

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

Business Plan

2025-2026

Working together. Making a difference.

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The Northern Ireland Social Care Council – Who we are

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) is a public body, established by the Department of Health (DoH) to help raise standards in social work and social care services.

We are responsible for:

- Maintaining a register of social workers and social care practitionersⁱ in Northern Ireland.
- Setting standards for social workers and social care practitioners for their conduct, training and practice.
- Setting standards for and regulating social work education and training in Northern Ireland.

There are over **49,000** people working in social work or social care in Northern Ireland who are registered with the Social Care Council (**6,755** social workers, **41,948** social care workers, and **800** students studying for the Degree in Social Work).

Our purpose and our vision

Our purpose: As a regulator, everything we do is focused on high quality safe and effective care. Our work is designed to support this through setting standards for people who deliver social work and social care. We make a difference to the quality of social work and social care services by regulating the workforce and promoting continuous training and learning.

We help support the development of a strong and professional social work and social care workforce. A workforce who provide safe, effective and compassionate care to ensure the best outcomes for people who use services and carers.

Our vision: the Social Care Council's vision is '*to Improve Standards in Social Work and Social Care*'. We have four values which underpin our culture and explain how we will work with those around us:

- We promote **respect**.
- We work with **integrity**.
- We believe in **partnership**.
- We strive for **excellence**.

We work in partnership

We deliver our business by working collaboratively across the social work and social care system and through our established partnerships. We have a number of Partnerships:

- People who use services and carers – **Participation Partnership**.
- Social care providers – **Leaders in Social Care Partnership**.
- Social work employers and education providers – **Professional in Practice Partnership**.
- **Research and Evidence Partnership** (this is a new Partnership to support the Social Care Council in relation to research and evidence in social work and social care services to support better outcomes).

ⁱ During the consultation on our engagement strategy we heard about the importance of language from social care workers, and the need to change how we refer to this workforce – using the term 'practitioner' instead of worker.

We also established a new 'Social Worker Registrant Engagement Group' to help bring together the views and experiences of social workers into our business activities and planning. In terms of social care engagement, there are already a number of groups that support social care engagement including our Social Care Managers Forum, so we are therefore taking time to ensure that whatever model of engagement we use for social care adds value and connects with existing groups and forums.

Delivering our Strategic Plan

Our **Strategic Plan** covers the period April 2023 to March 2027 (four years). The Plan sets out a number of strategic themes and outcomes we want to achieve over the next four years.

Our strategic themes are:

- Delivering effective regulation.
- Developing the capability of the workforce.
- Leading with influence.
- Innovating and improving.

Business Plan 2025-26

This Business Plan explains what we will do this year in support of our Strategic Plan. We will report on how well we do in our Annual Report which is published on our website at: nisc.info/annual-reports.



Chief Executive's Introduction



I am pleased to present our 2025/26 Business Plan which is the third annual business plan in support of our Strategic Plan 2023-27. This is my first business plan in my current role as interim Chief Executive for the Social Care Council, having previously held the position of Director of Registration and Corporate Services for seven years. We experienced a number of changes last year, including the retirements of Patricia Higgins (former Chief Executive) and Marian O'Rourke (former

Director of Regulation and Standards). These were significant changes at our senior team level, and as a result we had to put in place a number of interim arrangements to support the organisation while the recruitment to fill these positions on a permanent basis is completed. At the same time, Gerry Guckian (Board Member) stepped in as Deputy Chair to cover this role while our substantive Chair, Paul Martin, remains on long term sick leave.

While we recognise that all of these changes happening at the same time are not ideal for any organisation, we also recognise that we have a great strength in our culture, with our staff and our Board continuing to work together to deliver our strategic and business aims, and we will continue to and grow and improve. We are not standing still. We delivered on a wide range of important initiatives last year across social work and social care and 2025/26 will be no different. We will keep our statutory functions at the heart of what we do and as a systems leader. We will also work in partnership to

support the Department of Health, employers, registrants and all of our stakeholders in creating an environment in which social work and social care flourishes and is valued across our communities.

Our Strategic Plan for 2023-27 sets the context for what we are delivering over that four-year period under four strategic themes: delivering effective regulation; developing the capability of the workforce; leading with influence; and innovation and improvement. We continue to see challenges for social work and social care including funding and resource constraints, and pressures in recruitment and retention. In social care we can see the turnover experienced by employers through the churn in our register and understand the difficulties this presents in the delivery of services. We have however been working closely with the Department of Health through the Fair Work Forum which is aimed at improving pay, terms and conditions for social care practitioners.

The Department of Health also published a 10-year Social Care Workforce Strategy last year alongside the Social Care Council, who launched the Care in Practice Framework which sets out career progression and learning pathways for both new and experienced social care practitioners. Taken together, all of these initiatives, taken together are about strengthening the social care profession from pay, terms and conditions, through to recruitment and retention, and career development.

In social work we are working to support employers by reviewing the routes into social work training and seeking to increase opportunities for social work entry level training. Through our work with the Department of Health's Social Work Implementation Board, Social

Chief Executive's Introduction

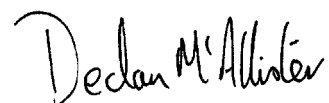
Care Collaborative Forum and Children's Services Reform Board, we are working with employers, the Department of Health and other key stakeholders and decision makers to build a sustainable social work and social care workforce for the future.

As the Regulator of the social work and social care workforce we have a responsibility to ensure that the Standards of Conduct and Practice for registrants are relevant to current practice and support the delivery of safe and compassionate care. We are using the learning from our Fitness to Practise work to support improvement in the delivery of care, through the development of digital learning resources for the workforce. We were pleased to introduce a new Case Management system last year to support our Fitness to Practise activity.

We also have responsibility for the Leadership in Social Work Framework and the Social Work and Social Care Research Strategy. We created a new partnership last year to support this programme of work and look forward to building on the existing work of the social work research community, and developing new partnerships to influence the development of research and inform best practice.

We will continue to engage with carers and people who use services through our Participation Partnership, listening to their experiences and views to help shape what we do. The views of our registrants are also important in shaping our work, and we have agreed to develop a new approach to our engagement. We have established a new social work registrant engagement group and are looking at how we best support and connect our social care registrants.

All of our work is supported by the dedication and commitment of 68 staff working in the Social Care Council. Through their hard work and enthusiasm, we have been awarded the Investors in People Platinum Award. We will continue to build on this award as we work together to make a difference in everything that we do.



Declan McAllister,
Interim Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Social Care Council



Strategic theme: Deliver effective regulation

Through our regulatory activity we protect anyone who uses social work and social care services by supporting our registrants to be person-centered, values driven, competent, confident and compassionate. All social workers and social care practitioners must comply with our *Standards of Conduct and Practice*.

Professional regulation assures people who use social work and social care services that the person working with them meets our requirements for registration and will work to our *Standards of Conduct and Practice* in order to provide safe, effective and quality care. In providing this assurance, it is important that we maintain an accurate and up to date register of social workers and social care practitioners. We provide a self-service digital portal for registrants and our Registration Team also support registrants to keep their registration data up to date by promoting how to use the Public Facing Register (the register), answering emails and phone calls and arranging one to one in person meetings where this supports the registrant or employer.

Last year the Registration Team managed over 61,000 contacts with registrants and employers, and processed over 10,000 new applications to the register. We also launched a pilot last year to improve call handling services – supporting people contacting us between 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday. We will evaluate the pilot this year and see how we can continue to improve our services in this area on a longer-term basis.

Our model of regulation focuses on promoting the *Standards of Conduct and Practice* and supporting registrants to improve and develop in their role. A small percentage of the workforce are referred to us to review their fitness to practise, some of whom require additional support or training whilst others are suspended or removed from the register. This work is supported by our Fitness to Practise (FtP) and Committee Services teams. While the numbers of referrals received are low compared to the size of the register (1% of the total register), this is complex and sensitive work with over 40 new cases on average being referred to the FtP team each month.

We will continue to work with registrants and their employers to make sure they fully understand and value the importance of maintaining their registration and practice within their *Standards of Conduct and Practice*. We intend to commence a review of the Standards this year to ensure that they continue to reflect best practice and emerging thinking. As part of this we will engage and consult our stakeholders including registrants, employers and Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA).

We will work with the RQIA and employers and to ensure that employers are using the *Standards for Employers of Social Workers and Social Care workers* to support social workers and social care practitioners including those newly appointed to that role.

Strategic theme: Deliver effective regulation



Strategic actions from our Strategic Plan 2023-27

Develop our model of regulation to ensure it focuses on improving standards and supporting registrants to be the best they can be.

Ensure our *Standards of Conduct and Practice* are aligned with the changing context of social work and social care.

Enable social workers and social care practitioners, through education and training, to put standards at the heart of their practice.

Ensure employers understand their responsibilities in relation to *Standards for Employers of Social Workers and Social Care workers*.

Ensure the experience of people who use services and carers informs the *Standards of Conduct and Practice for social workers and social care workers*.

By delivering our strategic actions we will ensure:

- Social work and social care registrants use the *Standards of Conduct and Practice* to support their practice.
- Regulation enables people who use services and carers to have confidence in the social work and social care workforce.
- Social workers and social care workers are supported by their employers through the *Standards for Employers of Social Workers and Social Care workers*.



Strategic theme: Deliver effective regulation



To support this work in 2025-26, we will:

1. Support registrants and employers to maintain and value registration by promoting our online resources, encouraging the use of the online Portal, managing and responding to emails and phone calls, promoting one-to-one clinics for registrants and employers, and effectively processing applications, and renewals against our KPI's.
2. Deliver our FtP functions safely and effectively in accordance with rules, emerging case law and regulatory best practice and our KPI's. This includes triaging cases, investigative enquiries, and preparing and presenting evidence to FtP Hearings.
3. Deliver our Committee hearings services to support our KPI's, including the provision of high-quality papers, ensuring hearings (online or in-person) are managed professionally and that all committee members are trained and supported in carrying out their roles.
4. Commence a review our Standards of Conduct and Practice for Registrants and the Standards for Employers to ensure these remain fit for purpose.
5. Promote compliance with the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Registrants, and working with RQIA to promote compliance with the Standards for Employers.

How we will measure our success:

- A minimum of 97% of registrants maintain their registration throughout the year and our KPI's are met.
- FtP activity is managed efficiently in line with FtP Rules, best practice, and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).
- The outcomes of our activity are robust, fair, equitable and proportionate.
- Committee activity delivers against the KPIs and hearings are managed in an effective, professional and timely manner.
- The Standards continue to reflect best practice and meet the needs of registrants and employers.
- At least 90% of registrants' report using the Standards to inform their practice.
- At least 90% of employers' report using the Employer Standards to support social workers and social care practitioners.

Strategic theme: Develop the capability of the workforce



Social work and social care services are delivered within diverse communities and multi-professional environments. In order to improve outcomes for people who use services and their families, carers and communities, we will help develop a confident and competent social work and social care workforce that delivers safe, effective and high-quality care.

Continuous learning and development is a requirement of registration and through our Workforce Development function we support registrants to develop the knowledge and skills required to practice safely and to a high standard. We also monitor adherence for social workers in maintaining their professional development. By setting and monitoring standards for social work education and training at both qualifying and post qualifying levels we support the development of safe and effective practice across the career spectrum. We regulate and quality assure the delivery of the Degree in Social Work and Professional in Practice approved programmes and courses (for which we are the awarding body through robust approval, monitoring and review processes).

We want to ensure that we use our knowledge of the workforce to shape learning and development in the future. The Professional in Practice (PiP) framework is the continuous professional development framework for all social workers in Northern Ireland. As the awarding body, we have a statutory responsibility for the approval, quality assurance and delivery of the framework. We continuously aim to improve opportunities for social workers to have their learning and development benchmarked against the Framework's quality standards. Our Learning Zone resources and Lunchtime Seminars provide accessible ways to support and complement workforce learning.

The Minister for Health launched the 10-year Social Care Workforce Strategy in December 2024, alongside the Care in Practice Framework. We worked in support of the Department of Health in developing these important frameworks and also launched the *Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice* which is an entrance level qualification for all new social care practitioners.

We recognise that the sector and communities are changing with people who use services, carers and registrants having a wide and diverse range of cultural backgrounds. It is essential that in planning and developing the workforce's capability that we are mindful of that diversity to ensure the workforce is equipped to deliver high quality services in a diverse setting. We have seen an increase in Internationally Qualified Social Workers (IQSW) applying to register to work as social workers in Northern Ireland. We have robust procedures in place to support IQSW's applying to register and we continue to look at ways to improve efficiency in responding to the increase in applications. At the same time, we know many social care providers are depending on the international workforce to deliver social care in Northern Ireland and it is therefore important that we continue to support a diverse social care practitioner workforce.

We will deliver the Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) and Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) audits throughout the year – reporting learning to employers and relevant stakeholder groups. We will continue to support the work of the NI Social Work Degree Partnership throughout the year as we ensure those training for the Degree in Social Work have a quality and engaging experience to support their careers in social work. We will also engage social work leaders to support leadership at all levels of the profession through the implementation of the Social Work Leadership Framework; and work closely with the DoH to progress the social care reform agenda.

Strategic theme: Develop the capability of the workforce



Strategic actions from our Strategic Plan 2023-27

Establish a qualifications and continuous learning framework which can support a career in social care that strengthens the capability of the social care workforce.

Ensure the delivery of high-quality qualifying and post-qualifying social work education and training that is accessible, flexible and equips social workers to meet the needs of the people they work with in an increasingly diverse society.

Embed the PIP Framework for social workers as the benchmark for safety, quality, improvement and continued fitness for practice.

Support the development of social work leadership capability using the DoH Leadership Framework.

Promote uptake and engagement in continuous learning through the development of a Digital Learning Strategy.

By delivering our strategic actions we will ensure:

- Career choices for the social care workforce are supported by continuous learning and development.
- There is increased engagement in the PIP Framework and Digital Learning Resources to support learning and development.
- Leadership capability is embedded in qualifying and post-qualifying social work education and training..
- The social work and social care workforce are supported to work effectively with people of various cultural backgrounds and understand how their own cultural beliefs may differ from other cultures.

Strategic theme: Develop the capability of the workforce



To support this work in 2025-26, we will:

How we will measure our success:

1. Approve and assure standards of social work education and training at qualifying and post qualifying levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Degree in Social Work programmes meet the required Standards for Approval. • Actions arising from the Review of the Degree are delivered. • The statutory requirements for the PiP Framework are met. • Post-qualifying social work education meets the required Standards for Approval within the PiP Framework.
2. Work with the Professional in Practice (PiP) Partnership, social work registrants, and others to promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement through engagement in the PiP Framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All forums and committees associated with the delivery of the PiP Framework are delivered. • Routes to achievement within the Framework are delivered. • PiP Awards are delivered.
3. Engage with Social Work Leaders to support leadership at all levels of the profession by implementing the Social Work Leadership Framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Zone includes a section promoting the Leadership Framework. • Evidence of engagement with social work leaders to support the Social Work Leadership Framework. • Evidence of outcomes from year one of implementation across workstreams.
4. Support the equality, diversity and inclusivity of the social work and social care workforce by establishing baseline datasets on which to build evidence and growth by September 2025.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline data gathered that will enable a strategy and actions to be developed to support equality, diversity and inclusion in our work to support the workforce.
5. Develop, promote and support the Care in Practice Framework and career progression as part of the Social Care Council's responsibilities within the wider Department of Health social care workforce reform agenda as set out in the DoH Social Care Workforce Strategy 2025-35.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Care Council actions in the Social Care Workforce Strategy are delivered. • A Social Care Workforce Reform Implementation Plan will be finalised. • Review of the Diplomas in Health and Social Care are overseen and facilitated.



Strategic theme: Lead with influence

As the workforce regulator, we have a key role to play in empowering social workers and social care practitioners to effectively contribute to the delivery of high-quality services. In order to support and develop the workforce, we need to understand the environment in which they work. There is a need to build our evidence base, using research, data and intelligence, to inform the provision of sufficient numbers of the right people, with the right knowledge, skills and values, are in the workforce. Our focus will be on supporting them in a way that reflects the value of their work and the contribution they make to the wider health and social care system. This is critical to the improvement and transformation of health and social care services.

Key to our work is the information and intelligence we hold about the social work and social care workforce. We are uniquely placed to collect and use this information and our ambition remains to use our workforce intelligence to inform strategic decisions to support the sector. We now produce monthly reports on the registered workforce which are published on our [website](#).

We continue to improve how we share and access data across the health and social care system to present this to decision makers and leaders so that they are informed when developing policy and responding to the challenges faced by the social work and social care workforce – we continue to work alongside the Department of Health to support the 'Social Care Collaborative Forum' and the 'Children's Services Reform Board'.

We also continue to work with employers and education providers to promote careers in social work and social care to help strengthen the capability and diversity of the workforce – we have started to look at how we can influence and support a more inclusive workforce both for ourselves and the sector. We commenced this work last year with workshops with our staff, Board and Participation Partnership members to help us better understand our internal and external experiences around diversity and inclusion. We will build on this work during 2025/26 as we start to look at our role around diversity and inclusion both in the delivery of our services but also how we can support the diversity of the social work and social care workforce.

We have just established a new partnership to support our social work and social care research and evidence agenda. This is an evolving area of work – as we look for evidence to support learning and decision making at a leadership, strategic and operational level. We have developed a new research and data section on the website on our website to share our learning and will be looking ahead to measure how effectively we have delivered the Social Work and Social Care Research Strategy 2020-2025.



Strategic theme: Lead with influence

Strategic actions from our Strategic Plan 2023-27

Develop our capacity and capability for research evidence and data analysis and insight to unlock intelligence about the workforce, and the context of social work and social care practice.

Work with our partnerships and networks to promote a collaborative working environment to enable transformation and improvement.

Work collaboratively with health and social care workforce regulators and the RQIA, using our data and insights to inform, improve and enhance service user safety and experience of social work and social care workforce and services.

Influence the recognition of the value and contribution the social work and social care workforce make to society.

Promote careers in social work and social care that reflect the diversity of our communities.

By delivering our strategic actions we will ensure:

- Workforce data, intelligence and research improve understanding of the role and value of social work and social care and informs the development of policy and strategy.
- The contributions of social work and social care are recognised and valued by those who engage in the services they provide.
- There is greater diversity in the social work and social care workforce.
- A more stable and sustainable workforce exists across both social work and social care.



Strategic theme: Lead with influence

To support this work in 2025-26, we will:

1. Support the reform, transformation and development of the social care workforce through our work with the Leaders in Social Care Partnership, the Social Care Collaborative Forum and the Children's Services Strategic Reform Board.
2. Work across all our Partnerships to design and deliver our business to meet the needs of the workforce, employers, and stakeholders.
3. Work collaboratively with our existing partnerships and networks to develop our Research and Evidence Partnership in order to influence and support the use of research and evidence within the social work and social care workforce, including the development of a 10-year research and evidence Strategy.
4. Raise the profile of social work and social care while increasing recognition of the value of the social work and social care workforce.
5. Engage our stakeholders in agreeing our equality, diversity and inclusion programme to support an inclusive and diverse workforce that embraces differences and improves awareness.

How we will measure our success:

- The programme of work for the Leaders in Social Care Partnership for 2025-26 is delivered.
- Support provided to designated workstreams to achieve agreed outcomes.
- The Social Care Council programme of work for the Children's Services Strategic Reform Board, for 2025-26 is delivered.
- The programme of work identified by each our partnerships (Participation, PiP, Leaders in Social Care, Research and Evidence and Registrants forums, are delivered during 2025-26.
- Continue to establish the Research and Evidence Partnership and programme of work through inclusive engagement and networking with existing groups and by supporting the creation of new research engagements as appropriate, internally and externally.
- Using surveys around awareness and recognition of the value of the social work and social care workforce, develop a benchmark based on the 2023 survey outcomes and 'Social care: making a difference' campaign evaluation outcomes.
- Targeted public relations campaign delivered.
- Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion programme is built in collaboration with others including agreeing how we will evidence baselines and change.

Strategic theme: Innovate and improve



We are an innovative regulator, with a culture that supports inclusion, collaboration and creativity. We will develop our digital systems to deliver efficient and effective workforce regulation, and will support our registrants to engage with digital innovation.

The use of technology continues to revolutionise the way we work – we are now much more confident and capable in accessing services online, using online meeting tools, the use of Applications (Apps) to support services, social media platforms and being prepared for the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and how it might change our business and daily lives. The 'shift left' strategy for health and social care has a focus on analogue to digital services as part of a tri-partite solution for the reform of health and social care. All of this means that as an organisation we need to keep connected to the evolutions in technology and provide services in a manner that meets the needs of our registrants and our staff – while acknowledging the benefits of in- person engagement and communication – and getting the balance right between technology and human contacts and interactions.

As part of this we have been developing an engagement strategy with registrants, people who use services, carers and staff to ensure that we do get the balance right – and target our use of electronic communications, engagement and collaboration in a meaningful and accessible way. To inform this we are tracking the experience of those who engage and connect with us so that those experiences influence the design and the way we deliver our business.

The Department of Health have produced a Digital Strategy and we are continuing to see how we can deliver our business in support of this. We are engaging with Digital Health and Care NI (DHCNI) to scope a new registration and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system to support our business and hope to be in a position to receive business case approval in 2025/26. The system will need to integrate with the new Case Management System we developed last year to support our Fitness to Practise and Committee functions. We also launched an App last year for existing registrants – this is just the first phase and we plan to build on this during the year to see what other services we can move online and share through the App.

We are also starting to look at how AI can inform and improve our business and we are starting this year to scope how AI can work to support the social care environment and what we can do to utilise this innovation.

We continually seek to improve the quality of the data which we hold to ensure confidence, and we have developed a Data Quality Assurance Plan which we are planning to embed into our business to constantly review and ensure the quality of our data remains of a high calibre.

Strategic theme: Innovate and improve



Strategic actions from our Strategic Plan 2023-27

Work in partnership with our registrants and employers to co-produce a future proofed regulation and registration system.

Embed a culture and model of continuous improvement, research and evidence to ensure the efficient delivery of Social Care Council services.

Improve our digital registration, regulation and development systems to ensure a seamless and efficient service for registrants and all of our stakeholders.

Engage the Digital Strategy to inform our digital innovation and system improvement.

By delivering our strategic actions we will ensure:

- Stakeholders' experience of engaging with us is positive and our services fulfil their needs.
- Registrants are able to engage effectively and easily with our systems and processes.
- The Social Care Council maximises the use of digital innovation to deliver high quality services.



Strategic theme: Innovate and improve



To support this work in 2025-26, we will:

1. Finalise our engagement strategy by December 2025, following a period of consultation, which will set out how we engage registrants and others in delivering our business and promoting the value, impact and recognition of the social work and social care workforce.

2. Following business case approval for a new Registration and CPD system, commence delivery of a business reform project to put a new ICT enabled system in place by March 2027.

3. Scope how AI can support workstreams and business functions that will inform a Digital AI strategy for the Social Care Council by December 2025.

4. Work with our Registration, Workforce Development, Database, Fitness to Practise and Committee Teams to drive up the quality of our system data with clear targets and outcomes to identify areas for inspection and quality assurance during 2025-26.

How we will measure our success:

- Engagement strategy in place supporting meaningful engagement.

- Two-year project plan in place.
- First year's project milestones are met.

- Surveyed understanding of AI on the business.
- Potential pilot areas identified.
- Principles of AI on current and future business drafted.

- Testing and quality assurance of our data and datasets will improve reporting, confidence and better outcomes.



Delivering our Strategic Plan for 2023-2027

People, communication and engagement, evaluation and resources.

The Social Care Council is an Investors in People Platinum accredited employer and also holds the iIP Health and Wellbeing Gold Award. There are 68 staff in the Social Care Council who can work from the office or remotely in line with the organisation's Agile Working Policy. The organisation is also supported by its Health and Wellbeing Committee, which is represented by staff from each of the functions. The workforce supports a range of front line and back office functions, supporting the overall delivery of the Social Care Council's Business Plan.

The organisation is committed to equality and diversity including making positive change in line with its values and representing those it provides its services to, and will continue to pursue positive change in this important area by delivering its Equality and Disability Action Plans.

The Social Care Council has robust governance and financial systems in place to provide assurance to its Board – this includes managing risks and incidents, producing an Annual Report and Accounts, an Annual Equality Scheme Progress Report, a Quality 2020 Report, an annual Complaints Management Report, business performance and information and evaluation reporting.

The organisation is supported by a Communication and Engagement Team who have an extensive remit to support internal and external engagement and collaboration, campaign management and development, social and digital media, promotional activity, public affairs and publication design and production.

Strategic actions from our Strategic Plan 2023-27

People

We will invest in the capacity and capability of our people, empowering creativity, continuous learning and improvement in everything we do.

Communications and engagement

We will maximise our ability to inform, connect, engage, support, collaborate and empower registrants, people who use services, careers and stakeholders.

Evaluation

We will develop an effective model of evaluation that will measure our progress against our outcomes, demonstrate the impact of our work and use this to inform our annual business and operational plans.

Resources

We will work with the DoH to ensure we have adequate resource for the sustainable growth necessary to realise the outcomes of the Strategic Plan.



Delivering our Strategic Plan for 2023-2027

To support this work in 2025-26, we will:

1. Deliver the actions arising from the IIP assessment including a Reward and Recognition framework for all staff that supports our culture, values, equality and diversity commitments and People Plan by December 2025.
2. Develop a three-year Learning and Development Programme for all staff that supports them in their work and their careers.
3. Develop a Health and Wellbeing Programme with associated outcomes to support all staff in the organisation by March 2026.
4. Review our structure and functions to ensure we are able to continue to deliver our business priorities in the future within our financial allocation, while also building career structure and growth for staff.
5. Develop and implement an internal communications plan to include digital opportunities such as redeveloping the intranet using SharePoint and investing in the right tools for updating staff by December 2025.
6. Ensure we break even by March 2026.

How we will measure our success:

- IIP Platinum maintained.
- Reward and Recognition Framework in place.
- Positive impact on culture of the organisation and staff satisfaction levels benchmarked against the IIP survey.
- Staff have ownership of their learning and development and a pathway for career progression.
- Leadership capability is improved across the organisation.
- IIP Health and Wellbeing Gold maintained with actions that will inform a future Platinum accreditation by March 2026.
- Positive impact on the wellbeing of staff with levels benchmarked against the IIP health and wellbeing survey.
- A sustainable and flexible structure is in place to enable the organisation to perform to a high level and support growth for staff.
- Internal communications plan implemented.
- Establish a baseline survey to measure staff satisfaction levels, with a target of 20% improvement by 2026/27.
- Break even achieved.

Appendix I – Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

What we will measure

KPI's

KPI Description

1. We will provide quality services that achieve a minimum of 85% stakeholder satisfaction throughout the year.	85%
2. We will process 100% of completed applications/renewals within 20 working days of submission.	100% within 20 working days
3. We will update the register for all Fitness to Practise decisions within two working days of receipt of the information.	Two working days
4. We will triage all referrals to the Fitness to Practise Team within five working days.	Five working days
5. We will conclude 100% of Interim Suspension Order (ISO) hearings within four weeks of referral.	100% within four weeks
6. We will conclude 90% of Fitness to Practise cases within 15 months of opening the case.	90% within 15 months
7. We will conclude 90% of Fitness to Practise hearings under the Fitness to Practise procedure within six months of the date of transfer.	90% within six months
8. We will conclude 90% of Fitness to Practise hearings under the health procedure within 10 months of the date of transfer	90% within 10 months
9. We will conclude or refer to a Registration Committee, 75% of all suitability assessments within two months of creating the case.	75% within two months
10. We will ensure our staff absence levels do not exceed 3.5% during the year.	3.5%
11. We will ensure we achieve the minimum standard of paying 95% of undisputed invoices within 30 days.	95% within 30 days
12. We will ensure we achieve the minimum standard of paying 75% of undisputed invoices within the 10 day prompt payment target.	75% in 10 days
13. We will manage our finances to achieve financial breakeven target of 0.25% or £20k (whichever is greater).	0.25%/£20k
14. We will ensure the Online Registration Portal is available at least 98% of time during the year.	98%

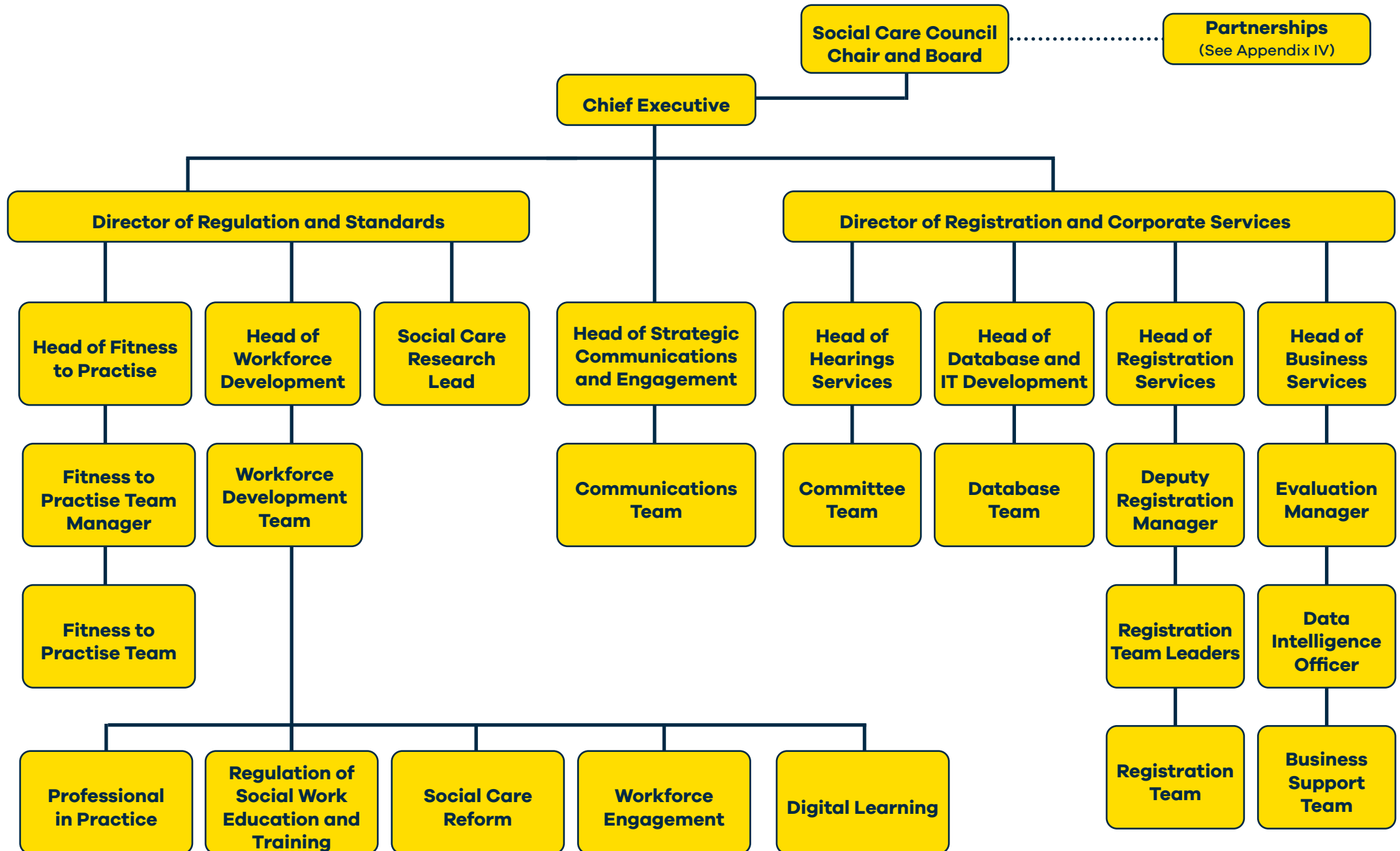
Appendix II – Terms and definitions used in this plan

AI	Artificial Intelligence - enables computers to simulate human learning, understanding and problem solving to improve services and systems.
Board	The Social Care Council Board are appointed by the Minister for Health to make sure that the organisation is managing its work properly and is carrying out the functions that they were set up to do.
BSO	Business Services Organisation.
CPD	Continuous Professional Development – ongoing learning and training.
DHCNI	Digital Health and Care Northern Ireland.
DoH	Department of Health – the government body responsible for Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.
FtP	Fitness to Practise – a registrant’s suitability to work in social work or social care.
HSC	Health and Social Care – the people, systems and facilities that provide medical and personal care and support.
ICT	Information and Communications Technology – computers, networks, websites and Apps we use.
IiP	Investors in People – an award for good standards in staff and organisation management and development.
IQSW	Internationally Qualified Social Worker.
ISO	Interim Suspension Order – temporary action to stop a registrant working while we investigate a serious complaint.
KPI	Key Performance Indicator – standards we use to measure how well we are doing our job.

Appendix II – Terms and definitions used in this plan

NI	Northern Ireland
PiP	Professional in Practice – a Continuous Professional Development framework that supports and provides professional recognition for social workers' learning and development.
PRTL	Post Registration Training and Learning – a minimum of 90 hours of learning that all registrants must complete during the cycle of registration.
Register	The Social Care Council's register is an electronic list of social workers and social care practitioners working in Northern Ireland (and also students studying for the Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland).
Registrant	A person approved for registration on the Social Care Council's Register – social workers, social care practitioners and social work student.
RQIA	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority – inspects Health and Social Care organisations to ensure standards are being met.
SLA	Services Level Agreement.
Social Care Council	Refers to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
Social Care practitioners	Previously referred to as 'social care workers'. Individuals who provide support and/or personal care for people in their own homes, day care, residential care, or nursing home settings.
Social Worker	Individuals with a recognised social work qualification who improve and safeguard the social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.
Stakeholders	People who are involved with our work or who are affected by what we do.

Appendix III - Organisation Structure 2025-26



Appendix IV – Our Partnerships

Partnership is at the heart of our work. We can only deliver our strategic priorities through the invaluable and enduring partnership arrangements we have in place, working with our registrants, people who use services and carers, providers of social work and social care services, education and training providers, and with Government, all of contribute to how we deliver our business.

- People who use services and carers – **Participation Partnership**.
- Social care providers – **Leaders in Social Care Partnership**.
- Social work employers and education providers – **Professional in Practice Partnership**.
- **Research and Evidence Partnership** (this is a new Partnership to support the Social Care Council in relation to research and evidence in social work and social care services to support better outcomes).

We also established a new 'Social Worker Registrant Engagement Group' to help bring together the views and experiences of social workers into our business activities and planning. In terms of social care engagement, there are already a number of groups that support social care engagement including our Social Care Managers Forum, so we are therefore taking time to ensure that whatever model of engagement we use for social care adds value and connects with existing groups and forums.



Our Purpose

To protect the public and safeguard service users through the regulation and development of the social work and social care workforce.



Our Values

Our Vision

To have a thriving, capable and compassionate social work and social care workforce providing the highest quality of care, protection and support to people in need.

We will realise our vision by taking forward four priorities:

Regulate



Deliver effective regulation

Support



Develop the capability of the workforce

Influence



Lead with influence

Innovate



Innovate and improve



Working together. Making a difference.

Northern Ireland

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Care
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