

**NICS SENIOR LEADERSHIP GROUP (SLG)**  
**Friday 29 MAY 2026, 09:00am**  
**Executive room, Stormont Castle**

**In attendance:**

Jayne Brady/HOCS (Chair)	Alex Gordon
Emer Morelli	Grainia Long
Moira Doherty	Ian Snowden
David Malcolm	Louise Crilly
Katrina Godfrey	Mike Farrar
Hugh Widdis	Neil Gibson

Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

Apologies were received from Helen McCarthy CSTA.

HoCS welcomed all to the first meeting of the NICS Senior Leadership Group since the reset document was agreed, thanking all for their input to the final document.

It was noted that communications should be agreed to issue to all staff to advise of the change in name for the group.

**Action:** Secretariat to liaise with Chris McNabb regarding all staff comms on the reset and renaming to NICS SLG.

**2. Minutes & Actions arising from PSS 08 May 2026**

The minutes of the meeting of 08 May 2026 were agreed.

Actions from the previous meeting were reviewed and discussed.

**3. Strategic Policy Group on matters arising in the Middle East**

The Group noted an update on engagement with external stakeholders regarding emerging Middle East-related issues and the importance of ensuring Northern Ireland perspectives are reflected in wider UK-level discussions. Members noted current resilience considerations, including potential implications for key supply chains.

It was noted that, while no immediate concerns were identified regarding fertiliser supply, there may be future cost pressures arising from market conditions and the limited number of suppliers.

**4. Executive Update**

The Group noted an update on recent Executive business, including budget pressures, legislative issues and the wider strategic challenges currently facing the system.

Members noted the ongoing discussion on the Employment Rights Bill and the need to collate departmental input, alongside emerging timing considerations in relation to forthcoming legal constraints.

The Group discussed concerns regarding officials recent attendance at Committees, including the impact on officials, and noted that further engagement would take place to consider appropriate next steps.

It was noted that HoCS would raise with FM and dFM the case for a fiscal sustainability approach framed through a capital expenditure lens.

**Action:** HoCS to meet with TUS to discuss officials concerns in relation to Committee attendance.

**Action:** SLG to establish a Subgroup this to agree next steps following HoCS meeting with TUS.

**Action:** HoCS to write to Lesley Hogg again to provide an update on the situation.

## **5. Tour de Table**

### **5.1 DoJ**

HW provided an update on ongoing pressures within the justice system arising from the continued withdrawal of services by the Criminal Bar Association.

Members noted the broad scope of the Katie Simpson Review, including its cross-departmental implications and its focus on institutional issues, with significant relevance for PSNI and other sectors.

**Action:** EAWG and DSA leads to attend a future SLG to look at how this is being taken forward, in relation to the recommendations in the report.

### **5.2 DfC**

GL provided an update on a review of departmental priorities, including emerging decisions in relation to budget reductions and the significant implications arising. Members noted work under way to strengthen corporate strategy and review arrangements for ALB oversight, and agreed that the Anti-Poverty Strategy should be brought back to SLG for further discussion. The Group also noted progress on housing-related initiatives, including cross-departmental work on public land and strategic land partnerships, as well as an update on the voluntary sector partnership programme.

**Action:** Anti-Poverty Strategy to be brought back to SLG for further discussion.

### **5.3 DfE**

IS provided an update on upcoming end dates of all 8 board appointments to the Tourism NI Board and the need to maintain continuity of expertise on the Board while progressing the public appointments process. IS also noted ongoing challenges with the completion by NIAO of three statutory audits outstanding for the Northern Regional College which may have an impact on the laying of the DfE Group Accounts.

### **5.4 OLC**

AG provided an update on the legislative programme, including pressures on Assembly time ahead of summer recess. Members noted that urgent procedures were being used in relation to a number of Bills. The implications for the timing and handling of forthcoming legislation were also noted.

### **5.5 DfI**

EM provided an update on budget-related pressures affecting key public bodies, including ongoing engagement on associated operational challenges. Members noted positive progress in cross-border senior leadership engagement, particularly in relation to infrastructure development and opportunities for closer alignment with wider funding initiatives. The Group also noted an update on preparations for the Fleadh, including strengthened multi-agency arrangements and an improved risk position.

### **5.6 DoF**

NG advised that there were no further budget updates at this stage. All Members welcomed the usefulness of the log-on data and agreed to receiving it as regular MI.

### **5.7 DE**

DM advised of ongoing scenario planning within DE regarding the significant budget challenges the Department faces, taking into account the obligations set out under MPMNI and the Departments Order.

### **5.8 DoH**

MF provided an update on departmental financial planning, including proposed parameters for planning assumptions and the significant progress against waiting times targets, while recognising the constraints associated with ringfenced funding and the wider operational risks to sustaining delivery.

Members noted wider strategic considerations, including the potential impact of industrial action and forthcoming public inquiries, progress on academic and all-island partnership work. Members welcomed the proposal for a future presentation on the Manchester model.

**Action:** Presentation on the Manchester model to be scheduled for a future SLG.

## **5.9 TEO**

MD advised invitations were due to issue shortly for the EU Presidency briefing on 26 June. TEO EU team have been working with DFAT on the meeting and will liaise with HOCS office to coordinate attendance. The Irish Government have indicated that Executive Ministers may start receiving invitations to some of the informal EU Council meetings that will be hosted in Ireland between July and December.

These will focus on areas where there is ongoing North South cooperation. The first is expected to be to the DfC Minister for the EPSCO (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) – Social Policy informal happening 5th and 6th of July.

Others are expected to follow for informal meetings in the following areas: Health, Equality, Agrifish (Agriculture), Transport, Telecoms and Energy (TTE) Education and Youth and Culture (EYCS). Ministers will start receiving invites to informal EU Council meetings between July and December.

## **5.10 DAERA**

KG noted the publication of the Climate Change Committee's fourth risk assessment, including a number of priority risks requiring action across areas such as health, buildings, heat and flooding and advised this will affect all Departments. Members noted recent re-accreditation in relation to information and cyber security standards. KG recorded thanks to colleagues for their support at the government exhibition stand at Balmoral.

## **6. Presentation on TransformEd**

*Suzanne Kingon joined the meeting at 10.30 for this item only*

DM introduced Suzanne Kingon who leads on the TransformEd programme. Suzanne delivered a presentation TransformEd, including the wider context of educational underperformance, persistent attainment gaps and the case for long-term systemic reform. Members noted the emphasis on early intervention, improving classroom practice, strengthening delivery capacity and supporting a more coherent education system, particularly for children with additional needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The discussion that followed focussed on the importance of cross-departmental collaboration particularly in relation to health, youth justice and wider social outcomes, alongside the need to align reform with future skills and digital developments. The Group welcomed the strategic ambition of the programme and agreed that a wider workshop on transformation projects should be

arranged, with TransformEd represented. Members commended Suzanne on the significant work to date and thanked her for her presentation.

**Action:** Wider workshop on transformation projects to be scheduled to include TransformEd.

**7. AoB**

No AoB was raised.

**8. Date of next SLG meeting:**

Friday 05 June 09.00 – 11.00, Executive Room, Stormont Castle

*Meeting closed 11.10*