Children's Social Care Services
Reform Programme

Minute of the fourteenth meeting of the Children's Social Care Services Reform Programme Board (RPB)

Date of Meeting: *17 February 2026*
James House, Cromac Avenue, Belfast

Members in attendance
Peter Toogood, Deputy Secretary, SRO
Eilís McDaniel (EMcD)– DoH
Dawn Shaw (DS) - DoH
Edel McKenna (EMcK) – CCGANI
Gerry Largey (GL) – TUS
Deirdre Mahon (DM) – DoH, WS9 Co-chair
Martina Moore (MM) – DoH
Lyn Preece (LP) – South-Eastern HSCT
Kerry-Lee Weatherall (KW) – BHSCT
Jacinta Linden (JL) – Bolster Community, WS9 Co-chair
Stephen Martin (SM) – YJA
Stephen Dallas (SD) – Bytes Project
Tom Cassidy (TC) - WHSCT
Michelle Janes (MJ) – Barnardo's NI
Lynn Long (LL) – RQIA
Marie Louise Sloan (MLS) – South-Eastern HSCT
Maura Dargan (MD) – Northern HSCT
Deirdre Ward (DW) – DE

Non-Members in attendance
Donna Kernaghan (DK), Reform Coordinator WS6
Sheila Smyth (SS), Reform Coordinator WS4
Glenda Davies (GD) - DE
Ciara Quinn (CQ) – DOH/SPPG
Carol Picton-Lynas (CP) - DoH
Shona Graham (SG) – DoH, PMO
Courtney Dawson (CD) - DoH, PMO
Sinead Johnson (SJ) – DoH, PMO
Stefani Millar (SM) – DoH, FCPD
Paul McConville (PMcC) – OSS, DoH
Amber McCloughlin (AMcC) – PHA
Jenny Kirkwood (JK) - DoH

Apologies
Michelle Tennyson, Chief AHPO, DoH
John McCord, DfC
Colm McCafferty, SHSCT
Claire McClelland, DE
Heather Stevens, DoH
Tracy Reid, NISCC
Aine Morrison, DoH
Jenny Irvine, ARC Healthy Living Centre
Stephen Dallas, Bytes Project
Emily Roberts, PHA
Ciara McKillop, SPPG, DoH
Catherine Cassidy, SPPG, DoH
Caroline Keown, DoH

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Introductions

1. The Chair welcomed members to the fourteenth meeting of the Reform Programme Board.

2. The Chair thanked LP for both her contributions to the Programme and her work more widely. MLS was welcomed to the meeting as the future representative of SET on the Board, following LP's retirement.

Agenda Item 2 – Declarations of Conflict of Interest

3. No conflicts of interest were declared by members.

Agenda Item 3 – Minutes of 17th September and matters arising

4. The minutes of the 17 September meeting were approved by members as an accurate record and actions recommended for closure were agreed, with one (02/09) remaining open (in relation to work with reform co-ordinators on development of the delivery plan).

Agenda Item 4 – Chair's Update

5. The Chair provided an update on the joint work by Health and Justice Ministers to identify and progress the steps necessary to establish a Regional Children and Families Authority, as noted by the Executive at their meeting on 16 October 2025.

6. Detailed advice to both Ministers is currently being finalised, recommending three phases to establishing the Regional Authority - design, build and implementation over four years. The Chair emphasised the importance of early engagement with key stakeholders in shaping the Authority, noting that Board members will have opportunity to provide views as part of the design process. The contribution of DS to this work was acknowledged.

7. The Chair updated members on the development of the Together for Families model and the extensive ongoing preparatory work in anticipation of confirmation of funding for implementation of the model, including business case development, consideration of legal obligations and establishment of implementation team. Members noted that initial engagement with key stakeholders has been positive and will continue as plans develop.

8. Members discussed planning for long-term sustainability, noting challenges of delivering short-term transformation while securing lasting system change. DM referenced the importance of ongoing evaluation of the model. MM referenced previous experience of working with Trinity College in connection with evaluations. DM agreed to pick this up with MM after the meeting.

   ACTION 01/02: MM to share evaluation contact information with DM.

9. The Chair informed members that a written briefing on progress against the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services has been submitted to the Health Committee. The update will be shared with Board members and reform coordinators. The Chair acknowledged the substantial volume of ongoing work as encouraging and expressed appreciation to all involved.

   ACTION 02/02: PMO to circulate the February Health Committee update.

Agenda Item 5 – Children and Families Charter 'Our Pact' Update

10. The Chair referred members to PB9-1-26 and introduced 'Our Pact,' the Children and Family Charter co-produced with children, young people, parents, carers and staff. DK was invited to present the Charter and advised members that it is built around four key principles and is designed to be accessible, visually engaging and meaningful. It has been shaped through extensive engagement, including participatory workshops, digital design input from young people. It is the product of multi-agency collaboration and is underpinned by the Lundy Model. Draft staff guidance has received positive feedback, with further comment being sought.

11. The Chair referred members to the 'asks' of organisations set out in the Paper. SM advised that the Charter was similar to the YJA Model of Practice and that there may be learning that the YJA participation officer could share on engagement. Senior leaders were invited to support development of the guidance and secure organisational buy-in, including through incorporation into training / induction and policies and procedures. EMcD advised that the task and finish group will now work on how to implement the Charter. SM suggested that DK link in with the children's champions from government departments. LP suggested that DK present on 'Our Pact' at CYPSP Outcomes Groups.

ACTION 03/02: SM to link DK with YJA participation officer.
DK to develop draft implementation plan to be circulated by correspondence.
All members to consider how 'Our Pact' can be endorsed in the organisation they represent, with specific reference to the 'asks' set out in the paper.

Agenda Item 6 – Social Work Workforce Update

The Chair referred members to PB3-1-26 and invited PMcC to provide a verbal update. It was noted that the workforce workstreams of the Children's Reform Programme and the Adult Social Care Collaborative Programme have been amalgamated into a new Social Care Workforce Implementation Board (SCWIB). There is an expectation that SCWIB will continue to report to the Programme Board. There was discussion on potential for involvement of education on the Social Work Workforce Implementation Board (SWWIB).

ACTION 04/02: PMcC to link in with AM (CSWO) on education involvement in SWWIB.

Agenda Item 7 – Workstream Progress reports – Waiting List Workstream papers for consideration

12. The Chair referred members to the workstream progress reports (PB4-1-26) and asked members to note the items identified for Programme Board consideration. Members were directed to the consolidated set of papers for Workstream 1 (PB5-1-26). MD provided an overview of progress against the priority areas of Workstream 1 and the recommendation that Workstream 1 is closed.

    MD talked members through the work to examine a multi-agency front door for children's services, including the outcome of a desktop review and subsequent options appraisal. There was discussion on how to proceed with the recommendation for the introduction of a multi-agency front door, including the potential to test the model in one HSCT area. Members concluded that the multi-agency front door should follow the roll out of the Together for Families model in order to ensure sufficient and appropriate early help services to respond to the higher numbers of referrals for support that it is expected would come through a multi-agency front door. It was highlighted that there would be some work required at departmental level to agree multi-agency commitment to a multi-agency front door and a number of practical considerations, including accommodation and IT system access. Learning from Camden, where the multi-agency front door was developed gradually, was referenced by PMcC. It was agreed that a multi-agency front door would align with the Together for Families model and to identify opportunities to begin to move to a multi-agency front door by way of a phased approach. It was noted that there was potential to progress this as part of the design work for the Regional Authority.

13. Members discussed proposals for the inclusion of specialist child protection social workers and psychological support within FIT services as part of the work taken forward by workstream 1 on a family support and intervention team structure. While acknowledging the value of these roles, it was considered appropriate that decisions on team structures should align with the Safer Staffing work and the wider team composition work now underway within OSS and it was agreed that these recommendations are considered by that programme of work.

14. The SPPG guidance on unallocated cases was noted. It was explained that developing a team makeup and structure for Looked After Children teams was dependent on the SPPG Review of Leaving and Aftercare Services. CQ advised that the first draft of this review would be available by the end of February. The Chair thanked workstream 1 for the significant work that had been undertaken.

ACTION 05/02: PMcC to share Camden Centre for Relational Practice free webinar information with Board members.

Agenda Item 8 – Final Draft Strategic Plan and Summarised Version

15. The Chair referred members to the revised 5-Year Strategic Plan PB6-1-26 and accompanying summarised version PB7-1-26. Members were advised that the updated plan reflects feedback from the June and September workshops and were asked to provide any final comments to the PMO by 24 February 2026, after which preparations will begin for Ministerial submission and publication. It was agreed to consider including a reference to ‘Our Pact’ in the Strategic Plan.

ACTION 06/02: Board members to provide final comments on the Strategic Plan to PMO by 24 February 2026.
PMO to consider including ‘Our Pact’ in the draft Strategic Plan.

16. The Chair provided an update on the draft Strategic and Operational Planning Guidance, which will set out the Department’s key priorities for 2026/27 to deliver the Reset agenda

and ensure financial sustainability. Members were advised of the priority areas for children's social care services.

Agenda Item 9 – Future Programme Structures

17. The Chair referred members to the Future Programme Structures paper PB10-1-26. EMcD provided an overview of the three options presented in the paper and highlighted the intention to align the Programme more closely with the implementation structures for the Together for Families model and any potential Programme to take forward a Regional Authority.

18. The role of the Reform Co-ordinators was discussed, including the current role in supporting the Adoption and Children Act implementation and need for a lead contact in each HSCT. The importance of maintaining strong partnership arrangements with the VCS was also highlighted. Members agreed to proceed with this option, subject to clarification on a number of points raised.

ACTION 07/02: PMO to finalise option 3 to address issues identified and circulate for Board agreement.

Agenda Item 10 – Children's Social Care Outcomes Framework Update

The Chair invited SG to provide an update on the Outcomes Framework. SG advised members that the working group has been established and held its first meeting in December 2025, with a discussion paper shared for comment PB8-1-26. Work has begun to map the four agreed outcomes and associated measures using an OBA approach, with opportunities being explored to align measures with the encompass build and a further update will be provided in June. Members discussed the importance of a clear, well-structured framework to demonstrate impact.

Agenda Item 11 – Programme Communications Update

19. The Chair invited SG to provide an update on Programme communications activity. This update included reference to DS papers from March and June 2025 and progress on a number of agreed tasks to strengthen communication and engagement with children and young people. It was noted that there is currently no dedicated resource for participation and engagement. An Ezine has been drafted and is due to issue shortly. Workstream progress reports will continue to include a section on engagement activity, supported by a central database and a staff engagement template has been produced, which will be updated on a quarterly basis. Work is also progressing on a Social Care Reform website, and a draft communications plan is in development, including a schedule of upcoming events that will be shared with Board members once finalised. PMO will shortly be reaching out to Board members to seek a communication contact point in their respective organisations to distribute the newsletter and other publications / key messages in line with the 'Network of Networks' approach previously tabled and agreed by Programme Board.

Agenda Item 12 – Any Other Business

20. EMcD provided members with an overview of the Partnership Agreement co-designed by Government and the VCS through the Joint Forum, replacing the 2011 Concordat. Members were asked to share the Agreement across their teams and business areas. EMcD advised that workstream 6 had agreed to assist with an exercise led by DoF and DfC to provide case study examples where fair funding principles are being effectively applied and invited members to share any examples.

ACTION 08/02: Members to share Fair Funding case examples with PMO for submission to DoF and DfC.

21. KLW provided an update on the Residential Care Strategic Plan. It was agreed that this could be cleared by correspondence.

ACTION 09/02: KLW to share final draft of plan and PMO to circulate for clearance/approval to Board members.

Agenda Item 13 – Date of Next Meeting

22. Chair confirmed that the next meeting has been scheduled for 17 June 2026 in James House.

ACTIONS ARISING

Open Actions from 17th September 2025 meeting.		
Action	**Owner**	**Detail**
02/09	**PMO**	PMO to follow up with Coordinators on delivery plan.
Actions Arising from 17th February 2026 meeting.		
Action	**Owner**	**Detail**
01/04	**Martina Moore**	MM to share evaluation contact information with DM.
02/04	**PMO**	PMO to circulate the February Health Committee update.
03/04	**Stephen Martin/Donna Kernaghan**	SM to link DK in with YJA participation officer. DK to develop draft implementation plan to be circulated by correspondence. All members to consider how 'Our Pact' can be endorsed in the organisation they represent, with specific reference to the 'asks' set out in the paper.
04/04	**Paul McConville**	PMcC to link in with AM (CSWO) on education involvement in SWWIB.
05/04	**Paul McConville**	PMcC to share Camden Centre for Relational Practice free webinar information with Board members.
06/04	**Board Members/PMO**	Board members to provide final comments on the Strategic Plan to PMO by 24 February 2026.

		PMO to consider including 'Our Pact' in the draft Strategic Plan.
07/04	**PMO**	PMO to finalise option 3 to address issues identified and circulate for Board agreement.
08/04	**Board Members**	Members to share Fair Funding case examples with PMO for submission to DoF and DfC.
09/04	**Kerrylee Weatherall**	KLW to share final draft of plan and PMO to circulate for clearance/approval to Board members.