

TITLE/ORGANISATION		Covid 19 Public Inquiry HOCS Reference Group	
VENUE:		Teams	
DATE/TIME:		Thursday 17 August 2023	
List of Attendees:		Jayne Brady Denis McMahon Neil Gibson Hugh Widdis Michael Kennedy Jill Minne	Tony Simpson Eugene O'Loan Jane Holmes Tracey McCavigan NR
Apologies:		Peter May	
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:			
1	<b>Welcome &amp; General Overview</b> Jayne Brady opened the meeting welcoming everyone.		
2	<b>Meeting Note of the last meeting – 9 May 2023.</b> The Group agreed the meeting note.		
3	<b>Matters Arising</b> Jane updated the Group on Action Points. The meeting noted that DoF are in conversations with Cabinet Office regarding the use of AI.  Jane talked through key points of Risk Register, the meeting noted that 3 risks remain as Red and the reasons why this remains the case. Jane updated the meeting on the issue of deadlines and pressure TEO and DoH are under with parallel modules running and what appears to be the lack of communications between UK Module leads. It was highlighted that Module 2, which starts on 3 <sup>rd</sup> October, will have 48 hearing days with the need for NICS departments to be aware of issues that may come up that will need Departments to be aware of any criticisms being made.  It was suggested that further consideration should be given to what additional actions could be taken to mitigate against the Risks. <a href="#">AP – TEO CRSD to explore what further action could be taken to manage the risks particularly those still recorded as RED.</a>		
4	<b>NICS Highlight Report</b> It was noted that the NICS Highlight report covered the reporting period 21 April - 31 July 2023. Michael provided a report overview and thanked all Departments for providing input. The report draws out that some Departments are under significant pressure to keep on top of disclosure, drafting statements and support witnesses. The meeting noted the need for Departments to understand how important it is to disclose all relevant material to Inquiry.		
5	<b>Legal Update</b> Hugh outlined the implications of failing to disclose material that should be.  The meeting was advised that DSO remain in the position to support any request for legal advice to Departments and can avail of Panel Ds. TEO also highlighted that witness rule 9s are extremely detailed. It was agreed that the issue of the scale of the Inquiry should be brought to PSS and that there is a need for a wider education piece to be built into a broader lesson learned exercise. <a href="#">AP – Jane Holmes to explore how best to bring learning on scale and disclosure to all departments.</a>		

6	<p><b>Resources</b></p> <p>Neil provided an overview of the Resource paper, highlighting that the paper presents only the finance perspective. DoF continue to engage with DAs on costs of serving Inquiry. He suggested that there would be merit in staff who become skilled in Inquiry processes would support other Departments if a departmental Inquiry team experiences a dip in Inquiry-related work. It was noted it would be difficult for some departments to provide that level of support or find the right people with the skill set. It was agreed that learning from Module 1 should be taken onboard and that a paper to cover Lessons Learned and Resourcing should be provided to the September NICS Board meeting.</p> <p>The meeting noted that the cross-Departmental Inquiry Group have agreed that opportunities for further collaborative working will be identified and implemented.</p> <p>Jane advised that the cross-Departmental group met recently and discussed lessons learned regarding operational issues. A paper is being prepared and will be shared by correspondence with the group. This paper will then be taken forward into wider paper including financial position for NICS Board consideration.</p> <p>AP – TEO CRSD to issue by correspondence the Operational Lesson Learned Cross Departmental Paper.</p> <p>AP – Jane Holmes, Tony Simpson and Jill Minne prepare a paper using the Operational Lessons Learned with the DoF paper on Financial and Resource Costs paper also needs to include detail of risk legal of not being prepared. Paper to go to September NICS Board.</p>
7	<p><b>Retention of Records</b></p> <p>Michael provided the meeting with an overview of the correspondence received from the UK Inquiry team on 31 March regarding electronic device records. Denis introduced Tracey McCavigan and provided an overview of her role in leading on the fact finding investigation on mobile devices allocated to former Minister and SpAds.</p> <p>HOCS will write to all Permanent Secretaries to remind Departments about the need to retain all records including those on electronic devices. The meeting agreed to commission Tracey McCavigan NI Audit to take forward an independent fact finding review.</p> <p>AP – TEO CSRD to share timeline of HOCS communication on retention of records.</p> <p>AP – Tracey McCavigan and Jane Holmes to prepare initial Terms of Reference for the review an ensure they are reflective of the questions that the UK Inquiry has raised. Initial Draft to be shared by correspondence with group.</p> <p>AP – HOCS to write to all Permanent Secretaries to remind Departments about the need to retain all records including those on electronic devices including a call to action on now retain records.</p>
9	<p><b>Any other Business - none</b></p>
<p>Minutes written by: <span>NR</span> Date: 17 August 2023</p>	