Department of Finance
An Roinn Airgeadais
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MINUTE TEMPLATE

DoF PRIVATE OFFICE MEETING NOTE

☐ **Internal**	☒ **External**

KN REF:	INV-0298-2025			
TITLE/ORGANISATION:	Meeting with Martin O'Brien - Social Change Initiative - CLC JR			
DATE AND TIME:	24 September 2025 at 12:45 – 13:30 Pre Brief 12:30 – 12:45			
VENUE:	☐ **PB**	☒ **Clare House**	☐ **OTHER:**	

ATTENDEES:

Martin O'Brien - Social Change Initiative

Padraic Quirk - Social Change Initiative

☒ **Minister**	☒ **SpAd**	☒ **PS**	
OFFICIALS:	Jeff McGuinness Neil Gibson		

KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:

<u>Pre- Brief (DoF Officials only)</u>
Discussed the approach for the meeting.

<u>Meeting</u>

- JMcG provided an overview of the processes followed by DoF for 2025-26 budget.
- Have continued to have regular engagement with ECNI on embedding equality into the budget process.
- Referred to the detail of commissioning note to departments and receipt of 566 pages of information from departments to inform a cumulative equality impact assessment (CEIA). –
- Published a CEIA and for first time DoF has also published a final equality statement as a follow up to the CEIA
- Set out key inequalities and how depts are seeking to address those matters.
- DoF is now looking at the process for forthcoming budget.
- This provided an indication of DoF's direction of travel and commitment to equality and trying to improve that process

- Minister reassured MoB/PQ that DoF has been open to moving the equality agenda forward to ensure it is embedded in the system. Section 75 (S75) at centre of what we do and acknowledged that we can still learn.
- Explained however there is also a framework that Ministers and Assembly have to work within when conducting and delivering business.

MOB/PQ

- Have had long standing interest in S75 issues.
- Concern is around the DoF arguments to be presented in court will have on S75 after there is a change in Minister.
- View is there is a regression in approach DoF is taking in the litigation.
- If the dept's view prevails as a consequence of the court process it will mean stakeholders have to rely on the person holding office and their personal commitments which will undermine the intention of S75.

JMcG

- Referred to the department's position paper and the issues that DoF do not want the court to decide upon, but this position was not accepted by court and leave was granted.

NG

- Explained that DoF does not want to have to go to court on the matter.
- Referred to how the legal arguments are structured and the intent is not to undermine S75. DoF does not own the budget, it is an Executive budget.
- Explained how the process would have to operate to satisfy the requirements sought by CLC.
- Open to taking a cumulative approach to budget process within practical working arrangements.
- Offered ECNI to come and work alongside DoF to inform and observe how the budget process operates.
- Confirmed it is not the intention of rowing back on position at all but was focused on practicalities.
- No practical way of doing what is being asked - will be unable to deliver a budget given technical constraints.
- Referred to developments in the department's collection of data in terms of detail and timing to inform equality issues.

MoB

- Reiterated that the current legal arguments being presented by DoF despite intent will undermine S75.

- SpAd view is court process is not the forum to consider such complex issues.
- Position has always been to work with ECNI to deliver requirements of S75.
- DoF has had to let the process take its course.

- Minister referred to remainder of mandate which would be better spent working together to embed best practice in respect of equality within DoF.

- MoB view is that DoF is arguing there is no duty on DoF due to the practicalities of delivering a CEQIA for the budget.
- Minister disagreed and explained the duties he has responsibility for and stated consideration of S75 is part of those responsibilities.

JMcG

- Explained how the proposed ECNI ask that CEQIA is carried out before it is presented to the Minister would work in practice and the implications on the budgetary process.

- Undermines role of departments, Ministers, Executive and Assembly.

MoB

- stated issue is the DoF arguments do not open what has already been established ground in terms of application of S75..

- Without prejudice, Minister has been conscious of the concerns of stakeholders when signing off on skeleton arguments.

- PQ suggested sharing SCI position papers and ideas with DoF and engaging further on what approaches can be taken to achieve a resolution to issue as it currently stands.

- Main concern is the impact is of the argument and where it may end up.

- More suitable forum is discussion between the ECNI and wider sector and not the department.

- Parties agreed to await outcome of proceedings and DoF officials are happy to continue to engage with SCI on ideas of how to progress the issue.

ACTION POINTS / ISSUES AGREED & OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE

JMcG to follow up with SCI requesting SCI reports – action completed 24/09/25.

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NOTE WRITTEN BY: Paula Dawson	**DATE:** 24 September 2025