Draft Minutes – Extraordinary DoF Departmental Board Meeting
28 May 2026

Attendees:	Neil Gibson (Chair) Ciarrai Conlan (left meeting during Agenda Item 3) Louise Crilly Geraldine Devine Paul Duffy Janine Fullerton Sharon Gallagher (via Teams) Stewart Heaney David Hughes Tracey McCavigan Gavin Patrick Catherine Shannon Tony Simpson Maryann Smith Philip Wales Olwen Laird (NEBM) (joined meeting during Agenda Item 3) Lesley Chambers Jonny McNaught Roger Walker - Secretariat
Apologies:	Deborah Brown Paul Grocott Joanne McBurney Jill Minne Colin Woods Joan McEwan (NEBM)
Location:	Second Floor Conference Room, Clare House

1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest

1.1 Neil Gibson welcomed the members to the meeting. He noted apologies from Deborah Brown and Joanne McBurney (Maryann Smith deputising), Paul Grocott (Geraldine Devine deputising), Jill Minne (Janine Fullerton deputising), Colin Woods (Stewart Heaney deputising) and Joan McEwan. He clarified that Olwen Laird would join the meeting following completion of a prior commitment.

1.2 The members confirmed there were no conflicts of interest.

1.3 Neil noted this would be Janine Fullerton's final meeting before her retirement later this year and thanked her for her dedicated service and valuable contributions.

2. Chairman's Remarks

2.1 Neil referred to papers previously shared with members, including the HOCS memo of 30 April on a time-bound approach to workforce decisions, his memo of 18 May requesting consideration of vacancies within business areas, and David Hughes' 26 May request to support the NICSHR review of departmental vacancies to assess affordability. He asked members to ensure their teams were aware of this issue and that discipline is shown in local workforce management. Where this might lead to pressures on workloads, Neil indicated he was content to take the issue to the Minister and to discuss with other departments the impact on our shared service provision.

Action: Members to brief their teams on the issue of workforce management and ensure discipline is shown in local workforce management.

2.2 Neil outlined the drivers for this exercise, including the need for affordable, evidence-based and defensible workforce decisions in the absence of a multi-year budget, requiring departments to operate below baseline with a 5% reduction. He confirmed that DoF vacancies would be funded centrally and that David Hughes, Chair of the DoF People and Resources Committee, would act as his delegated authority to approve vacancy filling.

2.3 Catherine highlighted the need for a consistent approach across departments to avoid uneven application, which Neil supported, and to be aware that staff numbers might increase as a result of this exercise.

3. Workforce Management

3.1 David outlined the logistics of the vacancy management exercise and clarified that undeclared vacancies must also be included in returns. Members are asked to demonstrate in their returns how posts are affordable, within broad definitions. David also noted members had been provided with revised vacancy management procedures, which take account of HOCS' approach and would soon be published; if members had any comments, they had time to submit them.

3.2 Members discussed Temporary Promotion (TP) chains, agreeing that standing down TPs ahead of high-volume recruitment would improve transparency. Tony Simpson agreed, also noting the potential for staff redeployment as a result of this exercise. Catherine noted managers facing that decision should engage with their HR Business Partners at an early stage.

3.4 Tracey McCavigan noted some departments have commissioned Internal Audit reviews of TPs. Neil confirmed DoF was not yet at that stage, however, he added that scrutiny of TPs exceeding two years and requiring end dates on applications would support better oversight and behaviour change. PRC are considering how that might be managed.

3.5 He also referenced the HOCS-commissioned Grade 5 review, using DoF as a pilot, as helpful in providing a broader departmental view. David noted ongoing work by the Departmental Development Team to identify critical roles, as part of our Strategic Workforce Planning, while Sharon Gallagher cautioned that this process is resource-intensive, drawing on LPS experience.

3.6 Gavin Patrick addressed concerns that any late-year funding arising from an agreed budget would come too late to increase post filling by emphasising that operating within tighter first-year budgets would build necessary discipline given likely constraints in later years.

3.7 Neil urged members to complete the DDT vacancy management and strategic workforce planning exercises thoroughly and on time.

3.8 The members noted the discussion around workforce management and the need for timely completion of the DDT vacancy management and strategic workforce planning exercises.

4. AOB

4.1 Neil addressed hybrid working compliance, noting that the requirement for two in-office days (and higher attendance for SCS staff) is not being met in some areas. He asked members to reinforce the need for adherence with their direct reports and ensure the message is cascaded to all staff.

Action: Members to reinforce the need for adherence to the hybrid working policy with their direct reports and ensure the message is cascaded to all staff.

5. Date of Next Meeting

5.1 The next standard meeting of the Departmental Board is scheduled for Wednesday 24 June 2026 in Clare House.

5.2 The meeting closed with no further business.

Roger Walker

1 June 2026