

HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE INQUIRY**MODULE 7****DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY****SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT WITH REFERENCE TO DEPARTMENTAL FILE
DISPOSAL ARRANGEMENTS**

I, Hilary R Harrison will say as follows:

I refer to my oral evidence to the HIAI on 23 November 2015 in which I responded to questions posed by the Panel in relation to the destruction of Departmental records.

I stated that the Public Records Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI) was involved in all decisions to destroy or dispose of Departmental files. This was indeed the case when I joined the DHSS, the predecessor to the DHSSPS, in 1992 and for several years after this. However, having looked into the matter further, I am concerned that my evidence did not accurately reflect the complexity of file disposal arrangements for the full period under consideration by the Inquiry. As I intimated to the Inquiry, the Department is currently preparing a comprehensive statement on the discovery of documentation, which will refer in more detail to file disposal arrangements. In the meantime, the following supplementary statement has been prepared to avoid any possible misunderstanding with reference to this matter. The PRONI guidance which is referenced below, will be appended in full to the Department's statement on the discovery of documentation.

File disposal arrangements prior to 1968

1. According to guidance issued in 1968 by 'PRONI', entitled "Modern Departmental Papers: Memorandum on New Review Procedures for the Selection of Records for Preservation", prior to 1968, Departments listed papers and files which they wished to destroy. These lists, known as "Destruction Schedules" were then laid before Parliament and eventually the

papers were destroyed. The Memorandum states that as a consequence of this system “far too many papers were preserved by default”. The Memorandum introduced a review system under which every paper was to be positively examined and a decision made about destruction.

Arrangements between 1968 and 1992¹

2. Under the review system introduced by the 1968 Memorandum, each file was to be closed 5 years after its opening. A first review, to be done in accordance with advice from PRONI on the historical value of papers, took place 5 years after the file had been closed. Files “not considered of any further value for the Department’s own purposes” were to be destroyed at the first review without further reference to PRONI. A second review of retained files took place 20 years after the record had been created. At the second review, PRONI’s assessment of the value of the papers was a required element of a joint decision, to be made by PRONI and the relevant Department, to retain or destroy the file. The selection of papers for retention at any stage was to be done “in close consultation” with PRONI. The guidance therefore required that the process of selection and transfer of documents should be continuous and that Departments should transfer regular annual increments of documents to PRONI.

1992 to 2004

3. PRONI issued “A Guide to Records Management” in 1992. This guidance advised Government Departments to establish Disposal Schedules² in conjunction with PRONI. Disposal Schedules are intended to record every class of file or document created or used by a branch or division and place

¹ The 1992 PRONI guidance referenced in paragraphs 3-7 is a “second edition”. At present the Department does not know whether a first edition of the guidance was issued at an earlier stage. PRONI is presently conducting a search to establish whether a first edition or any further guidance was issued to Departments between 1968 and 1992.

² The 1968 Memorandum did not require Disposal Schedules to be established. Until PRONI has conducted the search referred to above, the Department does not know whether the 1992 guidance was the first to advise the setting up of such schedules.

each in one of three categories:

- Destruction after a specified period
 - Permanent preservation
 - Review
4. I am informed by the Department's Information Management Branch that the Department has no evidence of Disposal Schedules for the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) or Child Care Policy Branch (CCPD) having been in place prior to April 2003 and October 2005 respectively. These were the business areas of the Department most likely to have opened and held files relevant to the Inquiry.
 5. In accordance with the 1992 guidance, a review took place after a file had been closed for 5 years. This 'first review' was to be undertaken by a Departmental officer (desk officer) who determined whether the file should be retained or destroyed. In the latter case the officer only had to determine whether the file was 'likely to have any further administrative use'. PRONI was, however, required to "check and monitor the records" which the Department considered to be of "no further administrative value" and "thus ensure that nothing of particular long term historical or research value" was destroyed.
 6. The 1992 guidance stated that unless a Disposal Schedule specifically sanctioned destruction: "**no**³ records (including classified papers) can be destroyed without such monitoring taking place". Therefore, the policy of PRONI having to review all files was in place at least between 1992 and 2003/2005 in respect of the file records of SSI and the CCPD. The review process required the involvement of PRONI in all decisions regarding retention and destruction. This provision remains in place until the present day for records annotated on the Disposal Schedule with a final action of "Determined on Review".

³ The emphasis is in the guidance

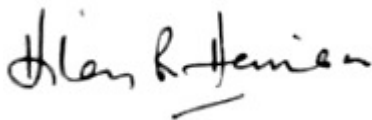
7. In the case of records that were retained under the 1992 guidance, the involvement of PRONI was required at a second review stage, which took place 20 years from the date of the last paper on the file. With reference to this second review, in order to avoid desk officers having to review records which PRONI had already selected as worthy of preservation, the guidance stated: “files should be seen by PRONI **“before”**⁴ they are passed to desk officers.”

8. The Northern Ireland Record Management Standard was published by PRONI in 2002. The “Good Management, Good Records” (GMGR) guidance which contained advice and guidance on records management, including the minimum retention periods for different types of records within the then HPSS, was issued in December 2004.

Current arrangements

9. As a result of a DHSSPS led review, the 2004 GMGR guidance was extended in 2011 to include guidance on the management of records and a retention and disposal schedule for all records of the Department, its Arms Length Bodies and those working under Health and Social Care contracts.

I trust that this will help to clarify the position.



Signed

Date 9 December 2015

⁴ The emphasis is in the guidance