

**Department of Finance
Departmental Response
to recommendations in the Northern
Ireland Audit Office's Report
Ministerial Directions in Northern
Ireland**

**Presented to the Northern Ireland
Assembly by the Department of Finance**

22 June 2023



© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/

Where we have identified any third party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at the Public Audit and Public Accounts Committee section of the Accountability and Financial Management part of the DoF website: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/> .

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at afmdreturns@finance-ni.gov.uk .

Contents

Pages 5-6

Department of Finance:
Ministerial Directions in Northern Ireland

Glossary of Abbreviations

C&AG	Comptroller and Auditor General
DoF	Department of Finance
MD	Ministerial Direction
MPMNI	Managing Public Money Northern Ireland
NI	Northern Ireland
NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office
TOA	Treasury Officer of Accounts
UK	United Kingdom

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE TO NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE (NIAO) RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE NIAO'S REPORT OF 27 APRIL 2023 ON "MINISTERIAL DIRECTIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND"

Department of Finance

Ministerial Directions in Northern Ireland

Introduction

The responses within this Departmental Response have been made at official level. Where specific recommendations relate to issues of policy these will require Ministerial decisions.

NIAO Recommendation 1

Given the importance of MPMNI as a key administrative document for senior civil servants, the Department of Finance should publish an updated version as a matter of urgency, ensure that it remains up-to-date and review it on an annual basis.

The Department of Finance (DoF) accepts the need to publish an updated version of Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI) as a matter of urgency.

DoF's current review of MPMNI is at a well advanced stage and it is planned that an up-to-date document will be published by the end of the summer.

In future, DoF will review MPMNI in line with HM Treasury updates to Managing Public Money and any other changes to public expenditure guidance or other emerging governance issues/lessons learned as necessary in a timely manner. In addition, should any other issues arise which require guidance to be issued, DoF will issue supplementary guidance through either a Dear Accounting Officer or Dear Finance Director letter.

NIAO Recommendation 2

The Department for Finance should remind all departments of their responsibility to notify the C&AG of any Ministerial Directions within the four-week timeframe and to include all relevant supporting documentation with the notification.

DoF accepts this recommendation.

DoF agrees it is important that all departments should notify the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) of any Ministerial Directions within the four-week timeframe and that they should include all relevant information. This requirement is already incorporated in DoF's guidance to Accounting Officers on Ministerial Directions which was issued on 2 February 2022. DoF will however write to Accounting Officers to remind them of their responsibilities for notifying the C&AG of any Ministerial Directions made in future and that they should ensure the relevant documentation is also provided.

NIAO Recommendation 3

The Treasury Officer of Accounts should consult with the Permanent Secretaries Group to determine why the use of MDs in NI is significantly more prevalent when compared to other UK regions.

DoF accepts this recommendation.

The Treasury Officer of Accounts (TOA) within DoF will engage with Permanent Secretaries to try and determine why the use of Ministerial Directions is more prevalent in Northern Ireland compared to other UK regions. The TOA will also engage with his counterparts in the other UK regions to see if they can provide any useful information/perspective to feed into a possible rationale/conclusion on this issue. DoF will update the C&AG of its engagement and conclusions on this issue.

DoF would wish to highlight however, that Ministerial Directions are an important vehicle for Accounting Officers in demonstrating proper accountability for public money. DoF would also highlight that as reflected in the NIAO report on Ministerial Directions in Northern Ireland, up until the end of the 2017-2022 mandate the Public Accounts Committee did not identify any Ministerial Directions which had been issued in an inappropriate manner.