

SCOTTISH SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

Unconfirmed minutes of the Council meeting held on 21 November 2024 at 10.00am in Tay Room, Compass House, Dundee and by Teams meeting

Present: Peter Murray, Interim Convener, Council Member
Sharon Ballingall, Council Member
Jillian Brannan, Council Member
Edel Harris, Council Member (online)
David Heaney, Council Member
Rona King, Council Member
Lindsay MacDonald, Council Member
Doug Moodie, Council Member (online)
Frank Reilly, Council Member

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

Observers: There were 10 staff observing

1.	Welcome and apologies
1.1	The Interim Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting. He advised that there were no apologies and the meeting was quorate.
2.	Declarations of interest
2.1	There were no declarations of interest.
3.	Minutes of the previous meetings – 22 August 2024
3.1	The minutes of the meeting held on 22 August 2024 were approved as an accurate record, subject to updating the job title for Maree Allison in the attendance list to Chief Executive.
4.	Matters arising
	<i>This item was taken in the private session</i>
5.	Interim Convener's report
5.1	Peter Murray presented his report as Interim Convener to Council. The report provided an overview of his induction into the Interim Convener role, having shadowed Sandra Campbell for a number of weeks before her resignation came into effect.

5.2	The report gave an overview of meetings he had attended and other general engagements including his attendance, along with other Council Members, at the staff conference held on 30 October 2024.
5.3	Peter Murray also asked the Council to approve a change of date for the Council meeting scheduled for Monday 24 March into Thursday 27 March 2025. This meeting is convened mainly to approve the budget and this slight delay would allow an additional few days for receipt of the budget confirmation letter from Scottish Government and also normalise the meeting day to Thursday (rather than Monday) which is the usual day for Council meetings.
5.4	The Council
	1. noted the report
	2. agreed to change the meeting date in March 2025 from Monday 24 March to Thursday 27 March 2025.
6.	Chief Executive's report
6.1	Maree Allison presented report 33/2024 which provided Council with an update on her key points of interest and also SSSC activities broken down by strategic outcomes. The key points mentioned were <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the launch of the consultation on registration fees • giving evidence about the National Care service Bill (NCS) to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee • noting the final meeting of the Future Proofing Programme Stakeholder Engagement Group had taken place with the final meeting of the Sponsor Group also having taken place the day before the Council meeting.
6.2	Maree Allison advised that in conversations with the Chief Social Work Officer, she had confirmed that arrangements for establishing the National Social Work Agency continued to progress notwithstanding the delays to the NCS. She also verbally highlighted that the SSSC's three-year Future Proofing Programme was near its end and that the benefits were already being realised
6.3	Members congratulated all officers involved with the FPP. Rona King requested a report on lessons learned, both positive and negative experiences, which may help address how to successfully run and future long running project. Maree Allison advised that the communications team were working on a video diary of the project which would be shared with Members and would form part of a discussion session.
6.4	Other areas discussed were <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether the delay of the NCS would result in any resource issues for the SSSC. Maree Allison confirmed that the focus for the organisation would continue to be support for the workforce including conditions and development. • Laura Lamb advised that the work with the Fire and Rescue Service on developing learning modules was progressing and once available

	<p>this would be an open resource and could be useful to workers in homeless units and care at home workers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jillian Brannan mentioned that the recent regulatory conference had covered the upstreaming of regulation. It was agreed that the SSSC worked towards preventative regulation, resulting in fewer Fitness to Practice issues and cases. Maree Allison commented that social services were more advanced in this method but that health regulators are now also moving to an upstreaming method of regulation.
6.5	Peter Murray confirmed that a report on FPP, including the likely and full effect of the changes made, should come to Council in February.
6.6	<p>The Council</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> noted the information contained in the report noted that further information and a report of the FPP would be submitted to the February meeting of the Council.
7.	Audit and Assurance Committee report to Council
7.1	Lindsay MacDonald presented report 34/2024, which summarised the matters dealt with at the Audit and Assurance Committee held on 29 October 2024.
7.2	<p>He highlighted the following matters which were discussed at the meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of the general reserve had been discussed and noted that this would be reviewed during budget setting for 2025/26. The level would be left as is for the current year. The internal audit reports on Future Proofing Systems Control and on Complaints were both positive reports. The improvements and benefits realised arising from the FPP should filter through into the Strategic Performance Indicators in time for the next Committee meeting in February.
7.3	<p>The Council</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 noted that Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> recommended a review of the general reserve should take place during the budget setting process for 2025/26 reviewed the risk register as at 30 October 2024 which included the risk relating to the issue with the FPP Notices of Decision approved an extension of time to 31 March 2025 to complete one recommendation of the audit report on Internal Workforce Planning Management Information endorsed the procurement update and performance report for 2023/24.
8.	Qualified status of the workforce

8.1	Laura Lamb presented report 35/2024 which provided the Council with an extensive overview of the qualified status of the social services workforce. This report was the second of the six-monthly reports on this. The report highlighted the rate of new workers joining the register, who were not yet qualified and also the attrition rate from the sector.
8.2	The report included data showing qualified numbers by register part and by job groups, eg managers, practitioners etc. The report referred to the parts of the register which were opened most recently as these workers are the least qualified group, taking into account the time allowed in order to gain qualifications. The adult social care sector has least percentage qualified and highest attrition rates. This group is the main area of focus and solutions are being sought in discussions with other stakeholder groups and bodies to identify the blockers to qualifications and to find solutions. The FPP is bringing in more accurate data from workers which will also help identify solutions. The launch of the FPP has also has resulted in more flexibility of qualifications needed and should help flexibility in the workforce and improve attrition rates.
8.3	There is further work planned to determine whether the percentage of qualified staff in a service impacts on the grades awarded to the service by the Care Inspectorate.
8.4	Laura Lamb referred Members to the appendix to the report which listed a number of actions in place to assist in ensuring a qualified workforce.
8.5	<p>Members raised a number of queries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was reference made to the younger age of workers in childcare and the benefits of guidance and assistance available through schools, youth academies etc. • On the question of whether the public can see the percentage of staff qualified at any care service, Maree Allison reminded Members that a decision was taken by Council not to publish information on qualification status on the Public Register. Much more work would require to be done on this before considering whether there is any benefit to providing this type of information to the general public. • It was suggested that disparity of conditions and wages may be a factor between children's and adults services and it would be useful to see if these are factors in attrition and also qualification rates. • Laura Lamb confirmed that the newly introduced leavers survey will highlight reasons that the workforce leave the sector. • Laura Lamb also confirmed that funding to support qualifications for staff is an issue. <p>Peter Murray concluded the discussion confirming that the desired result was to support a better service for people who use the services.</p>
8.6	<p>The Council</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. endorsed the actions that the SSSC is taking to support the workforce to get qualified 2. requested that newer Council Members be signposted to the earlier reports.

9.	Proposed registration of new groups
9.1	<p>Laura Lamb presented report 36/2024 which provided detail on the Government's proposal to register additional groups of workers in the social services sector. These would be included on the SSSC's register. We carried out a scoping exercise which formed part of the Future Proofing Programme. We reported back to Scottish Government in January 2024 and recommended that the following seven groups be included in the proposed consultation to expand the register:</p> <p>Support Worker – Adult Day Care Service Practitioner – Adult Day Care Service Supervisor – Adult Day Care Service Practitioner – Offender Accommodation Service Supervisor – Offender Accommodation Service Manager – Offender accommodation Service Social Work Assistants.</p>
9.2	<p>Consultation with a number of stakeholders has taken place on relevant qualifications, appropriate fee levels and Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) requirements for these groups.</p>
9.3	<p>During discussion the following matters were raised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maree Allison confirmed that the decision to register new groups belongs to Scottish Government. She also clarified that child minders are registered as a service but not as individuals, but they must still be qualified. Personal Assistants is a group that remains unregistered and at this point Scottish Government does not intend to bring onto the Register. • Some Housing Association workers provide a caring/social service type of role also. The SSSC can suggest groups to the Scottish Government and this could form part of the reply to the consultation process. • Laura Lamb advised that we will develop a function descriptor to help in categorising who will require to be registered, particularly helpful for registration of social work assistants, which is considered the most complex group to categorise. • Doug Moodie raised concerns about regulation of out of school groups and workers as there is strict criteria to be met and many groups and workers fall outwith the description and outwith regulation. • Peter Murray raised the issue of provision of sufficient training places if these additional groups are to be registered.
9.4	<p>The Council approved</p> <p>1. Consultation on the registration of the following new groups Support Worker – Adult Day Care Service Practitioner – Adult Day Care Service Supervisor – Adult Day Care Service Practitioner – Offender Accommodation Service Supervisor – Offender Accommodation Service Manager – Offender accommodation Service Social Work Assistants.</p>

10.	Appointment of Internal Auditors
10.1	Laura Shepherd presented report 37/2024 which provided information to Council on the process for the appointment of the internal audit service. Members noted that although Audit and assurance Committee had sought to recommend appointment of Henderson Loggie, the Members requested further information be provided to Council. They had asked how the Scottish Government procurement process and framework worked to ensure the best service was successful and how is due diligence carried out in the process?
10.2	Laura Shepherd explained the process carried out by Scottish Government in order for companies to be included in the framework and also the cost benefits to organisations like the SSSC as the costs are based on the wider opportunities provided to the companies by being part of the framework.
10.3	Maree Allison also explained that the instruction from Scottish Government is that the first option must be the framework as the combined potential size of the market for those on the framework ensure best value.
10.4	Peter Murray thanked the officers for the clarity provided adding that Members must have trust and understanding of the process.
10.5	The Council 1. approved the appointment of Henderson Loggie LLP to provide internal audit services to the SSSC. The appointment will be for an initial three-year period until 31 March 2028 with an option to extend for a further two 12-month periods.
11.	Digital Strategy
11.1	Laura Shepherd presented report 38/2024 which included the refreshed Digital Strategy for 2024-2027. She confirmed that there were no major changes and the direction of the strategy remained the same but with an increased focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cyber resilience. She advised on the reporting protocol for digital projects confirming that the Council receives an annual report from the Digital Programme Board.
11.2	Sharon Ballingall commented on some recent self-development she has undertaken in order to better understand the capabilities of AI and how helpful and informative she had found it.
11.3	In answer to a query, Laura Shepherd confirmed that where the SSSC promotes external sites for learning and experiences, this uses very little in resources as it essentially means posting a link to the other information site.
11.4	Members commented on and requested some small changes to be made to the Strategy to include

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure references such as the Promise and Adult Social Care Review are updated to current language update the date of the strategy to align with the Strategic Plan, ie 2024 – 2026 update to section six to show which actions are new and which are continuing.
11.5	The Council
	1. approved the refreshed Digital Strategy subject to the strategy covering the period 2024-2026 and to the other minor changes to wording as requested.
12.	Interim Communications Strategy
12.1	Laura Shepherd presented report 39/2024 along with the Interim Communications Strategy which will support the Strategic Plan until 2026. The interim strategy was discussed with Members at the development session in June 2024 and it sets out the focus for the coming months, to the end of the current Strategic Plan. Laura Shepherd emphasised that the strategy covers how we communicate with the public and stakeholders and not what we communicate.
12.2	Members and officers discussed the size and reach of our audience and whether our audience should be broader, in order to further raise awareness about funding and development of the workforce. There was also general discussion around visibility of social work and the social services sector.
12.3	Discussion also covered how we produce and advertise our publications and the availability of different formats. These concerns were addressed by Maree Allison and Laura Shepherd who both advised on the various formats available for our external communications as well as our utilisation of interpretation services.
12.4	The Council
	1. approved the draft Interim Communication Strategy for 2024-2026.
13.	Data Protection Policy
13.1	Anne Stewart presented report 40/2024 along with the revised Data Protection Policy which sets out the arrangements in place to comply with data protection legislation and guidance. She advised on the reporting process for incidents and referred Members to the Assurance Map which is reviewed quarterly by the Audit and Assurance Committee. Anne Stewart confirmed that compliance with Data Protection was the subject of internal audit in 2022 with a good level of assurance and is also included within the current audit on legislative compliance.
13.2	The Council
	1. approved the revised Data Protection Policy 2024.

14.	Health and Safety Annual Report
14.1	Laura Shepherd presented report 41/2024 along with the Annual Health and Safety Report for 2023/24. She advised that Display Screen Equipment (DSE) forms continue to be required to be completed annually by staff for home and office working. In the office environment there is a focus on near misses as well as accidents as these can often be easily remedied.
14.2	Jillian Brannan commented that she was disappointed to see there were two verbal aggression incidents reported, although pleased that these were included within the reporting process.
14.3	The Council
	1. endorsed the performance in the Health and Safety report for 2023/24, noting that in paragraph 3 the table will be amended to read 2023/24.
15.	Fitness to Practise Committee
15.1	As Chair of the Fitness to Practise Committee, Peter Murray presented report 42/2024. Along with the report, he presented the minutes of the triennial meeting of the committee held on 10 September 2024, and the information on outcomes and disposals and training for panel members, which was considered by the committee members who had attended the meeting.
15.2	The Council noted the contents of the report and the appendices.
16.	Council Action Record
16.1	Council noted that two actions were completed and would be archived for future information. For action C24/01 Hannah Coleman advised that only one letter was still to be issued and this was subject to information incoming first. Maree Allison confirmed that discussions on the Partnership Agreement with the Care Inspectorate were taking place at Board level and for clarity, action C23/25 should be relabelled Partnership Agreement rather than Shared Services.
17.	Date of next meeting and Calendar of Business
17.1	The next scheduled meeting of the Council will be held on Thursday 27 February 2025.
17.2	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_____