

NICS Board Meeting

Executive Room, Stormont Castle

Tuesday 27 January 2026 @ 9:30am

Minutes

Board Members

Jayne Brady, Chair (HoCS)
Louise Crilly (LC)
Neil Gibson (NG)
Patrick Magee (NEM)
Declan McGeown (DMcG)
Frances Ruane (NEM) (Chair)
Hugh Widdis

Ronnie Armour (RA)
Mike Farrar (MF)
Katrina Godfrey (KG)
David Malcolm (DM)
Laura McKeaveney (NEM)
Ian Snowden

In attendance in an observing capacity

Moira Doherty (MD)
Grainia Long (GL) *from 11am onwards*
Emer Morelli (EM)

Scott Wilson (SW) & Conor McCrory (CMcC) *(Item 4 only)*
Paul Duffy (PD) *(Item 6 only)*
Prof Helen McCarthy (HMcC) *(from 11am onwards)*

Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)
Jayne Byrne (Secretariat)

(1) Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

HoCS welcomed Board members and introduced DMcG interim Permanent Secretary for Infrastructure, and Emer Morelli and Moira Doherty attending the meeting as observers in advance of official confirmation of their Permanent Secretary appointments.

HOCS advised this would be the last Board meeting for RA as he retires at the end of January 2026 and extended sincere thanks to RA for his contribution to the NICS Board and to NICS.

No apologies received. HoCS advised that RA needed to leave the Board meeting at 12:00pm. There were no declarations of interest.

(2) Draft Minutes and Action Points from 25 November 2025

PM provided a number of amendments to the draft minutes.

Action: HoCS Office

Action Points from the minutes of 25 November 2025

Agenda item	Actions	Responsible officer	Status
(2) Minutes / actions	Minutes – HoCS Office to publish minutes.	HoCS office	Complete
(4) ISNI Committee	Meeting to be arranged for Committee Chairs and SROs to discuss sequencing of Committee reporting to the Board.	HoCS Office	Meeting has taken place. An update to be provided to Board by correspondence.
	SW to draft two letters to Accounting Officers to request data input to DataMAP before Christmas and second to provide details of projects.	S Wilson	Complete
	Perm Secs to ensure list of SROs is up-to date.	Perm Secs	Complete
(5) People Committee	NG to circulate people hub demo when available.	N Gibson	Complete
(6) Review of NICS Board	BH to bring update paper to future Board.	B Henderson	Ongoing
(7.2) Revised Procurement Policy Note	Perm Sec colleagues to provide any comments to CPD Director by COP 26 November.	Perm Secs	Complete

(3) Matters Arising – there were no matters arising.

(4) ISNI Committee

@ 9.30am SW and CMcC joined the meeting for this item only

4.1 PM provided a verbal update on the work of the ISNI Committee. There were no changes in terms of the RAG status of key actions since the last meeting and mixed progress on uploading project information to DataMAP to date was noted.

- 4.2 The Board considered the Enabling Action Highlight Report and provided comments, feedback and endorsement of the progress. It was noted that 4 of the enabling actions remain amber, 3, 6, 7 and 11.

FR noted the target of 80% renewable energy by 2030 and the need to consider the findings of the report into the Iberian blackout. IS noted the report had been considered and the need to maintain a certain level of fossil fuels at present to support the system and that technological solutions were in development. IS also noted that data centre power consumption is an issue.

The Board considered the progress of data collection for the 39 PAC reported projects in DataMAP. There are currently gaps in the data requested despite the scope being reduced as agreed with the Board in November. The Board agreed to communicate to all SROs to request outstanding data gaps are filled as a matter of urgency and by 12 February 2026 at the latest. All data to be signed off by the relevant SRO.

4.3 End to End Review Report of the Delivery Model for Education Capital Investment

SW and CMcC provided an overview of the Report which covered the Review's objectives and methodology, the format of the Action Plan, delivery issues and proposed mitigations. SW noted that DE are currently considering the report for factual accuracy. CMcC outlined the initial analysis and findings. NG commented that a report on procurement has been produced by an Expert Procurement Panel and is currently being considered.

The Board considered the findings of the report and noted the approach is intended to be replicated across other departments with a view to developing a consistent approach to capital investment in the longer term. It was noted that a review of the DoH model for capital investment is the next planned review.

Action:

- Communication to issue to SROs requesting outstanding data to be returned by 12 February 2026 at the latest. All data to be signed off by the relevant SRO.

@ 10:07 SW & CMcC left the meeting

(5) People Committee

- 5.1 LMCK provided a verbal update on the Committee meeting which took place on 12 January 2026. The supporting report was noted by the Board.
- 5.2 The update noted the establishment of the People Strategy Programme Board which finalises the implementation of the governance and delivery frameworks approved by the NICS Board in July 2025. The Board noted the importance of ensuring the People Strategy progression is not viewed in isolation from day to day operations and of embedding the strategy across the system in all

management interactions. LMck stressed the criticality of effective communications and noted the need to secure communications resources and that options for this were currently being explored.

5.3 Job Family and Professions Framework

LMck drew the Board's attention to recent all staff comms on the Job Families and Professions Framework, a major transformation initiative within the People Strategy, and the importance of optimising reach and consistency of the messaging to amplify reach and staff understanding. LMck asked Permanent Secretaries to amplify the message from HOCS (copy attached at Annex A), and signpost staff to the related intranet article within their departments. P&OD staff available if there are any questions.

5.4 Pay & Reward strategy

There was a discussion on the opportunity for NICS to explain the total value proposition that each NICS member of staff benefits from and how to make total rewards transparent and understandable beyond individual salary. This would help clarify and set out the competitiveness of the package offered by NICS.

5.5 NIAO Report

NG provided an update on the NIAO published report - *Leading and Resourcing the NICS – A follow-up report to Capacity and Capability in the Northern Ireland Civil Service* today which was published on 27 January 2026 – day of the Board meeting.

The headline findings were set out in a report circulated to the Board in advance of the meeting.

HoCS thanked NG and his team for all the hard work engaging with the NIAO to inform this report. It was noted the people strategy will address many issues raised leveraging the efforts of collective leadership at the NICS Board and leaders across the service.

There was a discussion around the need for both internal and external comms to align with delivery of the People Strategy. The Board recognise the volume of work taken forward every day by staff and the everyday contributions of the people who make up the NICS.

Action:

- Board members to bring staff's attention to the email from HoCS to all staff in relation to the development of Job Families and Professions framing the work in the context of the people strategy. Appendix A refers.

@ 10:40 Paul Duffy joined the meeting

(6) Integr8 Update

PD delivered a presentation on the current progress with the Integr8 Programme. The presentation covered the key strategic benefits, the team and partners, governance structure, the programme dashboard, the go-live timeline, organisational design and the key risks/issues for delivery. Integr8 will harness new technology and data capability and has created the conditions necessary to review policies, processes and ways of working.

The Board noted the significance of this work, the key benefits and opportunities it presented to enable the delivery of the People Strategy, response to key findings in the NIAO report on Leadership and Resourcing and its link to the PfG commitment to reform and transform public services.

PD emphasised the significant level of change that would be required, across the NICS, to deliver the Programme, including the potential impact on BAU activities. He provided details of the governance and change network established to support the level of change and that a co-design phase approach had been adopted with all key stakeholders.

The Board noted the ask that they support the delivery of the Programme and the management of the inevitable impact across Departments, prioritising resources in order to support the Programmes activities. The Board also noted the complexity of the programme delivery and the significant change which will need to take place.

@ 11.25 Grainia Long & Prof Helen McCarthy joined the meeting

(7) Reform & Transformation

7.1 Multi-year budget

NG provided an update on the multi-year funding context and the current challenging budget position.

@ 11.40am RA left the meeting

7.2 PfG

Speaking to the document previously circulated, FR provided a verbal update, noting that the PfG Committee had not met since the last Board meeting. She advised that the targets in the Delivery Plan for the PfG had recently been agreed and that the draft plan could now go to all Board members, and each department this week, giving them a picture of how actions from all departments map into delivery of the PfG as a whole. With the plan in place, progress could be measured against metrics for the agreed targets.

FR advised that a commitment was given to produce an annual report. The first report would cover the period of the Plan up to end March 2026. The draft format for the Report included in the papers had been prepared by TEO following consultation with other jurisdictions and this would be reviewed by the PfG Committee at its next meeting. The Report should be ready for consideration for publication in Q2. Going forward there would be a mid-year report in October and a further update at the end of March 2027.

FR suggested that it would be timely to revisit the role of the PfG Committee now that the delivery plan has been agreed.

Actions:

- Circulation of the draft Programme for Government Delivery Plan 2025-2026
- Review of the current ToR for the PfG Committee

7.3 Transformation Projects

HoCS provided an update on the second call for Transformation Projects. 25 proposals were received and, following a period of assessment, the Public Sector Transformation Board has identified 11 of those proposals as fundable. National Lottery co-investment has been confirmed for one of the projects. All departments have been notified of the outcome of the Board's assessment.

The Board noted the need to continue to build positive working relationships with ROI officials in relation to Shared Island. DfC has a framework in place to work with ROI officials on various workstreams and there was a view that a collective structure would encourage and enable more engagement on strategic issues.

7.4 CSTA 6-monthly update

HMcC spoke to the update which was previously circulated to the Board. The update covered engagement to date with other CSAs and progress to date in the establishment of the office of science and technology.

The key areas for the OST are; Women in STEAM, NI Science website, the R & I Strategy, Areas of Research Interest, the R&D KPI Dashboard and the Innovation Board.

HMcC thanked Board members for their feedback on the draft AI strategy, commented on the work still to be done, and asked the Board to note the importance of effective collaboration in driving this forward. HMcC commended the positive engagement to date with key partners. HoCS noted the fiscal challenges and that work at this scale requires resources which at present are extremely challenging.

7.5 Chief Digital Officer

IS provided the Board with an update on the progress of defining the role and responsibilities of the proposed Chief Digital Officer post and how it would relate to other NICS roles and functions relating to digital and data matters. He outlined proposed responsibilities of the role and the organisation that they will lead. The draft JD to be shared with Perm Sec colleagues for consideration and comment.

Action:

- Draft job description for Chief Digital Officer to be shared with PS colleagues for consideration and comment.

(8) AOB

8.1 LC reminded the Board of the importance of being aware of any ongoing legal issues in the preparation of Board reports.

(9) NICS Board Forward Workplan

The Board noted the Forward Workplan and its contents.

(10) Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 25 March 2026, Stormont Castle

Meeting ended 12:50