ANNEX A

FOI DOF/2026-0091

Request

I am submitting these requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I seek information relating to the development, review, and implementation of the Northern Ireland Civil Service hybrid working / office attendance policy (the 40% office attendance requirement).

These requests cover the period 1 January 2023 to the present.

1. Staff Roundtable Discussions

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

(i) Records of roundtable discussions, meetings, or engagement sessions held between management and staff and/or trade unions regarding hybrid working, office attendance, and remote working;
(ii) Agendas, minutes, notes, briefing papers, presentations, and outcome summaries of these meetings; and
(iii) Reports or internal summaries capturing staff views, explaining how these informed the final policy.

2. Equality Considerations

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

(i) Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs), equality screening documents, or other equality analyses carried out in relation to the Hybrid Working policy;
(ii) Internal papers or correspondence setting out how potential adverse impacts (e.g. on disabled staff, staff with caring responsibilities, or those living further from offices) were identified and mitigated; and
(iii) Correspondence with recognised trade unions relating to equality considerations.

3. Rural Needs Impact Assessment

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide:

(i) Confirmation of whether a Rural Needs Impact Assessment was carried out in line with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016;
(ii) A copy of the assessment, if conducted; and
(iii) If no assessment was carried out, documentation explaining why this was considered unnecessary.

4. Productivity, Service Delivery and Staff Retention

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

(i) Internal papers, analyses, or correspondence considering the impact of the policy on productivity, performance, and service delivery;
(ii) Documents assessing risks that increased office attendance could negatively affect productivity; and
(iii) Assessments weighing intended benefits such as collaboration and team building against risks including staff attrition, constrained budgets, and increased public demand for services.

5. Policy Drafting and Development

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

(i) Draft versions of the hybrid working policy and accompanying guidance, including tracked changes or explanatory notes;
(ii) Submissions or briefing notes provided to the Minister of Finance;
(iii) Evidence, research, benchmarking, or external comparisons used to justify the 40% attendance requirement;
(iv) Input, reports, or recommendations from external consultants, advisers, or other departments; and
(v) Internal legal advice or compliance assessments relating to employment law, equality duties, or other statutory obligations (with redactions applied where legally necessary).

6. Monitoring, Evaluation and Enforcement

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

(i) Documents setting out how the policy will be monitored or evaluated, including key performance indicators or success measures;
(ii) Arrangements for monitoring office attendance and any enforcement measures or consequences for non-compliance; and
(iii) Any commitments or plans to review the policy following implementation.

7. Office Estate Strategy and Financial Implications

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

(i) Documents linking the policy to office estate strategy, estate rationalisation, regional hub provision, or office capacity planning; and
(ii) Business cases, financial assessments, or cost-benefit analyses relating to the policy, including projected savings or additional costs.

8. Health and Wellbeing Impacts

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

Assessments of impacts on staff wellbeing, mental health, work–life balance, commuting stress, or related issues.

9. Staff Communications and Feedback

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

(i) Communications to staff regarding the policy, including guidance, FAQs, intranet posts, circulars, or briefings; and
(ii)Data on staff complaints, grievances, or formal feedback relating to the policy.

10. Interdepartmental Correspondence

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide any and all:

Correspondence with other departments relating to the policy's impacts (including equality, transport, environmental, or operational impacts).

11. Catch-All

For the period 1 January 2023 to the present, please provide:

Any other internal or external correspondence, reports, or briefing materials not otherwise specified in the other FOI requests, which formed part of the Department's consideration of the development, review, or implementation of the policy.

DoF response

I can confirm the department holds some of the information requested.

Please note some personal information has been withheld because it is exempt under Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 40(2) exempts personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of that information would contravene one of the data protection principles in schedule 1 of the Data Protection Act.

Having considered all the information contained within the Legitimate Interest Test – also known as a Lawful, Fairness and Transparency Test - (attached as a separate document – **Annex 60**), the department has established that, on balance, there is no lawful basis for the disclosure of third-party personal data falling within the scope of the request of which the requester is not the data subject. Making an unrestricted disclosure of personal data for private interests could constitute a disproportionate and unwarranted level of interference with the individuals' rights and freedoms – particularly their right to privacy and family life under the Human Rights Act 1998.

1. In respect of parts (i) and (ii), this information is being partially withheld as it is exempt under Section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 applies to information that is already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption, and the department is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. For ease of reference, the document is available at FOI 2025-0620. All other documents are attached at **Annexes 1 to 9.**

   (iii) I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

2. (i) An Equality Impact Assessment was completed. This information is being withheld as it is exempt under Section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 applies to information that is already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption, and the department is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. For ease of reference, the document is available at EQIA - Hybrid Working Policy Screening.

   (ii) I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

   (iii) I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

3. (i) (ii) and (iii) A Rural Needs Impact Assessment was completed. This information is being withheld as it is exempt under Section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 applies to information that is already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption, and the department is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. For ease of reference, the document is available at FOI 2025-0465.

4. In respect of questions (i) – (iii), I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

5. (i) This information is being partially withheld as it is exempt under Section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 applies to information that is already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption, and the department is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. For ease of reference, this information is available at FOI 2025-0620. All other documents are attached at Annexes **10 to 14.**

   (ii) Submissions or briefing notes provided to the Minister of Finance are attached at **Annexes 15 to 17.**

   (iii) Evidence, research, benchmarking and external comparisons used to justify the 40% attendance requirement are attached at **Annexes 18 to 21.**

   (iv) I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

   (v) I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

6. (i) (ii) and (iii) I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested. However, the NICS People Strategy gives a Key Initiative to complete a HR policy renewal programme.

7. (i) In reviewing the Hybrid Working Policy the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Office Estate Strategy was considered in order to create a hybrid working model which was appropriate for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). This information is being withheld as it is exempt under Section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 applies to information that is already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption, and the department is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. For ease of reference, the document is available at NICS Office Estate Strategy. It was concluded the requirement to attend the workplace at least 40% of an individual's contractual working hours per week, was a reasonable determination to meet NICS requirements.

   (ii) I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

8. I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

9. (i) Documents relating to communications to staff regarding the policy, including guidance, FAQs, intranet posts, circulars, or briefings can be found at **Annexes 22 to 26.**

   (ii) I can confirm that the Department does not hold the information requested.

10. This information is being partially withheld as it is exempt under Section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 applies to information that is already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption, and the department is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. For ease of reference, these documents are available at FOI 2025-0620. All other documents are attached at **Annexes 27 to 59B.**

11. I can confirm that the Department holds no further information in respect of other internal or external correspondence, reports, or briefing materials not otherwise specified in the other FOI requests, which formed part of the Department's consideration of the development, review, or implementation of the policy.

Annex B - Internal Reviews

An Internal Review request examines the response based on applied exemptions, search adequacy, or response timeliness.

It is not the following, which will be treated as specified:

- Questions asking for clarification on information provided: Will be treated as part of the original FOI request.
- Additional questions about the information in the response: Will be treated as a new FOI request.
- Questions about the subject not related to the original request: Will be treated as new FOI request.
- Questions regarding how a service operates or why a decision was made: Will be treated as normal business and responded to accordingly.
- Complaints or concerns raised in response to information provided: Will be treated in line with relevant complaints procedure.

To make an Internal Review request:

- **Clearly state**: That you want an internal review of a previous FOI response and provide the necessary details.
- **Follow the timeline:** Be sure to submit your request within 40 working days of receiving the original response. If the Department has not responded at all, you have 40 working days after the original 20-day response period has passed.
- **Wait for a response:** The review is typically completed within 20 working days but can take up to 40 working days in exceptional circumstances. The Department should inform you of any delays.

What the review includes

- A fresh decision based on a reconsideration of all relevant factors.
- An assessment of whether the request was handled correctly and if exemptions were applied appropriately.
- The review will be conducted by someone who was not involved in the original decision.

If you wish to request an internal review, please email foi@finance-ni.gov.uk or write to FOI/EIR Team, Department of Finance, 2nd Floor, Craigantlet Buildings, Stoney Road, Belfast, BT4 3SX.