

SCOTTISH SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

Confirmed minutes of the Scottish Social Services Council held on Thursday 25 May 2023 at 10:00 am in Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NY and by Teams meeting.

Present: Sandra Campbell, Convener
Theresa Allison, Council Member
Professor Alan Baird, Council Member
Lynne Huckerby, Council Member (online)
Rona King, Council Member
Lindsay MacDonald, Council Member
Doug Moodie, Council Member (online)
Peter Murray, Council Member

In attendance: Maree Allison, Acting Chief Executive
Hannah Coleman, Acting Director, Regulation
Laura Lamb, Acting Director, Workforce, Education and Standards
Laura Shepherd, Director, Strategy and Performance
Nicky Anderson, Head of Finance
Anne Stewart, Head of Legal and Corporate Governance
Audrey Wallace, Corporate Governance Coordinator

Observing: The link was shared and there were up to 12 online observers

1.	Welcome
1.1	Sandra Campbell welcomed those present. Apologies were intimated from Julie Grace and Linda Lennie, Council Members and Lorraine Gray, Chief Executive. The meeting was quorate.
2.	Declarations of interest
2.1	There were no declarations of interest.
3.	Minutes of previous meetings
3.1	The minutes of the meeting of 27 February 2023 were approved as an accurate record.
3.2	The minutes of the meeting of 27 March 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

4.	Matters arising
4.1	There were no matters arising which are not included elsewhere on the agenda.
5.	Convener's report
5.1	Sandra Campbell presented report 15/2023 which summarised her activities as Convener since the Council meeting in February 2023. She spoke about the encouraging responses received when services had been asked if they would like Members to visit. These visits will assist in Members' development and understanding of the work being done within the sector. This activity of visiting services was paused at the start of the pandemic, which was only a few months after many of the Members took office.
5.2	Maree Allison confirmed that once Members had submitted their visiting preferences, staff would start the process of contacting the relevant services and making the arrangements.
5.3	The Council
	1. noted the summary of the key issues and activities covered in the report.
6.	Chief Executive's report
6.1	<p>Maree Allison presented report 16/2023 which detailed the SSSC's performance against strategic priorities as well as key areas of work in each of the directorates. She highlighted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confirmation of funding for the Future Proofing Programme (FPP), from Scottish Government • the consultation on the review of the Codes of Practice (CoP) • positive feedback from staff on the in-person staff conference held earlier in the month. <p>She also updated Members on progress with the lease of the headquarters offices, the ongoing pay negotiations for 2022/23 and the pausing of the proposed National Care Service Bill focussing on the work that can still be carried forward, without any changes to legislation.</p>
6.2	<p>The following areas were discussed further:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laura Lamb advised on the progress being made to establish Mutual Recognition Arrangements to allow automatic acceptance of non-UK qualified social work qualifications for registration with the SSSC. Funding to support this work has been agreed with the UK Department of Business and Trade. She added that we are in the first year of a multi-year bid proposal and currently focussing on accepting workers who have qualifications gained in Ireland. Scoping has begun on accepting qualifications from other countries. Currently, qualifications from Australia and Greece were most closely matched to those from the UK.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laura Lamb also advised on the Return to Social Work Scheme and confirmed, after questionnaires having been sent out, that 112 people have signed up to return to work in social services and they have been matched with 29 authorities. A number of these have now gone into employment. The scheme and process are being evaluated to determine how well it worked. The responses received have been very positive.
6.3	The Council
	1. noted the information contained in the report.
7.	Audit and Assurance Committee report to Council
7.1	Alan Baird presented report 03/2023 from the Audit and Assurance Committee meeting of 02 May 2023, along with the assurance report which was submitted to the Committee. He outlined the main points of discussion. Sandra Campbell asked specifically for some more detail on the issues raised regarding areas in the performance summary which were categorised as red, mainly the staff absence figures and turnover.
7.2	Alan Baird advised that the Committee had robustly discussed the refunds of fees to local authorities, the absence of a final position on the lease of the headquarters building in Dundee, and the 2022/23 pay remit being unresolved and therefore impacting also on the negotiations for the 2023/24 pay remit.
7.3	He noted that the Committee was informed, during the meeting, that funding for the FPP had been agreed with Scottish Government.
7.4	He also reported on the internal audit reports submitted, noting that some of the recommended actions had already been completed by management.
7.5	Alan Baird thanked Theresa Allison for stepping in temporarily as the Counter Fraud Champion, pending a replacement for Russell Pettigrew. He advised Council that the Committee recommended that Lindsay MacDonald be appointed to the position as of 1 June 2023.
7.6	<p>Thereafter the following matters were raised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laura Lamb addressed Members on risk 5: People and Culture: Organisational Development. She confirmed that there had been discussion with officers around trends for sickness absence or for staff turnover figures. Members noted that a 'heatmap' would be included in the next assurance report which would show particular areas of concern. Maree Allison commented that the People Strategy Delivery Plan will be brought to the August meeting of the Council and this will bring the risks on these matters together.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rona King asked if it was time to fully review the Agile Working Policy to see if there was any correlation between terms of the policy and the attendance and turnover figures. Laura Shepherd addressed the Council on the absence figures, first of all advising that these were figures from March 2023, when the public sector trend was high at 16.5%. She explained that turnover is likely due to there being very little opportunity to move during the pandemic. Now we are starting to see the aftermath of this as people are able to look for and move to other positions. She added the figures had improved since March 2023. • Lynne Huckerby confirmed that in the NHS exit interviews were compulsory. Laura Lamb confirmed that she would look into any benefits of that process. • Laura Lamb advised that work was being done to breakdown the data on social service workers obtaining qualifications. This would include looking at data gathered by the Strategy and Performance team as well as information gathered from surveying stakeholders to understand the benefits of workers with qualifications. Laura Shepherd added during the pandemic, a specific measurement was added to assist in promoting the work of the social services sector, and highlighting the essential work they carry out. • Laura Shepherd explained that some performance measurements showing red were due to work on the FPP not being progressed pending a decision from Scottish Government on funding for the programme. • There was some further discussion on reviewing the benefits of agile working and digitalisation. Maree Allison confirmed that we were in contact with and learning from other bodies as well as learning from our own experiences. The Agile Working Policy will be reviewed at the August cycle of meetings. • Laura Lamb advised that we will be holding an event with adult social care providers to look at the impact of reducing the time allowed for workers to obtain qualifications, should the time allowed be reduced, in the main, from five to three years.
7.7	The Council
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 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. In particular that <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. operational performance as measured by strategic key performance indicators give confidence that the SSSC is delivering as forecasted to meet strategic objectives agreed with the Sponsor Department

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. financial performance is consistent with forecasted spend and this does not present concern relating to year-end outturn of approved budget c. operational delivery and financial expenditure are consistent <p>2. approved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the Annual Audit and Assurance Committee report b. the appointment of Lindsay MacDonald as Counter Fraud Champion from 1 June 2023 <p>3. noted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. concern was expressed over the continuing uncertainty over the budget b. the changes to the risk register included closure of risk seven and a further report to be submitted on a review of the wording of risk five c. a revised framework for reporting on the Strategic Plan was approved d. the annual report from the internal auditors was noted e. the internal audit report on Organisational Development was considered and there were no recommendations f. the Internal Audit report on Shared Services contained four recommendations g. Committee approved its annual report for submission to Council h. an amended Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Framework was approved i. a Fraud Action Plan for 2023/24 will be submitted to the Committee in August j. changes were requested to be included in the benefits realisation reporting k. an updated report on the interim arrangements for the Senior Team will be presented to Council.
8.	Audit and Assurance Committee Annual Report
8.1	<p>Alan Baird presented report 18/2023 which provided a summary of the work of the Audit and Assurance Committee during the year 2022/23. He highlighted the main aspects discussed and highlights throughout the year. In particular he mentioned counter fraud and bribery, the benefits realisation reports, the appointment of new external auditors who will carry out their first audit of 2022/23 and the ongoing issue with pensions and holiday pay for Fitness to Practise panel members.</p>
8.2	<p>Maree Allison clarified that the areas chosen to be audited each year are proposed to the Committee by the internal auditors, based on a five-year rolling programme and discussions with senior officers. The plan is put to Committee for approval. However this is flexible and can and has been changed or added to in accordance with current issues or particular work, such as the audit of the FPP being added.</p>

8.3	Rona King led thanks to the Chair and staff who contributed to the business of the Committee. She assured Council that throughout the year there was opportunity for open discussion and debate and questions to be answered, ensuring appropriate scrutiny is carried out by the Committee.
8.4	Lindsay MacDonald commented on the assurance report and particularly the revised version, which was approved at the meeting earlier in the month, which will be more dynamic and will assist in looking forward to identify possible trends.
8.5	The Council
	1. approved the Annual Report of the Audit and Assurance Committee
	2. noted the content of the report informed the preparation of the annual governance statements in the annual report and accounts for 2022/23.
9.	Information Governance Annual Report
9.1	Anne Stewart presented report 19/2023 which provides an update on the organisation's performance in complying with its obligations under the data protection, freedom of information and records management legislation. She also presented a revised Data Protection Policy for approval. Anne Stewart highlighted the 100% response rate for answering freedom of information and individual rights' requests, as well as the success rates in responding to data breach incidents and third party requests.
9.2	Anne Stewart clarified that since leaving the European Union the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has been replaced with UK GDPR which is in the same terms as GDPR. She further confirmed the security of SharePoint, the system used by the SSSC for storing information. Laura Shepherd reassured Members that where there were concerns, this was due to how an organisation had set up their system and not the actual product.
9.3	The Council
	1. endorsed the SSSC's performance on information governance compliance in 2022/23
	2. approved amendments to the Data Protection Policy which was attached at appendix 1 to the report.
10.	Complaints Annual Report 2022/23
10.1	Laura Shepherd presented report 20/2023 which outlined the SSSC's complaints performance for the year 2022/23, she also advised that the SSSC has a duty to publish the data.
10.2	Members particularly noted that lessons had been learned from the complaints processes and changes made to these to help prevent recurrent issues. There was some discussion around ascertaining if

	complainants are satisfied with the process and the response received. It was noted that, where a response to a complaint does not give the desired outcome, any feedback would likely be negative so there was limited benefit in seeking feedback. However officers were also looking into the use of technical software to send out a text message to obtain quick feedback on the process which may be useful.
10.3	The Council
	1. endorsed the annual complaints performance for 2022/23
	2. endorsed publication of the report on the website.
11.	Digital Development Update
11.1	Laura Shepherd presented report 21/2023 which gave an update on the SSSC's digital development work for the 2022-2023 digital programme. She highlighted that twelve projects were completed within the timescale and the timeframe for one was extended due to vendor availability. Additionally she highlighted that the internal audit carried out on Digital Strategy and Digital Transformation gave an assurance level of good with no recommended actions.
11.2	In reference to cyber security, Members noted the staff training and awareness carried out and also that the organisation attained its Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation in March 2022. Laura Shepherd confirmed that penetration testing is carried out every quarter and the lessons learned and improvements made reported to the Digital Programme Board.
11.3	The Council
	1. endorsed the progress made on Digital Development work.
12.	Senior Structure Interim Arrangements
12.1	Maree Allison presented report 22/2023 which detailed arrangements for the management of the responsibilities of the vacant Director of Finance and Resources role. She advised that her report was also considered at the Audit and Assurance Committee earlier in the month and there were only a few updates to this version.
12.2	Maree Allison particularly focussed on the finance aspect of the role including strategic finance advice. She was content that Nicky Anderson, the Head of Finance would attend the Audit and Assurance Committee and Council meetings to provide advice and she was exploring options to get strategic finance advice. This included a possible secondment from Scottish Government. She confirmed she would give an update to Members at their development session on 27 June.
12.3	Sandra Campbell commented that it would not be good practice to review the structure at this point as there were now a number of

	interim arrangements in place. This included interim measures to cover the post of the Chief Executive.
12.4	Members commented that the health and wellbeing of the members of the Executive Management Team must be looked after given the additional responsibilities placed upon them. Additionally it was noted that the External Auditors were taking an interest in the absence of a senior finance officer. Alan Baird assured Members, as Chair of the Audit and Assurance Committee, that he was having regular meetings with the Acting Chief Executive and the Head of Legal and Corporate Governance to ensure he was kept informed of any developments or issues.
12.5	Sandra Campbell agreed that although this was currently an operational matter it could potentially become a strategic risk and any decision on the position would then be brought back to Council.
12.6	Council noted that there was some expertise amongst Council Members and, if appropriate, advice could be offered.
12.7	The Council 1. noted the current arrangements.
13.	Council Action Record
13.1	Members reviewed the Council action record and noted that actions C14 to C17 and C19 to C26, inclusive, were completed and agreed that these be archived from the quarterly report but be held on file for future reference.
14.	Date and time of next meeting
14.1	The date of the next Council meeting will be Thursday 24 August 2023 at 10.00am.
	<i>Items 15, 16 and 17 were discussed in private and minuted separately.</i>

Council 25 May 2023
Start time: 10am
Finish time: 12.25 pm

S. Campbell

Signed: _____ **Date:** 28 September 2023

Sandra Campbell
Convener