

**Social Care Council Board Meeting
Confirmed Minutes
10:00am on Wednesday 25th March 2026
Rooms 2.8 & 2.9 James House**

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Tracy Reid, Chief Executive, 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
Anne McGlade, Social Care Research Lead, Social Care Council
Helen McVicker, Interim Co-Director of Regulation and Standards, Social
Care Council – until 1: 30p.m
Sandra Stranaghan, Head of Corporate Services, Social Care Council
Maureen Martin, Secretariat, Social Care Council

Observer(s):

Lorraine Conlon, Department of Health

Apologies:

Professor David Hayes, Board Member
Declan McAllister, Director of Registration & Corporate Services, Social Care Council

Formalities

Item	Agenda
1.	Welcome and apologies
1.1	The Acting Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies as listed above.
2.	Declarations of Interest
2.1	There were no Declarations of Interest to note.
3.0	Minutes and Matters Arising
3.1	<i>Minutes of the previous meeting of 17th December 2025</i>
3.1.1	The minutes of 17 th December 2025 were approved by the Board as a true and accurate record.
3.2	<i>Matters Arising</i>
3.2.1	<u>Agenda item 12.1</u> The Chief Executive updated that BSO had confirmed that they were unable to provide assistance with a workforce load analysis and an alternative route will be worked through.
Chair and Chief Executive Reports	
4.	Acting Chair's Report – verbal
4.1	It was noted that this was the final Board meeting for the Acting Chair and the four current Non - Executive Directors. Tributes were paid to all departing members for their service, leadership, and contribution during their 8-year tenure. <u>Non-Executive Director recruitment</u> The Public Appointments Unit has officially confirmed the appointment of 4 new Non-Executive Directors who are due to take up the role from April and May 2026. Introductory meetings with the Acting Chair and incoming members have been arranged for 31 st March. The recruitment exercise for the new Board Chair is underway and the notification of appointment will be shared in due course.
4.2	<u>Engagement with Department of Health</u> The Acting Chair and Chief Executive attended a constructive meeting with the Minister of Health on 12 th February 2026 to discuss operational matters and forthcoming challenges.

4.3 **Research Conference**

The Board formally recorded its recognition of the work of the Research Team and colleagues for the planning and delivery of the Research Conference held on 11th March 2026. The event was commended for being of an exceptionally high-quality with a substantial number and broad range of excellent presentations and research outputs.

4.4 The Acting Chair paid tribute to the departing Non-Executive Directors, expressing sincere thanks for their commitment, contribution and support throughout their tenure, and extended appreciation to the remaining Board members for meeting the challenge of joining a Board enriched by diverse talents, experience and values.

Denise Hunt was noted as the new ARAC Chair and will act as a source of support for incoming members, with engagement planned at the April Strategic Board Session as part of the induction process.

Professor David Hayes - the Board and Senior Leadership team recognised his significant contribution over the past eight years, and particularly his leadership as Chair of the Research & Evidence Committee over the past two years. His willingness to remain on the Board to provide continuity when the Acting Chair was appointed was commended, and his steady, thoughtful perspective was acknowledged.

Jacqui McGarvey - the Board and Senior Leadership team noted Jacqui's invaluable role as a thoughtful and principled voice, often providing a moral compass and alternative perspective. Her contribution to both the Board and ARAC was acknowledged as highly impactful.

Roslyn Dougherty - Roslyn's steadfast support during a period of reduced Board membership was highlighted. She has provided consistent leadership to the Professional in Practise Committee and played a key role in ensuring robust scrutiny, thorough examination and effective resolution of matters. Her support to the Chair and Deputy Chair was particularly recognised.

Sarah Browne - the Board and Senior Leadership team acknowledged Sarah's exemplary leadership as Chair of the Leaders in Social Care and Participation Partnership, noting her commitment, professionalism and ability to ensure continuity and strengthening of committee work. Her significant contribution to the Chief Executive recruitment exercise and involvement in the Remuneration Committee was commended, with appreciation expressed for her ability to promote rigorous and constructive discussions.

The Acting Chair concluded by noting that the outgoing Non-Executive Directors represented a corporate group of exemplary leaders, whose complementary and collaborative approach has greatly strengthened the effectiveness of the Board.

Board members and the Senior Leadership team recorded sincere thanks to the Acting Chair for his 23 years of public service, noting the significant contribution he has made to the organisation and the sector and the considerable loss his departure represents to the Social Care Council. His leadership has been characterised by fairness, wisdom, kindness and integrity, along with deep care, knowledge and genuine interest in social work and social care. His role as a respected ambassador for the organisation, and his commitment to strengthening relationships were formally acknowledged by colleagues.

It was noted that, despite the difficult issues considered, discussions have always been consistently constructive and collaborative.

Sarah Browne extended appreciation to the Acting Chair and Chief Executive, stating that it had been a privilege to serve on the Board for eight years. She reflected on the depth and breadth of the organisation's work, describing the Social Care Council as an outstanding organisation that will continue to grow from strength to strength

5. Chief Executive's Report – Paper B

5.1 The Chief Executive presented her Board report which outlines emergent risks and activity undertaken during the period 11 December 2025 – 18 March 2026.

The Board were informed of the sad passing of esteemed colleague, Seamus McAleese who had been a valued member of the Workforce Development team. The organisation has rallied to provide support to Seamus's family and a future fundraiser is planned.

The Chief Executive drew the Board's attention to key events/meetings and activities summarised as:

1. Fitness to Practice demand and capacity pressures remain high and there are significant capacity issues within BSO Legal Services which is impacting Committee processes. The risk had been escalated to BSO and Sponsor Branch and a tri-party meeting has been scheduled for 30 March 2026 to discuss the legal service pressures.
2. Savings Plans including proposed fee increase scenarios have been submitted to Sponsor Branch for consideration.
3. The Research conference on 11th March was commended as a high-

	<p>quality event with relevant research around AI and the launch of the Digital Skills that will support the social work workforce.</p> <p>4. New Community Development resource has been launched on the Learning Zone.</p> <p>5. Completion of the Landscape Review is expected by the end of March 2026 and correspondence from Sponsor Branch is awaited.</p> <p>The Board noted the Chief Executive’s Report.</p>
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Partnership Updates

6. Professional in Practise Partnership Unconfirmed minutes of 12th March 2026 - Paper C for information

6.1	<p>The Chair of the Professional in Practise Partnership, Roslyn Dougherty gave an update on key matters and activity as discussed at the Partnership meeting of 12th March 2026.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion was held around the Research Conference, the impact of AI on Professional in Practise and the implications for social work; • A proposal to streamline the IAR Direct Observation submission route was presented to the Partnership for review and decision. The key changes were approved and will come into effect from October 2026; • Susan Ritchie, Department of Health attended to deliver a presentation on Social Work Workforce Guidance & CPD Links. The Partnership will continue to engage with the DoH during development of career pathways; • The Professional in Practise Awards ceremony is planned for 22nd September 2026. It was noted that this date clashes with the Children’s Social Care Reform Board (SCRB) meeting. It was agreed that the Chief Executive would write to the Department of Health as a priority to request a change of date for the SCRB meeting. A letter will also be issued to the Trust Directors of Social Work to encourage senior leadership representation at the event and to encourage the release of staff to attend in order to collect award in recognition of their achievement. <p>The Partnership had formally recognised the Chair’s final meeting and expressed gratitude for her service including 4 years as Partnership Chair and 8 years as Board member.</p> <p>Action: Chief Executive to write to Directors of Social Work, HSC Trusts and to the Department of Health in relation to the PiP Awards ceremony on 22nd September 2026.</p>
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	<p>The Board noted the Professional in Practise Partnership minutes of 12th March 2026.</p>
7.	<p>Research and Evidence Partnership update – Paper D for information</p>
7.1	<p>The Research Lead presented the progress update paper in the absence of the Chair of the Research and Evidence Partnership and the following key information was highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The annual Social Work and Social Care Research Conference was held on 11th March 2026 at Riddel Hall and was widely attended and positively received. The theme was <i>‘Innovating for today while preparing for tomorrow’</i> with a strong focus on AI, human rights, and online safety for staff. A full report will be provided in due course and a fully accessible video of the conference will be made available • The partnership will go forward with a blend of meetings, virtual and face to face to ensure inclusivity and maximise attendance. • A small working group has been established to develop the content of the new Research Strategy which will go out for formal consultation after Easter. • Further engagement is planned with the Department of Health around involvement in shaping the social care and social work research priorities. <p>Partnership members acknowledged the valuable contribution of Professor Hayes as the Chair of the Research & Evidence Partnership since 2023 and further formal recognition is planned for the next Partnership meeting.</p> <p>The Board noted the Research and Evidence Partnership update paper.</p>
8.	<p>Participation Partnership Unconfirmed Minutes of 9th March 2026 – Paper E for information</p>
8.1	<p>The Chair of the Participation Partnership, Sarah Browne presented the minutes of the Participation Partnership of 9th March and noted the following key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership recruitment work is ongoing, including broadening representation across youth, community, and voluntary sectors. • Update received on Social Care Reform Board restructuring and alignment with the Integrated Neighbourhood Model. Feedback reflected concerns regarding funding, role clarity, duplication of visits, and ensuring meaningful involvement of service users and carers. • AI/IMPACT Group update – increasing use of Encompass and MyCare app has led to continued concerns regarding data access and privacy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An update was provided on the Social Work Degree Framework Review and members endorsed key themes and contributed feedback. • A presentation was delivered on Returning to the Register guidance and the proposal for a more flexible, tiered NI model was agreed following discussion. Draft return-to-practice guidance is expected end of April for further review. <p>It was noted that new Chair arrangements will be in place from September 2026.</p> <p>The Board noted the Participation Partnership minutes of 9th March 2026</p>
9.	Leaders in Social Care Partnership Unconfirmed minutes of 10th February 2026 – for information
9.1	<p>The Partnership Chair thanked Social Care Council colleagues, Andriana Alkiviadou, Paul Rooney and Mervyn Bothwell for the support provided throughout her appointment. An email has been issued from the Partnership Chair to thank members for their commitment and to advise that of Chair arrangements that will be in place from September 2026.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A membership refresh has been completed, broadening the remit of the Partnership to encompass both children’s social care and adult social care, reflecting this as an emerging and expanding area of focus. • The Chief Executive attended to deliver an update on the Fair Work Forum and the Social Care Collaborative Reform Board. • There has been an increased uptake of social care apprenticeships and significant progress across Level 2–5 qualifications. • A work plan is in place for the coming year for the two workstreams; Comms workstream will be chaired by an LSCP member the Workforce group will be led by Mervyn Bothwell, Professional Advisor. • Board member, Carol Diffin has been appointed as the incoming Chair of the Leaders in Social Care Partnership • Members were reminder to save the date for the Social Care Campaign launch on 24 June at Beech Hall, Belfast. <p>The Board noted the Leaders in Social Care Partnership minutes of 10th February 2026</p>
Business Matters/Governance	
10.	Business Performance Report to 28th February 2026 – Paper G for information
10.1	The Head of Corporate Services presented the Month 11 Financial Performance report for information and gave an overview of key information in the report. Due to the timing of the Board meeting, the report covers the period up to 28 th

	<p>February 2026. The following key highlights were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board’s comments from the previous meeting have been noted and will be used to build improved benchmarking and trends into relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) • Fitness to Practise and Committee KPI’s resource challenges • Approximately 3,000 registration related emails and 3,000 phone calls are managed monthly. The Registration team receive around 900 applications per month and process around 300 renewals monthly in addition to also managing a wide range of other registration processing activity. • The Social Care Council is working with ITS alongside other ALBs as part of the pilot for Copilot app. • Work is underway with the Department of Health in relation to the ethics, policy, governance and application of AI. • Work is continuing around the promotion of the social work career campaign including the ‘Holding Space’ photography exhibition. • Staff absences remain low and continue to be below the average levels recorded over the past two to three years. <p>The Board noted the Business Performance Report to 28th February 2026</p>
11.	Financial Performance Report – Month 11 – Paper H for approval
11.1	Following review and discussion, the Board approved the Month 11 Financial Report.
12.	Risk Progress report - Paper I for information
12.1	<p>The Head of Corporate Services presented the Risk Progress report and a number of attachments including the strategic and operational risk registers and horizon scanning overview document. The following key highlights were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report was presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in February. • There are currently 9 strategic risks with the Fitness to Practise risk assigned as an Extreme Risk. An Early Alert has been raised with the Department of Health regarding the immediate pressures and concern in relation to the availability of DLS legal support for hearings and Interim Suspension Orders. Meetings are scheduled with DoH and BSO officials this month to address concerns. • The Risk Management Committee met on 23rd March and updated the live risk register including the following which will be presented at the ARAC meeting in May:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New risk added in relation to DLS support for Committee hearings ○ New risk added in relation to AI ○ Level of risk decreased following completion of a Do Not Remove data cleansing exercise ○ Escalation of risk in relation to changes at Board level ● The progress report also includes two updates in relation to the ID fraud investigations and includes a copy of the Do Not Remove Data Cleansing Exercise. The Register was not significantly impacted from the exercise and it has provided an excellent learning opportunity. The remit and oversight of the Socrates Improvement Board will be changed to include a role in reviewing data and triangulating issues. <p>Formal thanks to the Database team for their exemplary work in completing the Data Cleansing exercise were recorded and the Chair will write a letter of commendation to express the appreciation of the Board. ACTION</p> <p>The Board noted the Risk Progress report.</p>
13.	Progress Report on Savings Plan - Paper J
13.1	The Chief Executive advised that the item had been added to the Board agenda to formally record concerns around the proposed savings plans and confirm that a meeting with the Department of Health is to be arranged.
14.	Business Plan 2026/27 - Paper K for approval
14.1	The Head of Corporate Services invited members to submit comments on the Business Plan and Equality Screening document by 30 March and noted that comment from Sponsor Branch is awaited. The Plan incorporates core services and additional actions relating to the Strategic Plan consultation, system development, Being Open, Being Human and the Neighbourhood Model. and the Council awaits DoH comments.
	An updated draft Business Plan will be shared once all comments have been received and incorporated.
15.	Update on ‘Being Open’ Framework and RQIA ‘Being Human’ Framework – for note
15.1	The Chief Executive advised that a forthcoming Board strategic session will be used to consider the implications of both frameworks for the organisation’s inward-facing operations and outward-facing responsibilities.
16.	Audit & Risk Assurance Committee unconfirmed minutes of 18th February – Paper L for information
16.1	The Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee thanked Committee member, Lesley Mitchell for the guidance and support during her induction and

	<p>transition into the role of Committee Chair.</p> <p>It was noted that the main focus of discussion had been around the continuing Fitness to Practise and Committee risk and challenges faced by the respective teams.</p> <p>The Board approved the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee unconfirmed minutes of 18th February 2026.</p>
17.	Remuneration Committee update – Verbal for information
17.1	The Remuneration Committee Chair reported that the Korn Ferry Senior Executive Job Evaluation had assessed the Chief Executive role at pay band level 4 rather than the anticipated level 5. An appeal of the banding determination is currently being prepared, with submission due by 31 March, subject to a possible extension to 31 May 2026.
18.	Records Management Strategy - Paper M for approval
Closing Formalities	
19.	Any other business
19.1	<p>As it was the last Board meeting, the Acting Chair formally noted the following expressions of appreciation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Administrators, Maureen Martin and Hollie Bishop for their diligence in delivering a high-quality, professional service that has been valued by all members. • Tracy Reid, Chief Executive for her exemplary leadership and support since taking up the post, noting her significant contribution to ensuring a smooth transition for both the Board and the Senior Leadership Team. • Catherine Maguire and Helen McVicker, Interim Co-Directors of Regulation and Standards for stepping into interim roles at short notice and their professionalism and significant responsibility in jointly carrying two Director posts under a shared appointment model. • Declan McAllister, Director of Registration & Corporate Services for his services as interim Chief Executive and for providing continuity and leadership to the organisation during a period of transition and guidance and support to the incoming Chief Executive • Anne McGlade for her leadership as Research Lead and for establishing a new research function that is critical to raising standards and informing practice. Anne’s contribution was recognised as exemplary, particularly given the limited resources available.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandra Stranaghan, Head of Corporate Services for her leadership and support to the Board and Acting Chair, including her interim role as Director of Registration and Corporate Services. Her contribution in providing stability, operational excellence and high-quality business support was formally acknowledged. • Communications Team, and in particular Rita McCullagh, was recognised, noting the central role of Communications as a core and evolving function, especially in the context of the reform agenda, and commending the delivery of impactful podcasts and campaigns highlighting the value of social work and social care. <p>The Acting Chair thanked Board colleagues for their valuable input, strong contribution and unwavering support over the previous eight years.</p>
20.	Date of next meetings
20.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Strategic Session: 10:00a.m Wednesday - 22nd April 2026 • Board Strategic Session: 10:00a.m Wednesday 20th May 2026 • Board meeting: 10:00a.m Wednesday 17th June 2026

Approved by: Gerry Guckian, Interim Board Chair

Date of approval: 22 June 2026

Signature: 

ANNEX 1 – ACTION LIST

ITEM	NEW ACTIONS 25th March 2026	OWNER	PROGRESS
12.1	Letter of commendation to be issued to the Database for exemplary work in completion of the Data Cleansing exercise	<i>Chair</i>	<i>Open</i>
6.1	Letter to be written to the Directors of Social Work, HSC Trusts and to the Department of Health in relation to encouraging staff and senior leadership attendance at the PiP Awards ceremony on 22nd September 2026 and to request rescheduling the Children's Social Care Reform Board meeting	<i>Chief Executive</i>	<i>Open</i>