BSO 195/2026

BUSINESS SERVICES ORGANISATION

Minutes of Proceedings

The one hundred and ninety fifth meeting of the Board of the Business Services Organisation was held on Thursday 24 September 2026 at 10.00am in the Boardroom, BSO HQ, 2 Franklin Street, Belfast, BT2 8DQ.

Present:

Sharon O'Connor (Chair)

Mrs Maureen Brunt
Mr Mark Lowry
Mrs Bernie McCrory
Mr Linus McLaughlin
Mr Maynard Mawhinney
Mr Peter Russell
Mr Alan Todd

Mrs Karen Bailey (Chief Executive)
Mr Simon McGrattan (DoF)
Mr Robin Arbuthnot (Interim Director of People & Place)

In Attendance:

Mr Ben Doran (Director of Digital)
Mrs Karen Hunter (Director of Strategic Planning & Customer Engagement)
Miss June Turkington (Chief Legal Adviser) deputising for Lesley Young, Director of Operations
Miss Amanda Mills (Board Secretary)

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Lesley Young and Joe Stewart.

2. **Conflicts of Interest Declarations**

At the outset Maureen Brunt advised the Board that she holds a role as an Equality Commissioner however it was noted that no conflict required withdrawal from agenda item Agenda item 7.2 "BSO Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2025-26".

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

3. **Minutes of BSO Board Meeting held on 27 August 2026**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 August 2026 were agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings and approved by the Board.

4. **Action Template – Paper BSO 65/2026 refers**

Members noted the contents of the Board Action Template and the forthcoming due dates.

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5. **Chairs Business**

The Chair welcomed Maureen Brunt to the Board and noted her interest in joining the Business and Development Committee (BaDC). Members were reminded that a business planning workshop would take place later that day, although it was noted that a number of members were unable to remain for the full session.

The Board was advised that Alan Todd had been appointed Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC). The Chair offered congratulations to Mr Todd and conveyed her best wishes in the role.

The Chair reported that HSC and NICON had engaged an independent consultant, Rob Webster, to review the overall health system, innovation and future direction; HSC Chairs had been briefed on the terms of reference. She also advised that a separate review relating to Board members development is being undertaken by Eileen Mullan, Chair of Southern Trust and Heather Moorhead from Nicon. The Chair has raised this matter with the Department of Health Sponsor Branch reminding them that the Leadership Centre already provides a programme on Board development.

The Chair and Chief Executive had attended the BSO year-end Accountability Meeting on 8 September 2026, which she described as constructive and positive; the Chief Executive will expand on the key issues raised at the meeting under her CX Report.

The Permanent Secretary's visit to BSO Digital Directorate was also reported as a successful event. In addition, the Chair had participated in a workshop reviewing the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) work on the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Business Case. The Chair opened the "Meet the Buyer" event on 22 September 2026 and commended BSO staff for the organisation of this event; in particular she was struck by the wide range of suppliers who attended.

The Chair concluded by noting that the overall financial position continues to prove very challenging.

Members noted the Chairs business.

6. **Chief Executive's Report - Paper BSO 66/2026 refers**

The Chief Executive presented her monthly report to the Board.

The Chief Executive referred to the year-end Accountability Meeting with the Permanent Secretary and briefed members on key issues discussed. Once BSO is in receipt of the formal agreed minutes they will be circulated to Board members. The Permanent Secretary had recognised BSO's achievements, particularly in innovation and acknowledged the support provided by BSO in relation to cyber security and the procurement benchmarking work reported to the Committee in Common (CIC) group. The meeting also addressed some of the digital challenges being experienced, transformation funding and working-capital requirements. The Year end Assurance Statement was raised and the differing positions of DoH and the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) regarding PPE and the CX thanked DoH for their correspondence which formally set out their view and position regarding this matter.

The Chief Executive advised that discussion had also covered funding received for grants relating to the Honest Broker Service (HBS) in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and

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NITRE. In answer to a question from Maynard Mawhinney, the Director of Finance outlined the governance route to take forward innovation projects; these included briefings to HSC Directors of Finance. It was also reported that the Directorate of People & Place have initiated a project to develop strategic shared-services workforce measures, including recruitment agency reduction which will support savings across Trusts.

The Chair suggested that members should take the opportunity at this afternoon's Board workshop to review the organisational approach and the risks associated with BSO assuming responsibility for innovation projects and emphasised the need for Department of Health (DOH) support, particularly in relation to risk. The Chief Executive considered that the current environment allowed BSO to bring forward opportunities for DoH consideration and noted recognition that BSO was taking a more active system role.

The Equip programme has now entered its final cutover planning period and advised that work could continue only up to 1 December 2026. She assured members that the work to get Release 1 over the line will continue to remain a central organisational priority in the run up to go live. The Board was assured that, while implementation of a major system was complex, a structured plan was in place to support go-live.

The Chief Executive attended a lunchtime briefing from Jayne Brady, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, on the financial outlook, which was described as very challenging.

Work is commencing on the 2027-28 annual business plan which is due to be submitted to the Department of Health in early 2027 and stressed the importance of having Board involvement.

Mark Lowry commended the Strategy, Planning and Corporate Engagement team for developing the KPI Framework to support innovation projects. The KPI Framework had been discussed at the BaDC meeting on 21 September 2026.

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

7. Approval Items

7.1 Bank of Ireland Bank Mandate Authorisation – Paper BSO 67/2026 refers

The Director of Finance sought approval to amend the authorised personnel listed in Appendix B of the Bank of Ireland mandate so that the required banking activity could continue.

The Board approved the amendment to the Bank of Ireland mandate. The revised mandate will be signed by the Chief Executive and will be forwarded to the Bank of Ireland.

7.2 BSO Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission for 2025-26 – Paper BSO 68/2026 refers

The Interim Director of People & Place presented the mandatory statutory return to the Equality Commission and highlighted ongoing work. This included development by the Leadership Centre of an e-learning package on neurodiversity and work to support staff who had come to Northern Ireland to progress into leadership roles. Members also noted the significant number of languages supported by Regional Interpreting Services and the increasing demand for that service in enabling equitable access to healthcare across Northern Ireland.

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Linus McLaughlin queried whether the screening of 12 policies was sufficient, particularly given the number of policies due for renewal. The substantial work undertaken by the Equality Unit in preparing the return was acknowledged. In his role as Disability Champion, Maynard Mawhinney formally recognised the work completed and recommended approval. Mark Lowry also commended the report, and the Chair asked that the Board's appreciation be conveyed to the BSO's Equality Team.

The Board approved the BSO Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission for 2025-26.

8. **Finance Report – Month 5 – Paper BSO 69/2026 refers**

The Director of Finance (DoF) presented the Month 5 Finance Report for noting. The mid-year review would be undertaken in Month 6 and its outcome will be reported to the October Board meeting. The principal revenue risk remained delivery of HSC breakeven. Members were briefed on the five-stage model for identifying savings and confirmed that BSO continues to support clients in securing value for money while maintaining transparency with customers.

The Board noted the Month 5 Finance Report and that the mid-year review would be presented to the October Board.

9. **Update on Management of PPE & Audit Qualification – Paper BSO 70/2026 refers**

The Director of Finance and Chief Legal Adviser updated the Board on the continuing management of PPE and the associated audit qualification. The Department of Health was aware that the position remained similar to the previous year. Progress depended substantially on the BSO business case submitted to DoH. It was noted that the position would remain under continual review throughout 2026-27 as stock reduced and planned disposal and write-off activity progressed.

In answer to a question from Bernie McCrory as to whether stock had been donated to Ukraine, the DoF confirmed that donations had been made initially, however any further action required a UK-level decision. The Chair noted that Department of Health budget cover remained the principal constraint however was assured that BSO would continue to identify opportunities to reduce exposure. Members also noted the need to resolve the warehouse position before the lease expired in September 2027.

The Board noted the update and the continuing review of the funding requirement, stock reduction, disposal and write-off activity.

10. **Report of Business and Development Committee (BaDC) meeting held on 21 September 2026 – Paper BSO 71/2026 refers**

The Chair of BaDC briefed members on the key issues considered at the BaDC meeting held on 21 September 2026.

Mark Lowry, Chair of BaDC reported on the key issues considered at an extraordinary meeting held on 21 September 2026 to principally to review the KPI Framework. The Framework comprised seven themes and was intended to provide the Board with meaningful organisational metrics. The Committee had also discussed creation of an Innovation Hub and the outworkings of this exercise will be presented to the October Board meeting.

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The revised Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2026-2029 was presented to BaDC where it was recommended that it be presented to the September Board for formal ratification (**Appendix B refers**).

To that end the Board approved the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

The Committee also reviewed the BSO Digital Report for 2025-26 which highlighted the progress within BSO's Digital Directorate, particularly around the area of cyber resilience, which members agreed was reassuring.

The BaDC minutes of the meeting held on 19 August 2026 were noted by the Board (**Appendix A refers)**

11. **Updated Declaration and Register of Members' Interests – Paper BSO 72/2026 refers**

Members noted the revised Declaration and Register of Members' interests for 2026/27 and were reminded that any changes should be notified to the Board Secretary.

12. **Any other Business**

There was no Any other Business raised by members.

13. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the BSO Board will take place on Thursday 22 October 2026 at 10.00am in the Conference Room, Rosewood Villa, 73 Loughgall Road, Armagh, BT71 7PR.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

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Chair

_____
Chief Executive

Date _____

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