

**PERMANENT SECRETARIES STOCKTAKE (PSS)**  
**Friday 8 May 2026, 9:00am**  
**Executive Room, Stormont Castle**

**In attendance:**

Mike Farrar (MF)	David Malcolm (DM)
Neil Gibson (NG)	Emer Morelli (EM)
Katrina Godfrey (KG)	Ian Snowden (IS)
Alex Gordon (AG)	Hugh Widdis (HW)
Gareth Johnston (GJ)	
Grainia Long (GL)	

Janet Smyth (Secretariat)  
Jayne Byrne (Secretariat)

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

Neil Gibson deputised for Jayne Brady (Chair), and Gareth Johnston deputised for Moira Doherty. Apologies were noted from Louise Crilly and Professor Helen McCarthy (CSTA).

**2. Minutes & Actions arising from PSS 24 April 2026**

The minutes of the meeting of 24 April 2026 were agreed, subject to amendments proposed by Louise Crilly and Neil Gibson.

Actions from the previous meeting were noted with one action carried forward. PSS noted the action associated with the reset paper.

**3. Strategic Policy Group (SPG) on matters arising in the Middle East**

Neil Gibson provided an update and advised the SPG are working on a dashboard to provide information associated with updates. Discussion ongoing with Cabinet office to improve data sharing.

**4. DoF update on ALB research and development of additional MI**

Neil Gibson provided a high-level update on work ongoing with regards ALBs and highlighted the growth over the last 6 years. He referred to the meeting scheduled with DoF officials and Finance Committee and agreed to share the information with PSS.

He also provided an update on hybrid working and advised that as part of the PSS reset HR and finance data / outturns will be discussed at future PSS meetings. He referred to the meeting scheduled with DoF officials and Finance Committee.

**Action:**

- (AP1) Neil Gibson to share data pack associated with ALB research.
- (AP2) Neil Gibson to share other Management Information

**5. Budget and AO Guidance**

Neil Gibson provided an update on the Budget position and Accounting Officer (AO) guidance. It was agreed to replace the NICS Board Leadership Development session on Monday 18 May 2026 with a special meeting of PSS/Finance Directors to discuss the budget and potential scenario planning. A pre-meeting to take place on Friday 15 May 2026 – afternoon.

**Action:**

- (AP3) PSS members to forward any questions that require legal clarity to NG to ensure a collective response is received.
- (AP4) Meeting with PSS/FDs to be arranged on Monday 18 May 2026. Pre-meeting to be arranged on Friday 15 May 2026 – pm.

**6. Tour de Table**

- 6.1 **DfC:** GL provided an update on the Sign Language Bill; relationships with DWP; Anti-Poverty Strategy reset; Casement Park and; strategic land partnership.
  
- 6.2 **DfI:** EM provided an update on the Fleadh Belfast 2026 event due to take place in from 2-9 August, expecting 600k visitors. There was discussion about the need for assurances that all aspects associated with transport and public services have been taken into account throughout the planning / delivery of this event as there are other events taking place in the city at the same time; eg: Belsonic. DfI meeting with John Walsh CEO Belfast City Council (BCC) this coming week. EM to advise if a meeting of Permanent Secretaries and BCC CEO would be beneficial following this meeting.

**Action**

- (AP5) EM to advise if a meeting with departments and John Walsh CEO Belfast City Council for the purposes of considering and addressing the impacts of the Fleadh event is required.
  
- 6.3 **DfE:** IS provided an update on the European Court of Auditors report on apprenticeships. No financial errors and a question raised on eligibility.
  
- 6.4 **DoJ:** HW provided an update on a number of staffing moves and the tree nursery at Magilligan HMP. Trees are available to purchase and a site visit can be arranged.

## Action

(AP6) PSS members to connect with HW if they wish to visit Magilligan and / or purchase trees.

6.5 **DoH:** MF advised of the launch of the “This is our Health” programme. He provided an update on the “Neighbourhood Approach”; Connecting People” initiative; Hantavirus and engagement with Prof Sir Michael Marmot, a guru on tackling inequality

6.6 **DAERA:** KG provided an update on a ballot for industrial action; the Balmoral Show; and a clash of dates with the NICS September Board meeting and an invitation to attend an Assembly Committee.

## Action

(AP7) Secretariat to consider the clash of dates impacting the September NICS Board meeting.

6.7 **DE:** DM provided an update on TransformEd conferences taking place w/c Monday 11 May 2026. He referred to costs associated with annual leave accrual and the need to encourage staff to use their leave.

6.8 **TEO:** GJ advised the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting taking place today and; strategic partnerships with regards land use.

## 7. AOB

7.1 Draft agenda for meeting with Sec Gens – 14-15 May 2026  
NG provided a verbal update on the draft agenda for these meetings.

7.2 NG provided an update on the Grade 3 Deputy Secretary recruitment competition which is due to launch next week and the AO competition.

8. **Date of next formal PSS meeting:** Friday 29 May 2026

*Meeting closed @ 11.00am*