

NICS SENIOR LEADERSHIP GROUP (SLG)
Friday 21 August 2026, 09:00am
Executive Room, Stormont Castle

In attendance:

Jayne Brady (HoCS) (Chair)
Moirá Doherty (MD)
Katrina Godfrey (KG)
Emer Morelli (EM)
Helen McCarthy (HMcC)

Neil Gibson (NG),
Mike Farrar (MF)
David Malcolm (DM)
Hugh Widdis (HW)

Joanne Timoney (JT) obo Louise Crilly
Iain Greenway (IG) obo Grainia Long
Shane Murphy (SM) obo Ian Snowden

Simon Baugh (SB)

Jayne Byrne (Secretariat)
Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)

1. Welcome and Apologies

HoCS noted apologies from Alex Gordon and welcomed members to the meeting, those deputising and Simon Baugh.

HoCS took the opportunity to recognise the work of Iain Greenway, deputising on behalf of Grainia Long, who was commended in a recent High Court judgment in relation to the substantial evidence he provided.

2. Minutes & Actions arising from SLG 24 and 31 July 2026

The minutes of the meeting of 24 and 31 July 2026 were discussed *and agreed subject to minor amendments*.

Actions from the previous meetings were reviewed. Members were reminded of the need for any outstanding responses to the affordability grip exercise to be submitted, and that responses are due today for comments on the IAS Insights report which circulated to SLG on Friday 24 July.

3. Special session with Simon Baugh - Review of Executive Communications

MD outlined the rationale for commissioning the review of Executive communications and thanked members for their engagement to date. MD introduced Simon Baugh, former Chief Executive of UK Government Communications, who drew on his experience leading government communications through major national events and modernising the profession. SB presented the review methodology, emerging findings and proposed direction of travel. Members discussed and provided perspectives from across departments to inform the further development of the work. Members agreed to support MD in taking this work forward.

4. Tour de Table

HoCS: Provided an update on a meeting between HoCS, NG and the Comptroller and Auditor General. Members agreed NIAO attendance at SLG should be deferred until a budget is agreed.

HoCS reminded members of the UK wide CSLG being held here on 8/9 October and encouraged all members to attend.

Action: HoCS to write to the Comptroller and Auditor General in follow-up, noting the key issues raised in the meeting.

DAERA: Provided an update on current issues.

DoH: Provided an update on current issues.

DE: Provided an update on SEN placements and the establishment of an Area Planning Commission.

DfE: Provided an update on the Regional Balance Bill on which responses have been requested from departments. Recorded thanks to DoF who have been very helpful in taking forward the work regarding 0% VAT on domestic bills.

DoF: Provided update on budget discussions and information requirements.

DSO: Provided an update on current legal issues.

DfC: Provided an update on the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme.

DfI: Updated on ongoing public inquiries nearing conclusion. Recorded thanks to DoF for ongoing support and advice.

CSTA: Recorded thanks to all for support for the draft AI Strategy which is currently out for consultation and noted discussions will be required on implementation. Updated members that two of three projects identified have been successful in securing UK funding for research and innovation with a third anticipated to be submitted in the autumn. Noted that an AI Taskforce has been established by DfE to identify how to increase AI capability across SMEs and a Life and Health Sciences innovation panel has been approved.

DoJ: Updated on appointment of new police ombudsman. Noted the increase in prison population and recognised the extremely difficult circumstances in which NIPS staff are currently working.

TEO: Provided an update on current issues.

6. Date of next SLG meeting

Next meeting: Friday 28 August 2026 at 09:00 in the Executive Room.

Meeting closed 11.25am