

NICS SENIOR LEADERSHIP GROUP (SLG)
Friday 05 June 2026, 09:00am
Executive Room, Stormont Castle

In attendance:

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

Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)

1. Welcome and Apologies

David Malcolm provided apologies, Suzanne Kingon deputised.

2. Minutes & Actions arising from SLG 29 May 2026

The minutes of the meeting of 29 May 2026 were agreed.

Actions from the previous meeting were reviewed and discussed.

3. Civil Service Commissioners

09:15 Deirdre Toner, Chairperson; Dr Lesley Carroll, Commissioner; David MacAnulty, Commissioner; and Amanda Martin, Secretary, all joined the meeting for this item only.

The Commissioners were introduced to the SLG. Discussion focused on recruitment and workforce reform, including the application of the exception-to-merit principle, strategic workforce planning and the development of job families. The Commissioners outlined a more collaborative approach to engagement with departments, and members noted the value of continued dialogue on these issues.

4. Fiscal Sustainability

SLG considered the emerging approach to fiscal sustainability across resource and capital spending, including the need for a credible plan to inform ongoing budget discussions. Members discussed the importance of aligning this work with wider reform, efficiencies and pay bill control, supported by stronger departmental evidence and financial modelling, particularly in relation to Education and Health. Members noted the need to articulate the implications of a range of funding scenarios, and that further work would be taken forward on the supporting fiscal sustainability material and capital planning.

Action:

- (1) NG to coordinate development of communications approach on fiscal sustainability materials.

5. Tour de Table

- 5.1 **HOCS:** HoCS provided an update on forthcoming engagement opportunities with CSLG in Belfast and wider discussions on trade, net zero and growth. Discussion also covered emerging work on AI capability, domestic energy and housing issues, and lessons from Greater Manchester on integrated infrastructure, regeneration and place-based leadership. Members reflected on the importance of strategic alignment across housing, transport, wastewater and land use, and noted that further proposals will be brought forward on related governance, engagement and advisory arrangements.

HoCS discussed the concept of an internal reference panel for NICS Board which SLG were supportive of.

Actions:

- (2) Save the date to issue to NICS SLG in respect of the CSLG event on 8-9 October in Belfast.
- (3) HoCS to provide further information on CSLG event and next steps in due course.
- (4) HoCS to connect CSTA and DoF into "One Big Thing" work being taken forward by Cabinet Office
- (5) HoCS to take forward further engagement with Greater Manchester Combined Authority.
- (6) DoF to develop a paper for SLG on the internal reference panel concept.

- 5.2 **DAERA:** KG provided an update on the work of the NICS Diversity Champions Network and highlighted the need to reconfirm some departmental champions following recent staff changes and to ensure effective departmental engagement. KG also provided an update on issues relating to bonfires and an industrial dispute affecting a small number of DAERA staff, and thanked colleagues for their support in sharing the public appointment opportunities for the new Just Transition Commission.

- 5.3 **DoH:** MF provided an update on recent engagement in relation to pay reform and on improved service performance, with positive quarter-end results reported across diagnostics, inpatient and outpatient activity. Members noted positive engagement with Committee representatives highlighting examples of good practice to support understanding of proposed improvements in GP access and wider service delivery.

- 5.4 **DfE:** IS provided an update on the progress of the Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee Bill to the Executive and recent statistics showing positive progress on energy strategy targets.

- 5.5 **TEO:** MD advised that a review of EIS has been commissioned and correspondence will issue in due course. Discussion highlighted wider changes in departmental arrangements and noted the need for structures to reflect the modern communications environment.
- 5.6 **DoF:** NG noted that the SAMU report had been circulated and that supporting material would be made available, with further communication to issue to relevant colleagues.

All SLG members agreed that new dignity at work and sexual harassment training should be made mandatory, subject to further consideration of how this will be delivered effectively in industrial settings, including for NIPS and other staff without routine access to standard training channels. HoCS noted intention to arrange unconscious bias and bystander training for SLG.

Action:

(7) Secretariat to organise unconscious bias and bystander training for the SLG.

- 5.7 **DE:** Members noted an update from DE on current operational and budgetary pressures, including implications of ongoing industrial action, continued challenges in relation to placements, and preparations for the introduction of the new curriculum.
- 5.8 **Dfl:** EM provided an update on a recent cross-departmental Emergency Response and resilience exercise which modelled a reservoir flooding scenario and generated useful learning for future planning and response arrangements.
- 5.9 **OLC:** AG provided an update on the current legislative programme.
- 5.10 **CSTA:** HMcC provided an update on recent innovation and R&D engagement, including external visits and wider UK discussions on AI, regional innovation, and opportunities to better integrate R&D assets with broader economic and infrastructure priorities. Members also noted that work is underway to explore the use of AI in business case development, with interest in piloting this approach. Members discussed current challenges in relation to animal licensing and inspection arrangements, and agreed that DoH, DAERA and CSTA should engage further on this issue.

Action:

(8) DoH, DAERA and CSTA to engage on issues around animal licences & inspectorate

- 5.11 **DfC:** GL provided an update noting impact of current budget pressures and planned wider engagement with local government via SOLACE. Members noted a positive update on recent AO and EO recruitment outcomes, with anticipated benefits for the delivery of services.

Action:

9) HoCS to engage with DoF on appointments criteria for chairs and boards across service and ALBs.

5.12 **DSO:** LC provided an update on legal and operational pressures.

5.13 **DoJ:** HW provided an update on current operational pressures, including the ongoing impact of CBA withdrawal of services and prison population nearing 2100 putting severe pressure and risk on NIPS. He also provided an update on SCS staffing moves inside DoJ.

6. AOB

6.1 **Dignity at work and sexual harassment training:**

Covered under Tour de Table 5.6.

6.2 **NICS SLG Forward workplan:** Members agreed NICSHR operations to attend SLG meeting on 12 June and to postpone meeting with NIAO until after the summer. HoCS and NG to meet NIAO separately

Actions:

(10) HoCS and NG to meet NIAO to discuss forward workplan and further meeting with SLG to be rescheduled for the autumn.

(11) Upon rescheduling of NIAO attendance, Secretariat to request input from members regarding key topics for discussion.

7. Date of next SLG meeting:

Friday 12 June 2026

Meeting closed 11.00am