

## SCOTTISH SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

### Unconfirmed minutes of the Council meeting held on 22 August 2024 at 10.00am in Tay Room, Compass House, Dundee and by Teams meeting

**Present:** Sandra Campbell, Convener, Council Member  
Alan Baird, Council Member  
Sharon Ballingall, Council Member  
Edel Harris, Council Member  
Rona King, Council Member  
Lindsay MacDonald, Council Member  
Peter Murray, Council Member

**In Attendance:** Maree Allison, Interim Chief Executive  
Hannah Coleman, Acting Director of Regulation  
Laura Lamb, Acting Director of Workforce, Education and Standards  
Natalie Sutherland, Senior Solicitor  
Audrey Wallace, Corporate Governance Coordinator

**Observers:** There were four staff observing

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| <b>1.</b> | <b>Welcome and apologies</b>   |
| 1.1       | The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were intimated on behalf of Theresa Allison, Council Member, Laura Shepherd, Director of Strategy and Performance and Anne Stewart, Head of Legal and Corporate Governance.                                       |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>Declarations of interest</b>  |
| 2.1       | There were no declarations of interest.  |
| <b>3.</b> | <b>Minutes of the previous meeting – 23 May 2024</b>   |
| 3.1       | The minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2024 were approved as an accurate record.  |
| <b>4.</b> | <b>Matters arising</b>   |
| 4.1       | There were no matters arising from the previous minutes not included on this agenda.   |
| <b>5.</b> | <b>Convener’s report</b>   |
| 5.1       | Sandra Campbell presented report 28/2024. She verbally advised that this had been a busy period with the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive and also the interviewing process for three new Council Members. She congratulated Maree Allison on her appointment as |

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|           | permanent Chief Executive confirming that a number of applicants were interviewed but that the decision was unanimous. She also commented that she considered that the newly appointed Members were good appointments picked from a lot of competition.   |
| 5.2       | The Convener also paid compliment and good wishes to the two Members, Alan Baird and Theresa Allison, whose appointments would expire at the end of August. Alan Baird responded by complimenting the management group and staff of the SSSC for their support and hard work over his period of tenure, especially so once he was appointed Chair of Audit and Assurance Committee.   |
| 5.3       | With reference to her own departure from the Convener's position at the end of September, she advised that Peter Murray will step into the position of Interim Convener until a permanent appointment is made. Peter Murray advised that he had been appointed until June 2025, or before then if an appointment to the permanent position is made earlier. He added that he felt privileged to be asked to step into the spot.   |
| 5.4       | The Council<br>1. noted the report  |
| <b>6.</b> | <b>Chief Executive's report</b>   |
| 6.1       | Maree Allison presented report 29/2024, her report on highlights and information to be shared with Members since the last full Council meeting in May 2024. The report included an update on the Future Proofing Programme which was launched on 3 June 2024; correspondence with the Minister regarding funding for adult social care qualifications; confirmation of the additional grant in aid funding would be reported to the Council meeting in October.   |
| 6.2       | Maree Allison confirmed that later in the meeting, Hannah Coleman would speak to a report on the Nursing and Midwifery Council independent review of its culture. She also referred to the dateline for evidence to be presented to the Parliamentary Committee on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill.   |
| 6.3       | Maree Allison then thanked Theresa Allison, Alan Baird and Sandra Campbell for their work and support to her and staff, including Senior Officers, during their tenure as Council Members and Convener.   |
| 6.4       | The main issues discussed were <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested any further update on funding. Maree Allison confirmed that this was for this year only and not known if it would be recurring.</li> <li>• The introduction to Fusion, the new Scottish Government finance system, was not going as well as hoped, less testing than expected and there have been delays in rolling out the system. In answer to a specific question, Maree Allison advised there was no sandpit as of a few weeks previously. She expected to know during September if the system go live would be delayed.</li> </ul> |

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|           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peter Murray asked about the evaluation of the Safer Staffing Guidance recently published, including any feedback from employees or employee groups. He felt that the guidance could lead to inconsistencies in practice. Laura Lamb advised that she was not aware of any evaluation of the guidance at present, but her opinion was that this would be a part of the process. Peter Murray expressed his concern about the risks of managing how the guidance is acted upon, including financial implications.</li> </ul>  |
| 6.5       | Members discussed the new Open Badges which were developed in partnership with the Care Inspectorate. Council was pleased to see the collaboration between the two organisations to help develop an understanding between them.   |
| 6.6       | The Council   |
|           | 1. noted the information contained in the report.   |
| <b>7.</b> | <b>Appointment of Chair, Vice Chair and Members to Audit and Assurance Committee</b>  |
| 7.1       | Sandra Campbell presented report 30/2024 which sought approval for changes to membership of the Audit and Assurance Committee following the changes to the Council membership, which included Peter Murray taking up the position of Interim Convener at the beginning of October 2024.   |
| 7.2       | <p>After discussion on the timing of the changes, the Council agreed</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lindsay MacDonald is appointed Chair of the Audit and Assurance Committee and Rona King appointed Vice Chair of the Committee both with effect from 1 September 2024.</li> <li>2. Peter Murray will remain as a member of the Committee until his appointment as Interim Convener comes into effect on 1 October 2024.</li> <li>3. Three members are to be appointed to Audit and Assurance Committee, to replace the positions left vacant by Alan Baird, Theresa Allison and Peter Murray. These will be appointed once the three newly appointed Council Members take up their position on 1 September 2024.</li> </ol> |
| <b>8.</b> | <b>Audit and Assurance Committee report to Council</b>  |
| 8.1       | Alan Baird presented report 31/2024, which summarised the matters dealt with at the Audit and Assurance Committee held on 30 July 2024.   |
| 8.2       | <p>He highlighted the following matters which were discussed at the meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Strategic Performance Indicators (SPIs), including the benefits realised and to be realised from the launch of the Future Proofing Programme.</li> <li>• The four internal audit reports which showed consistency and high quality in line with others which had been presented throughout the year.</li> </ul>  |

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|     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Particular discussion had taken place on the consultancy review of the Rewards Review and it was noted that it contained a number of recommendations. Members agreed that this had been a complex piece of work and the auditor had engaged with the Members and officers involved and discussed and considered the concerns expressed. It was noted that management had accepted the recommendations and a number of these had already been acted upon. Alan Baird assured Members that the external auditors had received papers relating to the Rewards Review and were aware of the decisions that had been made in relation to it. Members expressed their views that lessons had been learned from this project and were confident that a similar scenario regarding governance and decision-making would not happen again in future.</li> <li>The new Counter Fraud Policy developed and tailored to the SSSC, by the Head of Legal and Corporate Governance, as the contract with Counter Fraud Services had terminated.</li> </ul> |
| 8.3 | Edel Harris had a query around an SPI around average time for a person to become registered with the SSSC. Hannah Coleman explained that the change to legislation to shorten the time to register and the figures in the assurance report were predictions, but once data from the change to legislation kicks in, these figures will be easier to predict more accurately. This led to further discussion on non-registered workers and while the shorter time to register should result in workers being registered more quickly, Care Inspectorate have a compliance role to play in ensuring that services do not employ unregistered workers. The responsibility for this lies with the employer and not the individual. Doug Moodie confirmed that worker records are checked during inspections of premises.   |
| 8.4 | Hannah Coleman clarified that by changing the time allowed to register, this did not affect the time taken to process the application. This would still be carried out within the allocated timescale. The change to timescales affects the time a worker has in order to apply to register.   |
| 8.5 | Peter Murray suggested that step two of the Assurance Map should include a date for action.  |
| 8.6 | The Council <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>accepted that the assurance report presents a true and fair view of the SSSCs performance towards achievement of strategic objectives, financial management and risk identification and management</li> <li>noted that Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approved the revised Assurance Report template</li> <li>noted the internal audit reports and approved the management response to the recommendations in the auditors Consultancy Review of the Rewards Review</li> <li>approved the Counter Fraud Policy.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>   |
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| <b>9.</b>  | <b>Anonymous complaint addressed to Council Members</b>  |
| 9.1        | Laura Lamb presented report 32/2024, which summarised an anonymous complaint which raised concerns re practices across the organisation and which had been sent to Council Members.  |
| 9.2        | The report set out the reasons that the correspondence did not meet the definition of whistleblowing. It detailed how the complaint was investigated along with the outcome of the investigations. It was noted that while the allegations were not substantiated, a number of actions will be put in place to raise awareness of and assure staff and Members of policies and processes we have.  |
| 9.3        | Members were assured that all steps were taken to investigate fully the allegations made although further detail could not be obtained, as the complaint was submitted anonymously. Members were also reminded of the outcomes of the staff surveys carried out annually and also the annual staff events which give Members the opportunity to mingle and talk to all staff who attend the events.  |
| 9.4        | The Council endorsed<br>1. the action taken to investigate the anonymous complaint<br>2. the recommendations contained in the report.  |
|            | <i>Council recessed for a short break</i>  |
| <b>10.</b> | <b>SSSC Response to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Independent Culture Review Report July 2024</b>  |
| 10.1       | Hannah Coleman presented report 33/2023, which summarised our response in relation to the Independent Culture Review published by the NMC. There were 36 recommendations to the NMC and we have categorised these into three main areas of concern and considered and addressed these in the report. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have no backlog of cases and our time to close cases is significantly less than the NMC. Our investigation timescales compare very favourably with other regulators.</li> <li>• We have an external firm of solicitors who audit our decision making in our cases and to date no concerns have been raised. We have decisions guidance which includes guidance on sexual misconduct including that outside of work. It also covers racist abuse and discrimination.</li> <li>• We have in place a support service for workers involved in the hearings process with officers trained in mental first aid. We hold meetings with the FtP representatives' group to help identify and address issues and areas where improvements may be made.</li> </ul> |
| 10.2       | There was some discussion on how the issues in the NMC related to issues addressed in the previous discussion item. Hannah Coleman referred to the positive results from the annual surveys carried out. She also addressed the question over the SSSC approach to people taking part in the hearings process and confirmed that we do   |

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|            | proactively engage with employers to make sure we are addressing issues raised or perceived.  |
| 10.3       | The Council endorsed the following planned management actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complete audit of case decisions</li> <li>• direct Investors in People to focus on the cultural issues identified in the Review when carrying out their assessment later this year, the outcomes of which we will report back to Council.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>11.</b> | <b>Review of Registration Fees</b>  |
| 11.1       | Maree Allison presented report 34/2023, which sought approval to amend the consultation proposals to take account of the proposed change to the annual level of fees in order to keep within the parameters of the current legislation. Discussions with Scottish Government revealed that it would prefer the increases to be a fixed amount each year, rather than a percentage increase annually, in order to provide more certainty of income.  |
| 11.2       | The Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland (CCPS) expressed concern that increases in fees would lead to higher turnover of staff. It also highlighted the inequality between sectors as the local authority met the fees of its employees. Feedback from other stakeholders was in a similar vein.  |
| 11.3       | Maree Allison confirmed that the consultation was planned to take place from end of September to end of December with a report coming to the meeting of Council in February 2025. She also confirmed that the use of the comparisons of other regulators were those which most closely matched the professions and salaries of their registered workers.  |
| 11.4       | A number of questions were raised and answered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was no direction from Scottish Government to set fees to bridge the funding gap.</li> <li>• The disparity arising from funding of local authority workers' fees was discussed with Scottish Government.</li> <li>• A yearly percentage increase was not acceptable to Scottish Government and the levels now proposed are based on a five-year projection. Proposed increases are rounded to the nearest pound resulting in students paying a slightly higher percentage increase. The proposed increases are set at maximum level. When the report comes to Council in February it can make a different decision.</li> </ul> |
| 11.5       | Council discussion then turned again to the disparity between local authority workers and those in private and third sector and the bias this may create in the consultation response. Members agreed and acknowledged that this is a concern over which SSSC has no control.   |
| 11.6       | The Council approved amending the consultation proposals to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. annual changes to fee levels for five years</li> <li>2. annual increases of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>£2 for students</li> </ul> </li> </ol>   |

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|            | £3 for support workers<br>£4 for practitioner/supervisor<br>£8 for manager/social worker.   |
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| <b>12.</b> | <b>People Strategy Annual report</b>  |
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| 12.1       | Laura Lamb presented report 35/2023 which set out the progress on the current People Strategy and also presented the next strategy which takes us through 2024 – 2027. The focus for the new strategy continues to be around leadership and managing change and this includes remote teams and managing attendance. She highlighted the various promotions and staff moves within the past year and the benefits in agile working, which allowed posts to be filled from people not living in the area local to the offices. Laura Lamb also mentioned that due to funding challenges, some of the initiatives in the current strategy could not be progressed however have been included in the new strategy.  |
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| 12.2       | Laura Lamb advised that the 2024 -2027 strategy focussed on four pillars:<br>A great place to lead and inspire<br>A great place to develop<br>A great place to be yourself<br>A great place to work and make a difference.<br>She confirmed that the strategy had been reviewed at the Partnership Forum and also circulated to staff for comment.  |
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| 12.3       | The main areas for discussion were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focus on this strategy was about developing culture, agile working and the package we offer staff rather than reward, as reward is an area where we have little control.</li> <li>• Is it possible to have actual staff in the graphics rather than stock pictures?</li> <li>• Are the measurables sufficient for the level of expectation of the Council, some appear to be statements and not connected to something that can be measured? Laura Lamb clarified that these will be clearer in the delivery plan and perhaps the wording of the strategy isn't clear and will be revisited to be outcome rather than output focussed. She added that the outcomes and measures will be reported in the annual report to Council.</li> </ul> |
| 12.4       | The Council   |
|            | 1. approved the new People Strategy 2024-2027   |
|            | 2. endorsed the progress made in the final year of the 2021-2024 Strategy.  |
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| <b>13.</b> | <b>People management policies – Grievance Policy</b>  |
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| 13.1       | Laura Lamb presented report 36/2023, along with the revised Grievance Policy, for approval. She advised that changes were mainly around providing greater detail and clarity for staff of the processes relating to the policy  |
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| 13.2       | Laura Lamb clarified there was no detriment to staff who were moved from a process in the older policy onto the processes in new policy. She also confirmed that the trade union had no specific issues and were content with the policy as a whole.  |
| 13.3       | Sharon Ballingall commented on ease of reading and following the policy and clarity on procedures. It was noted that this was part of the aims of the review.   |
| 13.4       | The Council<br>1. approved the updated Grievance Policy.  |
| <b>14.</b> | <b>Records Management Policy</b>  |
| 14.1       | Natalie Sutherland presented report 37/2023, along with the Records Management policy which had been reviewed by officers and some minor changes made.  |
| 14.2       | Questions were asked about procedures which supported the policy and Natalie Sutherland assured Members that there were a number of supporting processes and procedures within the records management plan and gave a verbal overview of these. It was noted that officers were also working through further improvements to the processes. |
| 14.3       | The Council<br>1. approved the reviewed Records Management Policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report.   |
| <b>15.</b> | <b>Council action record</b>  |
| 15.1       | Council noted that one action, C24/02, was complete and would be archived for future reference. All others were in progress, including several with future reporting dates in place.  |
| <b>16.</b> | <b>Date of next meeting and calendar of business</b>  |
| 16.1       | The next scheduled meeting of the Council will be held on Thursday 29 October 2024 to approve the Annual Report and Accounts.   |
| 16.2       | The next meeting for usual business will be Thursday 21 November 2024.  |
| 16.3       | The calendar of business for the next 12 months was noted.  |

The meeting started: 10am  
The meeting finished: 1.15pm

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Peter Murray  
Interim Convener

Date \_\_\_\_\_