



**DOF PRIVATE OFFICE
INFORMATION GUIDE FOR
MINISTER & SPAD**



S 40 (2)

**Private Office Information for Finance Minister and SpAd
05 February 2024**

Minister's Private Office

1. Key Contacts

Role	Name	Contact Details
Private Secretary (PS)/Head of Private Office	Paula Dawson	E: Redacted Section 40(2) M: W:
Assistant Private Secretary (APS)	Redacted Section 40(2)	E: Redacted Section 40(2) M: W:
Acting Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer (DALO)	Redacted Section 40(2)	E: Redacted Section 40(2) M: W:
Diary Secretary	Redacted Section 40(2)	E: Redacted Section 40(2) W:
Principal Information Officer	Leander Harding	E: Redacted Section 40(2) M: W:
Head of Communications and Engagement Division (Grade 5)	Mark McLaughlin	E: Redacted Section 40(2) M: W:
Deputy Head of Communications and Engagement (Grade 6)	Ciarrai Conlan	E: Redacted Section 40(2) M: W:

- The office structure with all team members' names is attached at **Annex A**

2. Clare House – Department of Finance Headquarters

- Address: Minister's Private Office
Clare House
Second Floor West
303 Airport Road West
Belfast
BT3 9ED
- Evacuation Procedures - **See Annex B**
- Security Pass will be provided for access to Clare House.
- Car parking – Minister has a reserved parking space at the front of the building.

- Meeting rooms – Boardroom/Room 2.6/Minister’s Huddle -all rooms are equipped with cameras and software to facilitate virtual meetings as required.
- Further information on Clare House can be found at: <http://nics.intranet.nigov.net/finance/articles/clare-house-premises-arrangements>

3. **Office Hours**

- The Private Office mailbox operates from 8.30am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday.
- The Private Office is staffed between 8.00am and 6.00pm
- Out of hours cover is provided by the Private Secretary and the Private Secretary is first point of contact for Minister and SpAd.

4. **Ministerial Diary and Correspondence**

- The Ministerial diary is managed electronically using Microsoft Outlook.
- All Ministerial correspondence received into private.office@finance-ni.gov.uk is managed electronically using the Knowledge Network (KN2).
- Papers for clearance are forwarded from the Ministerial Clearances inbox, (Redacted Section 40(2)) to the Minister and SpAd with the request to “Note” or “Approve”.
- Briefing papers for meetings and Assembly business, including oral AQs, are printed in hard copy and provided to Minister usually a day in advance.
- Papers for Executive business are provided in hard copy, where possible, once agenda has been confirmed.

5. **The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021**

The Act places certain duties on Ministers, SpAds and officials and the key provisions of the Act are listed below.

- Sections 6 & 7 – Recording of meetings and decisions;
- Section 8 – Lobbying;
- Section 1 - Amendments to the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers (2013); and
- Section 9 - Register of Interests.

More detailed guidance on the provisions is available in hard copy as part of the suite of reference materials provided for your use. *Guidance for Ministers and Special Advisers post FoG.*

- The full Act is also available in hard copy and online at [Functioning of Government Act \(NI\) 2021](#)

6. Meetings

- The Private Secretary/APS will normally minute ministerial meetings.
- Regular weekly meetings are scheduled to cover:
 - Key Issues with the Permanent Secretary and departmental officials. Lobbying is a standing agenda item on the Minister's weekly key issues meeting and enables Private Office to ensure appropriate records of such occasions are retained.
 - Finance Committee Readout with DALO
 - Forward Look with SpAd, Private Office and Media & External Communications Team – Minister does not attend.

7. Ministerial Visits

- Current practice for visits is that a member of the Media & External Communications team will accompany the Minister. Where both a meeting and a visit are scheduled, the Private Secretary / APS will also accompany the Minister.
- Occasionally officials may be asked to attend visits. This is normally at the request of the Minister.
- All ministerial visits, including travel to and from an event, are recorded in the Minister's Private Office diary.

8. Parliament Buildings

- DoF Minister's Rooms are located on the first floor of the building in Rooms 142 and 142A.
- There is IT kit in place to facilitate virtual meetings and access Assembly TV.
- The DALO will attend Parliament Buildings for all plenary business and the Private Secretary or APS will attend on Executive business days and as required.
- The Finance Committee meets every Wednesday at 2.00 pm in the Senate Chamber (TBC).

9. IT Kit

- Minister and SpAd will be provided with the following IT kit:
 - User account(s): **Redacted Section 40(2)** and **Redacted Section 40(2)**
 - Software to facilitate virtual meetings to include (MS Teams/Webex)
 - Laptop
 - iPad
 - Mobile phone
 - Additional kit for homeworking is available if required.

10. **Information Security**

- To assist Ministers and SpAds to protect the integrity and confidentiality of official papers, the following policies and protocols set out the requirements for use of all departmental electronic equipment and communications.
 - [Email Policy](#)
 - [NICS Mobile Device Security Policy](#)
 - [NICS Use of Electronic Communications Policy](#)
 - [Official Information Held in Non-Corporate Channels Policy](#)

11. **Gifts and Hospitality**

- Under the provisions of the Ministerial Code, Ministers must at all times “Ensure that rules on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality are adhered to.” Further information can be found at: [Guidance on the acceptance of gifts & hospitality](#).
- Private Office maintains registers for (i) the recording of all gifts and hospitality, (ii) meetings with external organisations/individuals and (iii) any overseas travel.
- Details of all Ministerial and Special Adviser gifts and hospitality received, meetings with external organisations/individuals and Minister’s travel overseas are published on the Open Data NI Portal on a quarterly basis.

12. **Declaration of Private Interests**

- A Minister must ensure that no conflict or perception of one arises between his or her public role and private interests.
- Ministers are therefore required to complete the *Ministerial Declaration of Interest* document which is provided twice yearly from HoCS office and make a full declaration of those interests that potentially might create a conflict. This applies to a Minister’s spouse, partner and close family members and friends.
- Disclosed information will be treated confidentially, however a statement covering relevant Minister’s interests will be published twice yearly. (see Section 4 –Guidance for Ministers in the Exercise of their Official Responsibilities).

13. **Complaints**

- The Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards is responsible for investigating all complaints of breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct.
- The Commissioner will write directly to the Minister or to a nominated contact in the Private Office to ensure they receive any complaints directly in their capacity as Minister.

14. Guidance Documents

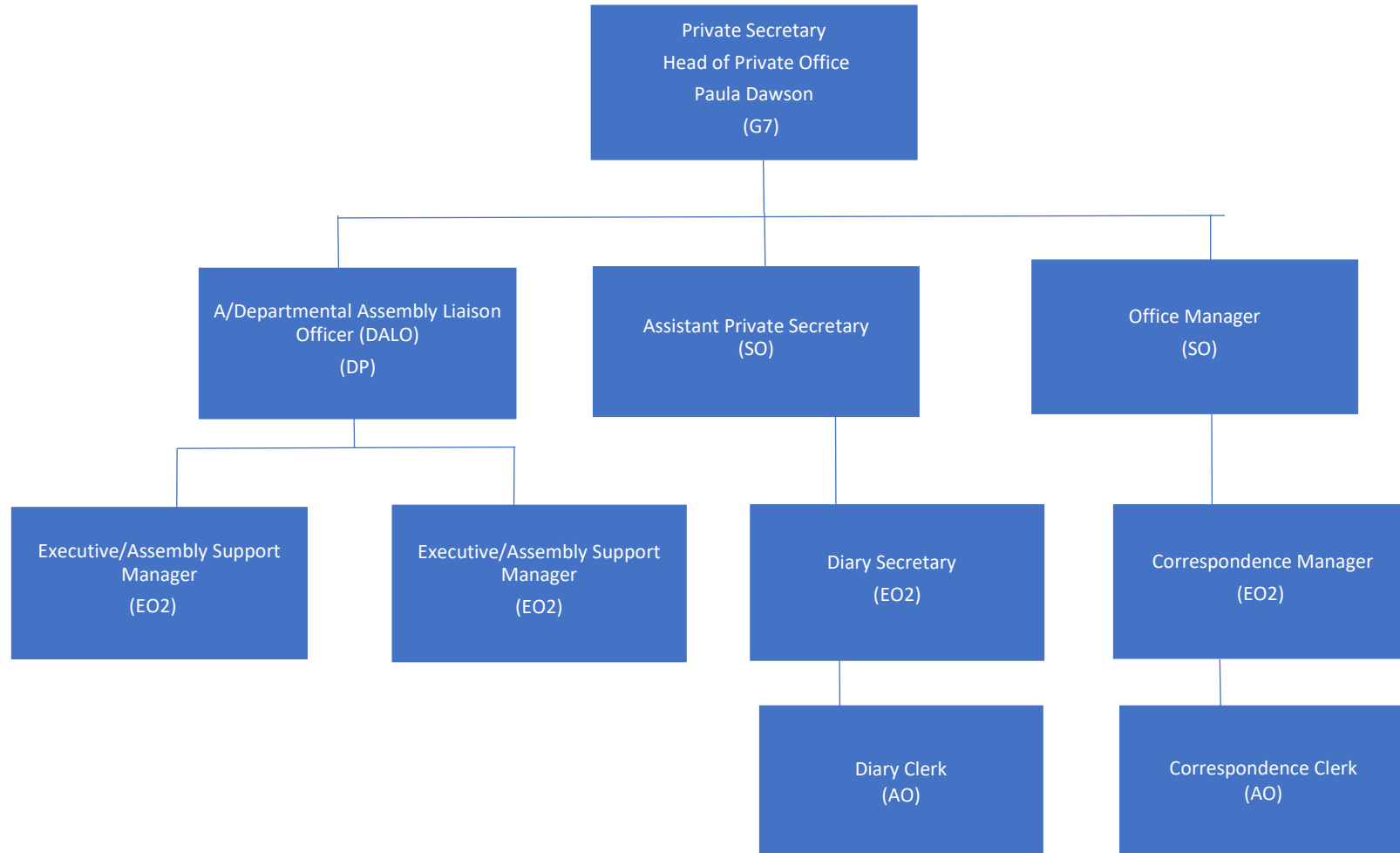
- The documents listed below are also provided in hard copy for ease of reference.
 - [Ministerial code](#)
 - [Code of Conduct for Special Advisers](#)
 - [The Code Governing the Appointment of Special Advisers](#)
 - [Guidance for Ministers in the Exercise of their official responsibilities includes Ministerial Declaration of Interest](#)
 - [Conduct of Executive Business](#)
 - [Scheme defining categories of registrable interests](#)
 - [NICS Code of Ethics](#)
 - [Functioning of Government \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) NI Act 2021](#)
 - Functioning of Government Act guidance note for Ministers and Special Advisers
 - [Direction by the Committee on Standards and Privileges on General Procedures](#)

15. Ministerial Car and Driver

- The Department retains a car for the Minister's use in his/her official role.
- The framework for ministerial travel is set out in section 6 of [Guidance for Ministers in the Exercise of their official responsibilities](#).

Minister's Private Office Structure

February 2024



CIRCULATION - ALL CLARE HOUSE STAFF TO SEE

FIRE PRECAUTION INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLARE HOUSE

The purpose of this circular is to inform staff of the current Fire Precautions pertaining to Clare House.

1. RAISING THE ALARM

Any persons discovering a fire should shout "Fire" and immediately break the glass in a Fire Alarm Break Glass Point on that floor.

The **evacuate** signal will then sound on all floors.

All lifts will automatically descend to and stay at the ground floor with the doors remaining open – do not use lifts in alarm conditions.

2. ALARM SIGNALS

The fire alarm signal is given by audible and visual devices:-

- i. audible signal - high pitched siren
- ii. visual signal – flashing beacon.

3. ACTION TO BE TAKEN ON HEARING THE ALARM

On hearing the evacuate signal all personnel must immediately leave the building, in an orderly manner. This should be by the nearest available stairway, unless advised otherwise. Staff are advised that they should use the staircases at either end of the building or the back staircase. **Staff should not use the spiral staircase.** Staff should make their way to the nearest end of the car park that they exited from and assemble at the 'Assembly Point'. Assembly Points are situated at both ends of the car park on the front side of the building. These areas are clearly signed. Staff should return to the building only when advised to do so.

Routes to the escape staircases are clearly marked. These routes lead you away from reception and the spiral staircase. Please familiarise yourselves with the escape routes.

Emergency Exit doors are located at the bottom of escape staircase and in the corner of the canteen. If these doors have not been opened, open the door yourself by use of the pushbar.

During an alarm or after evacuation staff must **not**:-

- exit the building via Reception,
- contact Control or Graham FM,
- re-enter the building until they are told to do so,
- use the lifts, or
- carry items such as hot beverages during evacuation.

4. PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Those unable to use the stairway to evacuate the building should, on hearing the Fire Alarm signal, go immediately to a protected area (in the front and rear lift lobbies) and await assistance.

Note: Reception can be contacted from these points by intercom after the main evacuation has taken place.

Anybody that may have a problem evacuating the building as a result of a temporary or permanent disability should inform Graham FM as soon as possible. A Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) will be developed to cater for individual needs.

During an evacuation of the building, Nominated Officers/Fire Wardens will ensure that all areas on their respective floors have been vacated. They will then evacuate the building and report to the incident controller/security guard, standing opposite the front entrance, that their respective floor areas are clear.

5. VISITORS

Visitors to Clare House become the responsibility of the person they are visiting or the person holding the seminar/meeting, on entering the building.

Under alarm conditions, the responsible person must make sure that all his or her visitors, seminar/meeting attendees are safely out of the building and then should report this fact to the guard.

6. LIFTS

When a fire alarm is activated all lifts will automatically descend to the ground floor and open. The lifts will react in a similar way during the Monday afternoon test procedure.

7. TEST PROCEDURES

Each Monday at approximately 2.30pm the signal is tested, using the "Break Glass Test" of the Fire Alarm System.

Staff are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this signal and to confirm that they can hear/see it; the test is not solely for Fire Wardens/Nominated Officers to respond to Control. Fire Wardens / Nominated Officers are reminded that they must contact reception (ext. 76933) after the Monday afternoon test, to verify the quality of the signals.