

ACCESSNI STAKEHOLDER FORUM – 22nd January 2026
On-line via TEAMS

Those in attendance

Board Members:

Rasa Stoylte (**ABC**)
David Jackson (**CEF**)
Colm Stranney (**NICSHR**)
Caroline Sweeney (**BSO**)
Helen McMillan (**DVA**)
Gary Richardson (**PSNI**)
Julie Jack (**PSNI**)
Vicky Shirley (**ARC**)
Lorna Houston (**Early Years**)
Bernie Fox (**Ulster GAA**)
Natasha Moroney (**QUB**)
Claire Gardner (**EA**)
Jane Lewsley (**UK Recruitment**)
Gemma Stevenson (**SEHSCT**)
Matt Binks (**First Advantage Ltd**)

AccessNI:

Neville Ferguson (**NF**) **Chair**
Amanda Jenner (**AJ**)
Patricia Kerr (**PK**)
Glenn Moorcroft (**GM**)

Apologies:

Alex Hood (**SIA**)
Ann Marie Hughes (**SRC**)
Richard Honeyford (**NISF**)
Gerard Doherty (**PSNI**)
David Cleland (**PSNI**)
Kyra Moody (**QUB**)
Sean Maskey (**DBS**)
Andy Thomson (**CCND**)
Stephen Brady (**BHSCT**)
John Cuthbert (**NICSHR**)
Ruth Mulholland (**Volunteer Now**)
Ciara McCann (**HSC**)
Eileen Dunlop (**Beaumont**)

Note Taker: Julie-Anne Stewart (**JS**)

1.	Welcome/Apologies NF welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
2.	Introductions NF introduced himself to the forum and invited all forum members to provide a brief introduction of themselves.	
3.	Minutes of the last meeting (6th November 2025) The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and accepted as a true record of business. These have now been posted on the Department of Justice (DoJ) website.	

4.	Matters Arising - Action Points There were no action points from the previous meeting.	
5. 5.1	AccessNI Operational Position PK advised members of the Operational position. PK advised the Operations Team continues to perform well and currently receive around 3,500 applications per week. PK advised that things had slowed down slightly after Christmas but have now started to pick up to busy levels again. PK advised that we are in an excellent position and we are currently processing around 700- 800 applications per day. PK advised Basics, Standards and Basic Responsible Bodies are being cleared daily. However, Enhanced are harder to predict as we depend on other agencies to feed into applications. There is currently a 9-day average turnaround for cases referred to the PSNI, which accounts for around 27% of our Enhanced cases. 80% of Enhanced cases are being issued within 2 days. The Operations Team continues to miss one ministerial target (98% of Enhanced disclosure checks within 28 days); this is caused by a backlog of aged cases that has built up due to PSNI staff shortages. We are working closely with the PSNI to resolve this as quickly as possible, and the overall situation is improving. There has been a reduction of cases with the PSNI, from around 1800 cases before Christmas, to around 1200 cases now. Their team is now fully staffed and trained, which is beginning to reduce the backlog and get the daily workflow back on track. We appreciate that this backlog is having a direct impact on customers being able to fill posts in a timely manner, but we ask you to bear with us if you have any applications delayed due to being referred to PSNI. Operations continue to assist the on-going response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine by prioritising applications from hosts/sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Up to 30 th December 2025 we processed 2,400 applications with an average turnaround of 3 days. GB police referrals oldest case is 82 days; it is the applicant that is causing the delay with the case. Aside from that, the turnaround remains in a good position. EU referrals are all moving well and there are currently no delays on any EU Country referrals.	

	Customer queries have increased significantly to our in-house mailbox and external call centre with the implementation of Level Of Assurance (LOA)2 Northern Ireland Identity Assurance (NIDA) accounts. We have been working closely with nidirect to resolve these issues as quickly as possible. We have recently noticed a drop in emails and calls as people get used to the new processes. NIDA has increased their workforce which will make their service more efficient. Our understanding is that they are still experiencing delays in regard to manual verification but are actively working to address them. Unfortunately, this is outside of our control, however, we will continue to report the overall issue to nidirect. Calls and emails received relating to delays with cases referred to a third party are being expedited with the Police Disclosure Unit (PDU). We hope to see a reduction in delays now that PDU are up to full staffing levels and training well under way. The Chief Officer Delegate has been in post for a few months now and we expect to see delays in aged cases being reduced. We will continue to expedite cases where financial hardship is claimed by an applicant, or an urgent placement is required. PK advised that the dispute/appeal process is currently being updated to bring this more in line with our digital processes to be managed by the applicant through the online system. It is expected to go live by the end of February 2026 with details of the new processes being uploaded onto our website. An article will also be included in the next newsletter for information. There are currently no staffing issues or updates. Training continues to be carried out to ensure our staff are ready to take on new challenges. One of the biggest impacts on training will be the introduction of the Law Enforcement Data Service (LEDS), which will replace the Police National Computer, staff have been training in readiness for this to go live. We are also working on new process for spending convictions as a result of the upcoming changes to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Order in Northern Ireland due to get Royal Consent in the Summer. NF asked GR from the PSNI about the improvement of figures and reduction in the backlog of cases. GR explained that they were quieter over Christmas and advised they have a plan in place to further reduce the backlog. NF advised we appreciated their efforts with this matter.	
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6.	Compliance and Finance Update	
	GM provided an update on the Compliance and Finance position.	
6.1	<u>Initial Registrations</u>	
	There have been 27 applications received within the last three months with just over half going on to register, this is a drop in applications compared to 42 in the previous three months. The main reason organisations are rejected is generally due to them not meeting the minimum requirement of 20 applications per annum or the organisation has applied for the wrong level of check. During 2025/26, 63 organisations registered for the first time with AccessNI. To date we have 727 Bodies in total, 606 Registered Bodies and 121 Responsible Bodies. Somewhere between half and a third of RBs are umbrella bodies.	
	<u>Compliance Audits</u>	
6.2	The compliance team audits:-	
	In 2025/26 so far, 216 audits have been carried out, which is tracking very well against annual targets and against 197 this time last year. There has been a significant reduction in cancellations. Since November 2025 there have only been 5 cancellations and overall, in 2025/26 there have been 15 cancellations. This improvement has greatly helped our annual programme. GM advised that there has also been a marked improvement with 3rd and 4th audits with less recommendations being noted each time with a good number of organisations.	
6.3	<u>Newsletter</u>	
	We are hoping to issue the next AccessNI newsletter to all signatories in March or sooner if possible. A circular on eligibility for self-employed/ personal employees working in Regulated Activity (RA) is also expected to be issued, the legislative change is currently going through the Assembly Committee.	
6.4	<u>Surgeries</u>	
	Joanna Wilson conducted online surgeries on 11th and 12th November 2025. All slots were booked except for two. Further surgeries are planned for 10/11th February 2026. A notification has been issued to signatories regarding these slots.	
	<u>Lead Signatory Training</u>	

6.5	The next Lead Signatory training has been arranged for Wednesday 18th February 2026 to be led by Erin. All recently Registered Bodies have been invited to attend. Erin and Joanna have updated the training slides to reflect recent changes to the AccessNI Disclosure System. <u>Signatory Training</u> 6.6 GM advised that the AccessNI online YouTube videos are out of date and will be removed within the next weeks. Instead, we will be offering in-person-online training. The next set of dates for this are 25/26th February 2026, with two 90-minute sessions per day, a signatory can attend one or both of these sessions and time can be extended if required to cover questions. <u>AccessNI Customer Survey</u> 6.7 The AccessNI Customer Survey 2026 just issued with signatories encouraged to provide feedback. This helps us improve the service we provide. <u>ID Checking Update</u> 6.8 There has been a marked improvement in ID checks completed when conducting compliance audits, with a fewer number of organisations being re-audited on their ID checking at the three-month follow-up stage. GM asked the forum members to remind signatories to look out for the title “Mrs” and check if a previous surname has been included on the e-application. If not, the signatory should liaise with applicant to clarify if there is a previous surname. We recommend cross checking their birth certificate as this will include all middle names and surname at birth. Email addresses should also be checked as these may sometimes include previous surnames or known as names, these should also be recorded on the e-application. <u>AccessNI Documentation Update</u> 6.9 Due to forthcoming improvements and updates the following information on the nidirect/DoJ websites and AccessNI documentation will be updated:- • How to raise a dispute/appeal with AccessNI • Eligibility for AccessNI checks to self-employed or personal employees (legislation change in Justice Bill) • Removal of supervision element for RA with children (Department of Health (DOH)-led.	
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6.10 6.11	<u>Finance</u> Our cost projections are holding firm this year, although there are still additional costs with applicants opening new nidirect verified accounts, rather than reusing existing accounts. The last monthly cost was around £28k in charges to us from nidirect's supplier. The Finance Team had a very busy month in December with 1,385 card payments taken for Basic certificates were made (almost £22k) and with invoices issued to RBs (income £227k). We continue to pursue debt and the timely payment of invoices is essential, as it enables us to avoid any unnecessary suspensions. Overall, we are in a solid position and are on track to recover all our costs. <u>Staffing</u> There are no staffing updates or changes for the compliance and finance teams.	
7. 7.1 7.2 7.3	Business Support and Transformation - IT Support Contract AJ provided an update on the Business Support and Transformation – IT Support Contract. <u>Disputes Module</u> AJ advised that this is currently well under way to replace the existing service provided by nidirect and we hope to deploy in February 2026. Operations have been heavily involved in the testing and solution. This will integrate directly with our application rather than a separate system with nidirect. <u>Migration to LEDS</u> Work continues on our migration to LEDS which will allow us to search for criminal record matches against applications. Timescales have slipped due to the Home Office working on technology issues and small defects which have to be resolved. Release 17 is expected in February 2026, and we plan to onboard after user testing is complete. <u>Police National Database (PND)</u> AJ advised that we are continuing to explore the PND as a potential tool for portable certificates. It allows for older irrelevant information to be	

	removed thus more accurate information. This would require less requests to Police forces for information meaning certificates being issued quicker and a reduction in costs as we are charged per search. We hope this will help us move towards portability. <u>Change to Initial Registration and Counter Signatory Letter</u> This change will enable us to customise these emails without requiring our 3rd party support and consequently a charge. We can tailor these ourselves we hope to bring this into play around the end of March/April 2026.	
7.4		
8.	AOB LH advised that there was a noticed improvement with the manual verification process, she had welcomed feedback regarding this and was happy to report that the situation has improved. AJ advised that nidirect have simplified the process making it easier and to note other services onboarding can also cause delays.	
9.	Date and Time for Next Meeting NF thanked everyone for attending and for their contribution. The next meeting will be on Thursday 28th May 2026 at 2pm. To be held via Microsoft teams.	

Acronym Table

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Name</u>
CS	Counter Signatory
COD	The Chief Officer Delegate
DOH	Department of Health
DOJ	Department of Justice
IR	Initial Registration
LEDS	Law Enforcement Data Service
LOA2	Level Of Assurance 2
LS	Lead Signatory
NIDA	The Northern Ireland Identity Assurance
PDU	Protective Disclosure Unit
PNC	Police National Computer
PND	Police National Database
RA	Regulated Activity

RB	Responsible/Registered Body
UB	Umbrella Body