

18. In terms of records management NICS has an established governance programme in place which has provided staff with refreshed guidance on things like what is a record/what should be saved etc. The importance of this area was underscored by recommendations from the RHI Inquiry. As part of our communications to staff it would be sensible to highlight a public inquiry as something that staff need to be aware of and thinking about in relation to information governance. There is always a risk that if relevant emails are not saved as records they will be purged from the system after the fixed retention period.
19. On 16<sup>th</sup> September HOCS wrote to all Permanent Secretaries requesting a positive assurance that relevant records have been and are being preserved.
20. It is not inconceivable that when an inquiry is established it will begin to work at pace and Departments have been encouraged to begin to develop timelines and narratives around key decisions/actions that were taken during the course of the pandemic. As part of their Business Continuity Plans many Departments and ALBs may have operated a system of decision logs which may help in the preparation of these high level narratives.
21. Departmental Solicitor's Office has produced two guidance documents which are appended for information –
- DSO preliminary guidance in advance of any COVID-19 Public Inquiry (**Annex A**)
  - DSO Witness Guide - COVID Inquiry (**Annex B**)
22. In addition, DSO and TEO have been progressing some scoping work with DOF's Enterprise Shared Services which includes –
- Scoping possible automated technology to support document redaction;
  - Potential to use AI solutions for intelligent searching of data/information within documents;
  - Scoping options for digital transfer of discovery material to Inquiry potentially based on an existing API between NICS and PRONI.

#### Recommendation

23. It is recommended that you
- note the content of this submission and the preliminary steps being taken by NICS to prepare for a COVID Inquiry; and
  - consider the option of canvassing preliminary views from Executive colleagues by way of correspondence in advance of the draft terms of reference being received.

**JAYNE BRADY**