPIs which met or exceeded the required standard • There are 2 amber KPIs which were marginally below the standard: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conclude 100% of Interim Order Hearings within 4 weeks; ○ Conclude 90% of Fitness to Practise (FtP) Hearings under the FtP Procedure within 6 months. • The key KPIs impacting the organisation are primarily in relation to resourcing, particularly for ongoing work which is reliant on non-recurrent funding. • The allocation letter has been received and is sitting at a flat cash budget for the year. • Call handling in registration is up which is very positive and shows increased connectivity to resolve issues quickly. • The Registration App is due to release on 3rd July and will allow existing registrants to pay fees online. This should hopefully begin to reduce the number of callers. <p>Helen McVicker advised members that the Registrants Forum was stood down a few years ago to undergo some consultation and reform. It has since been agreed that this will no longer act as a formal reporting partnership to the Board. The new Social Work Registrants Group has been well established with a core membership. A Social Care Registrants Group will be convened further down the line to ensure representation from both sides of the register. Members</p>

	<p>discussed the Social Work Registrants Group and how it can be used to best represent registered social workers for the greatest impact and value. Members expressed the importance of providing a space for registrants to present both positive and negative feedback where they feel heard and respected.</p> <p>Members noted the Business Performance Report - Month 2.</p>
9.0	Financial Performance Report – Month 2
9.1	<p>The Interim Chief Executive presented the Financial Performance Report with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The closing position at month 2 is showing an actual year to date credit of £29k with the year-end forecast showing an expected deficit of £21k based on the initial budget approved by the Board. • The fee income position has been reset at £1.7million in line with the register increases witnessed over the last number of months. • The recent change in immigration laws for social care may see the registration fees plateau quicker than anticipated as the registration rate begins to settle. • The Senior Leadership Team met with the Department of Health in February to outline resourcing pressures, identifying a deficit figure of £169k due in part to the recent shortfall presented from DLS for legal services to Fitness to Practise and Committee, along with vacancy posts in both teams. This is all included in the final figure however there has been no recruitment undertaken for these positions at this time. This will hold until the Ground Clearing meeting is held with DoH. • Prompt payment targets are being achieved <p>Members noted the Financial Performance Report - Month 2.</p>
10.	Fitness to Practise Accountability Report 2024/25
10.1	<p>The Interim Co-Director of Regulations and Standards, Helen McVicker, presented the Fitness to Practise Accountability Report with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report is produced annually for the Board to reflect the activity of Fitness to Practise with performance indicators included. • There are significant resource pressures. There was a slight dip in referrals of 5% but overall referrals are up 16% since 2021. This is reflective of the growth in the register. • Increased activity in year offers a more real sense of pressures experienced by the team with 771 active cases in the system at present and 477 suitability assessments.

- There are 25% more committee days scheduled so far this year than in the previous year, with Hearings scheduled as far out as November for next available date.
- Experiencing longer lead in times to get cases listed.
- In period there were 38 interim suspension orders imposed alongside a similar amount of reviews required. This results in 79 listings alone which demands precedent over final review cases.
- 14% of incoming referrals were triaged out by officers and of those escalated 49% were then able to be closed with no further action. Only 13% of incoming referrals result in a sanction.
- All preliminary hearing screenings were transferred to hearings which reflects appropriate and accurate triaging by officers.
- KPIs are generally achieved however the time take to close a case is just over 12 months start to finish with a median of 10 months due to the complexity. These statistics are still on the right side of the industry benchmarks and are reviewed frequently against other regulatory bodies in the UK.
- Work has commenced to draft a business case to restructure the Fitness to Practise Team. Any additional work load has been addressed by recruiting another Fitness to Practise officer, but the current structure is no longer fit for purpose. The business case seeks to secure additional resources and a reconfiguration of the team structure. The Social Care Council is one of the only regulatory bodies without a dedicated triage function. Instead every referral is screened by the Fitness to Practise Manager, which is unsustainable given the increased figures of referrals.
- Only 8% of cases come in from service users, however they are often extremely complex with lengthy evidence submitted at point of referral.
- The team are working to scope out reintroducing Hearings on Demand, this will not be an immediate solution as it will require extensive consultation but would support caseloads.
- The Fitness to Practise team would like to increase work undertaken with Workforce Development colleagues to increase synergy between teams.
- The Fieldfisher report completed last September offered overall satisfactory assurance but did identify areas for improvement. This was presented to the Board last October however BSO Internal Audit have requested a better internal structure for recommendations which was presented at Audit and Risk Assurance Committee last week.
- The Review of Indicative Sanctions was rated amber, this is now out for review and it is hoped this can be implemented in early Autumn when it will be brought back to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee for sign

	<p>off.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Fitness to Practise content on the Social Care Council website is undergoing a refresh to increase accessibility. • The new case management system was implemented in October last year which includes an online referral portal which will hopefully increase accessibility. <p>Helen McVicker advised members that the Decision Review Group has met twice now. The membership of this group has representatives from Fitness to Practise, Legal Services and Committee with an external reviewer from Scotland. The external reviewer identifies the samples, but the Social Care Council reserves the right to specifically request that a case is reviewed if necessary. The group cannot overturn a decision of the Committee but it does provide an important learning and improvement opportunity.</p> <p>Members discussed the increased case load and impact on officers' wellbeing of these more complex cases. Helen McVicker assured members that there are schemes in place to support staff and a number of independent self-care options are provided.</p> <p>Members noted the Fitness to Practise Accountability Report 2024/25.</p>
11.	Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) Proposal
11.1	<p>The Interim co-Director of Regulations and Standards, Catherine Maguire, presented the Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) Proposal with the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Social Care Council are seeking the Board's approval to pause the Post Registration Training Learning biannual audit process in order to create capacity to scope a review of the current registration requirements as they relate to continuous professional learning and associated audit process. • Over the last 10-years the Social Care Council has taken a number of steps towards reviewing PRTL and Audit arrangements. Most notably commissioning a registration, regulation and revalidation evidence review. • At present social care managers and social workers are audited. As far as we can • Most other health and social care regulators in the UK have moved away from an hours based requirement for CPD and introduced more agile approaches that are appropriate to role and include peer reflection. . • The Registration Rules require registrants to provide the Social Care

	<p>Council with information at points in time, but there is no requirement specified for an audit to be completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At this time, the Social Care Council is seeking to stand down the audit process to scope a review. This will not involve any change in PRTL requirements linked to registration. <p><i>Decision: Members agreed to stand down the current audit review process as long as the hours recorded are upheld to stress the value of continued CPD.</i></p>
Subcommittees	
12.	Remuneration Committee Minutes – 4th June 2025
12.1	<p>The Interim Chief Executive and other internal staff left the meeting.</p> <p>The Acting Chair presented the Remuneration Committee minutes to Board members, advising that the Committee had agreed that both Patricia and Declan had surpassed their objectives and performed in the most upstanding way. The objectives for 2025/26 have been drafted.</p> <p><i>Decision: Members endorsed the objectives for the Chief Executive and noted the minutes of the Remuneration Committee meeting of 4th June 2025</i></p>
13.	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Minutes – 25th June 2025
13.1	<p>The Acting Chair presented the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee minutes advising that the meeting was convened to review and approve the Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 as well as the Report to Those Charged with Governance. It was noted that there were no qualifications and no recommendations which is virtually unheard of.</p> <p>Members suggested reducing the complexity of the financial notes included in the report.</p> <p>Members noted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting of 25th June 2025.</p>
14.	Risk Progress Report
14.1	Item noted under the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee minutes.
15.	Research and Evidence Partnership Update
15.1	<p>Davy Hayes presented an update on the Research and Evidence Partnership with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Partnership met on 4th June. Discussions are currently focused on developing a new research strategy for Social Work and Social Care. A stakeholder workshop was held on 27th May, with another workshop scheduled for September. The Partnership is spending time establishing Terms of Reference and

	<p>setting 10 areas of responsibility before beginning to think about a strategy to move forward and what actions can be taken to meet outlined objectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main issue remains resourcing, although funding is being sought. <p>Members noted the update from the Research and Evidence Partnership meeting of 4th June 2025</p>
16.	Participation Partnership – 23rd June 2025
16.1	<p>Sarah Browne provided an update on the Participation Partnership with the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The length of the minutes has been previously reviewed but it has been agreed that it is important for the thoughts and discussions of all members to be reflected to the Board to reiterate that there is value and appreciation. • Members recently reviewed the Business Plan with particular interest on the objective of AI use. A number of members raised the issue of re-enforcing that social work and social care rely on personal relationships and connection and that the use of AI could risk distancing or the loss of this connection, although there are obvious benefits. • Members had commented on how excellent the Campaign Launch was and how expertly Joanne had hosted the event. • The partnership has agreed to respond to the National Occupational Standards survey as a collective. • Mary McColgan attended the Partnership meeting to discuss the DoH Children's Social Care Reform Workstream recording framework to improve language, recording and reporting of social work assessments. <p>Members noted the minutes of the Participation Partnership meeting of 23rd June 2025.</p>
17.	Leaders in Social Care Partnership Minutes – 20 May 2025
17.1	<p>Sarah Browne presented the Leaders in Social Care Partnership minutes with the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been agreed that the partnership needs a membership refresh now that the Terms of Reference have been reviewed and updated. • 100 people have completed the Level 2 certificate which has been well received by providers. The main concern going forward is the financial implications of either providing the training or releasing staff to complete the training.

	Members noted the minutes of the Leaders in Social Care Partnership meeting of 20 th May 2025.
18.	Professional in Practice Partnership Minutes – 21 May 2025
18.1.	<p>Roslyn Dougherty provided an update on the Professional in Practice Partnership with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members have agreed that in honour of Judith the Mullineux Award for Outstanding Contribution to Post Qualifying Social Work Education will be introduced. This will be presented to Judith posthumously at the 2025 PiP Awards in September and will then be presented annually following a nominations process. • The Terms of Reference are presented today for approval from the Board. There had been challenges with no Vice Chair named for the Partnership, however this is now mitigated with Bria Mongan joining from the Board. <p>ACTION: Business report presentation to be shared with members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are ongoing issues with the IT systems in terms of recording the Credit Accumulation Route. • A date has been set for the PiP awards in September, although it will not be a full day • A workshop is scheduled for September to look at policy context with attendance from Susan Ritchie and colleagues at the Department of Health <p>Members noted the minutes of the Professional in Practice Partnership meeting of 21st May 2025.</p>
18.2	<i>PiP Partnership – Terms of Reference</i>
18.2.1	Decision: The Board endorsed the Professional in Practice Partnership Terms of Reference.
Closing Formalities	
19.	Any other business
19.1	No other business.
20.	Date of next meeting
20.1	<p>The date of the next Board meeting is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10:00a.m Wednesday 8th October 2025- Rooms 2.8 and 2.9. James House <p>Please note a light lunch will be provided following the Board meeting.</p>

ANNEX 1 – ACTION LIST

ITEM	NEW ACTIONS 2ND JULY 2025	OWNER	PROGRESS
5.1	A formal letter of thanks to be sent to Joanne Sansome in recognition of her role in leading the Social Care campaign launch	<i>Acting Chair</i>	<i>Open</i>
7.1	Previous Fieldfisher Fitness to Practise Audit to be shared with new Non-Executive Directors.	<i>Board Secretariat</i>	<i>Completed</i>
18.1	Professional in Practise Business report presentation to be shared with Board members	<i>Board Secretariat</i>	<i>Completed</i>

Approved by: Gerry Guckian, Acting Board Chair

Date: 8th October 2025

Signature: 