



Social Care Council Board Meeting
Confirmed Minutes
9:30a.m on Wednesday 9th October 2024
Council Suites 1 & 2, James House, Belfast

Present:

Gerard Guckian, Interim Chair
Sarah Browne, Board Member
Roslyn Dougherty, Board Member
Professor David Hayes, Board Member
Jacqueline McGarvey, Board Member

In Attendance:

Patricia Higgins, Chief Executive Officer, Social Care Council
Catherine Maguire, Head of Workforce Development, Social Care Council
Aine Morrison, Chief Social Work Officer, Office of Social Services – for item 4 only
Declan McAllister, Director of Registration and Corporate Services, Social Care Council
Rita McCullagh, Head of Strategic Communications & Engagement, Social Care Council
Helen McVicker, Head of Fitness to Practise, Social Care Council
Marian O'Rourke, Director of Regulation & Standards, Social Care Council
Sandra Stranaghan, Head of Business Services, Social Care Council
Hollie Bishop, Business Support, Social Care Council
Maureen Martin, Business Support, Social Care Council

Observer(s):

None

Apologies:

None

Formalities

Item	Agenda
1.	Welcome and apologies
1.1	<p>The Interim Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that no apologies had been received.</p> <p>The interim Chair advised that Aine Morrison, Chief Social Worker, Department of Health (DoH) was scheduled to join the meeting in person at 10:00a.m for agenda item 4 to give a position update on behalf of the Office of Social Services (OSS). Peter Toogood, Deputy Secretary, Social Services Policy Group, Department of Health, had also intended to attend however apologies had been sent due to unexpected commitments related to the Bengoa conference.</p>
2.	Declarations of Interest
2.1	<p>Due to his role at the School of Social Sciences, Education, and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast, a declaration of interest was disclosed by Professor Hayes in relation to agenda item 9, draft Review of the Social Work Degree Report.</p>
3.	Board Minutes –for approval
3.1	<i>Minutes of the previous Board Meeting of 19th June 2024</i>
3.1.1	The minutes of 19 th June 2024 were approved by the Board as a true and accurate record subject to any amendments received.
4.	Update from Office of Social Services
4.1	<p>The Interim Chair welcomed the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) to the meeting and thanked her for the opportunity for Members to exchange views and to receive an update position from OSS.</p> <p>The CSWO gave an overview of areas of work in progress that she currently is managing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The new Health Minister is in the early stages of appointment and a key area of focus is around the reduction of health inequalities which is also a priority in social work and social care. As health inequalities are directly related to poverty, work has been reinstated on the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy which will be cross departmental and led by the Department for Communities. 2. OSS Structure – in compliance with a directive from the Health Minister, policy and professional roles have been separated within the Department. Peter

	Toogood is Deputy Secretary, Social Services Policy Group and Aine Morrison is Chief Social Work Officer and reports directly to the Permanent Secretary.
5.	Interim Chair's Report - verbal
5.1	<p>The Interim Chair noted the following key updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DoH have initiated the process for the launch of a public appointments competition to recruit Non-Executive Directors to the Social Care Council; • The Chief Executive recruitment exercise remains in progress as the initial competition was halted on HR BSO advice and the post will be re-advertised at a later date. Declan McAllister, Director of Registration & Corporate Services (DORCS) has been appointed as Interim Chief Executive from mid-October following an Expression of Interest and interview process. Congratulations were extended to Mr McAllister and the Interim Chair particularly noted thanks to Board Members, Sarah Browne and Roslyn Dougherty for their support during the exercise. • The Health Minister accepted an invitation to visit the Social Care Council office on 20th August where he met with staff from across a range of teams to learn more about the work of the organisation and spoke of the primary focuses of his tenure. • An interview process has just been completed to appoint nine Fitness to Practise Committee Chairs and panel members and successful candidates will be notified shortly. The Interim Chair particularly commented on the high standard of applications and successful candidates. • An all staff celebratory event was held on 12th September to celebrate achieving the Investors in People Platinum award. Connor Martin, Registration Advisor, was presented with the inaugural Social Care Council's Employee of the Year award. • The Professional in Practice awards ceremony was held on 25th September at the Tullyglass Hotel. Key speaker, Declan Lawn (creator of the Blue Lights series) gave his insights into social work and awards were presented to 204 recipients. The Interim Chair reflected on the positive and uplifting event which exhibited the talent and commitment of social workers across Northern Ireland. A presentation was made to the Chief Executive and Director of Regulation & Standards to mark their upcoming retirements and a special tribute was paid to the Director of Regulation & Standards for her contribution to qualifying and post qualifying education and training in social work over the last few decades.
5.2	In recognition of the Chief Executive's final Board meeting before her retirement, the Interim Chair paid tribute to her outstanding contribution to social work and social care throughout her career. The presentation

	acknowledged the respect, work, leadership, and achievements appreciated by colleagues and the Department of Health. It was agreed that the qualities demonstrated by the Chief Executive in her engagement and leadership are reflected in the achievement of the Investors in People Platinum award and the culture of the organisation.
Business Briefings	
6.	Chief Executive's Report – for information
6.1	<p>The Chief Executive advised that the report outlined key activity undertaken covering the period mid-June to October 2024 and noted the following</p> <p>As part of succession planning for the retirement of the Director of Regulation & Standards in December following an expression of interest exercise, the Head of Fitness to Practise and the Head of Workforce Development have been appointed on an interim job share basis to back fill the post until a recruitment exercise is completed for a permanent appointment. Consideration will be given to the further consequential required.</p> <p>2.The non-recurrent budget allocation letter has been received for funding for the Social Care Workforce Strategy 2024/25. As part of delivery of the Workforce Strategy, it is expected that the Care in Practice framework will be launched by Christmas 2024.</p> <p>3. The Social Care Council has been shortlisted in the annual European Social Services Awards (ESSA) for the prestigious workforce award for the Social Care Workforce Reform project. As the project is supported by the Department of Health (DoH), the awards ceremony on 4th November will be attended by two representatives from the Workforce Development team accompanied by the DoH Professional Social Work Officer. The closing date for voting is 21st October and the Comms team will share the voting link.</p> <p>4. Arrangements are in place for researchers from the University of Kent to meet with members of the Workforce Development team and partners from across the social care sector in October to discuss innovation in social care with particular focus on the Workforce Strategy and Care in Practice framework.</p> <p>5. Professor Hayes chaired the inaugural meeting of the Research and Evidence Partnership on September 26th. The meeting, held in a workshop style, was well attended and positively received by members.</p> <p>6. The Chief Executive, serving as co-chair of the Social Care Collaborative Forum (SCCF), led a Carers N.I roundtable under the IMPACT project. The roundtable focused on understanding the challenges faced by carers in rural</p>

	<p>areas with a view to connecting the outcomes of the roundtable to the SCCF carers workstreams.</p> <p><i>The Board noted the Chief Executive's Report.</i></p>
Business Matters	
7.	August Business Performance Report – for approval
7.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services (DoRCS) and the Director of Regulation and Standards presented the August Business Performance Report and noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overall positive report with 11 of 12 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) rated as 'Green'. The one KPI not rated as Green is in relation to the conclusion of Interim Suspension Orders within 4 weeks and this was affected due to process delays caused by external factors; • 96% overall customer satisfaction reported; • 99% registration processing achieved – the increase in new applications and register was; • An increase in Fitness to Practise referrals has resulted in a 10% increase in Committee activities which will be closely monitored for resource implications going forward; • The accreditation application by the Open College Network (OCN) NI with CCEA has been completed and the Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice qualification approved. A presentation was delivered to the Leaders in Social Care Partnership on the programme of work to support the Reform of Adult Social Care project and the accreditation of the Level 2 Certificate. The pilot to roll out the certificate has been well received and discussion will be taken forward with the Department of Health on funding for continued support of the certificate which is the early stage of building a qualification-based register for social care; • Social Care Collaborative Forum and Children's Reform Board representation; • Professional in Practise (PiP) awards ceremony was successfully held in September and reflects the overall positive response to the PiP framework; • The Social Care Council are supporting the Western Health & Social Care Board with the applications process for the Social Work Awards which will be hosted on Wednesday 26th March 2025; • The launch of the new Fitness to Practise Case Management system is planned for the end of October; • The discovery report for a new registration system has been approved by DHCNI and the DoRCS is currently drafting a business case; • Support has been provided to the Fair Work Forum to issue a survey to the social care workforce and to manage the survey responses. 1000+ responses have been received to date and employers are being

	<p>requested to encourage staff to respond.</p> <p>The Board approved the August Business Performance Report and commended the organisation on the high level of engagement and activity.</p>
8.	Financial Performance Report at August 2024 - for approval
8.1	<p>The Director of Registration & Corporate Services (DoRCS) presented the Financial Performance Report at August 2024 for Board approval and noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A second allocation of non-recurrent funding amounting to £299k is designated for the reform of Adult Social Care. • Despite an £85k surplus, there remains a year-end deficit position of £44k. The notional cost of the annual lease was budgeted at £44k, while the actual cost is £22k per quarter, necessitating ongoing work in this area. Registration fees are to be adjusted to increase the budget level from £1.6m to £1.7m. • Expenditure on Pay and Non-Pay items has seen an overspend on training, with plans to realign in the coming months. Increased face-to-face event attendance has prompted the setting of a more realistic target for travel expenses. • Prompt payments have been consistently maintained at a Green status <p>The Board approved the Financial Performance Report at August 2024.</p>
9.	Draft Review of the Social Work Degree Report - for approval
9.1	<p>The Director of Regulation & Standards sought approval for the Review of the Social Work Degree report and introduced Professional Advisor, Tricia Devlin to present a summary presentation.</p> <p>A declaration of interest was disclosed by Professor Hayes due to his role at the School of Social Sciences, Education, and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast.</p> <p>Ms Devlin delivered a presentation which summarised the objectives and methodology used to complete the review of the Social Work degree and the key findings outlined in the report on areas for development and improvement alongside evidence of what is currently working well.</p> <p>The Interim Chair thanked Ms Devlin and all officials involved in the production of the report and noted its importance in relation to the continuum of education at post qualifying level as addressed by the Professional in Practice framework.</p>

	The Board approved the draft Review of the Social Work Degree Report.
Governance	
10.	Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Matters
10.1	The Interim Chair referred to two key Audit & Risk Assurance (ARAC) matters for Board information; Annual Accounts and Fitness to Practise Fieldfisher Audit report.
10.1.1	<p><i>Annual Accounts</i></p> <p>As discussed at the last ARAC meeting of 2nd October, the final Report to Those Charged with Governance has not yet been circulated and Accounts certified as External Auditors, Deloitte had identified a potential issue with the James House licence. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and Deloitte are of the opinion that this agreement should be accounted for as a lease, and not a licence. Meetings will be scheduled with the Department of Finance, Department of Health and Business Services Organisation to resolve the matter.</p> <p>Other Health and Social Care Sector occupants within James House have already had their accounts certified which presents an additional issue in finding a resolution agreement for the accounting treatment of the licence. A consistent treatment will need to be agreed and applied to all relevant occupants. Legal advice was sought to confirm if a licence was the correct arrangement, however it has been agreed by Deloitte and the NIAO that legal opinion does not equate to accounting opinion.</p> <p>The Interim Chair confirmed that an Extraordinary ARAC meeting can be convened to review the outcome of the issue if required.</p> <p>It was noted that the divergence has been added to the Mid-Year Assurance Statement and it has been agreed that matter will be escalated for the attention of the Permanent Secretary if a resolution is not in place by the end of October.</p>
10.1.1	<p><i>Fieldfisher Fitness to Practise Audit Report</i></p> <p>The audit report has been provided for Board information under agenda item 10.4.</p>
10.2	<i>Audit & Risk Assurance Committee draft unconfirmed minutes of 2nd October 2024 – for approval</i>
10.3.1.	Board members approved the Mid-Year Assurance Statement.
10.4	<i>Mid-Year Internal Audit Report – follow up on outstanding audit recommendations - for approval</i>
10.4.1	The Director of Registration & Corporate Services presented the Mid-Year Internal Audit report for Board approval. The report reflects that 89% of audit

	<p>recommendations have been completed and 11% are in progress.</p> <p>The Board approved the Mid-Year Internal Audit Report – follow up on outstanding audit recommendations</p>
10.5	<i>Fieldfisher Fitness to Practise (FtP) Audit Report – for information</i>
10.5.1	<p>The Head of Fitness to Practise presented the key findings and next steps from the Fieldfisher FtP Audit report and the following were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two previous independent audit reports were commissioned from Fieldfisher in 2017 and 2021 and although the audits are not mandated they provide independent assurance that robust decision-making processes are in place in the Fitness to Practise function; • A sample was drawn from 21 anonymised cases that had resulted in sanction for the period April 2021 – March 2024 and six of these cases were randomly selected for an in-depth audit of Fitness to Practise and Committee decisions; • Positive findings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Timely disposal of cases particularly in view of restricted resources ✓ Excellent and prompt risk assessments completed; ✓ Clear and timely communications with registrants and referrers; ✓ Prompt imposition of interim suspension orders. <p>Areas recommended for improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Review and refresh of the Indicative Sanctions Guidance review and refresh; ✓ Tendency towards leniency in case outcomes – The audit report highlighted a tendency towards leniency in some of the sanctions imposed, particularly in caution/conviction cases. There was some accompanying acknowledgement of the nature of the workforce the Social Care Council regulates as distinct from other regulators who only regulate qualified professionals. The report also highlighted that 57 Removal Orders were imposed during the reporting period although these were not included in the audit as this type of disposal is generally considered to offer adequate public protection. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next steps – Sarah Ellison, from Fieldfisher is providing training to FTP Officers on 15th October 2024. An additional training day has been scheduled in January 2025 for Committee panel members

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Decision Review Group has been established as a quality improvement mechanism with internal sampling of Committee and FtP decisions with the first meeting scheduled for 5th November. This Group will have external representation from the Scottish Social Services Council, SSSC. <p>The Board noted the Fieldfisher Fitness to Practise Audit Report.</p>
11.	Equality Progress Report 2023/24 – for approval
11.1	<p>The Head of Business Services presented the Equality Progress Report 2023/24 for Board approval and noted the following:</p> <p>The report must be completed and returned to the Equality Commission annually on the template provided. An easy read and accessible version will be published on the Social Care Council website.</p> <p>Some of the actions outlined in the Equality and Disability action plans have been completed and some remain in progress and will be delivered in new plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Work around the promotion and awareness of resources related to the Domestic Violence Strategy is expected to be completed by the end of March 2025. ✓ Due to a lack of participation in the Tapestry Network, they are attending the December Equality Forum and this will be re-launched. ✓ The Disability Work Placement scheme is now managed by BSO HR which will allow a broader scope of fora and networks for placement. The Head of Business Services will progress in the coming months. ✓ Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) work this year will continue beyond March 2025 and the Service Level Agreement with the Equality Unit has been extended to support this area of work. Planning is underway for two EDI workshops with Board and Participation Partnership members, and staff and an internal EDI working group has been established. <p>The Board approved the Equality Progress Report 2023/24.</p>
12.	NMC Review Report – for information
12.1	<p>The Chief Executive spoke to the NMC Review report and advised that it had been provided for Board information.</p> <p>The report was reviewed internally by the Senior and Operational Leadership</p>

	<p>teams to extract lessons, especially regarding cultural and leadership concerns highlighted in the report.</p> <p>It was agreed that a Board Strategic session will be arranged for in-depth review and consideration of the NMC Review report.</p> <p>The Board noted the NMC Review Report.</p>
Subcommittee Minutes	
13.1	<i>Update on the Leaders in Social Care Partnership meeting of 8th October 2024 – for information</i>
13.1.1	<p>The Chair of the Leaders in Social Care Partnership gave a verbal update on the meeting of 8th October::</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main focus of the meeting was a presentation by members of the Workforce Development team on the workforce reform programme which was well received and reflected the significant amount of work undertaken to achieve the Care in Practice framework and certificate rollout. 2. The Head of Communication & Strategic Engagement reported on the Making a Difference campaign which was positively received. 3. A review of the Terms of Reference will be undertaken in December supported by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) using logic model methodology to review the remit of the partnership aligned to i the Social Care Collaborative Board and the Children's' Services Strategic Reform Board. <p>The Board noted the update on the Leaders in Social Care Partnership meeting of 8th October 2024.</p>
13.2	<i>Participation Partnership unconfirmed minutes of 17th September 2024 – for approval</i>
13.2.1	<p>The Chair of the Participation Partnership gave an overview of the minutes from the meeting of 17th September and noted the following key highlights:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Chief Executive provided an update on the Social Care Collaborative Forum (SCCF). Joanne Sansome, Participation Partnership member, had expressed concerns about her ability to positively influence as a service user representative. The Chief Executive and the DoRCS met with Ms Sansome to work through these concerns towards a positive outcome. 2. Members were given an update on the Registration mobile app. 3. A member of the Participation Partnership had supported the launch of the Making a Difference Campaign at the Long Gallery, Stormont. 4. A review of the Terms of Reference has been completed and will be

	<p>brought to the Board meeting in December for approval.</p> <p>The Board approved the Participation Partnership unconfirmed minutes of 17th September 2024.</p>
13.3	<p><i>Professional in Practise (PiP) unconfirmed minutes of 5th September 2024 – for approval</i></p>
13.3.1	<p>The Chair of the Professional in Practise Partnership presented the unconfirmed minutes of 5th September 2024 for Board approval and noted the following:</p> <p>The meeting was conducted as a workshop with a focus on the strategic direction for research in social work. Professional Advisor, Gillian McAuley delivered a presentation on research within the PiP framework, which initiated robust discussion among participants.</p> <p>The Chair of the Partnership commended all those involved in organising and delivering the PiP Awards ceremony on 25th September and it was agreed that feedback from attendees had been extremely positive.</p> <p>The Board approved the Professional in Practise Partnership unconfirmed minutes of 5th September 2024.</p>
13.4	<p><i>Report on Research & Evidence Partnership meeting of 26th September 2024 – for information</i></p>
13.4.1	<p>The Chair of the Research and Evidence Partnership and the Director of Regulation & Standards presented a report for Board information on the inaugural meeting of the Research & Evidence Partnership meetings which was delivered in a workshop format of 26th September. The following key highlights were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The meeting with 26 invited members from across Northern Ireland in attendance was structured as a workshop to facilitate relationship building and engaging roundtable discussions on the priorities, values and principles of the group. 2. A number of priorities were agreed: Terms of Reference How to identify research priorities for social work and social care Identifying research priorities and potential funding streams 3. Promotion of the Research & Evidence Partnership will be taken forward by the Comms team. <p>The Board noted the Report on Research & Evidence Partnership workshop of 26th September 2024.</p>

Closing Formalities

14.	Any other business
14.1	<i>Registrants' Forum</i> The Director of Regulation & Standards verified the establishment of the Social Work Registrants group, with the official group title to be confirmed. The Board will receive regular updates on the group's progress.
15.	Date of next meeting
15.1	The next Board meeting is scheduled for <u>2:00p.m</u> Wednesday 4 th December 2024 at James House.

Date of Board approval: 13th December 2024

Signed by: Gerry Guckian, Acting Chair

Signature:

