

PERMANENT SECRETARIES' STOCKTAKE (PSS)
Friday 13 February 2026, 09:00am
Executive room, Stormont Castle

In attendance:

Jayne Brady/HOCS (Chair)	Sean Holland
Louise Crilly	Gareth Johnston
Mike Farrar(virtually)	Declan McGeown
Neil Gibson	David Malcolm
Katrina Godfrey	Emer Morelli
Alex Gordon	Ian Snowden

Janet Smyth (Secretariat)

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies received from Hugh Widdis and Moira Doherty. Sean Holland and Gareth Johnston deputised respectively.

HoCS thanked Katrina Godfrey who is looking at new ways of working for the PSS. PSS will continue with its current format until this work is concluded.

2. Minutes 23 January 2026

The minutes of the meeting of 23 January 2026 to issue for clearance at 20 February 2026 meeting.

3. Staffing: Grade 5 and Grade 3 competitions

NG provided an updated on planning for a Grade 3 and Grade 5 competition.

NG presented the Senior Civil Service (SCS) quarterly update tracker/ dashboard. The dashboard is designed to provide a quarterly overview update on SCS staff in post, recruitment competitions underway, temporary promotions; staff moves, leavers and new entrants. PSS members agreed this information is helpful and provides the opportunity to take collective responsibility in managing the SCS cadre.

Action: NG to provide a timeframe in relation to approach and delivery for the Grade 3 competition.

4. Chief Digital Officer

Following an action from January NICS Board, IS provided 3 papers for discussion in relation to a Chief Digital Officer role.

4.1 Development of digital roles to 2028

IS presented a graphic of each of the Digital Services, responsibilities and linkages.

4.2 Summary of 'NICS Digital' and Chief Digital Officer role

IS provided a summary outline of proposed responsibilities for a Chief Digital Officer role and the organisation that they will lead (provisionally named NICS Digital). IS discussed how the role will relate to others working in this space and how it might evolve following delivery of the Integr8 programme.

4.3 Chief Digital Officer – Job Description

IS explained that the Chief Digital Officer is the NICS principal leader of digital enabled transformation, responsible for reshaping operating models, driving data driven decision-making, and coordinating NICS wide change to deliver modern, efficient and user-centred public services.

PSS agreed this work would be crucial to move forward with providing a sustainable public service.

5. DfE Matrix Futures and Foresight

IS presented on the purpose and impact of Matrix (a NI Science Industry Panel convened to advise government and inform academia and industry on the commercial exploitation of research and development, science, and technology in NI) and referenced foresight research carried out in the past year which included a recent report on AI and the Future of work.

IS suggested this is an opportunity to showcase and raise awareness of the work of the industry led panel and opportunities across Departments to make use of this resource.

6. Tour de Table

6.1 DfI

DMcG reported that 9 people had already lost their lives on the roads in 2026 and that the Translink CEO competition is ongoing.

6.2 DfC

EM provided an update on Social Housing and Casement Park.

6.3 TEO

GJ advised that the Principal Information Officer competition was completed with notifications issued to successful candidates. GJ provided an update on plans to unveil the HIA memorial at Parliament Buildings; EVAWAG and Race equality.

6.4 OLC

AG commented on matters relating to legislative planning.

6.5 DoH

MF referred to strategic operational planning guidance and working across government; GP pay position and; a case of Hemorrhagic fever.

6.6 DE

DM provided an update on the DE budget position.

6.7 DoF

NG referred to the Peace Plus Programme Paper and requested that Permanent Secretaries seek departmental expenditure that might be considered for inclusion; drew attention to the request to confirm Digital IT Projects commitments which have been circulated.

Action: Permanent Secretaries to consider the Peace Plus Programme, returns due 27.2.26.

6.8 DfE

IS referred to the Ryanair MRO investment opportunity and the potential this would bring with 600 additional jobs.

6.9 DAERA

KG sought suggestions from colleagues for filling the NICS Gender Champion role and updated on plans for an International Women's Day event (IWD) - Friday 6 March 2026.

Newly appointed Permanent Secretaries & DSO have been asked to take part in a Panel discussion at the NICS Women's Network event at Loughry on Friday 6 March. In previous years PSS scheduled to take place on IWD have been postponed allowing Permanent Secretaries to attend the event. KG encouraged all Permanent Secretaries to attend and support this event. HoCS agreed to cancel the meeting scheduled for 6 March 2026.

Action: (1) Consider the Gender Champion position

(2) Cancel PSS scheduled for 6 March 2026.

6.10 DSO

LC updated on legal matters.

6.11 DoJ

SH updated on the position with the Sentencing Bill and made reference to the prison population increasing.

6.12 HOCS provided an update related to her attendance at the UK Ireland Permanent Secretary conference.

7. AOB

HoCS referred to the Primary Care MDT steering group transformation meeting which took place on Monday 9 February 2026. HoCS commended the great work and progress made.

Meeting closed 11.30