Strategic Steering Group Meeting
Monday 18 August 2025
13:00–14:30 (Online)
MINUTES

Attendees	Apologies
Jane O'Donnell (JO'D), COSLA (Co-Chair) **Mary McAllan** (MM), Director of Public Service Reform, Scottish Government (Acting Co-Chair) **Shona Riach** (SR), DG Strategy and External Affairs, Scottish Government (SR) **Anna Fowlie** (AF), SCVO **Lucinda Godfrey** (LG), ACOSVO **Catherine McWilliam** (CM), Institute of Directors Scotland **Pippa Milne** (PM), SOLACE / Argyll & Bute Council **Janice Gibson** (JG), Deputising for Karen Reid, NES **Tai McLennan** (TM), Deputy Director of Leadership, Culture and Wellbeing, Scottish Government **SLF Programme Team** – Laura Turney (LT), Angelika Majdanik (AM), Grant Campbell	**Joe Griffin** (JGr), Scottish Government (corresponding member) **Richard Foggo** (RF), Scottish Government **Karen Reid** (KR), NES **Sara Thiam** (ST), Prosper **Caroline Hiscox** (CH), NHS Lothian **Vicki Bibby** (VB), Audit Scotland

1.) **Welcome and introductions**

- Mary welcomed Shona Riach, DG Strategy and External Affairs, who will join Jane O'Donnell as Co-Chair in future meetings.
- Thanks were extended to DCC Jane Connors for her contributions. DCC Bex Smith to join the next meeting.

Action: SLF Programme Team to send formal thanks to DCC Connors. (**ACTION 1**)

2.) **Actions since the previous SSG meeting and Programme Update [via correspondence]**

- March 2025 minutes and Action Tracker were cleared via correspondence.
- Key themes from 1-2-1 meetings with members:
  - Need for a clearer group identity and proactive leadership role.
  - Desire for impactful contributions and strategic influence.
  - Mixed views on expanding membership; gaps noted in leadership practice and AI/automation.
  - Emphasis on system-wide accountability and integration with broader public service reform (PSR).
- Discussions highlighted:
  - Importance of AI and leadership in strategic reform – this is about people.
  - Need for clarity on SLF's role – development capacity vs. practical leadership.

- Loss of deeper networking opportunities amongst leaders in Scotland due to the end of the Scottish Leadership Academy (SLA) pilot.
- Value in focusing on a few high-impact areas (e.g., succession planning, talent management).
- Building trust and cross-sector relationships, with a need for candor.
- Potential for SLF to support leadership success profiles and academy-style reflective practice.

3.) Leadership with common purpose: opportunity for members to share contributions from their respective areas and share reflections following the publication of the PSR Strategy and the FM summit on Whole Family Support

- <u>Reflections on leadership challenges and reform:</u>
  - Reform efforts vary across sectors, need for shared understanding of priorities and clear messaging.
  - Concerns about reform being perceived as cost-saving rather than transformational.
  - Emphasis on prevention requires imagination when resources are tight.
  - Need for continuation of the approach undertaken via the Scottish Leadership Academy pilot and succession planning. [part of Leadership and Cultural Change workstream]
  - Recognition of operational pressures and need for space for transformational change and compassionate accountability. Basic management development is also required.
  - Emphasis on parity of esteem across sectors and clarity in complex environments.
  - Whole Family Approach event cited as a successful example of collaborative engagement. The Programme Team played a key role in delivery. Ten enablers from the event will inform future work.
  - Importance of trust, relational leadership.

- <u>Role and purpose of the group</u>
  - Feedback from members highlighted the need for a clearer purpose and stronger influence ('teeth'). Agreement to focus on 2–3 impactful areas as guided by the PSR Strategy rather than `trying to do everything`.
  - Connection to broader public service reform (PSR) strategy is critical.
  - It is important that we consider group membership and expertise gaps.
  - Recognition of the revolutionary moment in leadership (e.g., digitisation and AI).
  - Desire for SLF to be a key part of a wider accountability and reform system.
  - Co-Chairs to review group purpose and membership and consider how SLF can influence and support PSR implementation. (**ACTION 2**)

4.) **Implications of the PSR strategy for the SLF**

- Leadership and culture identified as complex areas within PSR.
- Support for a shared leadership statement aligned with the National Performance Framework (NPF). A need for common language and a common approach welcomed:
  - Should reflect collaborative practice, not just instruction. The statement should be practical, inclusive, and not overly prescriptive.
  - Must be high-level, sector-inclusive, and practically applicable.
  - Should acknowledge current leadership challenges and existing good practices.
  - Suggested use in governance and accountability frameworks.
  - Emphasis on peer accountability, digital and climate leadership.
  - Concerns about duplication with existing frameworks.
  - Emphasis on people coming to this as skilled leaders, not from a deficit.
- Programme Team to design a collaborative process for developing the statement and engage with all sectors to ensure relevance and buy-in. Align timing with the NPF review. (**ACTION 3**)

5.) **Next steps & AOB**

- Next meeting scheduled for 27 November 2025.
- Interest in an in-person meeting to deepen collaboration.
- Programme Team to poll members for suitable dates for an in-person meeting. (**ACTION 4)**

Action Points:

1. SLF Programme Team to send formal thanks to DCC Jane Connors.
2. Co-Chairs to review group purpose and membership and consider how SLF can influence and support PSR implementation.
3. Programme Team to design a collaborative process for developing the statement and engage with all sectors to ensure relevance and buy-in. Align timing with the NPF review.
4. Programme Team to poll members for suitable dates for an in-person meeting.