

PERMANENT SECRETARIES' STOCKTAKE (PSS)
Friday 24 April 2026, 09:00am
Executive room, Stormont Castle

In attendance:

Jayne Brady/HOCS (Chair)	David Malcolm
Louise Crilly	Emer Morelli
Moira Doherty	Paul Rice
Neil Gibson	Ian Snowden
Katrina Godfrey	Hugh Widdis
Alex Gordon	
Grainia Long	

Debbie Murphy (Secretariat)
Jayne Byrne (Secretariat)

Patrick Gallagher (Item 3 only @ 9:10am)
Jennifer Mooney (Item 3 only @ 9:10am)
Joanne McBurney – *accompanying NG*

1. Welcome and Apologies

HoCS welcomed Paul Rice deputising on behalf of Mike Farrar and Emer Morelli to her first PSS as substantive Permanent Secretary of DfI.

2. Minutes & Actions arising from PSS 17 April 2026

The minutes of the meeting of 17 April 2026 were agreed.

Actions from the previous meeting were noted.

3. Update on Transformation Fund and role of Delivery Unit

Patrick Gallagher and Jennifer Mooney attended to provide an update on the Transformation Fund and the work of the Delivery Unit, including plans for regular reporting and publication of the annual report.

The update covered progress from tranche one and the expected announcement of tranche two of the Transformation Fund, and an update on the role of the Delivery Unit which has now been formalised with a stronger central coordinating approach. There was a discussion on the draft annual report, which will set out the purpose and year-one achievements, information required for regular governance/assurance reports (including dashboards), digital transformation, and the planned spend trajectory. There is an emphasis on clear communications and ensuring a consistent public narrative supported by stronger qualitative evidence of impact. Potential timings for publication and comms were noted.

HoCS thanked PG, JM and their team for all their hard work, their ability to find new ways of working and their continued engagement across departments.

@ 09:40 – PG & JM left the meeting

4. Budget update

A high-level budget update was provided, noting that formal guidance has not yet issued. Members discussed the implications of the absence of an agreed budget. Further communications intended to issue over the next few weeks, including next steps and timings.

ACTION:

(AP1) Secretariat to arrange a meeting of Permanent Secretaries following issue of DoF guidance.

5. NICS timebound Grip April 2026

Discussion focused on the proposed timebound approach to filling vacancies in the absence of an agreed budget. The focus is on applying a consistent, timebound methodology for managing vacancies and paybill while allowing Accounting Officers discretion on implementation. Members highlighted the need to ensure governance and assurance via system gateways, senior sign-off and repeat checks to ensure affordability and real-world accuracy of vacancy data.

Members noted the need for collective Perm Sec leadership, clear expectations and communications to avoid piecemeal departmental action and to maintain probity. Additional points raised included the need to manage operational risk and exceptions for statutory/frontline services, alongside engagement with trade unions and recognition of wider delivery pressures and the importance of longer-term workforce planning and productivity.

ACTION:

(AP2) DoF to issue a request for information to inform timebound grip exercise.

(AP3) PSS Members requested methodology be provided for further consideration of how the proposals could be taken forward.

6. Strategic Policy Group (SPG) - HoCS provided a high-level overview of the discussions at SPG and share a copy of a letter issued to UKG.

7. AOB – there were no matters arising.

8. Date of next formal PSS meeting: Friday 08 May 9.00 – 11.00

Meeting closed @ 10.30