

BUSINESS SERVICES ORGANISATION**Minutes of Proceedings**

The one hundred and ninetieth meeting of the Board of the Business Services Organisation was held on Thursday 26 March 2026 at 10.00am in the Boardroom, BSO HQ, 2 Franklin Street, Belfast, BT2 8DQ.

Present:

Sharon O'Connor (Chair)

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

Mrs Karen Bailey (Chief Executive)
Mr Simon McGrattan (DoF)
Mrs Paula Smyth (Director of People & Place)
Miss Linda O Hare (Interim Director of Ops)

In Attendance:

Mr Ben Doran (Director of Digital)
Mrs Karen Hunter (Director, SP&CE)
Mr Robin Arbuthnot (Incoming Interim Director of People & Place)
Miss Amanda Mills (Board Secretary)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Lesley Young.

2. Conflicts of Interest Declarations

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

3. Minutes of BSO Board Meeting held on 26 February 2026

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2026 were considered by members.

Mr Smyth referred to Minute 8.1 "Year End Break Even Position" and queried the reason for this agenda item being stood down and no longer a substantive Board agenda item. The DoF explained the rationale for this decision in that BSO received an allocation for the AFC pay award which therefore negates the impact on BSO to Breakeven. In addition, following confirmation from DoH that there was no further funding available to increase the BSO stock provision, this information would be posted in the financial statements and therefore would leave BSO in the same position as in 2024/2025 resulting in an audit qualification in stock valuation.

It was agreed that a footnote would be added to Minute 8.1 to reflect the rationale and for added clarity.

To that end the minutes of the Board meeting held on 26 February 2026 were approved subject to the amendment to minute 8.1.

4. Chairs Business

The Chair informed members that today would be Paula Smyth's final Board meeting and on behalf of the Board wished to acknowledge the value and expertise Paula has brought to the organisation.

Following the recruitment exercise on 26 February 2026 Robin Arbuthnot has been appointed as Interim Director of People & Place. Members were advised that the recruitment process for the permanent post is scheduled to take place in the Autumn.

Members were reminded that the Board workshop on Digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) will take place after today's Board meeting.

The Chair referred to the recent visit by the Permanent Secretary to PALs, Boucher Crescent site which was very successful. From the Chairs perspective the visit helped her understand this key service area and the connections and support to Trusts and the wider general public. She suggested to members to hold some Board meetings in BSO sites which would allow members to meet staff and gain further knowledge about the vast range of services BSO delivers.

Discussion ensued around the Leadership and Governance Conference which took place on 25 March 2026 and was attended by a number of NEDs and the Director of SP&CE. It was suggested that BSO should consider making a presentation to next year's conference on how BSO can contribute to the transformation of HSC. The Chair advised that the contact point for the conference is Colin Coffey, Chair of PHA.

5. Chief Executive's Report - Paper BSO 22/2026 refers

The Chief Executive presented her monthly report to the Board which included details of key meetings attended during March 2026.

In particular she was delighted to announce that two members of BSO staff were successful in winning an award at the Women in Business Awards ceremony which took place on 12 March 2026. Melissa Cochrane, Head of Programme Delivery, won the Transformational Leader of the Year Award and Claire Hamilton, Head of BSO Interpreting Service, won the Advancing Diversity and Inclusion Champion Award.

The LIMs Programme (Regional HSC Laboratory Information Management System) was also successful in winning the transformational project at the of the year at the Health Service Journal Awards ceremony in London.

Linda O Hare made a presentation to the Senior Finance Management Group (SFMG) on a procurement benchmarking project which should incur potential spend reductions across HSC. An action plan is being developed by BSO PaLS, so as the opportunities identified can be progressed with HSC Trusts. BSO will fund a small team in the first instance to take forward this cost savings initiative, and the once Trusts see the benefits of this project, they will fund in the next financial year. This was agreed with HSC Trusts at the recent Procurement and Supply Chain Partnership Board (PSCPB).

The Chief Executive wished to place on record the work undertaken on the Financial Reset Programme which in turn translated into the BSO Savings Plan by Simon McGrattan. DOH has welcomed BSO's approach to the savings plan. The DoF briefed members on the approach BSO has taken to achieve the savings targets and explained the mechanism of this approach. It was noted that BSO has also suggested some invest to save initiatives however these are dependent on the Trusts working with BSO to achieve these savings. It was noted that BSO is in the position to resolve a number of issues which sometimes would only incur a small level of investment.

Following submission of BSO's Annual Business Plan for 2025/26 DoH made a number of comments; these were reviewed by ELT and submitted to the Board. The revised Business Plan will be resubmitted to DoH on Board approval.

The Chief Executive attended the Oracle AI World Tour Conference in London along with a number of Equip stakeholders. At the Conference she had the opportunity to meet with a number of key contacts and an organisation who recently implemented Equip.

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

6. Approval Items

6.1 Statutory Climate Change Public Body Reporting (DAERA) – Climate Adaptation – Paper BSO 23/2026 refers

The Director of SP&CE presented BSO's Climate Adaptation Report which is due for submission to DAERA by 31 March 2026. It was noted that this is a statutory requirement. Discussion ensued regarding the assurance process for this matter and it was agreed that quarterly progress reports should be submitted to BaDC rather than GAC and subsequently reported to the Board via the Chair of BaDC report of meeting.

The BSO's Statutory Climate Adaptation Report was approved by members for onward transmission to DAERA.

7. Finance Agenda Items

7.1 Finance Report – Month 11 – Paper BSO 24/2026 refers

The DoF presented paper BSO 24/2026; a finance report for the eleven month period ending 28 February 2026. The summary financial position shows the reported income and expenditure position for the period, excluding the impact of the pay award deficit, with a small 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.

Members were reminded of the Board workshop on the financial position is scheduled to take place on 23 April with the main objective in helping the Board gain a better understanding of the BSO's financial position.

DoF advised members that the BSO Financial Strategy 2026/27 is scheduled to be presented to the Board in May.

The Finance report for month 11 was noted by members.

8. Office of Research Ethics NI (OREC NI) Executive Summary for Financial Year 2024-25 for OREC NI and HSC Research Ethics Committees (RECs) A&B (HSC REC A and HSC REC B) Annual Report – Paper BSO 25/2026 refers

Dr Karen Beattie, Head of OREC NI presented an overview on the performance, accreditation process and the implications for OREC NI of the new clinical trial regulations which come into force in April 2026.

Members noted the Executive Summary for Financial Year 2024-25 for OREC NI and Health and Social Care RECs A&B Annual Report.

9. AOB

9.1 BSO Disability Awareness Day

Mr Mawhinney briefed members on the BSO Disability Awareness session on Chest Heart and Stroke Conditions which was held on Tuesday 24 March 2026. The session was well attended by staff and he wished to congratulate BSO on holding such a worthwhile event.

9.2 Preparation for Potential Impact of Middle East Conflict

BSO has written to DOH setting out the actions being taken in preparation for the potential impact of the escalating Middle East Conflict. Following a Cyber incident on Stryker, one of the main suppliers of clinical goods, BSO has raised a corporate risk as well as strengthening the Service Area risks, especially in Digital and PaLS Service areas.

It was agreed that the Board should be kept posted on this matter.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the BSO Board will take place on Thursday 23 April 2026 at 10.00am in BSO HQ.

A Board workshop on the financial position is scheduled to take place following the Board meeting that day.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Chair

Chief Executive

Date _____