

NICS SENIOR LEADERSHIP GROUP (SLG)
Friday 10 JULY 2026, 09:00am
Executive Room, Stormont Castle

In attendance:

David Malcolm (DM), Chair
Katrina Godfrey (KG)
Louise Crilly (LC)
Hugh Widdis (HW)
Ian Snowden (IS)

Joanne McBurney (JMcB) obo Mike Farrar
Gareth Johnston (GJ) obo Moira Doherty
Declan McGeown (DMcG) obo Emer Morelli
Paul Duffy (PD) obo Neil Gibson
John Greer (JG) obo Grainia Long

Deborah Brown (DB)
Catherine Shannon (CS)
Katie Taylor (KT)
Adele Brown (AB)

Jayne Byrne (Secretariat)
Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)

1. Welcome and Apologies

David Malcolm chaired in the absence of HoCS. Apologies received and noted as set out above.

2. Minutes & Actions arising from SLG 29 May 2026

The minutes of the meeting of 12 June and 19 June 2026 were agreed.

Actions from the previous meeting were reviewed.

3. One Big Thing 2026, 'AI in Action'

The Chair welcomed Catherine Shannon to the meeting who spoke about the One Big Thing 2026 initiative, seeking SLG endorsement for NICS participation in the Cabinet Office-led programme. Members noted that the initiative would support the responsible and effective use of AI across the NICS, align with existing People Strategy and digital capability programmes, and provide access to learning, resources and networks available across the wider UK Civil Service.

Members welcomed the potential benefits of participation, including support for digital maturity, enhanced capability development and the opportunity to build on existing departmental and cross-NICS activity while avoiding duplication. Subject to DAERA having an opportunity to undertake further consideration, SLG agreed in principle for NICSHR leading NICS engagement in the initiative and taking forward the necessary arrangements.

Catherine Shannon left the meeting at 9:10

4. NI Budgets

Deborah Brown provided an update on recent correspondence seeking information on departmental financial pressures and transformation activity.

SLG discussed the wider funding context, engagement with the NIO and Treasury, and the importance of ensuring that ongoing departmental transformation and efficiency activity is appropriately reflected in responses.

5. Public Disorder Transition to Prevention-Led Recovery

Katie Taylor and Adele Brown joined the meeting at 09:25 for this item only.

Hugh Widdis introduced the topic and the Chair welcomed KT and AB to the meeting. HW provided an overview of lessons learned from the recent period of public disorder and proposals for a transition from recovery to a more prevention-led approach. Members noted the findings of a rapid review of the response phase and agreed on the need for a more coordinated, whole-system approach to preparedness, prevention and recovery.

Discussion focused on the importance of stronger strategic leadership, improved cross-departmental coordination, and more effective information sharing during periods of heightened risk both internally and externally. Members recognised the increasing challenge posed by misinformation and disinformation, and the need for enhanced strategic communications capability to provide timely, authoritative information and counter harmful narratives.

SLG agreed that further work should be taken forward to strengthen preparedness, empower decision-making, improve coordination across departments and agencies, and support the development of a more preventative and evidence-based approach to recovery and community resilience.

Actions:

(AP1) All to engage with their departmental representatives on the Strategic Engagement Group (SEG) and Recovery Group to ensure they are appropriately empowered to take decisions and progress the recommendations set out in the paper.

(AP2) Recommendations arising from the paper to be considered further as part of ongoing work on prevention-led recovery, strategic communications and civil contingencies preparedness.

Katie Taylor and Adele Brown left the meeting at 10:07

6. Strategic Policy Group Update:

An update was provided on the current position regarding fuel supply and prices, with members noting that impacts had reduced and that routine fortnightly SPG meetings may no longer be required at this stage. Members

discussed maintaining appropriate oversight while considering a pause in meetings until circumstances warrant further engagement.

Members agreed to postpone the meeting on 21 July and agree approach going forward with HoCS on her return.

Action:

(AP3) Secretariat to agree with HoCS the proposal to pause Strategic Policy Group meetings, while maintaining appropriate monitoring arrangements and reconvening if required.

7. Tour de table – by exception

7.1 TEO

GJ provided an update on community engagement activity, including preparations for the bonfire period, support for diversity and inclusion initiatives, and progress in relation to Good Relations Funding. Members noted positive cross-departmental engagement and ongoing work to support community relations and inclusion objectives.

7.2 DfI

DMcG noted an update on preparations for the upcoming Fleadh, including engagement with Permanent Secretaries and other senior officials to support and coordinate involvement in the event.

7.3 DoF

PD drew members attention to the publication of a PAC report relating to Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland and the report's recommendations.

7.4 DfC

JG provided an update on current community-related activity, including ongoing monitoring of bonfire-related issues and preparations for the upcoming Fleadh.

7.5 DAERA

KG provided an update on industrial relations issue.

7.6 DoJ

Members noted an update on the current bonfire situation. HW recorded appreciation for the collaborative engagement and support provided by colleagues across departments and agencies.

8. Date of next SLG meeting

Next meeting: Friday 24 July at 09:00 in the Executive Room.

Meeting closed 10.30am