

Strategic Steering Group Meeting
Monday 24 March 2025
 11:00 – 13:00 (Online)
MINUTES



Attendees	Apologies
Jane O'Donnell (JO'D), COSLA (Co-Chair) Mary McAllan (MM), Scottish Government (Acting Co-Chair) Anna Fowle (AF), SCVO Lucinda Godfrey (LG), ACOSVO Caroline Hiscox (CH), NHS Lothian Catherine McWilliam (CM), Institute of Directors Scotland Janice Gibson (JG) Deputising for Karen Reid, NES Pippa Milne (PM), SOLACE / Argyll & Bute Council SLF Programme Team – Laura Turney, Angelika Majdanik, Laura Todd	Joe Griffin (JG), Scottish Government (Co-Chair) John Paul Marks (JPM), Scottish Government (corresponding member) Richard Foggo (RF), Scottish Government Vicki Bibby (VB), Audit Scotland Sara Thiam (ST), Prosper DCC Jane Connors (JC), Police Scotland Karen Reid (KR), NES SLF Programme Team , Grant Campbell

1.) **Welcome and introductions**

- Co-Chair Jane O'Donnell welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided an update on Joe Griffin's new appointment as Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government.

2.) **Actions since previous SSG meeting/Programme Update**

- Minutes of the previous meeting in August were cleared by correspondence without comments.
- A long-standing action to explore a joint workshop on skills utilisation with Fair Work Convention was deprioritised and closed due to the shift to PSR focussed events.

3.) **Leadership with common purpose: members' updates**

Summary: members reflected on the PSR Summit (February 2025) the need to invest time in building and sustaining relationships, time and space for connection, an ongoing need for a shared vision and emphasis on action with the longer term in mind.

- PSR Summit, February 2025 - good to see so many public service leaders in one space. Implications for the SLF and the experience of the SLA, important to create opportunities to bring alumni together and sustain momentum. Although the SLF team supported the delivery of the event, it was not SLF branded, despite feeling very much like one on the day;
- importance of engagement; the summit offered a practical opportunity to do this as well as test the development of the strategy with stakeholders and partners;
- emphasis on PSR being owned by all parts of the public service system;
- SLF can be a positive force behind public service reform, particularly for sustaining purposeful relationships.

- Adaptive Learning Sets led by NES serve as an example of working on shaping organisational / sectoral cultures and being innovative in the leadership space. Common observations included: collaboration becoming harder; loneliness felt by leaders and being pushed by the system into the operational and managerial rather than the leadership space; ability to flex across boundaries becoming more brittle; pressures result in a default tension about efficiencies vs effectiveness; ongoing confusion about “reform language”, not being commonly understood as a means to achieve better outcomes but rather as cost-cutting and efficiencies exercise – there’s an opportunity here to address some of this more effectively, particularly in terms of emphasising the long term investment in public services.
- Need to reflect on the UK context, really hard for Third Sector to get beyond the significant impact of NI increases.
- Population Health Framework is in progress and based on good cross-sectoral connections which should take the health sector to a better place. There is recognition for strong systems leadership – nothing can be done without building strong relationships. Bold and courageous leadership required. Need to create spaces for people to come up with the best change ideas - not easy due to financial constraints. Integrated joined boards is where this is happening. SLF is crucial to create and convene these spaces at national and cross sector level, solutions-focused and prevention-centred.
- A focus on Prevention has been challenging in terms of both resources/ bandwidth. Prevention is efficiency; by focusing only on immediate efficiencies, we are creating a cost for future generations.

4.) Reflections on the Strategic Steering Group (SSG)

- an opportunity to take stock, reflect on and express views on current SSG arrangements, with a view to reviewing and potentially revising the group in time for the next SSG meeting.
- JO'D noted that this group first met in January 2024 with a remit to operate in an advisory capacity, working as ‘champions’, ‘challengers’ and ‘experts’, drawn from key sectors to support Co-Chairs.
- Terms of Reference were presented at the April 2025 meeting with an annual review timeframe.
- Key discussion points :
 - Reinforced the need for ‘an SLF’, there is no other comparable offer in Scotland;
 - since shifting to advisory/sounding board, members reflected on a loss of momentum and advised that a more formal arrangement should be reinstated. Co-chairs to reflect on this. Team to set out options (**ACTION 1**)
 - recognising that this work is complex and there is a lot of activity across the public services system, members would welcome a ‘reset’ and spending some time together to clarify the SLF focus
 - frequency remains right, though diaries remain a challenge. Providing programme of quarterly SSG meetings in advance with one annual, in-person planning session organised at the beginning of the year (**ACTION 2**)
 - all attendees to provide their views on this going forward (**ACTION 3**)
 - suggestion to map synergies between the various leadership offers across the sectors (Digital, leading to change, IGB chairs, armed forces, etc.) (**ACTION 4**)
- Next step: the Programme team will bring options to the Co-chairs for decision with a view to implement changes at the next SSG meeting (currently scheduled for 18 August but subject to review).

5.) **Scottish Leadership Academy – post pilot options**

- This item aimed to establish consensus on the next phase of commissioning the SLA. Following the allocation of funding from the Scottish Government, members views were sought on the post-pilot phase of the project.
- AM provided a summary, highlighting options and inviting comments. Evaluation and feedback for the SLA suggests that the pilot broadly met its aims when measured against the outputs and outcomes agreed at its outset. Delegate feedback has been broadly positive. The pilot has however not been without its challenges, including the difficulty in securing participants, the optics around Blair estate, and the impact the pilot has had on the Programme Team's resources.
- Members who experienced the SLA provided brief reflections, stressing the positivity and the value of the offer, particularly it having functioned as an 'accelerant' to relationship building.
- Members were asked whether they would like to be involved in the tender process more directly (**ACTION 5**).
- Members agreed with the emphasis on collaborative leadership, need to widen to leaders in waiting, and emphasis there remains a need to invest in this work.

6.) **Next steps & AOB**

- N/A

Action Points Summary

1. Team to set out options and Co-chairs to reflect on reinstating formal arrangements for the SSG.
2. Issue a schedule of quarterly SSG meetings with one in-person, annual day/half-day planning session.
3. The programme team to hold 1-2-1 conversations regarding the SSG review with those members who sent their apologies to the March SSG.
4. The programme team to work with JG to map the synergies between the various leadership offers across the sectors.
5. Members wishing to support the Programme Team and get involved in the SLA tender process are asked to put their names forward.