

NICS Board Meeting

Wellbeing Hub, HMP Maghaberry

Tuesday 19 May 2026 @ 9:15am

Minutes

Board Members

Jayne Brady (Chair) (HoCS)
Louise Crilly (LC)
Moirá Doherty (MD)
Mike Farrar (MF)
Neil Gibson (NG)
Grainia Long (GL)
Patrick Magee (NEM) (PM)

David Malcolm (DM)
Laura McKeaveney (NEM) (LMcK)
Emer Morelli (EM)
Frances Ruane (NEM) (FR)
Ian Snowden (IS)
Hugh Widdis (HW)

In attendance in an observing capacity

Mark O'Donnell (MO'D) – as observer on behalf of Katrina Godfrey
Scott Wilson (SW) – Agenda items 6 and 9 only
Sharon Smyth (SS) – Agenda item 6 only
Jill Minne (JM) – Agenda items 7 and 9 only
Mark Wishart (MW) - Agenda items 7 and 9 only
Chris McNabb (CMcN) - Agenda items 7 and 9 only
Jaclyn Richardson (JR) – Agenda items 8 and 9 only

Host Representatives (in attendance at start of meeting only)

Beverley Wall (BW) - Head of NI Prison Service
David Kennedy (DK) - Director of Prisons.
Tracy Megrath (TM) - Governing Governor HMP Maghaberry

Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)
Jayne Byrne (Secretariat)

(1) Pre-meeting Host Welcome and introduction to the Facility

BW provided an overview of the transformation of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, highlighting progress made in recent years through collective leadership, workforce development, staff wellbeing initiatives, partnership working and a stronger rehabilitative approach. TM and DK gave an overview of key initiatives and partnerships being taken forward with Departments and the important work with the Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) in supporting those moving on from custody. The discussion recognised the significant operational pressures facing the service, including workforce shortages, an ageing estate, increasing complexity within the

prison population, high levels of remand, addiction and mental health issues, and ongoing financial constraints. Members noted the importance of innovation, cross-sector collaboration and listening to staff in driving improvement, while also reflecting on wider systemic challenges around diversion from custody, timely justice processes and ensuring appropriate support is in place for individuals on release.

The Board thanked BW and the team for their welcome and agreed the team deserve real commendation for the transformation they have led through clear vision, strong collaboration and an unwavering focus on their people. This work has not happened by accident; it reflects high-quality leadership, a commitment to partnership across services, and a determination to improve outcomes for both staff and those in custody. Their approach stands as an exemplar not only within the prison service, but more broadly as a model of effective, values-led public sector leadership.

@ 10am BW, TM and DK left the meeting

(2) Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

HOCS welcomed Members to the meeting and noted apologies received from Katrina Godfrey with Mark O'Donnell attending the meeting in an observational capacity on her behalf. There were no declarations of interest.

(3) Draft Minutes and Action Points from 31 March 2026

PM raised a number of queries and amendments in relation to the draft minutes.

Actions:

AP1. Secretariat to review the minutes and action log for accuracy.

Action Points from the minutes of 31 March 2026

Agenda Item	Action	Responsible officer	Status
(2) Draft Minutes and Action Points from 27 January 2026	HoCS Office to amend and publish the minutes of 27 January 2026.	Secretariat	In progress
(5) ISNI Committee	All Members to ensure SROs complete the information required to facilitate progress on DataMAP.	All members	In progress
(5) ISNI Committee	HoCS to meet with DM and Chief Executive of Education Authority to identify a way forward in relation to completion of details for DE projects.	Secretariat	Sharon Smyth Progressing

(7) PfG Update	HoCS office to develop NICS Board annual report seeking input as required from Committee Chairs and SROs.	Secretariat	In progress
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(4) Matters Arising – there were no matters arising.

(5) Budget Update

HoCS provided an update on the current budget position, including fiscal sustainability work, recruitment controls and the implications of continuing to operate without a formal budget. NG outlined current constraints, noting the need to demonstrate tight control of expenditure, cost discipline measures, continue efficiency measures, and avoid committing to new spending across Departments and their ALBs. The Board discussed the impact on RDEL and CDEL, the position of ALBs, the risk of service reductions, the potential for collective advice through HOCS to the Executive on cross cutting financial pressures such as pay and the importance of articulating how reform and transformation activity could deliver savings. It was noted that fiscal sustainability work would continue, with further work on efficiencies under way. Members also discussed the emerging timetable and legal pressures, including the potential significance of the end of July and potential future cashflow concerns.

(6) ISNI Committee

@10:50 Scott Wilson and Sharon Smyth joined the meeting for this item only

- 6.1 PM introduced the item and gave a broad overview of key areas of progress noting positive momentum in the Committee and the notable impact of collective leadership on driving forward work on the enabling actions. SW presented the Highlight Report. The Board noted positive progress across the ISNI programme, including continued momentum on procurement reform and wider enabling actions. Members were advised of progress on DataMAP with SRO sign off now achieved for all 37 Phase 1 projects, work will now commence on development of dashboards and departments will be contacted to collect data for a Phase 2 of project data upload. It was noted that further work on housing-led regeneration remains under development with discussions planned between SIB, DfC and DfI. The Board also noted alignment between EA10 infrastructure needs assessment work and broader systems-based infrastructure planning, with further proposals to be brought forward following member input.
- 6.2 SS presented on Enabling Action 7 Comparative Analysis of procurement timescales in NI compared to other Jurisdictions. SS commended the work of Jane Mellor SIB in preparing this report.

Members noted progress on EA7 and endorsed the recommendations set out in the Comparative Analysis of Procurement paper. In discussion, the Board highlighted the importance of collective leadership, clarity on expectations and system behaviours, and the need to ensure that the right leadership, capability and supporting structures are in place to sustain reform.

Members also recognised the importance of stakeholder engagement, strengthened frameworks and clear articulation of the implications of change as this work progresses. HoCS noted this would be Sharon Smyth's last attendance at Board in her current role and wished her all the very best in her future role.

Actions:

- AP2. Paper on needs assessment to be circulated for consideration and feedback in June.
- AP3. Detailed recommendations for EA10 Infrastructure Needs Assessment to be brought to the Board in September
- AP4. SIB will engage with departments to agree their portfolio of projects for Phase 2 of data upload to DataMAP

@ 11:30 Sharon Smyth and Scott Wilson left the meeting

(7) People Committee

@ 11:30 Jill Minne, Chris McNabb and Mark Wishart joined the meeting

- 7.1 LMCK introduced the item and provided a strategic overview of key progress to date, and the key enablers for the Strategic HR function. The Board noted the importance of a clear and aligned cross-Departmental internal communications and engagement approach to support the desired organisational change, including clarity on audiences and messaging. Members also noted the need to further define the wider strategic HR role and associated governance arrangements, particularly where these extend beyond the current scope of Integr8. The Board noted progress on delivery of the People Strategy, including approval of the Masterplan by the People Committee and the development of key enabling foundations such as job families, policy renewal and supporting structures.
- 7.2 JM provided a high-level overview of the Masterplan and key developments to date. Discussion focused on the importance of further clarifying and formalising the roles, responsibilities and governance arrangements underpinning the emerging strategic HR function, including the respective roles of departments, Ministers and the Centre of Expertise. Members recognised the necessity and value of collective leadership in supporting

departmental management and delivery, while noting that some areas of responsibility remain to be fully settled as this work develops. The need for role definition, clarity and frameworks to ensure progress is sustained was noted by all.

- 7.3 The Board discussed the need to strengthen clarity around metrics, sequencing and implementation arrangements to support effective delivery of the People Strategy over time. Members also considered the respective roles of Ministers, the Head of the Civil Service and departments in relation to strategic HR leadership and workforce planning, noting the importance of clear remits, collective leadership and sustained progress on workforce reform to support future resilience.
- 7.4 CMcN provided an overview of the work around communications for the People Strategy and the importance of a strong communications approach to support delivery of the People Strategy and wider organisational change. Members noted, while progress had been made in establishing communications activity and raising awareness of key milestones, further work is required to ensure the communications network is equipped to support change effectively at scale.
- 7.5 The Board, through its collective leadership role, recognised the need to discuss and champion delivery of the People Strategy, provide regular updates from the Board to departmental leadership teams, ensure a clear cascade of key messages, and amplify corporate communications from the centre.
- 7.6 MW advised of the importance of recognising the scale of the cultural and organisational change required to support delivery of the People Strategy and Integr8, and to sustain effort beyond initial implementation. He further emphasised the need to ensure that supporting toolkits and strategies are fully embedded and that clear accountability arrangements are in place for the Global Business Services model and Centre of Expertise.

Actions:

- AP5. Board Members to reinforce People Strategy engagement and key messages through SMTs.
- AP6. The SRO and team should ensure the masterplan is finalised for the next Board meeting ensuring that metrics and outcomes are clearly defined, including interdependencies and timelines
- AP7. Chris McNabb to prepare a comprehensive approach to communications and change management for the next People Committee

(8) PfG Update

@ 11:50 Jaclyn Richardson joined the meeting

- 8.1 FR provided an update on recent PfG Committee activity, including progress on the development of the PfG Annual Report, which was agreed by the Executive in January 2026 following extensive departmental engagement. FR noted that while progress may have appeared slow externally, significant work had been undertaken and that arrangements are being put in place to support ongoing monitoring through the development of appropriate metrics.
- 8.2 JR provided a high-level strategic update on the PfG Annual Report for 2025/26. The update included the proposed arrangements for the launch of the report. Members welcomed the strong cross-departmental collaboration that had supported the development of the PfG Annual Report, particularly in meeting tight timescales and aligning financial information. Members discussed the importance of timing, communications and presentation in supporting publication, including the need to highlight key areas of progress, consider wider endorsement and ensure the report is effectively linked to wider organisational processes and future delivery. Members noted the clear evidence of progress against objectives and welcomed the publication.
- (9) Draft NICS Board Annual Report 2025/26 and Draft NICS Board Business Plan 2026/27**
- 9.1 HoCS provided an overview of the background to the development of the draft documents, noting limited awareness of the Board's role and remit, and recognising the proposed reports as an opportunity to improve clarity and visibility. HoCS recognised the contribution of the Committees to the draft and reflected on the need to consider audience and positioning.
- 9.2 Members discussed the draft report and agreed that its purpose, audience and positioning required further refinement, with a preference expressed for recasting it as a broader Board report rather than an annual report. Members emphasised the importance of clearer alignment with Ministers and wider reform activity, including consideration of a Ministerial foreword, and agreed that the document should be revised and brought back to the Board for further consideration.
- 9.3 PM requested an update on the Board's collective leadership in the reform of NICS. NG advised that the Strategic Policy and Reform (SPaR) Directorate sits in DoF and that work is ongoing to update the arrangements governing the cross-cutting transformation roles carried out by TEO and DoF.

Actions:

- AP8. Board Secretariat to liaise with Perm Sec TEO and CMcN to take forward redrafting of Board report taking into account feedback from Members.
- AP9. NG to provide an update on the review of transformation roles and responsibilities in due course

(10) AOB

- 10.1** LMCK requested a brief update on the recent senior leadership forum. MF advised the event had re-enforced the importance of collective leadership as a key expectation of senior leadership within the NICS. Members noted plans to strengthen senior leadership engagement through revised arrangements for regular meetings, including periodic engagement with the Grade 3 cohort, to support oversight of cross-cutting issues and emerging pressure points across services.
- 10.2** Deadline for responding to Response to Red Guidance issued to members for review is Monday 25 May 2026. PM emphasised the impact of changes on Perm Secs as Accounting Officers.

(11) Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 4 August 2026 @ 9am, Stormont Castle, Belfast

@ 1pm meeting finished