

## PERMANENT SECRETARIES' STOCKTAKE

Friday 17 April 2026 - 9:00am

Executive Room, Stormont Castle

### In attendance:

Jayne Brady (Chair)

Louise Crilly

Mike Farrar

Katrina Godfrey

Helen McCarthy CSTA

Ian Snowden

Heather Cousins

Moira Doherty

Neil Gibson

Alex Gordon

Declan McGeown

Hugh Widdis

Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)

Jayne Byrne (Secretariat)

### 1. Welcome & Apologies

Apologies received from Emer Morelli and David Malcolm, with Heather Cousins deputising for DM. HOCS welcomed Grainia Long and Moira Doherty to their first PSS in their new substantive positions and recorded thanks to Declan McGeown on his last meeting at PSS on behalf of Dfl.

HoCS advised she may need to leave the meeting early and that Hugh Widdis would take on the role of Chair on her departure.

### 2. Minutes & Actions arising from PSS on Friday 27 March 2026

The minutes of 27 March 2026 were agreed. There were no actions arising from the previous meeting.

### 3. Executive update

HoCS provided a high-level update on ongoing Executive Business.

### 4. Budget update

All noted the continued challenges in the absence of an agreed budget with the need to ensure clarity and consistency across departments in relation to approach to spend and any new funding announcements. DSO advised they are finalising advice to Accounting Officers.

NG noted that correspondence will issue to all departments shortly, requesting submissions on the trajectory of spend and budget management within a very tight response time, with the fiscal sustainability work as the starting point.

Budget and staffing information will also be sought for all ALBs at year-end 2025/26.

**Action:**

(AP1) Members to encourage their FDs to speak to NG's team with any queries on required information.

(AP2) Members to ensure FDs provide information relating to ALBs by the deadline.

**4. Strategic Policy Group on matters arising in the Middle East**

HOCS noted the papers circulated in advance setting out the objectives of the group and its Terms of Reference along with the minutes of the meeting.

FMDFM have been briefed and officials are meeting with Cabinet Office next week.

This group does not cut into CCPB role and focusses on coordinating policy response and sharing of information. IS noted there is now clarity around the energy support payments, indicating the money is being provided for a comparable scheme to GB. GL noted the importance of ensuring all COPEs adopt a consistent approach to how contracts are applied and are reminded of their obligations to ensure contracts are monitored effectively.

MD noted the intention to develop reporting templates to synthesise information being provided to the Executive to ensure a clear overall picture of potential cross-cutting impacts.

**5. PSS Reset**

HoCS recorded thanks to KG for developing the original paper, the content which has now been pulled into a framework and propose that next week the Delivery Unit come to present the transformation fund's annual report.

Members noted there is now agreement to fund the second round of projects.

HoCS noted the forward programme and drew members' attention to the meeting with the Comptroller General at a future meeting. PSS to consider future potential agenda items of relevance.

Members endorsed the proposed framework.

**Action:**

(AP3) Secretariat to recirculate the draft framework and draft forward workplan for final comments and agreement.

(AP4) Members to consider themes for the bi-monthly meetings with G3s. Provide any suggestions to PSS Secretariat.

**6. Draft agenda for the Perm Secs / Sec Gens meeting 14-15 May 2026**

Members noted the upcoming Perm Secs / Sec Gens joint meeting.

MD provided insights on her recent meetings with Sec Gen colleagues. CSTA updated on recent engagement with CSA/ROI and the shared areas for potential working.

HoCS provided an update on the CEF - Cross Border Leadership Programme. Further information on the selection process will be provided in due course.

**Action:**

(AP5) Secretariat to share draft agenda for consideration and input.

## **7. Tour de Table**

### **7.1 DAERA**

Recorded thanks to all for supporting the staff's marathon fundraiser for Fermanagh and Omagh Women's Aid. Noted DAERA are happy to host the Pivotal Young Leaders at Clare House in June to meet with a few Perm Sec colleagues to hear about civil service jobs, working with the Executive and Assembly, and Perm Secs' own career paths. The leadership programme is particularly focussed on policy so would be keen for the Head of the Policy Profession to attend. PSS members advise KG if they are willing to take part.

KG advised the CAP is a legal requirement and it is important for all to understand the legislation and the requirements.

**Action:**

(AP6) PSS to advise KG if they wish to take part.

### **7.2 DSO**

Noted the ongoing discussions to relocate the NICSHR Litigation Unit under DSO management for better alignment of services, with no change in terms and conditions to staff. Update provided on engagement with relevant stakeholders including the Unions. PSS endorsed this approach.

### **7.3 CSTA**

CSTA updated on the development of the R&I and the AI strategies which are progressing to public consultation stage. She updated on the STEM Passport for Inclusion Launch and Celebration Event due to take place at the end of April 2026. The scheme is intended to address inequalities with access to STEM careers among secondary school students in socially disadvantaged communities.

HMCM also updated on the Local Innovation Partnership fund, ARIs and the need for ringfencing of research funding.

#### **7.4 DfC**

GL noted a very positive start in post with lots of great people and a very delivery focussed department. Keen to identify clearer structures and processes to improve decision making and escalation.

GL sought information on a lead for the Local Growth Fund. There is a point of contact in DoF. HoCS requested information be brought back to PSS on this.

#### **Action:**

(AP7) Secretariat to ensure information brought back to PSS on the LGF

#### **7.5 HoCS**

Advised of a follow up meeting with Lesley Hogg in the next few weeks.

#### **Action:**

(AP8) PSS to provide any further information in advance of the meeting.

*11.00 HoCS left the meeting*

#### **7.6 DoF**

NG stressed the importance of all staff having workstyle agreements agreed and on the system and a need to bring FDs and Corporate Services Directors together to discuss a range of cross-cutting issues at corporate level including a corporate approach to non-executive director roles. He updated on progress being made on improving efficiency in NICS recruitment processes.

*11.07 NG left the meeting*

#### **7.7 OLC**

AG advised positive progress in relation to enforcement of rules on scope in consideration of legislation and progress in relation to quality of legislation and engagement with policy teams on PMBs.

#### **7.8 DfI**

DMcG provided an update on engagement with NIAO and NI Water.

#### **7.9 DE**

HC noted challenging budgetary position and ongoing work in this area.

#### **7.10 DfE**

IS provided an update on progress on the Good Jobs Bill and further and higher education. He provided an overview of challenges associated with uncertainty on budget position, and an update on the new policy on smart meters and a new approach in the department to developing policy and legislative skills.

### **7.11 DoH**

MF updated on challenges in relation to pay and potential industrial action. Updated on lessons learned in relation to SEN summer schemes and the need for a consistent approach to professional advice.

### **7.12 TEO**

MD advised she would raise the Ulster University's Post Graduate Diploma in Public Administration at a future meeting.

### **7.13 DoJ**

HW provided an update in relation to response to recent fuel protests and the appointment of the new DOJ Perm Sec in the Irish Government.

## **8. AOB**

### **8.1 Encouraging Participation in the Charity for Civil Servants Mega Miles Challenge**

Jayne Byrne obo HOCS referred to previous agreement from PSS members to take part in a walk for the Charity for Civil Servants as part of the Mega Miles Challenge. Members noted that Catherine Shannon has written to departments to ask them to encourage participation across departments and sought clarification as to whether the request was of Perm Secs themselves, departmental staff or both noting they were content to participate.

#### **Action:**

(AP9) Jayne Byrne to clarify with Catherine Shannon details of proposal.

## **9. Date of next PSS meeting**

Next meeting: Friday 24 April at 09:00 in the Executive Room.  
The Delivery Unit will be attending and providing an update on the Transformation Projects.

Following the meeting a representative from the US Consulate provide a briefing on data and research security. To note, this session is being organised by TEO Perm Sec Team.