

Civil Service Management Board

29th January 2021

Note of Meeting

Item 1 Brexit

The CSMB discussed the impact of the UK's departure from the EU single market and customs union one month post-transition. Significant concerns are acknowledged around fisheries and the complicated rules on country of origin. It was noted that overall, the extensive work undertaken to get ready for Brexit has proved worthwhile and assisted in minimising the anticipated level of disruption. However, significant challenges remain. The grace periods allow for ongoing discussion and solutions for the little problems that can quickly mount. Key risks include the ongoing impact of COVID-19, the pace of adaptation by traders, the forthcoming phased introduction of UK import checks and controls in April and July 2021 and the operation of the Protocol, which is both politically sensitive and technically complex.

It was noted that it is vital that information continues to be circulated amongst secretaries general as we enter a critical moment and where a lot of small things can amount to one big thing. The importance of regular oversight on issues as they emerge and as they are addressed was stressed.

There was a discussion on some of the challenges currently being experienced in the most affected sectors. It was noted that up to now the focus has been on products and markets, but concern is expected to grow with regards services and now is the time to think this through and plan.

It was observed that the increased capacity on direct routes is positive and that the concerns regarding clogged ports did not come to bear as the levels of freight are down. Some challenges remain regarding customs agent capacity at ports and engagement on this issue will continue. The haulage sector is experiencing problems regarding not getting a return trip to Ireland with full loads. In addition, the rules of origin are proving complicated as EU goods entering UK distribution hubs for onward travel are no longer tariff free and thus treated as third country goods. It was highlighted that there are very high levels of non or incomplete compliance at Dublin Port and that a pragmatic and helpful approach is being taken. It was reported to the CSMB that health checks at ports are going well. It was noted that the Garda Commissioner visited Rosslare the previous week. Concerns around the sustainability of Dublin Port, as British routes are displaced to Northern Ireland, was highlighted. It was also noted that the antigen testing was going well and was stood up on time.

It was noted that there will need to be some bilateral engagement with the UK on the forthcoming import checks and controls on its practical implementation. The Economic and all island strategies will be important in the future, especially in terms of the supply chain. Current focus is on products and markets but services cannot be forgotten. Ultimately, the Assembly will vote for the protocol again in three years' time.

Issues around Rockall were noted. The flow of traffic and food products was down and there was a high level of incomplete/non-compliance. As volume builds so too will pressure.

It was stressed that as issues arise Departments should talk to DPER with regards staffing and resources. It was noted that a memorandum on the EU Recovery Fund would be brought to Government soon.

Item 2 Civil Service Renewal 2030 Vision and Strategy

The acting Secretary General of DPER introduced this item and outlined the approach to the development of the proposed high level 10-year framework.

The members welcomed the high-level, concise approach to the strategy but noted that some of the more detailed areas could be held for the Action Plan. The document would also benefit from governance structures for implementation and reporting timelines.

Areas that need to be incorporated or further reflected on included: - accountability, governance and the political world the Civil Service operates in and serves; and the role of senior leadership, including the CSMB in building public trust/engagement, supporting innovation, and managing risk appetite and risk taking in policy design.

Other areas for further consideration included: - how the Civil Service needs to ensure it has the skills and capacity to deal with current public policy challenges especially housing, healthcare and climate change. As well as a role in policy development, the strategy must reflect the Civil Service role in legislation; process operational change design; and project management and delivery. There should also be an interconnection with the wider public service in terms of developing a delivery on policy. The strategy should also have some outward focus, especially Ireland in the world and the Civil Service role in that.

It was noted that the vision and values need to stand out, be reflective of breath of the role of the Civil Service and be 'endurable' in terms of the 10-year timeframe. It was requested that the strategy provide some context setting, such as a broad statement on progress since the first plan and what we have learned and proven in the context of COVID-19.

Some specific issues raised included – that the language was somewhat woolly in places and that it should be checked for plain English; that equality (gender) as well as diversity and representation should be referenced; and the Civil Service's contribution – as an employer – to the climate agenda, e.g. decarbonisation, should be considered.

It was also noted that there should be some rebalancing of the areas outlined above with the existing 'process' focused elements.

It was noted that further thought should be given to who the audience for this document is, as well as timing of its delivery in the political context, and COVID 19 and the challenges the system is currently responding to.

The acting Secretary General of DPER thanked colleagues for their comments and will further iterate the strategy and bring it back to the CSMB for further discussion.

AOB

The Chair noted that a number of papers for information on Civil Service Renewal actions would be circulated to the CSMB in the coming days.

Attendance

Martin Fraser, Department Taoiseach

Robert Watt, Department of Health

Jacqui McCrum, Department of Defence

Seán Ó Foghlú, Department of Education

Derek Moran, Department of Finance

Jim Breslin, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Graham Doyle, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Kevin McCarthy, Department of Rural and Community Development

Katherine Licken, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

Ken Spratt, Department of Transport

Maurice Buckley, Office of Public Works

Damien Moloney, Office of the Attorney General

Shirley Comerford, Public Appointments Service

Pádraig Dalton, Central Statistics Office

Oonagh McPhillips, Department of Justice

Niall Burgess, Department of Foreign Affairs

Niall Cody, Revenue

John McKeon, Department of Social Protection

David Moloney, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Brendan Gleeson, Department Agriculture, Food and Marine

Orlaigh Quinn, Department Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Fergal Lynch, Department Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

John Callinan, Department of the Taoiseach

John Shaw, Department of the Taoiseach

Aingéal O'Donoghue, Department of the Taoiseach

Liz Canavan, Department of the Taoiseach

Colin Menton, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Fiona Curran, Department of the Taoiseach

Apologies

Mark Griffin, Department Environment, Climate and Communications