

Minutes of the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council Meeting, held on Wednesday 26 March 2025 at 2.00 pm in the Room 1.7, 1st Floor, James House, 2-4 Cromac Avenue, Belfast BT7 2JA

**Present:** Bronagh Scott (Chair)  
Linda Kelly, Chief Executive  
Kieran McCormick  
Siobhán Caslin  
Nirmala Bhogal  
Sharon McRoberts  
Gary Mitchell  
Janine Stockdale (via Teams)  
Karen Diamond  
Katrín Lehmann  
Ciara Scannell (via Teams)

**Apologies:** Eilidh McGregor  
Brenda Kelly

**In Attendance:** Jill Jackson, Head of Corporate Services

**Secretariat:** Heather Mallon, Council Secretary

## **1.0 Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Eilidh McGregor and Brenda Kelly.

## **2.0 Chair's Business**

### **2.1 Welcome to any Members of the Public**

Chair welcomed a number of staff and students from the Ambition to Success programme at Queen's University to the meeting and a round of introductions was made.

## **2.2 Council Members – Conflicts of Interest**

Members did not declare any conflicts of interest in relation to the agenda items to be discussed at today's Council meeting.

## **2.3 Register of Council Members' Activity**

Chair thanked those members who had submitted their updates for the Activity Register. Ms McRoberts noted that one of her recent activities had been omitted from the Register and undertook to forward the details to Mrs Mallon for inclusion. Chair requested that Mrs Mallon now archive the updated version for this year and commence a new Activity Register for 2025-26.

**Action:** *Mrs Mallon to make requested amendment to the Activity Register for 2024-25 and archive. New Register to be created for 2025-26.*

## **2.4 Board Governance Self-Assessment Document 2024-25 (Circulated for approval)**

Chair noted the receipt of comments from Ms McRoberts on the Self-Assessment document and enquired if any other members had comments. Mr Mitchell felt that the document read well. Ms Caslin was of the view that a sentence regarding succession planning should be included in the body text of section 2.3. Chair concurred with this and suggested that reference be made to discussing this with the Public Appointments Unit. Chair advised that she planned to hold a workshop to re-visit the Self-Assessment document and skills analysis.

Ms Diamond referred to page 9 of the document and the mention of the Equality Champion representing NIPEC on the regional HSC ALB Equality Forum. She advised that, as the Equality Champion for NIPEC, she was not aware of any recent meetings of the Committee having been held. Chair reported that she had been in contact with Professor Dorothy Whittington, Chair of the Champions Network, who had said that she had been finding it difficult to get good attendance at meetings and was subsequently reviewing the effectiveness of the Committee's role. Professor Whittington had advised that one of the issues appeared to be the large number of representatives on the Committee and the frequency with which these can change, making maintaining an effective level of continuity difficult. Ms Diamond was of the view that a number of options of dates for meetings would be useful, rather than only one date being circulated. Ms Jackson advised that, at a recent meeting she had attended with the Equality Unit, the same issues had been raised. Chair undertook to update Ms Diamond when she heard anything more.

Chair thanked Ms Jackson and Mrs Mallon for the work they had put into the document so far and requested that the comments from members be incorporated into it.

**Action:** *Board Governance Self-Assessment Document 2024-25 to be updated to include Members' comments.*

## **2.5 Updated Council Development Plan (*Circulated for approval*)**

Chair enquired if members had read the draft Development Plan, updated by Ms Jackson subsequent to the key actions agreed at the December Council meeting and members confirmed that they had.

Chair advised that she understood there had been discussion at the recent meeting of the Professional & Business Committee on the elevator pitch and that the Committee would be keen to lead on the development of this. Chair stated that the development of an elevator pitch was to be the subject of a future workshop to allow all members to provide input but she would be happy for the Committee to put some options together. Mrs Bhogal advised that the Committee were keen to incorporate feedback from staff into the development of an elevator pitch. Chair acknowledged that Ms McRoberts had submitted some suggestions.

Ms Caslin and Ms Diamond enquired if it would be possible for them to attend a meeting of the Professional & Business Committee as observers. Chair said that this subject had come up in a number of appraisals and urged members to observe a meeting of a committee they currently were not sitting on. She requested that members contact the relevant Chair and request future dates from Mrs Mallon. Chair also encouraged members to reach out to Trust Boards to provide them with the opportunity of gaining experience of a larger board.

Chair asked members if they were happy with the updates made to the Council Development Plan and were now content to approve this document as the final version.

Council members approved the final version of the Council Development Plan.

**Action:** *Ms Caslin and Ms Diamond to arrange to attend a future meeting of the Professional & Business Committee.*

## **2.6 Signed Partnership Agreement (*Circulated for noting*)**

Chair stated that the Partnership Agreement had been signed off in February 2024 by the Permanent Secretary, adding that it was recommended that this document be tabled annually at a Council meeting to remind members of the content and framework under which NIPEC operates.

Council Members noted the Partnership Agreement.

## **2.7 Update on Health Minister's Visit to NIPEC on 9 April 2025 and Council workshops**

Chair advised that the Health Minister is to visit NIPEC on 9 April between 10.00 am and 10.45 am, which is providing NIPEC with an important opportunity. Chair said that she intended to give a brief introduction and the Chief Executive would then give a presentation. Chair stated that it was important that any transformation work NIPEC was involved in be highlighted. She invited members to send any ideas they may have on examples or a short sentence which captures the essence of a piece of NIPEC's work that should be emphasised to Mrs Mallon ahead of next week's visit. Chair urged members to attend if at all possible and stressed that Teams was not an option for this visit. She requested that members inform Mrs Mallon of their intention to attend the event as soon as possible.

Chief Executive informed members that the focus of her presentation will be the priorities contained within the Minister's three-year strategy; ie Stabilise, Reform and Deliver. She intended to highlight the great work that had been achieved in relation to Equity of Access and Outcomes and the new Learning Disability nursing model; the new Mental Health nursing model; supporting Professor Renfrew's work on enabling safe, quality midwifery care; and the Quality Excellence Framework.

Chair advised that the workshop will follow after the Minister's visit as planned and will focus on NIPEC's Quality Strategy. Brenda Carson, NIPEC SPO will be facilitating the session and has several speakers lined up and so it should be a productive session. Chair requested that members inform Mrs Mallon of their intention to attend the workshop as soon as possible, if they have not already done so. It was anticipated that the workshop would be concluded by 3.00 pm.

Chair said that a further workshop is proposed for later in the year and that the possible dates are 28 August, 3 September or 4 September. Chair asked that Mrs Mallon circulate the dates after the meeting and requested that members respond as soon as possible so that numbers can be accessed.

**Action:** Members to send any ideas they may have for the Minister's visit to Mrs Mallon.

**Action:** Members to inform Mrs Mallon of their intention to attend the Minister's visit as soon as possible.

**Action:** Members to inform Mrs Mallon of their intention to attend the workshop as soon as possible.

**Action:** Mrs Mallon to circulate the date options for a further workshop. Members to respond as soon as possible.

## **2.8 Update on Second Term Expressions of Interest**

Chair reported that the Public Appointments Unit (PAU) had recently been in touch regarding a number of members who would be reaching the end of their first four-year term later this year. As part of their forward planning process, the PAU were seeking expressions of interest from those members regarding a second four-year term. Chair was pleased to report that all such members had confirmed their desire to continue on the Council for a further term and the PAU had been advised of this. Chair said that she was unable to confirm at this stage if all appointments would be renewed as this decision ultimately sat with the PAU. She undertook to update members once she had received correspondence back from the PAU.

## **2.9 Members' Appraisals 2024-25**

Chair advised that she wished to hold members' appraisals during the May/June period this year if at all possible. She was aware that Mrs Mallon had been getting in touch with members to arrange dates in this regard. Chair understood that there were several appraisal dates outstanding and so encouraged members to reply to Mrs Mallon with their availability if they had not already done so.

**Action:** Members with appraisal dates still to be arranged to reply to Mrs Mallon with their availability.

## **2.10 Regional Ethnic Diversity Collaborative Workshop – 26 February 2025**

Chair reported that she had attended the NIPEC Regional Ethnic Diversity Collaborative Workshop on 26 February 2025 in Stranmillis College, Belfast. The Health Minister had been in attendance to give opening remarks and had received a warm welcome. The keynote speaker was Mr Tshamano Mushapho, Service Manager, Western Health & Social Care Trust.

Chair advised that the event had provided a great opportunity to listen to inspirational stories from staff across the HSC as well as receiving feedback regarding the Organisational and Staff Survey. The latter focused on ascertaining what educational and promotional opportunities are available to those from the Global Majority. Chair reported that the workshop was well attended and it had been heartening to see the level of energy in the room.

Chief Executive reported that NIPEC's work in relation to the current Ethnic Diversity project was now coming to an end and the funding for the Ethnic Diversity Officers (EDOs) was ceasing on 31 March. She advised that the University of Ulster had made recommendations to the HSC Trusts in relation to overseas nurses accessing opportunities and that NIPEC would be continuing to monitor their implementation. Chief Executive acknowledged that this would be more difficult without input from staff who were experiencing these challenges first hand. NIPEC now intended to look at the learning from the project with a view to submitting a business case to take the project to a more strategic, human resources focused level.

Mr McCormick enquired if the end of the funding meant that NIPEC's own professional officer would be finishing at the end of March also and Chief Executive confirmed that sadly, it did. Mr McCormick expressed his disappointment at this, particularly given the Minister's keen interest in this issue. Ms McRoberts was of the view that regional oversight of the Trusts in implementing the recommendations was needed at a senior level and that NIPEC was well positioned for this. Chief Executive said that the CNO was committed to taking the work forward and was looking for opportunities to progress through conversation with the CNO Group.

Chair was of the view that it was important work and was pleased to note that two of the EDOs had received nominations for the RCN Nurse of the Year Award. Chief Executive added that two EDOs had also received nominations for the Hummingbird Awards, with one of them receiving highly commended in their category.

## **2.11 Regional HSC Chairs' Forum – 5 March 2025**

Chair reported that she had attended the Regional HSC Chairs' Forum with the Health Minister on 5 March. A large portion of the discussion at the meeting had been around the issue of Senior Executive Pay.

Chair advised that she had also attended the PHA Conference, 'Dying for Change', regarding a shared commitment to understanding and meeting the health needs of people with learning disabilities in Northern Ireland on 6 March at which there had been a number of high calibre speakers.

## **3.0 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2024 had been circulated for approval. Chair asked if members had read the minutes and were happy to approve.

The previous minutes were approved.

## **4.0 Matters Arising**

### **4.1 Updated Action Plan (*Circulated for approval*)**

Chair invited Ms Jackson to take members through the open items on the Action Plan. Ms Jackson advised that the first open item related to printing costs. Printing and photocopying had significantly reduced in the office but there had been an increase in the professional printing of reports and resources. There had been discussions at Business Team meetings around the possibility of professional PDF versions of documents being sent to each Trust for them to print themselves but there was a feeling that it was necessary to have at least some physical copies to hand out at engagement events. Ms Diamond suggested the use of posters with QR codes which could be scanned.

Chair was of the view that it was important to set a target to improve accountability in this area and asked that the issue remain on the Action Plan for now as a means of keeping it under review. Chief Executive undertook to discuss the matter further with staff. In response to a query from Mr Mitchell, Ms Jackson confirmed that NIPEC uses the Northern Ireland Civil Service's Sustainability Framework. Mr McCormick asked if NIPEC were over budget or if costs had increased in regard to printing. Ms Jackson stated that some additional costs had been incurred but that these had been met via slippage. Chair was of the view that some creative thinking was required.

Ms Jackson reported that the Muckamore Inquiry was drawing to a close and that she planned to seek legal advice on whether the associated action could now be closed.

In relation to the action regarding ways to encourage members of the public to attend meetings, Ms Caslin referred to a note she had made to suggest reaching out to universities and so was particularly pleased to see some students present at the meeting today. In response to a query from Ms McRoberts, Chief Executive confirmed that a notification of the meeting went out on social media and was included on the website. She suggested that the notification could go out more than once and Chair added that perhaps the notification could include an option to attend the meeting virtually. Chief Executive undertook to consider these options.

Ms Diamond enquired if NIPEC planned to move from the X social media platform. Chief Executive advised that the Senior Management Team had been discussing the possibility of taking the Department's lead and transitioning to BlueSky. There was a brief discussion on the most appropriate social media platforms for NIPEC. Chief Executive to keep Council apprised of any developments.

In relation to the new process for participation of Council members in NIPEC working groups agreed at the previous meeting, Ms Jackson advised that a flow chart required to be drawn up. Chair undertook to look at this.

Ms Jackson reported that work on the process for monitoring the registration and revalidation of staff and Council Members was almost complete. It was necessary to have the relevant staff registered with the NMC site to enable the checking of details. Once the process was finalised it would be handed over to Chief Executive's PA and Council Secretary to maintain.

Council approved the updated Action Plan

## **5.0 Correspondence**

### **5.1 Letter to HSC Bodies dated 2 January 2025: Strategic Review of Senior Executive Posts within Health and Social Care (*Circulated for noting*)**

In response to a query from Mr McCormick, Chair confirmed that the review of senior executive posts will impact NIPEC and the Chief Executive's post. Chair advised that there were a number of ongoing issues regarding structures which required to be finalised and once she received further information she would



update Council. Chair stressed the need to ensure that NIPEC's Chief Executive role was protected.

Chief Executive reported that the Department's review of senior executive pay running alongside Korn Ferry's review of senior executive posts had created a lot of discontentment, despite the Department's assurances that the two pieces of work are not related. Mr McCormick said that he understood the discontentment given how difficult it was to appoint new Chief Executives and Directors.

In response to a query from Ms McRoberts, Chief Executive replied that it was hoped that any increase in remuneration would come with the required funding. Chair undertook to provide members with a further update when she heard more. She hoped to be in a position to convene a meeting of the Remuneration Committee in the next few weeks.

- 5.2 Letter to CE dated 12 February 2025: Indicative Resource Budget Opening Allocation 2025/26 (*Circulated for noting*)**
- 5.3 Briefing Paper on Definitions and Terminologies used in BSO Internal Audit Reports (*Circulated for information*)**
- 5.4 BSO Fraud Alert re: WhatsApp Scam Messages dated 28 February 2025 (*Circulated for noting*)**

Council members noted the previously circulated correspondence.

## **6.0 Operational Performance and Service Improvement**

### **6.1 Chief Executive's Report (*Circulated for noting*)**

The Chair invited the Chief Executive to take the Council through the next section of the agenda. Chief Executive stated that her report had been circulated prior to the meeting and those present confirmed that they had read same. This report highlighted some of the key aspects of the Chief Executive's work and NIPEC's priorities. Chief Executive wished to draw particular attention to some of the work currently being undertaken in conjunction with the CNO's Office.

With regard to Delivering Care, a workshop had been held with a view to refreshing the policy. A further workshop is planned for early Spring, with the launch of the new policy scheduled to take place soon after.

In relation to the Widening Access to Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions Project, the stakeholder workshop originally planned for February had been postponed to allow time for further analysis of the project survey results.

Chief Executive reported that four workstreams had been created to take the Shaping Our Future work forward. She would be chairing a workstream subgroup on education and training.

The RCN had hosted an engagement event in February with the Newly Registered Nurse Network (NCN) and student ambassadors. A number of issues were discussed, one of which was NMC figures showing that HSCNI were losing many staff within the first 5 years of registration. The RCN would be conducting a piece of work to look into the reasons for this and NIPEC would be supporting this work.

Chief Executive reported that she had attended The Big Discussion Workshop on 4 March which had focused on winter pressures and identifying the challenges and opportunities from a whole systems perspective. The Health Minister expressed an expectation of a winter plan being developed by June 2025.

With regard to Public Health, Chief Executive advised that Healthy Child Healthy Future Framework was in the process of being refreshed and would be reissued by the Department as a matter of priority.

In relation to the issue of Delegation of Healthcare Interventions, Chief Executive advised that NIPEC was leading on the Task & Finish Group under direct payments within the HSC Trusts and the delegation of healthcare to social care practitioners employed by HSC Trusts and third-party providers. Mr McCormick was delighted to hear this as this challenging issue had been around for many years. Ms Lehmann agreed that the accountability nurses hold for delegation was very challenging. Chief Executive undertook to keep Council up to date with any developments and offered to prepare a presentation on the challenges. Chair accepted Chief Executive's offer stating that it would be very helpful.

Chief Executive reported that a group had been established to take the work forward following the successful launch of the Equity of Access and Outcome Report.

Regarding midwifery, Chief Executive was pleased to report that there were now Lead Midwives in post in all five HSC Trusts.

Chief Executive advised that the Northern Trust had hosted a celebration on World Mental Health Nurses Day on 21 February. NIPEC provided a presentation at this event on the development of a model for mental health nursing.

Chief Executive asked Council members if they had any questions. Mr Mitchell said that he had found the update in relation to the NRN Network and Student Ambassador Engagement event of particular interest as a new PhD was due to commence in autumn 2025 which will be exploring issues around newly qualified nurses' experiences (first six months in practice), their transition to practice and retention. Professor Donna Fitzsimons from Queen's University Belfast will be supervising this PhD study. Ms Diamond was interested to note that recruitment was such an issue. Chief Executive said that, upon further investigation, it was apparent that there was a lot of complexity around this issue. Chair thanked Chief Executive for her report, adding that it gave a strong sense of the amount of work she was leading on.

Council members noted the report.

**Action:** *Chief Executive to prepare a presentation on the challenges of delegation of healthcare for the next meeting.*

## **6.2 NIPEC Professional Work Plan 2024-25 – Business Plan objectives progress Monitoring Report from 1 April to 28 February 2025 (Circulated for consideration)**

Chief Executive referred to the Work Plan which had been circulated prior to the meeting and those present confirmed that they had read same. She wished to highlight some key areas of note and was pleased to report that, as of March 2025, 36 projects were now complete, 10 projects were progressing on target and only three had not been progressed.

Regarding the three projects that had not been progressed, Chief Executive advised that work is planned on reviewing the guidance document for the professions in developing career pathways for 2025/26 as this needs to be aligned to the endorsement of the final Career Model proposal. Some initial work had been undertaken and presented to the CNO Group. In relation to delegation, scoping of delegated HSC healthcare/nursing tasks under direct payments, this has been completed and presented to the CNO Group, however, given the recent level of media attention and sensitivity around this issue, this work has progressed to focus on exploring the challenges and solutions to the operational issues that have been raised.

With regard to the evaluation of the implementation of the co-production strategy, this had not been progressed as yet due to workload pressures but this project would be included on next year's Work Plan.

Chief Executive advised that the new Work Plan for 2025/26 would be in Excel format which made it much easier to track progress and therefore will provide better assurance to Council. The Work Plan was moving from the RAG rating system in order to provide more information on why a project may not be progressing. A weighting score was being introduced which would take account of things such the length of projects, number of phases etc. The corporate objectives would be separated out from external objectives. Chief Executive stated that the new Work Plan was still a work in progress and thanked the Professional & Business Committee for their input in the development of this new Work Plan. She asked if members had any questions on any aspects of the Work Plan.

Ms Lehmann enquired if the work around developing regional competencies and education for Band5/6 registered practitioners included the accelerated year in practice. Chief Executive advised that this had not yet been included as it had not currently been endorsed by the Minister at the time it was presented in the Nursing Task Group recommendations in 2020 due to funding. It was, however, a major strategic area of focus.

Mr Mitchell enquired as to the progress of the work in relation to a Regional Advanced Nursing Academy. Chief Executive replied that this was on next year's Work Plan and a PID had been submitted to the CNO proposing that NIPEC take the lead on this work. It was clear that a multi-disciplinary, collaborative approach was required and further instruction was awaited. There was some discussion on recent developments in both Scotland and England in relation to this issue.

### **6.3 Copy of the Consultation Activity Report (*Circulated for noting*)**

Chief Executive advised that there had only been a couple of key consultations received since the last meeting. One of these had not required a response and the other had just been completed. A further consultation around patient safety and Serious Adverse Incidents, which had just come in via CNMAC, had not yet it made the list.

Council members noted the Consultation Activity Report.

#### **6.4 Draft NIPEC Business Plan 2025-26 (*Circulated for consideration*)**

Chief Executive enquired if members had read the draft Business Plan previously circulated and they confirmed that they had. She advised that the draft Business Plan had been presented at the last Professional & Business Committee meeting and had been approved subject to a number of minor amendments being made. Chief Executive said that the Team had endeavoured to keep this year's plan on the lighter side as they were aware that the CNO had a number of priorities for the year ahead which will impact on NIPEC's work. She advised that the new Work Plan would be presented at the next meeting and this would give more information on priorities for the year ahead.

Chief Executive asked if members had any comments. Mr Mitchell expressed the view that the new Plan looked well and it was clear that NIPEC had undertaken a lot of work. He asked what the likely subjects would be for external audits. Ms Jackson advised that the audits followed a three-year cycle but there was always an audit in relation to an aspect of finance. It was likely that there would be one on professional projects this year as there had not been one for a while. This would involve looking at the PIDS and processes.

Members approved the draft Business Plan. Chief Executive advised that the Plan will now be sent to Sponsor Branch for final ratification.

### **7.0 Corporate Control & Finance**

Chair invited Ms Jackson to take members through this section.

#### **7.1 Report from Standing Committees**

##### **7.1.1 Unconfirmed minutes of the A&R Meeting held on 11 February 2025 (*Circulated for noting*)**

Ms McRoberts highlighted that her name had been recorded incorrectly on the attendance list. Ms Jackson undertook to have this amended.

Council members noted these minutes.

##### **7.1.2 Unconfirmed Minutes of the Professional & Business Committee held on 6 March 2025 (*Circulated for noting*)**

Council members noted these minutes.

## **7.2 Finance**

### **7.2.1 Financial Summary of Expenditure, Month 11 (Circulated for noting)**

Ms Jackson referred to the Financial Summary of Expenditure for Month 11 and drew attention to the fact that NIPEC are currently projecting a surplus of £2,000 at yearend. She explained that the main reason for the change in position was the decision made by Trusts and BSO to accrue 5.5% for the Senior Executive pay award for 2023-24 and 2024-25 as this is the amount to be paid to Agenda for Change staff at the end of March, although no final decision has been made as yet regarding the Senior Executive pay award. This has meant that NIPEC has had to find an additional £12,000 to cover the accrual and keep in line with the Trusts. Sponsor Branch have agreed to cover the cost of the associate undertaking the delegation work, which equates to £7,000 and the transfer of the money in Month 12 is awaited.

Ms Jackson reported that the key risks to breakeven are surplus from the allocation of the Agenda for Change pay award, annual leave accrual and the Senior Executive accrual. NIPEC are currently on target and this position was reported to the Department of Health in Month 11.

Ms Jackson enquired if members had any questions. Mr McCormick asked for clarification on the overspend between Month 10 and 11. Ms Jackson advised that the overspend was due to slippage. In response to a further query from Mr McCormick, Ms Jackson highlighted the surplus figure on Page 1 of the summary report. She said that even small amounts can make a huge difference at this time of the financial year.

Council members noted the update.

### **7.2.2 Draft Budget 2025-26**

Ms Jackson shared a presentation of a high-level estimate of the budget for 2025-26 and talked those present through it. She advised that the funding was in the form of flat cash but unfortunately costs had gone up resulting in the need to make efficiencies.

Ms Jackson stated that NIPEC currently had their full complement of 16 fully funded, whole time equivalent staff, although three staff were commencing partial retirement in October and November 2025. This would provide some slippage later in the year but the need to backfill these posts to rebalance capacity required to be kept in mind. Chief Executive said that this provides NIPEC with an opportunity to think about staffing need and structure going forward and a number of possible options were discussed. She planned to approach the Leadership Centre to assist in a review of the structure.

Chair was of the view that there was potential for NIPEC to do so much more if the requisite resource was available. Chief Executive was aware of some projects that may come NIPEC's way and advised that Business Cases would be prepared in order that they could be submitted once there was more certainty around these.

Ms Jackson advised that an associate spend of £44,000 had been built into the budget as well as £3,300 for travel and subsistence; £500 for catering for Council; £5,000 for a conference to be held later in the year; and a general fund of £15,000.

Ms Jackson stressed that the budget for the year ahead is very tight and would urge caution at the start of the year to ensure that NIPEC remain within financial breakeven. She advised that projecting a surplus of £69,357 presented some areas of risk, for example, it was not known at present if the Department would cover an increase in Senior Executive pay.

Council members noted the update on the draft budget.

### **7.3 Corporate Risk Register 2024-25, Version 9 (*Circulated for approval*)**

Ms Jackson referred to the Corporate Risk Register circulated prior to the meeting and asked if everyone had read the document. Members confirmed that they had.

Ms Jackson reported that the Register had been approved at the Business Team meeting held on 4 March. She drew attention to the fact that there was still work to be done in relation to the three Lines of Defence Assurance Model. Rather than simply update the Risk Register, the team would prefer to have an overall assurance framework drafted using this approach and so NIPEC plan to approach HSC Leadership Centre to appoint an appropriate person to look at this. It was hoped that the outcome of this work would be presented at the Audit & Risk Committee meeting in June and then to the Council. Ms Jackson invited any questions or comments from members but there were none.

Council members approved the Corporate Risk Register.

**Action:** *Outcome of work with Leadership Centre to be presented to Audit & Risk Committee and then Council.*

#### **7.4 KPIs 2024-25 (Circulated for noting)**

In relation to the KPI monitoring report previously circulated, Ms Jackson highlighted the slight reduction in the absence figure and explained that this was down to the two members of staff who had been off on long-term absence having returned to work. This figure was unlikely to reduce enough to achieve the target for this year, however, this would always be a challenge with such a small team. Ms Jackson enquired if members had any questions or comments on the report but none were forthcoming.

Council members noted the KPI monitoring report.

#### **7.5 Reporting of KPIs April 2025 onwards (Circulated for approval)**

Ms Jackson referred to the decisions made at the Council workshop in December 2024 in relation to the reporting of corporate activities and KPIs and advised that she had prepared and circulated a sample Head of Corporate Services' report accordingly.

Ms Jackson explained that she had attempted to mitigate any gaps in assurance in relation to information governance with this sample report and so had included Assembly Questions and Freedom of Information requests, for example. She asked if those present had any suggestions of anything else they would like to see included in the report. Mr Mitchell commented that the document was laid out well.



Ms McRoberts asked for clarification around legal costs and the need for a service level agreement with BSO. Ms Jackson advised that this was due to a legal case dating back to the National Board which was progressing very slowly. NIPEC had received an update before Christmas and had received assurance that the Department had a fund from which any award monies would be paid. Chair said that there had been a similar case in the news recently, which may help bring things to a conclusion, so it was worth keeping an eye on the matter.

Mr McCormick said that Ms Jackson had done a great job in tidying up the reporting of KPIs. Ms Jackson asked how often Council wished to be presented with this type of report. It was generally agreed that twice a year would be sufficient, with one report presented at mid-year and one at end of year.

Members approved the proposed way forward for the KPIs.

## **7.6 Business Continuity Update: Assurances from BSO and Desktop exercise**

Ms Jackson referred to the December 2024 meeting at which NIPEC's Business Continuity Plan had been reviewed and approved. At this time Ms Jackson had highlighted that Internal Audit had noted that there was a lack of clarity on how BSO would contact NIPEC in the event of a cyber incident. Ms Jackson had undertaken to seek these details as a means of assurance. A paper on Business Continuity Planning from BSO Shared Services had subsequently been presented at the February 2025 meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee, however, this did not cover other services provided by BSO such as IT. In view of the prolonged efforts to secure these assurances, the Committee made the decision to have the issue escalated to BSO's Chief Executive via NIPEC's Chief Executive. Ms Jackson advised that, once adequate assurances have been received, details of these will be incorporated into the Business Continuity Plan and the Plan will be presented at Council for ratification. In the meantime, progress will continue to be monitored by the Audit & Risk Committee.

Ms Jackson reported that a desktop test of the Business Continuity Plan is scheduled for 16 April 2025. This test is to assess NIPEC's level of preparedness and ability to restore business critical processes in the event of an interruption to services. After the exercise is complete, the process will be reviewed to understand what worked and what needs improvement. The outcomes of this test will be reported to the Council at the next meeting. Mr McCormick wished to acknowledge the huge amount of work that both Ms Jackson and Mrs McEneaney had put into the review of the Business Continuity Plan, adding that they had done a great job

Council members noted the updates in relation to the Business Continuity Plan and planned desktop test.

## **7.7 NIPEC Policies: (*Circulated for approval*)**

**7.7.1 Draft Conflict, Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace Policy**

**7.7.2 Draft Accessible Formats Policy**

**7.7.3 Draft Alcohol and Substance Misuse at Work Policy**

Ms Jackson referred to the draft policies previously circulated and advised that these were regional policies that had been regionally negotiated with trade unions and so had largely been kept the same, except to ensure they included reference to associates and bank staff. The Alcohol and Substance Misuse at Work Policy is a new one for NIPEC. Ms Jackson reported that these draft policies had been presented at the last Business Team meeting and had subsequently been approved. Ms Jackson asked if members had any questions on the policies and they confirmed that they did not.

Council members approved the presented policies.

## **7.8 Procurement Act 2023**

Ms Jackson provided members with a short presentation on the Procurement Act 2023. The Act became live in February 2024 with the purpose of ensuring equal treatment of small and medium sized enterprises. The Act has meant significant changes for everyone involved in procurement, including BSO PaLS who look after procurement for HSCNI. The main elements of the legislation, which will have an impact on the health service, are in relation to conflicts of interest, DACs, notices and contract management.

Ms Jackson stated that it is difficult to know how these changes will impact NIPEC at this stage but assured members that any changes will be reported to the Audit & Risk Committee. The contract register already goes to Audit & Risk Committee twice a year and NIPEC has a member of staff dedicated to contract management activities. There is a possibility that NIPEC could see an increase in Freedom of Information requests and Assembly Questions, however, as we are a small organisation, we tend to use frameworks whenever possible and so such requests should not cause too many issues. Ms Jackson asked members if they had any questions but no questions were asked.

Members noted the update in regard to the Procurement Act.

## **8.0 Safety and Quality**

### **8.1 DoH Covid-19 Public Inquiry Group**

Chair invited Ms Jackson to provide the Council with her update on the Covid-19 Public Inquiry Group. Ms Jackson reported that she had received an update from the Department on 7 March. With regard to Module 5 and the Government's procurement of PPE, this Hearing had commenced in London on 3 March 2025 and was due to conclude on 27 March. In relation to Module 6 and the care sector, Hearings are scheduled to take place in London from 30 June to 31 July 2025. Referring to Module 7 and the practice of testing, tracing and isolating, Ms Jackson advised that Hearings are scheduled to take place in London between 12 and 30 May. The Inquiry Chair aims to have concluded public Hearings by the summer of 2026.

Members noted the update.

## **9.0 Any Other Business**

Chair enquired if members had any other business they wished to discuss. Ms Bhogal said that it had come to light at the last Professional & Business Committee meeting that a couple of members were experiencing issues with logging into Decision Time and this had highlighted a further issue with regard to the renewal of the licence. Ms Jackson advised that OneAdvanced had outsourced their finances to a third party which had seemed to cause some confusion with regard to the renewal of NIPEC's licence. Ms Jackson had been in touch with the Account Manager and was working with him to get the matter resolved as soon as possible. It was noted that most members were able to use Decision Time as usual, however, a difficulty arose if technical support was required via the new Customer Service Portal. Mrs Mallon undertook to update the affected members as soon as she was able to access the new Portal.

There was no further business discussed. Chair concluded business and thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting. Chair requested that members stay behind for a short, confidential briefing.

**Action:** *Mrs Mallon to update affected members as soon as she was able to access the new Decision Time Customer Portal.*

#### **10.0 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting**

The next public meeting date of NIPEC Council is **25 June 2025 at 2.00pm** and will be held **in Room 1.7, First Floor, James House.**