

Minutes of the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council Meeting, held on Wednesday 25 June 2025 at 2.00 pm in the Conference Room, 4th Floor, James House, 2-4 Cromac Avenue, Belfast BT7 2JA

Present: Bronagh Scott (Chair)
Linda Kelly, Chief Executive
Eilidh McGregor (via Teams)
Siobhán Caslin
Nirmala Bhogal
Sharon McRoberts
Gary Mitchell
Janine Stockdale
Karen Diamond
Katrin Lehmann

Apologies: Kieran McCormick
Ciara Scannell
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 Kieran McCormick.

2.0 Chair's Business

2.1 Welcome to any Members of the Public

Chair noted that no members of the public were in attendance at today's meeting.

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 Caslin requested that her attendance at the June Professional & Business Committee meeting be removed. She now intended to observe the September meeting instead.

Members noted the Register.

Action: Mrs Mallon to amend the Activity Register accordingly.

2.4 Council Members' Participation in NIPEC Working Groups Flowchart

Chair stated that she had laid out the new process for Council Members' Participation in NIPEC Working Groups at the December 2024 Council meeting. A flowchart had subsequently been produced which clearly set out the process and had been circulated prior to the meeting. Chair asked if any members had comments to make on the flowchart but no comments were forthcoming.

Members approved the new process as laid out in the flowchart.

2.5 Update on Senior Executive Pay

Chair drew attention to the circular which had been received from Chris Wilkinson, Workforce Policy Directorate, Department of Health, setting out revised pay arrangements for Senior Executives with effect from 1 April 2023. These revised arrangements were being introduced in response to the review of Senior Executive pay, independently carried out during 2023 and following the approval of the Minister of Health.

Chair advised that she had agreed to sit on the Senior Executives Landscape Review Oversight Board as a representative of the Chairs of the regional ALBs. The purpose of this Board is to provide strategic oversight, direction and governance for the review of Senior Executive posts across the HSC which is being completed externally by the Korn Ferry Management Group. There had only been one meeting to date with a second planned for early July.

Ms Jackson reported that she had recently attended a regional operational meeting at which some frustration had been expressed at the lack of clarity around the process. She added that the issue did not appear to lie with Korn Ferry, the organisation carrying out the review. Chair stated that one of the challenges was that the senior executive job descriptions differ greatly depending on the organisation. Ms Jackson advised that NIPEC has engaged a consultant via the Leadership Centre to assist. He had strongly advised against accepting a standard job description.

Chair was of the view that the process, once complete, would result in a much fairer landscape.

2.6 Arrangements for Workshop scheduled for 3 September 2025

Chair asked members if there was anything specific they would like to see included in the agenda for the September workshop. There were no suggestions forthcoming. Chair advised that some key themes had been coming out of the ongoing appraisals and she would discuss these with Mrs Kelly and Ms Jackson. Chair was of the view that, with the upcoming recruitment of a new Chair and additional Council members, a skills analysis would be beneficial.

Chair added that she had recently participated in a feedback session on her SDI questionnaire and had found it very useful. Chair therefore was of the opinion that a group feedback session may be a good place to start. This would lead nicely into a skills analysis exercise which would allow Council to advise the PAU in advance of any competition for the Chair role in the autumn. Chair said that it would also be an opportune time to review the Committees and their membership.

Several members advised of difficulties in attending a full day's workshop on 3 September. Alternative dates were considered but it was ultimately agreed to proceed with arrangements for 3 September and commence the workshop at an earlier time.

Action: Ms Jackson to check the availability of a suitable facilitator via HSC Leadership Centre for 3 September.

2.7 Update on recruitment of new Chair, Council membership and Second Term Expressions of Interest

Chair advised that she had tendered her official resignation to the Permanent Secretary and had received a response from him acknowledging receipt of same and confirming that officials within the Department's Chief Nursing Officer Group were working with the Public Appointments Unit to ensure that recruitment to both the existing and any upcoming vacancies on the NIPEC Council will be taken forward as a matter of urgency.

Chair had subsequently met with the Permanent Secretary this morning following the End of Year Accountability Meeting in relation to the recruitment of a new Chair. The Permanent Secretary approved an interim arrangement of Mr McCormick stepping in as Interim Chair until a new Chair was appointed. It was his intention that someone would be in place by February 2026. Chair was aware that this would have an impact on the Audit & Risk Committee and undertook to include discussion of this at the September workshop.

With regard to the second term expressions of interest, Chair advised that closer to the date, the PAU would formally write to the relevant members asking if they wish to serve for a further term and outlining the process.

2.8 Review of Committee Membership and Performance

Chair advised that, as per the Standing Orders, Council are required to review the effectiveness of the Professional & Business Committee as part of its annual governance self-assessment. An initial draft of this review had been prepared and presented at the Professional & Business Committee meeting held on 23 June. Mrs Bhoghal confirmed that the Committee had been content with the document and Chair requested that Mrs Mallon now share the document with all members.

Chair reported that she had attended the meeting on 23 June in part as an observer and said that it was clear that the Committee plays an important role in assuring Council regarding professional issues. She was of the view that Council would not have time in a Council meeting to give such issues the level of scrutiny that this Committee provides. Mrs Bhoghal stated that the Committee intended to shift its focus for the year ahead to resourcing and human resource matters in light of the upcoming partial retirement of three SPOs and the impact on capacity to deliver stated objectives.

Chair advised that a self-assessment of the Audit & Risk Committee was completed annually to fulfil the requirements of the mid-year assurance statement and this was underway.

Chair stated that the recent loss of two lay Council members and the challenges a couple of members were experiencing currently with regard to attendance at meetings had highlighted the need to review Committee membership. She requested that, if any members wished to change over to another Committee or had a preference for a particular Committee, they email her registering their interest. Chair intended to review Committee membership, ensuring that each complies with the relevant Terms of Reference and that each Committee remains quorate. Any changes would be ratified at the September Council meeting.

Action: *Mrs Mallon to circulate the Review of the Effectiveness of the Professional & Business Committee document to all members.*

Action: *Members to email Chair registering their interest in sitting on Committees in advance of September 2025.*

2.9 Attendance at Committee Meetings

Chair understood that, due to other commitments and unexpected circumstances, it was not always possible for members to attend a specific meeting. She did, however, wish to remind members to notify Mrs Mallon or Ms Jackson in advance and at their earliest convenience, so that an assessment could be made as to whether the meeting was likely to be quorate and could proceed. Chair stressed that this was even more important at present with the Council being down two lay members.

2.10 Confirmation of NIPEC Conference 2 December 2025

Chair advised that NIPEC's Conference had been scheduled for Tuesday 2 December 2025 in Craigavon Civic Centre. The Health Minister had already accepted an invitation to attend and Jason Leitch, former National Clinical Director for the Scottish Government and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, had been invited to speak. Chair encouraged members to hold the date and endeavour to attend this event if at all possible.

2.11 Council Development: SDI feedback

This item had already been covered under Item 2.6 of the Agenda.

2.12 Honorary Title and Award

Chair was delighted to report that Mrs Kelly had received an honorary title of Professor in Nursing Practice from Queen's University. She was pleased to see Mrs Kelly's contribution to the profession of nursing acknowledged in this way. Chair made the presentation of a small gift to Mrs Kelly on behalf of the Council by way of congratulations.

Chair was also happy to note that Mr McCormick had received a Cavell Star Award for Leadership in Nursing. She added that this was a particularly special award as Mr McCormick had been nominated by students.

2.13 Update on End of Year Accountability Meeting – 25 June 2025

The Chair advised that the Chief Executive and herself had met with the Permanent Secretary and CNO earlier that day for the End of Year Accountability meeting. Chair reported that this had been a positive meeting and that Mr Farrar had shared a number of ideas on how he planned to get things moving in the right direction without a major re-organisation of the HSCNI. He had plans in place for a change in culture and to get the Trusts working together more. Chair was of the view that these plans would provide NIPEC with a real opportunity to positively influence the transformation and resetting agenda for the HSC.

Chair stated that Mr Farrar had expressed a keenness for more multi-professional working, with less silos and duplication. He was of the view that education commissioning would sit better with NIPEC. Chair advised that she had raised the matter of remuneration for Council members and left a Business Case with him to this end. Chief Executive added that she had found Mr Farrar to be supportive of reform but that he had been upfront about the lack of funding. He had said that he would welcome business cases which were able to demonstrate savings in the longer term.

3.0 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2025 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. She asked if members would be now happy to close this item. Ms Jackson confirmed that she kept a close eye on printing costs as part of the budget. Chair asked if Ms Jackson foresaw any increase in printing costs as a result of the planned conference. Ms Jackson did not think that any costs incurred would be significant and advised that the team were looking at alternative means of sharing resources, such as QR codes for key documents. Members agreed that this item could now be closed.

Ms Jackson advised that she had not yet sought legal advice regarding the records for the Muckamore Inquiry as it was still a little early and those present agreed.

With regard to the item on how best to encourage members of the public to attend Council meetings, Ms Jackson advised that the Senior Communications Officer was currently off on long term sick leave and would be consulted on the matter upon her return. In the meantime, the date of the next meeting continued to be updated on the website with the option to contact Mrs Mallon should anyone wish to make special arrangements to attend and notifications were posted on social media. Members agreed to keep the item open until Mrs White returned to work.

Mrs Bhoghal enquired if any progress had been made with regard to moving from X social media platform. Mrs Kelly advised that plans were in place for a gradual move from X to Facebook and Instagram but these had been paused in Mrs White's absence. Mrs Bhoghal referred to the Stakeholder Engagement Report which had been shared at the last meeting of the Professional & Business Committee and stated that it was clear that X was still very popular. Ms Jackson added that it was also very good for analysing metrics. Mrs Stockdale was of the view that X was currently the most powerful social media platform with its algorithms and intelligent posting.

Ms Caslin enquired if LinkedIn had been considered. Mrs Kelly said that the sense had been that LinkedIn had greater appeal for the private sector and may not be particularly beneficial in reaching nurses and midwives on the ground. This item would remain open until Mrs White had returned to post.

With regard to the item on the development of an assurance framework, Ms Jackson advised that this was scheduled for presentation at the September Council meeting.

In relation to Decision Time, Ms Jackson would be providing a verbal update under Item 7.8.

Council approved the updated Action Plan

5.0 Correspondence

- 5.1 Circular HSC (SE) 1-2025 – Revised Pay Arrangements for Senior Executives – 13 May 2025**
- 5.2 BSO Fraud Alert CFS FA 02 2025 – Phishing Scam - 27 May 2025 (For noting)**
- 5.3 Letter from DoF - Laying of Annual Report and Accounts in the Northern Ireland Assembly – 20 May 2025 (For noting)**
- 5.4 BSO Counter Fraud Services – 2024/25 End of Year Report (For noting)**
- 5.5 Letter from Permanent Secretary and accompanying Circular – Change or Withdrawal of Services – Revised Guidance on Roles and Responsibilities – 11 June 2025 (For noting)**

Council members noted the previously circulated correspondence.

6.0 Operational Performance and Service Improvement

Chair invited the Chief Executive to take members through this section of the Agenda.

6.1 Presentation on Delegation of Healthcare Interventions by Chief Executive and Geraldine McKendry, Senior Professional Officer

Chief Executive reported 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 and provided some background as to how this had come about. She said that she had invited Geraldine McKendry, Senior Professional Officer, who had been leading the work on delegation, along to the meeting to provide a presentation on Delegation of Healthcare Interventions and an overview of the work undertaken by NIPEC in this regard to date.

Ms McKendry stated that ultimately this project was about providing safe and effective healthcare interventions in a person's own home. An initial scoping activity was undertaken across the five HSC Trusts to establish the current scale and type of delegated healthcare tasks which are supported by direct payments across the HSC Trusts. The current governance arrangements and quality assurance mechanisms around the delegation of healthcare tasks was also explored.

Ms McKendry advised that this activity highlighted that delegation in practice can lead to timely and flexible person-centred care when conditions are met to ensure it is done appropriately and safely but that nurses have concerns regarding adherence to regulatory standards in respect of third-party social care practitioners. It was apparent that a variation of governance and accountability exists and that legislation in Northern Ireland for the delegation of healthcare needs clarification.

Ms McKendry explained that the key messages from this work have informed the development of a Project Initiation Document and Terms of Reference for the Task & Finish Group. These were both signed off at the last meeting of the Task & Finish Group held in May and the Project Plan was outlined to progress until October 2025. In addition to this, a Communication and Engagement Plan had been collated. A further meeting of the Task & Finish Group was scheduled for 27 June 2025.

Ms McKendry reported that two sub-groups had subsequently been set up. The first to look at the delegation of healthcare interventions under direct payments with HSC Trusts and the second to look at the delegation of healthcare to social care workers employed by HSC Trusts and third-party providers. Initial feedback from the subgroups indicated that it is too early to identify all themes. A draft report is expected from Sub-Group 2 in the near future.

Ms McKendry said that it had been positive to note that there was a clear appetite for a standardised process and clarity regarding delegation of healthcare interventions across all organisations. All professions involved in direct payment work indicated a shared commitment to wanting to delegate to personal healthcare assistants if the organisational best practice and governance framework was implemented and appropriate training provided.

Mrs Kelly advised that the presentation was indicative of the huge amount of work that had been done around delegation to date. The findings thus far have strengthened the direction by providing evidence of issues being experienced by staff working in this sector. Mrs Kelly stated that it was clear that communication between social care and the healthcare assistants was not as good as it could be and that oversight by a healthcare professional was required where there were significant health care needs. There was still work to be done around best practice, training and governance and the creation of resources such as templates and tools. It was hoped that some of these could be supported by Encompass. The CNO hoped to receive the completed report and recommendations by October 2025 but this timescale was proving challenging.

Mrs Kelly asked if members had any questions or comments. Mrs Caslin was of the view that the NMC would have a particular interest in this work and how it may affect their Code in relation to appropriate delegation. Ms Lehmann said that any delegation required a plan. She was of the opinion that this work would uncover a larger issue. Mrs Kelly stated that the research had revealed that ultimately the majority of people want to be able to make decisions with regard to their own healthcare and were prepared to accept a certain degree of risk to allow them more freedom. The challenge was doing this in a safe and person-centred way that met the regulatory codes of conduct.

Chair thanked Ms McKendry for her informative presentation and Ms McKendry left the meeting at this point.

6.2 Chief Executive's Report (Circulated for noting)

Chief Executive stated that her report had been circulated prior to the meeting and those present confirmed they had read same. This report highlighted some of the key aspects of the Chief Executive's work and NIPEC's priorities since the last Council meeting.

Chief Executive asked if members had any questions on the report. Mrs Bhoghal enquired if any progress had been made in relation to recruiting replacements for the lost hours which would be created by the three partial retirements. Chief Executive advised that there were plans in place to address this issue. A second workshop facilitated by the Leadership Centre was being held with the Senior Team to look at staffing need and structure. Once this work was complete, Mrs Kelly advised that NIPEC would move to recruit quickly. She accepted that the partial retirements would have an impact on NIPEC's Work Plan but gave her assurance that she would be keeping a close eye on the Work Plan with regard to what needed to be prioritised and what needed to be put on hold. Mrs Kelly said the team would work together to prioritise and support projects as needed. She added that the new version of the Work Plan would help with this.

Mrs Bhoghal enquired if, in light of the significant pressure on funding, there was the risk of a recruitment freeze. Ms Jackson stated that this was not the case as yet but was a possibility. In her view, the main risk was that the hours freed up by the partial retirements would show as a surplus come October and if that situation continued indefinitely, NIPEC could be asked to return these funds. Mrs Kelly assured Council that NIPEC would be aiming to recruit as quickly as possible, however, highlighted the fact that they were somewhat reliant on regional recruitment.

Council members noted the Report.

6.3 Closing NIPEC Professional Work Plan 2024-25 (Circulated for noting)

Referring to the Closing Professional Work Plan previously circulated, Chief Executive advised that 46 pieces of work had been completed, while three did not progress as assumed at the start of the year. One of these pieces of work related to the Multi-Professional Delegation Framework which had been rated as red as the initial requirements of the work had developed to incorporate the scoping exercise. This work would continue on the 2025/26 Work Plan. Ms Caslin enquired as to the progress of the Framework. Mrs Kelly advised that this had been presented to the CNO back in January but could not be launched until the scoping activity and the development of appropriate resources and tools were complete.

Council members noted the Closing Professional Work Plan for 2024-25.

6.4 **NIPEC Professional Work Plan 2025-26 Q1 – Monitoring Report from 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025 (Circulated for consideration)**

Chief Executive referred to the new Professional Work Plan for 2025-26 circulated prior to the meeting, which was now presented in Excel format. She advised that this new version of the Work Plan had been developed with input from the Business & Professional Committee. Mrs Kelly reported that this document had been presented at the Professional & Business Committee meeting held on 23 June 2025 and the Committee had been satisfied that it would provide the level of assurance required. The Work Plan showed that NIPEC currently have 24 ongoing projects, with the majority of these showing a medium weighting score.

Chair was content that the Professional & Business Committee had given the Work Plan adequate scrutiny at Monday's meeting and asked if anyone had any questions. Ms Jackson asked if Council wished to receive both the Word snapshot document and the Excel version going forward and members agreed that the Excel document was sufficient.

6.5 **Update on Total Quality Management Measurement Dashboard (Circulated for noting)**

Chief Executive advised that, over the past year, the Senior Team had been testing and developing a number of ways to measure against the priorities set in the Quality Strategy. She referred to the Driver Diagram, which sets out the plan for how the quality priorities would be delivered and the Measurement Plan, which sets out each of the measures being collected. Mrs Kelly took members through the Dashboard which has been built within an Excel spreadsheet, with some of the graphs enabled to auto-populate. She advised that the Dashboard was still work in progress.

Mrs Kelly explained that the information in the Dashboard outlined the progress made in the last year towards delivering the Quality Strategy by March 2028. She said that, due to the changes in the team over the past couple of years, the main focus had initially been on building the team and improving team effectiveness. A set of Teams Norms had been developed in consultation with the full staff team and are now displayed in the office.

Mrs Kelly stated that the main areas of focus for the year ahead would be to improve how data from our partners is captured and how to better demonstrate the value of NIPEC's work. During 2024/25 activity on NIPEC's website was tracked and the data captured provided insights into how people were accessing information and which webpages were viewed most frequently. A Frequently Asked Questions feature had been added, with the option to request further information if required.

Mrs Kelly advised that a Total Quality Management Group had been set up and was currently being tested as a means of capturing activity across the organisation and overseeing the development of the Annual Quality Report. Mrs Kelly asked if members had any questions or comments on the Dashboard but no comments were forthcoming.

Members noted the Total Quality Management Measurement Dashboard.

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

Chief Executive advised that nothing of significance had been received since the last meeting.

Council members noted the Consultation Activity Report.

6.7 Update on Stakeholder Engagement Survey Results (*Circulated for noting*)

Chief Executive referred to the Stakeholder Engagement Survey Results previously circulated and asked if members had any comments. Ms McRoberts was of the view that clarification was required around areas of responsibility and an improved understanding of NIPEC's role in the system. She suggested reaching out to Directors of Nursing and asking them to ensure the message was disseminated throughout their organisations. Ms Lehmann highlighted the low number of responses. Mrs Kelly advised that this was due to the fact that the information had been collected at specific engagement events with a targeted audience. Ms Lehmann suggested that this be made more clear so the results did not read as a universal opinion.

Members noted the report.

7.0 Corporate Control & Finance

Chair invited Ms Jackson to take members through this section of the Agenda.

7.1 Report from Standing Committees

7.1.1 Unconfirmed minutes of the A&R Meeting held on 20 May 2025 (*Circulated for noting*)

Ms Jackson advised that these minutes had been confirmed at yesterday's meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee.

Council members noted the minutes.

7.2 Finance

7.2.1 NIPEC's Opening Allocation 2025-26

Ms Jackson advised that she was only able to provide an indicative allocation at present but the opening allocation for 2025-26 was expected to be confirmed in early July.

Ms Jackson reported that she had attended the Department of Health's Finance Forum last week at which an update had been provided on the current financial position regionally. A projected deficit from in HSC for 2025-26 had increased from £400m to £600m. This was partly due to £165m of the additional £200m being ring-fenced for waiting list initiatives and the DoH being awarded only 33% of the total cost of the increase in Employer National Insurance Contributions.

Regarding the HSC AFC pay recommendations, Ms Jackson advised that a Ministerial Direction had been issued and sent to the Finance Minister who had referred the matter to the Executive. The outcome is still awaited but the Department of Health was not hopeful that this would be successful. In the meantime, the Department of Health are actively seeking to reduce the funding gap and during the June monitoring period they bid for the £200m pay rise, £67m shortfall in NI contributions and £100m for the remaining gap. Early indications from the Department of Finance suggest that that the total value of bids considerably exceeds the funding available.

Ms Jackson reported that the Permanent Secretary had established the Systems Financial Management Group (SFMG) and 13 workstreams had been set up to look at securing savings in year and for future years. The aim of the working group is to put the Department on a sustainable financial footing by reviewing central budgets and the smaller ALB allocations. The Department of Health has initially been asked if they could make a 10% reduction. Ms Jackson stated that NIPEC would not be able to accommodate this but was hopeful that this figure would decrease if implemented. She advised that the Department of Health have agreed to provide updates on any progress. Another Finance Forum is scheduled for early September.

Council members noted the update.

7.2.2 Financial Summary of Expenditure, Month 2

Ms Jackson reported a full year position of a projected £77k surplus, adding that at present expenditure was on course for breakeven. She was of the view that it was going to be a very tight year financially and highlighted that, as previously mentioned, the surplus showing was in fact the balance of the salaries of the three staff who were availing of flexible retirement. Ms Jackson said that, although NIPEC was on course for breakeven, unfortunately there was no room for growth against the current backdrop of financial pressure.

Ms Jackson asked if members had any questions. Ms Lehmann enquired if consideration had been given to offering secondment opportunities to backfill the vacated SPO hours as a means of using the funds quickly. Mrs Kelly advised that all options were being considered but was of the view that filling the posts using secondment would not necessarily be any quicker. Chair said that the pressure on this year's funding was not good news but was assured by her meeting with the Permanent Secretary that he would do his best. Mrs Bhogal was of the opinion that NIPEC needed to clearly demonstrate their impact. Chair stated that the submission of a business case presenting options showing future savings, as mentioned earlier, would be one course of action.

Council members noted the update.

7.3 Audited Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25 (Circulated for Approval)

Ms Jackson advised that as Mr McCormick, the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, was not present at the meeting, Ms Caslin had kindly agreed to formally present the Annual Report and Accounts for 2024-25 on his behalf.

Ms Caslin reported that the document had been presented to the Audit & Risk Committee held on 24 June 2025, together with a draft copy of the NI Audit Office's Report to those charged with Governance issued on 19 June 2025. This draft Report recommended that NIPEC consider removing disclosures which are not applicable to the organisation in order to make the financial statements more user friendly and shorter in length. Ms Caslin asked members to note that this recommendation was classified as Priority 3: issues of a more minor nature which represent good practice. She was pleased to report that the draft Report proposed that "the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) will certify the 2024/25 financial statements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification."

Ms Caslin advised that, following approval of the document, the Chair and Chief Executive would sign off the Annual Report and Accounts at a date advised by NIAO to prevent a significant gap between the date the accounts are signed and certification. It was anticipated that this would take place in the next week.

Chair thanked Ms Caslin for stepping in to present the Annual Report and accounts and Ms Jackson for the hard work she had put into the successful production of these throughout the year.

Council members approved the Audited Annual Report and Accounts.

7.4 Chair of A&R Committee's Annual Report on Activity and Assurance for 2024-25 (Circulated for noting)

Ms Jackson stated that, as per the Audit & Risk Committee's Terms of Reference, an annual report of activity is required to be submitted to the June Council meeting for consideration. The Annual Report for 2024-25 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Members noted the contents of the report and no comments were made.

7.5 Corporate Risk Register 2025-26, Version 2 (*Circulated for approval*)

Ms Jackson asked Council if they had reviewed Version 2 of the Corporate Risk Register 2025-26 previously circulated and they confirmed that they had. This version had been approved by NIPEC's Business Team on 10 June 2025 and then by the Audit & Risk Committee on 24 June 2025.

Members approved Version 2 of the Corporate Risk Register.

7.6 Equality Annual Progress Report 2024-25 (*Verbal update*)

Ms Jackson advised that the Annual Progress Report was due for submission to the Equality Commission NI (ECNI) by 31 August. Unfortunately, this deadline sits outside of the Council's meeting timetable. She said that, as with previous years, NIPEC will submit a draft of the Report to ECNI by 31 August with the caveat that Council are to approve same at their September meeting. ECNI will be advised that a final version will be submitted to them following this. There was a general discussion on the suitability of a 31 August deadline but Ms Jackson assured members that submitting a draft report with the caveat to submit the approved version in September had worked well in the past. Ms McGregor undertook to send Ms Jackson a note of a typographical error outside of the meeting.

Council members noted the update.

7.7 Business Continuity Desktop Exercise Update (*Verbal update*)

Ms Jackson reported that a business continuity desktop exercise had taken place on 6 May in James House and was well attended by staff. Staff were presented with the scenario of a cyber-attack and were then divided into two groups to talk through the process. Ms Jackson advised that Mrs McEaney and herself had observed the groups' discussions rather than participate to ensure staff had an adequate understanding of what would be required in the event of a disruption to services. Ms Jackson was of the view that the exercise had been very worthwhile and some good suggestions had come out of it. These would now be incorporated into the Business Continuity Plan which was due to Council for review in December 2025.

Ms Jackson advised that work was still ongoing on the two assurances around business continuity, with BSO reporting to the Audit & Risk Committee. Chair reported that she had recently attended cyber security training at the Leadership Centre and had found it to be very beneficial. She recommended that members attend if at all possible and suggested that it might make a good topic for a future workshop.

Council members noted the update.

7.8 Update on Decision Time (*Verbal update*)

Ms Jackson reported that, since the last meeting, she had made numerous attempts to address the issue with the new owners of Decision Time, Advanced Solutions, without success. She had subsequently asked PaLS to assist with the matter and a meeting had been held with PaLS and Advanced Solutions to discuss the current position. PaLS had pointed out that within NIPEC's current contract, there was the option of a further 12-month extension and Advanced Solutions have agreed to honour this. Ms Jackson advised that confirmation of the contract extension until January 2026 was awaited and assurance had been received that their finance department would be in touch very soon.

Ms Jackson said that consideration of the position going forward was required and undertook to prepare an options paper for the September 2025 Council meeting. There was some discussion around possible alternatives, such as SharePoint and Teams and Ms Jackson agreed to explore these. It was generally considered that Decision Time was expensive and the lack of effective customer service was a concern, however, it did meet the Council's requirements.

Action: *Ms Jackson to prepare an options paper for the September Council Meeting.*

7.9 NIPEC Policies

Ms Jackson asked Council to note the updates provided by BSO HR as outlined on the Cover Sheet previously circulated and approve a year's extension for each of these until the regional policies are issued. The affected policies relate to Attendance at Work, Family Pack, Gender Identity and Expression Employment, Leave Pack, Menopause at Work and Domestic Abuse.

Members granted the extension as requested.

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 there had been no further updates since the March meeting, however, a further update was imminent. As advised at the previous meeting, the Inquiry Chair aims to have concluded public Hearings by the summer of 2026.

9.0 Any Other Business

Chair enquired if members had any other business they wished to discuss.

There was no further business discussed. Chair concluded business and thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

10.0 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

The next public meeting date of NIPEC Council is **17 September 2025 at 2.00pm** and will be held **in Room 1.7, First Floor, James House.**