

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Finance

EXECUTIVE RHI INQUIRY REPORT

Published on Thursday 7 October 2021.

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): The RHI Inquiry highlighted a range of failings within the system of governance here and made 44 recommendations for change.

The Executive accepted these recommendations in full and set up a sub-group to take forward that programme of work.

This morning the Executive has published a report, setting out how the recommendations of the RHI Inquiry are being implemented.

The report sets out the Executive's response across the seven key themes identified in the Report's findings and recommendations. The themes are:

- the professional skills of civil servants, including the policy function, project delivery and risk management;
- the work of Ministers and special advisers, including standards of conduct;
- resourcing and people issues, including the recruitment and allocation of civil servants;
- issues of communication and collaboration, and the ways in which Departments and individuals can more effectively work together;
- governance and financial controls, including the scrutiny of spending decisions;
- records management; and
- raising and responding to concerns about the work of government.

A number of substantial pieces of work have already been completed, including:

- The revision of Codes of Conduct for Ministers and Special advisers, and the introduction of the Guidance for Ministers
- The Review of Business Case and Expenditure Approval Processes
- The publication of the NICS People Strategy
- The revised guidance on project delivery and the initiation of a project-delivery profession within the Civil Service;
- Cross-departmental reviews of risk management and whistleblowing by Group Internal Audit; and
- Extensive reviews of records management.

The Report also sets out specific pieces of work still required to fulfil the terms of the Inquiry recommendations. Key pieces of work will be advanced in this phase of the Executive's response to the Inquiry, including:

- an ongoing exercise to engage the policy community in revising the guidance on policy making and developing the wider policy function;
- the creation of a distinct project-delivery profession within the NICS;
- the transformation of the workforce model in the NICS, as well as the policies on civil-service recruitment and the management of the professions;
- the implementation of the five-case model for business cases;
- the roll-out of a unified policy for raising concerns; and
- the launch of a revised NICS Code of Ethics.

As well as changing policies and practices, it is important to change cultures within government. That change comes from the top. It requires leadership from Senior Civil Servants and particularly Permanent Secretaries. It also requires leadership from Ministers and Special Advisers.

Work will continue to deliver the changes recommended by the Inquiry Report. My officials will work with the Audit Office, which is monitoring implementation as the Inquiry itself recommended. And the Executive Subcommittee will consider how the Executive should report progress, in light of the work by the Audit Office.