



Department of
Finance
An Roinn
Airgeadais

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OFFICIAL SENSITIVE – NOT FOR ONWARD TRANSMISSION

From: JILL MINNE

Date: 11 JANUARY 2021

To: JENNY PYPER

Issues:

This paper is to

[REDACTED], (iv) propose action in relation to the substantive HOCS role [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Recommendation: **That you:**

- a. [REDACTED]
- b. [REDACTED]
- c. **consider the review of the HOCS role and associated action required;**
and
- d. [REDACTED]

Head of Civil Service Substantive Appointment

1. Further to our discussion 21 December 2020 on reviewing the HOCS role [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], I advise as follows.

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Review of HOCS Role and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

15. The HOCS role, and therefore its review, is inextricably linked to the NI Executive / NICS governance and accountability structures and consideration at the outset must be given to whether or not we are developing the proposals for HOCS role on assumption that current structures remain unchanged – are there changes to HOCS role in this context? Or should we look at other jurisdictions and suggest structural / governance changes from which may flow changes to HOCS remit?

16. Given the review's context, various options in this regard have been considered at a very high level i.e.:

- Do nothing: are there changes to role of HOCS we would suggest anyway?
- Quick wins: for example building capacity and capability at the centre and changes to HOCS role based on where we are today and linked to Executive's programme of work and money allocation.
- Public sector reform: this is a longer term programme of work and we can't wait to see outcome of this but it will undoubtedly impact role of SCS, including HOCS. This would however support the quick wins option as it would be a move to position HOCS to allow the reform programme to proceed under their direction and leadership.

17. Given the significant and hugely challenging Executive agenda and its delivery context the preferred approach is one of flexible 'quick win'.
18. The restoration of the Executive in January 2020 brought with it an ambitious agenda for investment and reform in public services, to address short and long term economic and social challenges. The biggest challenge, however, for the Executive over the past year turned out to have been the global pandemic meaning the postponement of the NDNA commitment to publish a three-year PfG.
19. Handling the pandemic has dominated the last year of government which also saw the publication of the RHI Inquiry report and the end of the EU exit transition period. Now, more than ever therefore, the NICS and its most senior leaders must support the Executive to work together to agree priorities, investments and areas for reform in an agreed multi-year PfG that addresses Northern Ireland's long standing economic and social challenges. Development and delivery of the PFG will be in the context of the health, societal and economic recovery from the current pandemic alongside the need to deliver NDNA reform commitments; respond to recommendations from the RHI and NIAO reports; and manage the impact of EU exit.
20. While we have a suite of outcomes and organisational improvements either in train or planned we need to do significantly more to ensure we manage this development work as a coherent and visible programme with clear lines of accountability. The need to ensure Ministers are effectively supported by TEO and the most senior civil servant and other senior leaders in its delivery is key.
21. TEO could therefore, as the corporate centre of the NICS, be strengthened in terms of its capacity and capability (resources, functions and skills) to effectively support effective joint working, forward planning and strategic decision making
22. TEO needs to be better able to drive collective leadership and delivery on key issues such as NICS reform and cross-cutting outcomes based (externally and internally facing) programmes, projects and policies; to lead a coherent and multi-faceted programme of reform and improvement across all departments; and to design, develop and implement appropriate governance arrangements with clear lines of accountability.
23. To do so may well require developing, strengthening and/or moving functions into the TEO department. Consideration could be given to aspects of public sector reform, public spending (e.g. recommendations on the optimum distribution of resources to NI programmes to ensure that NI departments spend money for the purposes set out in the PfG) and organisational transformation and development.
24. In this context the focus of the HOCS role should be on supporting and advising on the running of the Executive to enable the delivery of PfG and to reach collective agreement on policies. The key aspect of the HOCS role going forward will be to act as FM and dFM's senior adviser on the working of NI government and on major policy decisions and working closely with the Ministers in government, advising FM/dFM on priority issues and ensuring that the rest of the NICS works to deliver those priorities. Overall the role will entail:

- Secretary to the Executive Adviser to FM/dFM
- Leading reform and improvement of the NICS
- Driving implementation ensuring coherence and collective leadership to the work of the service as a whole
- Leading the NICS
- Managing senior civil servants
- Guardian of propriety and ethics and driving a diverse and inclusive NICS
- Representing the NICS externally

25. In that context capacity and capability (resources and skills) below HOCS level (in TEO) would need to be built to drive, deliver and manage cross-cutting programmes, projects and policies; a coherent NICS-wide programme of reform and improvement; and associated governance arrangements with clear lines of accountability.

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Proposed next steps

30. Having considered the above matters, the following actions are proposed:

█ [REDACTED]

- Review the HOCS position with the role's focus being on acting as FM and dFM's most senior adviser on the workings of government and on major policy decisions, working closely with all ministers, advising FM and dFM on priority issues and ensuring the rest of the NICS works to deliver these priorities.
- Review the salary for the HOCS role.

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Recommendation

31. You are invited to:

- a. [REDACTED]
- b. [REDACTED]
- c. consider the review of the HOCS role and associated proposed actions; and
- d. consider and advise on the proposed next steps.

JILL MINNE

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[REDACTED] the substantive HOCS role should be reviewed in preparation for the next competition.

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During the process of developing and agreeing interim arrangements for the HOCS role it was agreed that the substantive role and its recruitment policy and process should be reviewed.

The HOCS Role

Essentially, the NICS HOCS role is about:

1. Facilitating the development of Executive policy over the medium and long-term, including most obviously in development of an organised series of business in the form of what is known as a Programme for Government; and
2. Facilitating on a daily and weekly basis the Executive's sense of unfolding events and political priorities for planning, for example planning and delivering on Covid and Brexit. Helping Ministers to anticipate and operationalise immediate and developing Executive priorities through organising, preparing for and facilitating Executive meetings and business.

3. Ensuring delivery of Executive policy consistently over time, including on significant delivery priorities, for example Covid and Brexit, including leading the organisation and management of the NICS.

The significant and hugely challenging Executive agenda and its delivery context is the key consideration for HOCS role. The Executive has an ambitious agenda for investment and reform in public services, to address short and long term economic and social challenges. The biggest challenge, however, for it over the past year, has been the global pandemic meaning the postponement of the NDNA commitment to publish a three-year PfG.

The last year also saw the publication of the RHI Inquiry report and the end of the EU exit transition period. Now, more than ever therefore, the NICS and its most senior leaders must support the Executive to work together to agree priorities, investments and areas for reform in an agreed multi-year PfG that addresses Northern Ireland's long standing economic and social challenges. Development and delivery of the PFG will be in the context of the health, societal and economic recovery from the current pandemic alongside the need to deliver NDNA reform commitments; respond to recommendations from the RHI and NIAO reports; and manage the impact of EU exit.

The focus of the HOCS role should be on supporting and advising on the running of the Executive to enable the delivery of PfG and to reach collective agreement on policies. The key aspect of the HOCS role going forward will be to act as FM and dFM's senior adviser on the working of NI government and on major policy decisions and working closely with the Ministers in government, advising FM/dFM on priority issues and ensuring that the rest of the NICS works to deliver those priorities. Overall the role will entail:

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- Driving implementation ensuring coherence and collective leadership to the work of the service as a whole
- Leading the NICS
- Managing senior civil servants
- Guardian of propriety and ethics and driving a diverse and inclusive NICS

- Representing the NICS externally
- Capacity and capability (resources and skills) below HOCS level (in TEO) would need to be built to drive, deliver and manage cross-cutting programmes, projects and policies; a coherent NICS-wide programme of reform and improvement; and associated governance arrangements with clear lines of accountability.

We have a suite of outcomes and organisational improvements either in train or planned but we need to do significantly more to ensure we manage this development work as a coherent and visible programme with clear lines of accountability. The need to ensure Ministers are effectively supported by TEO and the most senior civil servant and other senior leaders in its delivery is key.

Arguably, this work would be easier, if there were to be an equivalent of a Cabinet Office function tasked central leadership and progression of the Executive's preoccupations, intentions and priorities.

There is no such central function and HOCS does not currently have formal authority to manage the Permanent Secretaries - they are Accounting Officers who report to their Ministers. The HOCS role is essentially a convening leadership role.

Changing the formality of those reporting relationships would, potentially involve some sort of either primary or secondary legislative change. While possible, it might be very difficult to get cross Executive political agreement to that sort of change, particularly within the current context in a period of months while preparing for and launching a new HOCS recruitment competition.

However, without altering the formality of the reporting relationship of the Permanent Secretaries to HOCS, it might be possible to strengthen the Executive Office.

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[REDACTED] It would also change the HOCS role and make it more manageable and potentially more attractive to candidates.

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- Develop and agree HOCS role.
- Review the salary for the HOCS role.

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