

NICS SENIOR LEADERSHIP GROUP (SLG)
Friday 11 September 2026, 09:00am
Executive Room, Stormont Castle

In attendance:

Jayne Brady (HoCS) (Chair)
Mike Farrar (MF)
Katrina Godfrey (KG)
Ian Snowden (IS)
David Malcolm (DM)
Grainia Long (GL)

Louise Crilly (LC)
Neil Gibson (NG)
Alex Gordon (AG)
Hugh Widdis (HW)
Emer Morelli (EM)

Paul Donnelly (PD) obo Moira Doherty

Katie Taylor joined the meeting for agenda item 3 only

Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)

1. Welcome and Apologies

HoCS noted apologies from Moira Doherty, welcomed members to the meeting and those deputising.

2. Minutes & Actions arising from SLG 4 September 2026

The minutes of the 4 September 2026 meeting were agreed, and members noted that actions are progressing.

3. NI preparedness for Public Disorder & Prevention-Led Recovery

Katie Taylor joined the meeting for this item only.

KT provided an update since the last meeting with SLG in July. Members noted that, while many of the issues identified in July remained, some progress had been made through the development of improved information flows, action tracking and a more structured approach to partner returns. These arrangements were, however, still developing, dependent on variable partner input and not yet sufficiently robust or tested. Key residual risks included the absence of a formal community tension monitoring mechanism; unresolved ownership of cross-cutting capabilities, including strategic communications; gaps in accommodation and safe-space arrangements; inconsistent engagement; and limited capacity, skills and resilience across the system.

The Group discussed the need for clearer roles, accountability and collective ownership of risk, supported by appropriate resourcing and a broader base of trained and experienced staff. Members recognised that existing arrangements were often dependent on a small number of individuals and goodwill, particularly during recovery periods, rather than being embedded sustainably within organisational structures.

The need for coherent, factual and consistent government messaging was emphasised, alongside trusted and proportionate routes for engagement with voluntary and community sector bodies. Members noted that the voluntary and community sector was diverse and that its role would vary according to the nature and

sensitivity of an incident. The Group also recognised the distinct challenges arising from racially motivated disorder and the potential value of drawing on established approaches elsewhere.

Members agreed that community cohesion required greater collective focus and that relevant issues would be considered in the first instance through thematic deep dives via the Prevention and Preparation group. It was recognised that the group will not be able to resolve issues around resourcing and capacity at working level, and that SLG must collectively consider longer-term solutions to these issues in the context of wider Civil Contingencies preparedness. The Group endorsed the asks in the paper, including confirmation of senior ownership and associated resourcing, stronger departmental engagement and partner returns, agreement of a minimum readiness package, and timely escalation of unresolved ownership, resource or delivery issues.

Action: Permanent Secretaries to nominate appropriate representatives to support the development of improved community tension monitoring arrangements.

4. Budget Update

HoCS provided an overview of ongoing budget discussions, including the implications of the forthcoming autumn Budget, the need to progress the decision-making timetable and the key financial pressures facing departments.

Members noted the significant steps taken by departments to identify efficiencies and operate within budgetary constraints and agreed on the need to establish the fundamentals of a sustainable, long-term approach.

5. Tour de Table – by exception

5.1 DoH

Members welcomed the successful launch of Together for Families. Thanks was recorded to Eilis McDaniel and Peter Toogood for their significant contributions to this work. MF updated on the publication of the Neurology Inquiry part report and noted that work is under way to coordinate learning across public inquiries.

Members discussed the significant departmental work to improve services, maximise existing resources and establish the foundations for wider reform and acknowledged that this activity had not been communicated effectively, contributing to a perception that reform was not progressing. It was suggested that the NICS Board consider whether a dedicated reform sub-committee would strengthen oversight and communication of the reform programme.

Action: NICS Board to consider sub-committee structures.

5.2 DfC

GL provided an update on current issues.

5.3 OLC

AG provided an update on Private Members' Bills.

5.4 DfE

Members noted that a report on the movement and retention of graduates in Northern Ireland would be published the following week, including positive findings on student retention.

- 5.5 **DfI**
Members noted that the Committee had requested additional time to consider the Harbours Bill. EM noted work was progressing regarding NI Water and updated on positive engagement under way through the Shared Island initiative on wastewater infrastructure, including joint working between DfI and DAERA. Appreciation was recorded for the support provided by NIAO and DSO colleagues.
- 5.7 **TEO**
The importance of developing a clear and coherent reform narrative was endorsed.
- 5.8 **DE**
DM provided an update on current issues including recent approval of updates to school uniform policy.
- 5.9 **NICS D&I Champion (KG)**
Members noted the positive meeting of diversity and inclusion champions held earlier in the week. Appreciation was recorded for the contributions and engagement of departmental and thematic champions.
- 5.10 **HoCS**
Members noted relevant UK Civil Service staffing announcements. The Group also welcomed engagement with young people in care and noted ongoing work on opportunities for young people not in education, employment or training. The Group discussed the NICS Board's wider engagement and governance approach, including how best to reach under-represented and harder-to-reach groups.
- 5.11 **DoJ**
Members noted the forthcoming social media campaign addressing rape myths and were asked to support its promotion through departmental communications channels.
6. **AoB**

There was no AoB raised.
7. **Date of next SLG meeting**

Friday 25.09.2026 9-10.30am
Executive Room, Stormont Castle
This meeting will focus on issues arising from recent Public Inquiries
- NOTE:** There is no SLG on Friday 18 September due to the joint SLG / G3 meeting taking place on Thursday 17 September 2026.

@ 10.30 am meeting concluded