BSO 188/2026

BUSINESS SERVICES ORGANISATION

Minutes of Proceedings

The one hundred and eighty eighth meeting of the Board of the Business Services Organisation was held on Thursday 22 January 2026 at 10.00am in the Boardroom, BSO HQ, 2 Franklin Street, Belfast, BT2 8DQ.

Present:

Mrs Sharon O'Connor (Chair)

Mr Mark Lowry
Mr Linus McLaughlin
Mr Maynard Mawhinney
Mr Peter Russell
Mr Alan Todd
Mr Fred Smyth
Mr Joe Stewart

Mrs Karen Bailey (Chief Executive)
Mrs Paula Smyth (Director of People & Place)
Ms Linda O Hare (Interim Director of Ops)

In Attendance:

Mr Ben Doran (Director of Digital)
Mrs Karen Hunter (Director, SP&CE)
Mr Thomas McCaffrey (Head of Communications)
Mrs Emma Thompson and Mrs Hannah Francis (AD Finance)
Miss Amanda Mills (Board Secretary)

At the outset of the meeting the Chair welcomed all members to the meeting and invited each member to introduce themselves and provide a brief professional overview.

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Bernie McCrory, Simon McGrattan and Lesley Young.

2. **Conflicts of Interest Declarations**

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

3. **Minutes of BSO Board Meeting held on 27 November 2025**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. **Action Template – Paper BSO 01/2026 refers**

Members noted the contents of the Board Action Template which were confirmed as closed. Members were reminded of the mandatory Board Cyber Security Resilience exercise scheduled to take place on 26 February 2026. The meeting to facilitate the official handover of the

Disability/Equality Champion role to Mr Mawhinney has now been confirmed to take place on 12 February 2026.

5. **Chairs Business**

The Chair conveyed a message from Julie Erskine, outgoing Chair to members. The significant contribution to the BSO from Julie was recognised and the Chair on behalf of the Board congratulated both Julie Erskine and Eilish Meehan, Directorate of Digital, on being awarded an MBE in the Kings 2026 Honours List.

Members were informed that Paula Smyth, Director of People & Place has decided to retire on 31 March 2026.

The Chair held meetings with NED colleagues in January and discussed the current vacancies in the Business and Development Committee (BaDC) and Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) following the departure of Robert Bannon, Sean McKeever and Professor Dorothy Whittington. The Chair advised that it was decided that NEDs should take the opportunity to participate in both committees when they meet in February 2026 (GAC 17th and BaDC 18th February) to give them a flavour of the work of committees and thereafter a decision will be confirmed on membership. The Chair is scheduled to meet with Executive Directors during the month of February to learn more about the organisation. Members were briefed on the key issues discussed at the Chairs meeting with the Permanent Secretary on 16 January 2026 which included the Reset Plan, where BSO is referred to throughout the document.

The new NEDs were reminded of the Mandatory Governance and Accountability Seminar scheduled to take place on Monday 9 March 2026.

Members noted the Chair's Monthly Report to the Board.

6. **Chief Executive's Report - Paper BSO 02/2026 refers**

The Chief Executive presented her monthly report to the Board which included details of key meetings attended during December 2025 and January 2026

The Chief Executive referred to her introductory session with the new Board members in December 2025 and advised that a programme of workshops and service-area visits would be arranged during 2026/27 financial year. She highlighted significant organisational challenges for 2026, particularly the Equip Programme and the Evolve Programme. Updates were provided on the Systems Financial Management Group (SFMG), HSC Senior Leadership Group (SLG) which is the mechanism for taking forward the Reset Plan and briefed members on discussions at the most recent meeting on the financial pressures for HSC. The AFC Pay Award for 2025/26 is scheduled for February 2026. The All Ireland Chief Executive Group continue to meet on a quarterly basis and the Chief Executive has been paired with the Chief Technology and Transformation Officer (CTTO) Damien McCallion for shared learning.

Mr Smyth suggested that the Board would appreciate a dedicated session on the challenges and opportunities for the organisation, and to that end the Chair proposed a Board horizon-scanning workshop to be organised in the Autumn.

Members noted the Chief Executive's monthly report to the Board.

7. **Signatories for New HSC Central Euro Bank Account – Paper BSO 03/2026 refers**

Members considered and approved the recommendation that the Chair and Chief Executive be designated as signatories for the new HSC Central Euro Bank Account in preparation for the Equip Programme.

8. **Finance Agenda Items**

8.1 Year End Break Even Position – Paper BSO 04/2026 refers

Emma Thompson (AD Finance) provided an update to member on year-end break-even assumptions noting funding pressures relating to the AFC Award and PPE stock valuation which DoH have confirmed they are unable to fund. It was noted that the Chief Executive and Director of Finance are meeting with Chris Matthews, DOH in mid-February to discuss the year end position and the stock provision and members will receive a further update on this matter at the February Board meeting.

The briefing paper on the year-end break-even position was noted by members.

8.2 **Finance Report – Month 9 – Paper BSO 05/2026 refers**

Emma Thompson (AD Finance) presented paper BSO 05/2026; a finance report for the nine month period ending 31 December 2025. The summary financial position shows the reported income and expenditure position for the period, excluding the impact of the pay award deficit, with an overall surplus reported for this period and at this stage in the year a break- even position is forecast for year end. Members were also advised that the capital and revenue positions remain on target.

Mr Smyth referred to the DOH directive on savings scenarios and the Chief Executive stated that ELT are currently working through this matter and the Board will be briefed at a later date.

The Finance report for month 9 was noted by members.

9. **Update on Management of PPE and Audit Qualification – Paper BSO 06/2026 refers**

The Interim Director of Operations provided an update on the Management of PPE and Audit Qualification. It was noted engagement continues with DoH regarding PPE related stock provisions and the associated risks as alluded to under agenda item 8.1.

Members noted the position.

10. **Quarterly Board Performance Dashboard (Quarter 3- 31 December 2025) - Paper BSO 07/2026 refers**

The Director of SP&CE presented the Q3 Performance Dashboard, drawing attention to red-rated KPIs relating to Legal Services and increased absence rates during the winter period which she assured members the BSO Absence team are managing pro-actively. It was noted that the Amber rag rated payroll issue, as a result of a systems issue, has now been resolved.

A review of KPIs will be undertaken in the new financial year and a presentation will be made to BaDC and the Board.

Members noted that Quarterly Board Performance Dashboard for Quarter 3.

11. **Performance against Business Planning (PaBP) - Quarter 3 Report – Paper BSO 08/2026 refers**

The Director of SP&CE briefed members on progress against the three-year corporate plan, with 64% of objectives expected to be completed by year-end. Two outstanding objectives relating to KPIs and Business Planning will transfer to 2026-27 financial year and members due to the significant focus on the BSO Realignment Project in 2025/26.

It was noted that the Annual Business Plan for 2026/27 will be presented to the February Board which will reflect the challenges to the BSO. A lengthy discussion ensued regarding the organisational challenges to BSO, its future strategy and opportunities for innovation whilst acknowledging legislative constraints.

Members noted the PaBP for Quarter 3.

12. **Appointment of New Optometry Northern Ireland (ONI) Representative to BSO Ophthalmic Committee – Pape BSO 09/2026 refers**

The Interim Director of Operations presented paper BSO 09/2026 advising on the appointment of a new representative to the BSO Ophthalmic Committee. Mr Smyth raised concern on the Board accountability process for FPS statutory committees in that the Board has no responsibility for these committees. Members noted the concern raised and the Interim Director of Ops agreed to follow up on this matter.

Members noted the appointment of a new member to the BSO Ophthalmic Committee.

POST MEETING NOTE: The Interim Director of Operations has confirmed that BSO Board is asked to note changes to this committee. Going forward the Board can be assured that new representatives of these committees are nominated by the profession, in this case Ophthalmology, or selected via a robust recruitment process coordinated by BSO FPS in support of Committee Chairs, with Committee Chairs being appointed by Department of Health, following an interview process, to which BSO FPS are panel members.

13. **Declaration and Register of Members' Interests 2025/26 – Paper BSO 10/2026 refers**

The Chair asked members to review their declarations of interests in detail and particularly those relevant to the HSC Leadership Centre. Any changes should be notified to the Board Secretary.

Members noted the Declaration and Register of Members' Interests for 2025/26.

14. **AOB**

The Chief Executive informed members that the Head of Counter Fraud is on sick leave following a serious accident; The Interim Director of Operations is keeping in contact with her and alerted members that temporary backfill arrangements may be required due to ongoing pressures in the service area. A business case has been submitted to the DOH, as commissioners of the Counter Fraud service due to the significant increase in work.

15. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the BSO Board will take place on Thursday 26 February 2026 at 10.00am in BSO HQ.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

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Chair

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Chief Executive

Date ___________________________