

Minutes of the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council Meeting, held on
Wednesday 1 July 2026 at 2.00 pm in James House

- Present:** Kieran McCormick (Chair)
Linda Kelly, Chief Executive
Eilidh McGregor (via Teams)
Nirmala Bhogal
Karen Diamond
Siobhán Caslin
Janine Stockdale
Brenda Kelly (via Teams)
Sharon McRoberts
- Apologies:** Katrin Lehmann
Gary Mitchell
- In Attendance:** Jill Jackson, Head of Corporate Services
Desi McKinney, Assistant Head of Internal Audit, BSO (via Teams)
Sharon Burnside, CNO Office (via Teams)
Denise Killough, Associate Senior Professional Officer (via Teams)
Mary Donnelly, Professional Officer
Brenda Carson, Senior Professional Officer (in part)
- Secretariat:** Heather Mallon, Council Secretary

1.0 Welcome and Apologies

Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular those guests in attendance to observe and a round of introductions was made. Apologies were noted from Ms Katrin Lehmann and Dr Gary Mitchell. Chair advised that Mrs Brenda Carson, Senior Professional Officer, would be joining the meeting later to present on the Total Quality Management Dashboard. Ms B Kelly advised that she would have to leave the meeting for a time at 3.00 pm.

2.0 Chair's Business

2.1 Welcome to any Members of the Public

Chair noted that there were no members of the public in attendance.

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.

Members noted the Register.

2.4 Update on appointment of new Chair and Council Members

Chair informed members that, since the beginning of the year, he has been engaging with the Public Appointments Unit (PAU) to seek confirmation of the commencement of the recruitment process for a new Chair. He advised that, following a long, drawn out process, all required documentation has now been submitted and Chair expressed his thanks to Ms Jackson for her support in the completion of these. The PAU, however, has subsequently advised that the recruitment process has not progressed as anticipated due to delays in securing panel members.

Chair noted that, once a panel has been established, Ministerial approval will be required before the recruitment process can be launched. The PAU has advised that it has engaged with the Commissioner regarding the possibility of proceeding with a launch during the summer period, which would not ordinarily be considered suitable for recruitment activity and that options to mitigate any further delay are currently being explored.

Chair advised that expressions of interest from those Council Members eligible for reappointment to a second term had been submitted to the PAU. He thanked those members who had responded and welcomed the strong level of interest expressed. Chair noted that, in due course, the PAU will seek Ministerial approval for the proposed reappointments. Once approval has been granted, he will be notified and Letters of Appointment will be issued to the relevant Council Members.

Chair further remarked that, given the significant changes anticipated within NIPEC in the period ahead, the continuity and stability provided by experienced Council Members seeking a further term would offer considerable reassurance to the organisation.

2.5 Update on Interim Deputy Chair

Chair reminded members that, following the previous Council meeting, an Expression of Interest had been circulated regarding the position of Interim Chair. Whilst a number of Council Members had expressed an interest, Chair advised that, as the recruitment process for the substantive Chair position had now commenced, he had decided to defer the appointment of an Interim Deputy Chair at this stage. He noted that this decision would be kept under review and reconsidered if circumstances required. He thanked those members who had expressed an interest.

By way of reassurance, the Chair further advised that the Standing Orders make provision for such circumstances and in the event of an emergency, Council would be able to elect a Chair for the meeting on the day.

2.6 Update on Members' Appraisals

Chair reported that the annual appraisal process for Council Members for 2025–26 was nearing completion. He thanked members for their engagement and cooperation in ensuring that this year's appraisals had been completed in a timely manner. Chair also expressed his thanks to Mrs Mallon for her support in coordinating and facilitating the appraisal process.

Chair asked any members who had not yet returned their comments to Mrs Mallon, to do so at the earliest opportunity to enable the completed documentation to be submitted to the PAU.

2.7 Update on Recruitment of Chief Executive

Chair stated that, as members were aware, sadly the Chief Executive would be leaving the organisation in October. He acknowledged the significant contribution made by Mrs L Kelly and noted that her departure would present a considerable loss to the organisation.

Chair reported that substantial work had been undertaken to progress the recruitment process and confirmed that the advertisement for the Chief Executive position had been published on 18 June. Chair expressed his appreciation to Ms Jackson for her support and assistance in successfully bringing the recruitment process to fruition.

Members were asked to note that applications for the post were due to close on 2 July, following which a shortlisting process would take place. An assessment centre at the Leadership Centre was scheduled for 23 July, with interviews planned for 4 August. Chair confirmed that the interview panel had been established and would comprise the Chief Nursing Officer, the Deputy Permanent Secretary, the Chief Executive of the Patient and Client Council and Ms Diamond, with himself as panel chair.

Chair was hopeful that the recruitment process would result in the successful appointment of a new Chief Executive, however, noted that the current Chief Executive's departure date of 1 October, together with the anticipated 12-week notice period for any successful candidate, could result in a period for which interim arrangements may be required. He advised that discussions were ongoing with BSO regarding the necessary steps should the appointment of an Interim Chief Executive be required.

Referring to the recent review of senior executive remuneration undertaken by Korn Ferry, Chair was optimistic that the new remuneration package would help attract a strong field of suitable candidates. Ms McRoberts expressed the hope that remuneration alone would not be the only consideration for candidates and Chair shared this sentiment.

Ms McRoberts noted that the interviews would be taking place during the peak summer holiday period and queried the arrangements should a shortlisted candidate be unavailable due to annual leave. Chair advised that consideration had already been given to this possibility and that remote participation via Microsoft Teams could be facilitated where necessary. He noted, however, that coordinating the availability of such a senior interview panel would be challenging and consequently, it may not be possible to offer alternative interview dates. Ms Roberts supported this approach, stating that a delay in appointing a new Chief Executive would not be ideal.

2.8 Update on Regional Collaborative Event on Ethnic Diversity on 25 March 2026

Chair reported that he, together with Dr Bhogal, had attended NIPEC's Annual Ethnic Diversity Collaborative Event on 25 March 2026 at Stranmillis University College, Belfast. He commented that the event was highly successful and welcomed the recognition afforded to this important section of the workforce. Chair noted that the event had been well attended and had provided a valuable opportunity for Global Majority colleagues to learn about the recently launched Northern Ireland Career and Development Model and to network. He advised that the Health Minister had been attendance and by all accounts appeared to enjoy the event. Chair recommended the event to Council members and encouraged their attendance at future such events.

ACTION: *Mrs Mallon to request that all Council members be invited to any such events in the future.*

2.9 Update on HSC Chairs' Forum with the Minister – 13 May 2026

Chair advised that the HSC Chairs' Forum meets every six to eight weeks and is attended by the Health Minister. He reported that the Minister had provided indicative timescales for the publication of the Urology Services Report and the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry Report. It was noted that the findings and recommendations arising from these reports may have implications for the development of safe staffing legislation currently progressing through Stormont, particularly in relation to registered nurses and midwives working within acute hospital settings. While progress was being made, no definitive timescale for the implementation of the legislation was available. Chair stated that he would be referring to the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry Report and its implications for NIPEC later in the agenda.

Chair further reported that the Minister had expressed concern regarding the continued absence of an agreed budget for Northern Ireland and had advised that there appeared to be limited urgency within the wider system to resolve the issue. Chair noted that this situation currently remained unchanged and continued to present significant challenges. Discussion at the Forum had focused largely on the financial pressures facing the Department of Health, including the recent industrial action by doctors and pay disputes involving other health professionals. The Minister had reported that no budget provision had yet been identified to fund a pay award. Ms McRoberts expressed concern at this position.

Chair advised that indicative budget allocations had now been received and confirmed that NIPEC had been notified of a 6% reduction in funding, the implications of which would be considered later in the meeting.

2.10 Update on End-of-Year NIPEC Accountability Meeting – 25 June 2026

Chair reported that the Chief Executive and himself had attended the End-of-Year Accountability Meeting on 25 June 2026 at Stormont. The meeting was attended by the Permanent Secretary, the Chief Nursing Officer and her Departmental officials. Chair advised that the meeting had been positive overall and that no concerns had been raised regarding the operation or performance of NIPEC.

Chair noted that both he and the Chief Executive had taken the opportunity to highlight NIPEC's budgetary position and the disproportionate impact that the funding reductions would have on such a small organisation. He further advised that both he and the Chief Executive had subsequently written formally to the Department to reiterate these concerns. A meeting with David Keenan, Director of Finance, has been scheduled to discuss the matter further.

While the Permanent Secretary had not indicated any significant concerns regarding NIPEC's position, Chair advised that no specific dispensation had been offered in relation to the financial challenges facing the organisation. He noted that further engagement with the Department may provide opportunities to mitigate some of the financial pressures. Ms B Kelly was of the view that it was important to present potential solutions and demonstrate the steps NIPEC could take to achieve some efficiencies. Chief Executive agreed with this approach and thought that it would be important for NIPEC to demonstrate its commitment to identifying savings and contributing to the overall financial savings.

2.11 Update Council Workshop – 30 September 2026

Chair advised that, at the last Council meeting, it was considered that AI and digital healthcare would be interesting topics for the September workshop. Ms Jackson was currently taking this forward and had obtained a couple of contacts. Chair suggested that an informal group supervision session would also be a worthwhile exercise given the current challenges facing the organisation and those present agreed.

2.12 Reminder re: Q2020 eLearning

Chair reminded members of the requirement to complete the Q2020 quality improvement training provided on HCSLearnNI, if they had not already done so and asked that it be completed at members' earliest convenience. He advised that members should all have access to HCSLearnNI but to reach out to Mrs Mallon if they experienced any difficulties. Chair confirmed that the course only required to be completed once.

Action: *Members, who have not already done so, to complete the Q2020 elearning.*

2.13 Muckamore Hospital Inquiry Report

Chair referred to the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry Report, which was published on 18 June 2026 and highlighted that NIPEC had been referenced within the Report. He noted that the references to NIPEC were not critical in nature but that one recommendation had been assigned to NIPEC. Chair advised that, whilst the recommendation was somewhat aligned with NIPEC's remit, the organisation did not possess the statutory authority or resources required to implement it. He further noted that the Department of Health was progressing work in response to the Inquiry's findings and recommendations through a number of workstreams. The Report contains a total of 106 recommendations.

Chair advised that further information on the Report and its implications for NIPEC would be provided later in the meeting under the Chief Executive's report. In relation to the deletion of contact data, Ms Jackson confirmed that she would now be seeking advice from the Inquiry's solicitors on whether to proceed.

2.14 Reminder re: Right to Raise a Concern Policy

Arising from Internal Audit's recent Council Effectiveness review, Chair wished to remind members that Ms Eilidh McGregor is the Whistleblowing Champion for the purposes of the Right to Raise a Concern Policy. This had been agreed at the December 2024 Council meeting when the policy was approved.

3.0 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2026 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.

With regard to the deletion of records relating to the Muckamore Inquiry, as previously discussed under Chair's Business, Ms Jackson undertook to follow up on this with the Inquiry solicitor and provide an update at the September Council meeting.

With reference to the item on verifying NMC registration, Ms Jackson advised that some dates of birth remained outstanding and undertook to follow up on this. Ms McRoberts was of the view that registration checks should be carried out monthly. Mrs L Kelly advised that she incorporated this into her monthly 1:1 meetings with the Senior Professional Officers. In response to a query on verifying the registration of registrant Council members, Chair considered that a check of the live register would be sufficient. Ms Jackson highlighted that there was a resourcing issue within the Corporate Team which could impact the feasibility of carrying out monthly checks but undertook to revisit the issue and feedback at the next meeting.

Regarding the open item on document sharing for Council meetings, Ms Jackson reported that ITS have advised that they will not be able to look at developing a SharePoint site until around October / November. Meanwhile, NIPEC's current licence with Advanced Solutions, who now operate Decision Time, is due to expire in January 2027. Notice would require to be issued to Advanced Solutions two months in advance. This will not allow for adequate testing of the new SharePoint site.

Ms Jackson advised that, meanwhile, Advanced Solutions have offered a revised contract. She explained that this revised contract would provide unlimited licences but would include a cap on the number of meetings. There was the option of a multi-year contract, with the cost of each year reducing the longer the term of the contract.

Ms McRoberts queried whether Microsoft Teams had been considered as an alternative solution. Ms Jackson advised that similar issues would arise as implementation would still require support from ITS. She highlighted the significant pressures currently facing ITS, including responding to approximately two cyber security incidents per day, which had impacted capacity. Ms Jackson drew members' attention to the correspondence from the Chief Executive of BSO regarding cyber security incidents, which was included later in the agenda.

Ms Jackson said that the possibility of extending the current Decision Time arrangement for a further year could be explored, subject to her obtaining procurement advice. In response to a query from Chair regarding affordability in the absence of a budgetary surplus, Ms Jackson confirmed that the expenditure had already been incorporated within the budget and noted that the organisation could not knowingly project an overspend against its statutory duty.

Ms Diamond asked whether Google Docs had been considered. Ms Jackson advised that this option had not been pursued as it was not considered sufficiently secure. In response to a further query, Ms Jackson confirmed that an HSC email account would be required for SharePoint.

Chair stated that he was uneasy about the cost of the Advanced Solutions' proposal. Ms Caslin acknowledged the need to secure value for money but emphasised that security considerations must also be taken into account.

Dr Stockdale described a system she used through Microsoft Teams, which utilised SharePoint in the background and provided a brief demonstration of its functionality.

Ms Jackson advised that she would seek procurement advice from PALS on the Advanced Solutions proposal and bring a further options paper to the September Council meeting for consideration.

(Ms B Kelly left the meeting at this point but as indicated at the beginning of the meeting, planned to return.)

Regarding the Council workshop, it was noted that this item had been covered under Chair's Business.

Council approved the updated Action Plan.

Action: Ms Jackson to provide an options paper for the September Council meeting on document sharing.

5.0 Correspondence

- 5.1 Letter from CEX of BSO re Cyber Security Incidents - 1 May 2026 (*For noting*)**
- 5.2 Correspondence from the NMC re Process for Considering Health & Character Declarations – 27 May 2026 (*For noting*)**
- 5.3 Letter re: Partnership Agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector (*For noting*)**

Council members noted the previously circulated correspondence.

6.0 Operational Performance and Service Improvement

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

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

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

Mrs L Kelly reported that she had sat on the judging panel for the RCN Nurse of the Year Awards and had attended the awards ceremony on the evening of 4 June. She noted that it had been an enjoyable evening, providing an opportunity to celebrate and recognise excellence in nursing practice.

In relation to the Ethnic Collaborative Event, previously referenced by Chair, Mrs L Kelly advised that this had been NIPEC's third such event. She expressed her delight at the positive response the event had received.

Chief Executive drew attention to the NIPEC report 'A Mental Health Nursing Model for Northern Ireland: Partnering for Wellbeing and Enabling Recovery' which is anticipated to be finalised in July 2026. The remaining element of work involves identifying and agreeing the key priorities arising from the report. This has presented some challenges given the breadth of mental health services and their relevance across the entire lifespan. NIPEC is continuing to work closely with the CNO Group to bring this work to a successful conclusion.

Referring to the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Public Inquiry report, Chief Executive advised that she had summarised the key findings and recommendations within her Report to Council.

There had been one recommendation included for NIPEC; namely that 'The effectiveness of the education programme for staff in relation to restraint reduction should be measured through defined data metrics. This is to ensure that every instance of restraint is clearly justified and appropriately utilised.'

Mrs L Kelly advised that NIPEC had already undertaken significant work in this area, working collaboratively with Registered Nurses in Learning Disabilities (RNLDs) and senior leaders to develop a suite of standardised measures. These measures will form the foundation of a multidisciplinary dashboard to support safety monitoring and quality assurance across Learning Disability Inpatient Wards throughout Northern Ireland.

Mrs L Kelly further reported that NIPEC continues to support the RNLD Steering Group in progressing the development of a career pathway for RNLDs, as well as the work of the Expert Reference Group and Community of Practice. She noted that NIPEC is uniquely positioned to support service transformation through its role in strengthening professional standards, education, leadership and workforce capability in partnership with HSC organisations. She, however, emphasised that NIPEC does not hold statutory authority or a regulatory function in this area.

Chief Executive advised that she had attended a regional Quality and Safety Summit the previous day, at which discussions focused on the findings of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Public Inquiry and the Urology Report as well as the wider issue of how quality and safety are measured, monitored and assured across the health and social care system. A key theme emerging from the discussions was the need for clear accountability at Trust level, with assurance mechanisms supported by effective governance arrangements. She noted that standardised Terms of Reference for Safety and Quality Committees had been developed as part of this work.

Chief Executive noted that NIPEC has six months to formally consider and respond to the recommendation directed to the organisation in the Muckamore Report. She further advised that the Chief Nursing Officer is planning a regional summit to consider a collective response to the Inquiry's recommendations and their implementation across the system. Mrs L Kelly anticipated that she would be in a position to provide a further update at the September Council meeting.

After some discussion, Chief Executive emphasised that responsibility for performance monitoring and assurance does not sit with NIPEC. Ms McRoberts queried the potential role of Encompass in supporting the collection and reporting of relevant data. Chief Executive noted that, where information is recorded appropriately, Encompass should be able to facilitate the capture and analysis of relevant data to support assurance processes.

Chair was of the view that the monitoring and assurance of mental health services would more appropriately fall within the remit of RQIA. Chief Executive said that NIPEC's specific role relates to the effectiveness of education programmes and the promotion of evidence-based practice and considered that the organisation could contribute through quality assurance activity in this regard.

Chief Executive said that NIPEC were involved in the development of the Neighbourhood Model being introduced by the Department of Health in an effort to provide more care and support closer to people's homes and communities.

Chief Executive concluded her report by highlighting that there was a lot of good work going on within the organisation at present, which had been reflected at the recent favourable Accountability Review.

Chair thanked Chief Executive for the presentation of her Report and Council members noted same.

6.2 Closing NIPEC Professional Work Plan 2025-26 (*Circulated for noting*)

Referring to the closing Professional Work Plan for 2025-26 circulated prior to the meeting, Chief Executive reported that 25 projects were listed at the close of the Work Plan. She advised that 15 of these had been completed and 10 were being carried forward into 2026-27. Ten of these projects related specifically to nursing, while 15 covered both nursing and midwifery.

Council members noted the closing Work Plan.

6.3 NIPEC Professional Work Plan 2026-27 Q1 – Monitoring Report from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026 (*Circulated for consideration*)

In relation to the new Work Plan for 2026-27, Chief Executive reported that the start of year's baseline information had been completed and that additional columns had been added to support the collation of this information. She advised that NIPEC now have three bespoke midwifery specific projects underway: namely the mandatory training matrix; midwifery career pathway and midwifery quality.

In response to a query from Chair, Mrs L Kelly confirmed that there were currently 21 live projects. She advised that not all projects outlined on the Work Plan had commenced as yet.

Chair noted that there was a similar number of projects on this year's Work Plan to that of last year. He observed, however, that, following three partial retirements, the organisation had reduced staffing resources and sought assurance from Chief Executive that NIPEC would be able to deliver the same volume of work. In response, Chief Executive explained that not all elements of project delivery required input from Senior Professional Officers. She advised that a proportion of the work would be undertaken by the recently appointed Professional Officer for Nursing and in due course, by the Professional Officer for Midwifery, once appointed. This would enable Senior Professional Officers to focus on other priority areas of work.

Chief Executive was confident that the Work Plan would be delivered, although acknowledged that some projects may take longer to complete than originally anticipated. She noted that, while a number of projects were non-negotiable, there was flexibility in relation to others. Some could be deferred if necessary and some projects may ultimately not require to be taken forward. Chief Executive further assured members that she met with each Senior Professional Officer on a monthly one-to-one basis to review workloads and monitor capacity.

Chair was cognisant of the possible implications of any projects being deferred or not progressed to completion and queried how this might be perceived from a performance and delivery perspective outside of the organisation. He emphasised the importance of maintaining public confidence in the organisation's ability to deliver against its agreed objectives.

In response, Chief Executive noted that the oversight provided by the Professional Business Committee offered an effective mechanism for monitoring the progress of the Work Plan, thereby providing assurance to Council. Dr Bhogal concurred with this view and remarked that the revised format of the Work Plan had enhanced transparency and ease of tracking.

Dr Bhogal emphasised the importance of focusing on those projects capable of delivering early, high impact benefits. She further observed that, on occasion, projects may be delayed or unable to progress for reasons beyond the organisation's control. In such circumstances, she stressed the need to ensure that the factors contributing to any delays were clearly documented and reported, thereby providing transparency and appropriate context.

Chair reflected on whether there may come a point at which the organisation would need to decline or defer additional projects where available capacity and resources were insufficient to support delivery. He noted that, should such circumstances arise, it would be important for Council to provide strong support for the organisation's position. Ms McRoberts was of the view that the impact of the current resource pressures should be clearer by the September Council meeting, at which point Council would be in a better position to assess the situation.

Dr Stockdale was of the view that, when considering whether a project could be undertaken, it would be appropriate to provide feedback regarding any additional resource requirements, particularly where a shorter timeline has been requested. Chief Executive advised that she had already secured agreement from the CNO that she would seek additional funding for specific projects when required. Chair wished to assure Council that there was clear evidence of the Chief Executive appropriately challenging requests and advocating on behalf of the organisation. He had nevertheless thought that it was important to have the discussion considering the role of Non-Executive members in ensuring the protection and sustainability of the organisation.

Council members noted the Professional Work Plan.

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

Chief Executive introduced Mrs Brenda Carson, the SPO who led on Quality Strategy, to the meeting. By way of background, she said that the organisation knew that it was performing well against its Quality Strategy but wanted to be able evidence this and get a better idea of where to focus improvement. Mrs L Kelly thanked Mrs Carson for her work on quality improvement to date and for coming along to the meeting to provide Council with an update on the Total Quality Management Measurement Dashboard, which was based around the Quality Strategy.

Referring to the Dashboard previously shared, Ms Carson explained that it focused on three key priorities: Our Work; Our Staff; and Our Partners. She said that 'Our Work' had been touched on during Mrs L Kelly's presentation of the Work Plan but added that this new approach had enabled better analysis of the reasons why a project may not be progressing and provided a deeper level of accountability.

There was discussion on the website hits and visits analytics and the changes in activity over the past four years. It was noted that most of the website users resided in the UK, however, active users had also been noted from Singapore and the US for example. It was further noted that the most popular pages at present were the Home Page, Delegation documents and the Quality Excellence Framework, whereas previously the most visited pages had been on recording care and PACE.

Mrs Carson highlighted the significant reduction in the use of X. It was noted that this may be attributable, in part, to the absence of a Communications Officer but also reflected a wider decline in the platform's popularity. Mrs L Kelly advised that NIPEC would prefer to focus its social media activity on Instagram and LinkedIn, however, she acknowledged that progressing this work would be challenging without a Communications Officer. Chair commented that, to his knowledge, much of the nursing audience had migrated away from X and noted that the situation provided a clear example of the impact of the vacant Communications post.

With regard to 'Our Staff', Mrs Carson outlined that seven core questions relating to psychological safety had been posed to staff through anonymous questionnaires over the past three years and provided an overview of the findings. She added that she had also undertaken a series of "What Matters" conversations with staff which had helped to provide context. Mrs Carson noted that a couple of areas had seen a slight decline but emphasised that, given the small size of the team, the views of one or two individuals could have a notable impact on the overall results.

She also indicated that responses may be influenced by timing and individual circumstances. Mrs Carson also thought that it was important to recognise that there were a number of areas which had shown improved results, such as the team working effectively together. She said that it would be interesting to see how the data may change over time.

Ms McRoberts enquired whether staff had been given the opportunity to comment on the findings. Mrs Carson advised that the key themes had been shared with staff at a recent team meeting and that an action plan had subsequently been developed to address the issues identified. Mrs L Kelly noted that the findings were largely positive and commented that the organisation's commitment to understanding and addressing any underlying concerns demonstrated its focus on staff wellbeing. Ms Caslin queried whether hybrid working arrangements may be a contributing factor to reduced team cohesion. Ms Jackson stated that there would be some discussion on this under the accommodation update later in the agenda.

Mrs Carson advised that the data presented in the 'Our Partners' section had been derived from a survey issued to all partners, comprising three core questions. In addition, feedback had been sought on potential areas for improvement and suggestions for topics that NIPEC might consider for future events. Mrs Carson emphasised the importance of reviewing how NIPEC engages with partners and shares information, noting, for example, that the organisation was considering whether the introduction of a newsletter could be beneficial in showcasing its work. The questionnaire had received 74 responses and it was understood that some of the respondents had not worked directly with NIPEC. There were a lot of positive comments noted such as 'highly valued', 'supportive and the 'professionalism of the team'.

Ms McRoberts commented that the results appeared to provide a fair reflection of the current position. Chair noted that a number of the issues raised highlighted the importance of effective communication and engagement. Mrs L Kelly advised that, in relation to the organisation's visibility, the Senior Professional Officers had now been aligned to specific Trusts and correspondence had been issued to Directors of Nursing informing them of these arrangements. She further noted that the commencement of the new Professional Officer for Nursing and the appointment of a Professional Officer for Midwifery was expected to enhance the organisation's visibility and engagement.

In addition, NIPEC was exploring opportunities to utilise the Royal College of Nursing's networks and social media platforms, and Mr Gary Cousins had already engaged with the local universities. Dr Stockdale suggested that consideration should also be given to engaging with the CEC to further extend outreach.

Chief Executive thanked Mrs Carson for her presentation, adding that she considered the Dashboard to be a valuable tool to inform the organisation of where it needed to apply the most focus but also to assure Council that the undertakings made in the Quality Strategy were being met.

Council members noted the Dashboard.

Mrs Carson left the meeting at this point.

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

Chief Executive reported that, in addition to the consultations listed on the activity report circulated, there was a further consultation ongoing regarding the NMC Practice Learning Review. Mrs L Kelly explained that this consultation will be important in shaping the education and preparation of future student nurses and midwives and it is essential that a significant response is received to ensure that the Northern Ireland voice is clearly and appropriately represented within the feedback. Mrs L Kelly further explained that Northern Ireland is in a challenging position due to its border with the EU, which requires a higher standard of education than that of the UK. It is therefore essential that practice learning in Northern Ireland continues to strike the right balance between both EU and UK requirements or it risks losing some of its nursing and midwifery workforce.

Mrs L Kelly advised that Fiona Bradley, Senior Professional Officer was collating the Northern Ireland response to the review in collaboration with Sharon Burnside from the CNO Group.

Mrs McRoberts requested that the Consultation Activity Report be reversed so that the most recent consultation appeared first. Mrs Mallon undertook to reformat the document accordingly prior to the next Council meeting.

Council members noted the Consultation Activity Report.

Action: *Mrs Mallon to reformat the Consultation Activity 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 19 May 2026 (*Circulated for noting*)

7.1.2 Confirmed minutes of the PBC Meeting held on 20 February 2026 (*Circulated for noting*)

Ms Caslin highlighted a typographical error in the attendance list of the Professional Business Committee minutes. Mrs Mallon undertook to amend same.

Council members noted the minutes of the standing Committees.

7.2 Finance

7.2.1 NIPEC's Opening Allocation 2026-27

Ms Jackson reported that NIPEC had been notified of a 6% efficiency requirement. Given the current financial pressures, the organisation could only achieve this saving through the suppression of a vacant post, with the Communications post currently identified as the most likely option. She advised that the matter had been raised with Sponsor Branch and the Chair and Chief Executive had written to the Department of Health's Finance Directorate seeking reconsideration of the requirement. A meeting with the Department of Health's Finance team has been scheduled for the end of July to discuss the position further. Ms Jackson emphasised that there was currently no capacity or specialist expertise within the organisation to progress the Communications work.

Ms Jackson asked if members had any comments or questions. Chair stated that the 6% efficiency saving would mean that there was no budget available for any pay awards or the licence fee for the accommodation in James House, should these be required.

There was discussion on whether consideration could be given to either a part time or a lower banded Communications post. Ms Jackson said that a lower banded post would require job matching and consequently would take some time to progress. Mrs L Kelly expressed the view that recruiting to a new post at this stage would present a significant risk given the current financial position. She suggested that consideration be given to inviting representatives from Sponsor Branch to attend the meeting with the Finance team scheduled for the end of July.

Ms Diamond expressed concern regarding the apparent lack of equity in funding compared with other organisations. Chair acknowledged these concerns and noted the need to consider how NIPEC could manage the situation, given that there was no indication of any change in the near future. He recognised that the current position remained both volatile and fragile and would require ongoing monitoring and careful management.

Council members noted the opening allocation.

7.2.1 Financial Summary of Expenditure, Month 2 (Circulated for noting)

Ms Jackson confirmed that the Financial Summary of Expenditure for Month 2 had been submitted to the Department. The forecast position indicated a year-end surplus of £15,000, however, Ms Jackson noted that this projected surplus was attributable to slippage in the recruitment of the Band 7 Professional Officer for Midwifery post.

Ms Jackson advised that NIPEC had not yet received the funding as promised from the Department in respect of the agency midwife currently in post. While this funding had not originally been incorporated into the budget, it would now need to be included. Chief Executive expressed confidence that the funding would be forthcoming and undertook to raise the matter directly with the Chief Midwifery Officer.

Ms Jackson reported that costs of approximately £4,000 had been incurred in respect of the advertising and the assessment centre for the recruitment of the Chief Executive's post.

Council members noted the update.

Action: Chief Executive to contact Chief Midwifery Officer regarding the funding for the agency midwife post.

7.3 Audited Annual Report and Accounts 2025-26 (Circulated for approval)

Ms Jackson referred to the Audited Annual Report and Accounts 2025-26 previously circulated and asked that Ms Caslin, as Interim Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, now formally present these to Council for consideration.

Ms Caslin reported that the draft Annual Report and Accounts, together with the Northern Ireland Audit Office's draft 'Report to Those Charged with Governance' (RTTCWG) dated 24 June 2026, had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting yesterday.

Ms Caslin advised that the Committee had noted that the draft RTTCWG contained one Priority 3 recommendation relating to the accrual of outstanding staffing recharge costs associated with the Ethnic Diversity Project. The recommendation was that NIPEC continue to engage with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to resolve the outstanding balance and establish clearer arrangements for the timely invoicing and settlement of inter-organisational recharges in future.

Ms Caslin further stated that the Committee had also considered an unadjusted misstatement relating to a provision carried in respect of a legal case against NIPEC. While a provision of £30,000 had been included in the accounts, the final legal costs amounted to £14,000. The Committee was advised that this arose due to the timing of information becoming available and that there had been no intention to misstate the accounts. Appropriate advice had been sought from Legal Services and the Department's Finance team regarding the provision and Audit had confirmed that the approach taken was appropriate. The Committee therefore agreed that the misstatement should not be amended and this will be noted in the minutes.

Ms Caslin advised that, in the draft, the proposed audit opinion is "that the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) will certify the 2025/26 financial statements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification."

Chair and Council approved the Audited Annual Report & Accounts.

Ms Caslin stated that, now the document had been formally approved by Council, the Chair and Chief Executive will sign off the Annual Report & Accounts at a date advised by NIAO to prevent a significant gap between the date the accounts are signed and certification. NIAO will advise when certification will take place but it is anticipated that this will be in the next week.

Chair thanked Ms Caslin for her presentation of the Audited Annual Report & Accounts.

7.4 Chair of A&R Committee's Annual Report on Activity and Assurance for 2025-26 (*Circulated for noting*)

Ms Jackson referred to the Draft Annual Report of Activity and Assurance previously circulated and explained that, set out in the Audit & Risk Committee's Terms of Reference, the Committee is required to report to Council annually on its work in support of the Governance Statement and NIPEC's Assurance Framework. The Report provides a summary of activity for the year and was approved at yesterday's Committee meeting.

There being no questions or comments made, Council members noted the Report.

7.5 Corporate Risk Register 2026-27, Version 3 (*Circulated for approval*)

Ms Jackson reported that, at the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held in May, members had discussed whether the ratings of Risks 1 and 2 should be increased to 'Extreme' in light of the organisation's financial position and the associated impact on capacity. It had been agreed that this matter should be referred to Council for further consideration.

Ms Jackson further advised that Council may wish to consider the risks arising from the organisation's current inability to appoint a Communications Officer and the potential impact this could have on NIPEC's capacity to deliver its statutory functions effectively. She also highlighted a potential risk relating to NIPEC's accommodation arrangements which, as previously mentioned, would be discussed later in the agenda.

There was a lengthy discussion on the ratings of Risks 1 and 2 and whether these required to be increased or have additional narrative built in. Chief Executive was of the view that the Business Plan was worded in such a way that an increase of the ratings was not necessary at this time as she was confident that the organisation would deliver on the undertakings made within.

Chair invited Mr Desi McKinney, Assistant Head of Internal Audit, BSO, to provide his views on the matter. Mr McKinney advised that, in his opinion, NIPEC was already managing the risks effectively and had robust controls in place. He recognised that the organisation's financial position was subject to regular monitoring and oversight by Ms Jackson, which greatly reduced the likelihood of an overspend occurring. He was therefore of the view that the existing controls were sufficient to support effective management of the identified risks. In response to a request from Ms Jackson, Mr McKinney confirmed that legally the organisation is not permitted to incur an overspend.

Chair was concerned about the reputational risk to the organisation if it was unable to deliver its Work Plan. Dr Bhogal asked if NIPEC would incur a surplus if they failed to appoint to the vacant Band 7 Professional Officer post. Ms Jackson confirmed that this would be the case but assured members that this could be managed, if necessary.

(Mrs B Kelly re-joined the meeting at this point.)

Ms Jackson suggested that the matter of the Risk Register be discussed in further detail at the 30 September workshop, with Mrs Lisa McEneaney, Business Manager, in attendance and those present agreed with this proposal.

Action: Ms Jackson to include the Risk Register on the Agenda for the September Council workshop and invite Mrs McEneaney to attend.

7.6 KPIs 2025-26 (Circulated for noting)

Ms Jackson reported that there was only one performance indicator of note which related to staff absence. This was showing as outside of the target but Ms Jackson explained that this was due to one staff member being off due to planned surgery. The staff member has since returned to work.

Council members noted the KPI update.

7.7 Equality

- Review of NIPEC's 5-year Equality Scheme (**Verbal update for noting**)

Ms Jackson advised that the Council had approved the review of NIPEC's 5-year Equality Scheme at its March meeting. She confirmed that the review document had now been completed and submitted to the Equality Commission.

- Annual Progress Report 2025-26 (***Verbal update for noting***)

Ms Jackson noted that, as per usual, the Report was due for submission by end August and confirmed that, as in previous years, NIPEC will submit in draft and advise that it will be presented to Council in September for approval. Ms Jackson stated that the Report is underway and has been shared with the Senior Team for comments.

Council members noted the update.

- Briefing Paper: Identity and Language Act (***Circulated for noting***)

Council members noted the Briefing Paper.

7.8 Update on Decision Time / SharePoint (*Verbal update*)

This item had previously been discussed under Matters Arising.

7.9 NIPEC Policies:

7.9.1 Management of Sickness Absence Policy & Procedure

Ms Jackson referred to the Management of Sickness Absence Policy & Procedure previously circulated and advised that this was a new regional policy which had been amended slightly to reflect NIPEC.

Members noted the new policy and procedure.

7.10 NIPEC Accommodation Update (*For Noting/Information*)

Referring to the Accommodation paper circulated and earlier discussions at the meeting, Ms Jackson asked if members had reviewed the options provided and had any others to propose.

Ms Caslin outlined a desk booking system she had experience of, which may be worth looking into if NIPEC were to rent a bank of desks. Ms B Kelly said that she was currently working within such a system and found it quite challenging. She said that it would be a shame for NIPEC to have to relinquish their offices but appreciated the difficulty presented by the budget constraints. Ms Diamond suggested that other organisations within James House be approached with a view to sharing their office space and Ms Jackson confirmed that this was one of the options being considered.

Ms Jackson asked if members were content that she proceed with exploring the options outlined and those present confirmed that they were.

Action: *Ms Jackson to explore the options provided and feedback any updates to Council.*

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 the UK Covid-19 Inquiry will publish its fifth report and recommendations on Tuesday 14 July 2026, which will conclude its investigation into 'the procurement and distribution to end-users across the four nations of the United Kingdom of key healthcare related equipment and supplies, including PPE, ventilators, oxygen, lateral flow tests and PCR tests' (Module 5). The Department of Health have advised that they have ceased providing updates to ALBs and that ALBs are now encouraged to keep up to date on the Inquiry's website.

Ms Jackson asked if, in light of the conclusion of the investigation, members were happy to remove this item from the agenda going forward and members confirmed that they were. Chair added that the item could be added onto a future agenda if needs be.

9.0 Any Other Business

Chair wished to extend his congratulations to Bronagh Scott on receiving the Kathleen Robb Award at the recent RCN Nurse of the Year Awards, in recognition of her significant contribution to nursing.

Chair also wished to highlight that Dr Gary Mitchell and himself had received the Learning in Practice Award for their work with nursing students.

In response to a query from Ms Diamond, Chair advised that time of the September workshop would be largely dependent on the availability of the speakers.

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 **16 September 2026 at 2.00pm** and will be held **in Room 1.7, First Floor, James House.**

