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

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

Members in attendance
Peter Toogood, Deputy Secretary, SRO - DoH
Eilís McDaniel (EMcD)– DoH
Dawn Shaw (DS) - DoH
Deirdre Mahon (DM) - DoH
Edel McKenna (EMcK) – CCGANI
Gerry Largey (GL) – TUS
Martina Moore (MM) – DoH
Kerry-Lee Weatherall (KW) – BHSCT
Jacinta Linden (JL) – DoH
Stephen Martin (SM) – YJA
Stephen Dallas (SD) – Bytes Project
Marie Louise Sloan (MLS) – South-Eastern HSCT
Maura Dargan (MD) – Northern HSCT
Colm McCafferty (CMcC) – SHSCT
Tracey Reid – NISCC
Jenny Irvine, ARC Healthy Living Centre
Ciara McKillop (CMcK) - SPPG, DoH
Catherine Cassidy (CC) – SPPG DoH
Aine Morrison (AM) - DoH
Caroline Keown (CK) – DoH

Apologies
Lynn Long (LL) RQIA
Deirdre Ward (DW) DE
Michelle Tennyson (MT) Chief AHPO, DoH
Michele Janes (MJ) Barnardo's NI
John McCord (JMcC) DfC
Claire McClelland (CMcC) DE
Heather Stevens (HS) DoH
Emily Roberts (ER) PHA
Caroline Keown (CK) DoH

Non-Members in attendance
Donna Kernaghan (DK), Reform Coordinator WS6 (deputising for MJ)
Stephen McLaughlin (SMcL) – WHSCT (deputising for TC)
Suzanne Cunningham (SC) – RQIA (deputising for LL)
Jenny Kirkwood (JK) – DoH (deputising for MT)
Patricia Nickell (PN) – DE (deputising for Deirdre Ward)
Glenda Davies (GD) – DE (deputising for CMcC)

Shona Graham (SG) – DoH, PMO
Courtney Dawson (CD) - DoH, PMO
Monica McLoughlin (MMcL), Reform Coordinator WS3
Sinead Johnson (SJ) – DoH, PMO

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Introductions

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

Agenda Item 2 – Declarations of Conflict of Interest

2. No conflicts of interest were declared by members.

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

3. The minutes of the 17 February meeting were approved by members as an accurate record and actions recommended for closure [PB2-6-26] were agreed, with one (02/09) remaining open (in relation to work with reform co-ordinators on development of the delivery plan).

4. In relation to the revised Programme Re-Structure paper [PB3-6-26] MM gave an update on the proposed two new Implementation Groups which will be dependent on consideration of the recommendations in the Residential and Foster Care Strategic Plans and decisions on which recommendations can be progressed and when, accepting that some phasing will be required given resource challenges.

5. The frequency of Programme Board meetings was raised by the Chair. It was proposed that four times a year would reduce to three, this was agreed by Members.

6. **Action 01/06:** PMO will be in touch with diary dates for Programme Board meetings.

Agenda Item 4 – Chair's Update

7. The Chair provided an update on the ongoing work relating to the Regional Children and Families Authority. Work to identify the steps necessary to set up an Authority has concluded and advice has been provided to the Health and Justice Ministers. A final decision is pending.

8. **Action: 02/06** Chair will update the Board once the decision on the Children and Families Authority is known.

9. The chair referred members to the Recommendations Update Paper [PB5-6-2026] which informs the regular updates on progress to the Health Committee. Following discussion on a number of the recommendations, in particular around workforce and private care provision, it was agreed to reconsider the position on closure of some recommendations and return to members for comment.

10. **Action 03/06**: PMO to revise and re-circulate Recommendations Update Paper [PB5-6-2026] to members for consideration.

Agenda Item 5 – Workstream 3 Report & Regional Residential Care Plan

11. KW gave an update on Workstream 3 [PB5-6-26] and the draft Strategic Plan for Residential Care Services which had been circulated to Programme Board members for consideration of the recommendations it contains. KW provided an overview of the Strategic Plan including needs and costing analysis on placement sufficiency. It was noted that the strategic plan was informed by thorough consultation and a robust evidence base and KW pressed for the maintainence of the evidence base to inform future commissioning and asked members to consider how to progress recommendations in the Plan to ensure that momentum is maintained. There was discussion on provision of care by the private sector and request that the wording of action 1.5 be re-visited to make clear that this is an interim proposal. CMcK advised that next steps will be to formulate a workplan. The Chair thanked KW and MMcL for their work on the Strategic Plan and invited any further comments to be fed back through the PMO.

    Action 04/06: KW / MMcL to review wording of action 1.5 in the Residential Care Strategic Plan.
    Action 05/06: Further comments on the draft Strategic Plan to be provided to PMO.

Agenda Item 6 – Strategic Plan for the Reform of Children's Social Care Services and Outcomes Paper

12. SG provided an update on the Reforming Children's Social Care in NI 5 Year Strategic Plan which was signed off at the February meeting subject to a small number of amendments. These amendments have been made, and work is on-going to develop the associated delivery plans.

13. The Outcomes Working Group has met 3 times since February's Programme Board to further define the population covered by the proposed Children's Social Care Outcomes Framework; the overarching outcomes descriptors; and to identify measures under each outcome.

14. Next steps will be to develop a draft delivery plan and draft Outcomes Framework for the Board's consideration.

Agenda Item 7 – Regional Foster Care Strategic Plan

15. CMcC gave an overview of the Strategic Plan for Fostering Recruitment and Retention noting that the vast majority of children looked after are in foster care and that delivering

in this area can reduce pressures for residential care. CMcC highlighted the opportunity the draft Plan presents for a regional approach to recruitment and retention system with a strong focus on retention and support. The need to consider capital solutions was also referenced as was the increased spend on foster care provided through independent fostering agencies. Members were asked to note the plan and feedback any comments via the PMO. CMcC also drew members attention to the Fostering Friendly Policy; members were asked to consider how this could be introduced within member organisations.

16. The Chair thanked CMcC and his colleagues for their work.

17. **Action 06/06**: Further comments on the draft Foster Care Strategic Plan to be provided through the PMO.
18. **Action 07/06**: Members to consider adopting a Fostering Friendly Policy within their organisations.

Agenda Item 8 – Together for Families Implementation Update

19. EMcD gave members an update on Together for Families. Members were informed that work is on-going to establish the implementation team. JL and DM are in place as Co-Directors of Together for Families and Natasha Duddy will start her role as Programme Manager of the programme in July.

20. Members were provided with an update on the four core components of the Model. JL is delivering a series of workshops relating to Family Support Hubs to promote harmonisation across the Hubs.

21. The main elements for the Enhanced Family Support Service (EFSS) have now been agreed. There will be three EFSS Teams in each HSCT area and this service will be funded by way of grant.

22. There has been a number of helpful workshops with Trusts on the Intensive Family Support Service. We now have agreed non-negotiables for the service and Trusts have submitted proposals which are to be considered by the Team.

23. What was previously named the Dynamic Framework, is now the Family Support Open List. The Open list will be an agreed menu of services & service providers that can be accessed across the model.

24. Work is also on-going to develop governance structures, this includes a Steering Group, a Programme Board, Regional and Local Partnership Boards and Multi-Agency Panels.

25. A formal launch for Together for Families is scheduled on September 10th. Members have been asked to keep this date in their diaries.

26. Work has also been on-going to set up the evaluation for Together for Families, as well as work on branding and comms. There is now page on the Departmental website for

Together for Families, a letter issued to MLAs informing them of the model and the Team also presented on Together for Families for the All Party Group on Children and Young People.

Agenda Item 9 – 'Our Pact' Update

27. DK gave a short update on the 'Our Pact' implementation plan which was developed as agreed at the previous Board meeting and highlighted the resources that had been developed and work underway and planned until December to raise awareness and commence implementation. Members agreed that increased visibility on Our Pact should be progressed. Members participated in a photo with a new Foamex 'Our Pact' sign at the end of the meeting.

Agenda Item 10 – Social Care Workforce & Social Work Workforce Update

28. AM provided an update on developments relating to the social care and social work workforces, highlighting that for the first time in significant time period, there will a small surplus of newly qualified social workers in this academic year. The draft 10 year plan to recruit, support and retain staff has gone to HSC Trust ADs for comment.

29. **Action 08/06**: The Safer Staffing in Social Work Guidance paper will be circulated by PMO.

Agenda Item 11 – AOB

30. A formal launch for Together for Families is scheduled on September 10th. This is the date of the next Programme Board. Members have been asked to keep this date in their diaries and PMO will issue a new date for Programme Board in October or November.

ACTIONS ARISING

Open Actions from 17th June 2026 meeting.		
Action	**Owner**	**Detail**
01/06	**PMO**	Issue diary dates for PB meetings
02/06	**PMO**	Chair will update the Board once the decision on the Children and Families Authority is known.
03/06	**PMO**	PMO to revise and re-circulate Recommendations Update Paper [PB5-6-2026] to members for consideration.
04/06	**Kerry-Lee Weatherall/Monica McLaughlin**	To review wording of action 1.5 in the Residential Strategic Plan.
05/06	**PMO**	Further comments on the draft Strategic Plan to be provided to PMO.

06/06	**PMO**	Further comments on the draft Foster Care Strategic Plan to be provided through the PMO.
07/06	**Board Members/PMO**	Members to consider adopting a Fostering Friendly Policy within their organisations.
08/06	**PMO**	The Safer Staffing in Social Work Guidance paper will be circulated by PMO.
Actions Outstanding from 17th February 2026 meeting.		
Action	**Owner**	**Detail**
02/09	**PMO**	PMO to follow up with Coordinators on delivery plan.