

# Civil Service Accountability Board “de facto does not exist”

## MARTIN FRAWLEY

**Asked in the Dáil whether the Civil Service Accountability Board has been stood down, the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, said it “does not exist and has not met since 2016, so the de facto answer is yes”.**

The Board was one of the main planks of then Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin’s 2014 Civil Service Renewal Plan.

The Board which was headed by the Taoiseach of the day and included four secretaries general, politicians and external members, had an overall governance role across the civil service.

Speaking at the time of its establishment, then Minister Howlin said the Board was “a very important development for the civil service and all of its stakeholders and for the Government’s reform agenda.”

However, controversy arose within weeks when it emerged that Dr Kevin Rafter, who chaired the independent panel on civil service reform that recommended the Board’s establishment, had recommended that four external members be appointed, to provide greater balance between internal and external members.

In 2015, then Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, agreed to appoint four external private sector members to the Board. The Taoiseach was chair, with the Ministers for Social Protection, Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform also members, as well as four of the most senior secretaries general. This made it one of the most high-powered boards in Government.

However, although supposed to meet quarterly, it has met on just a few occasions. Following the new administration in 2016, headed up by Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, the Board never met again.

Last week in the Dáil, Mr Martin confirmed the Board has not met since 2016. Asked by Sinn Féin’s Mary Lou McDonald whether there was any announcement that the Board had been stood down, Mr Martin said; “No, I do not think it was. It just happened around 2016”.

However, Mr Martin said that the Civil Service Management Board – another key plank of Mr Howlin’s 2014 Civil service renewal plan – continues to meet once a month. The CSMB is headed by the Secretary General to the Government and includes all secretaries general

and heads of major offices. It provides collective leadership to the Civil Service renewal programme.

Responding to a suggestion that inflation could increase to 8% or 9%, the Taoiseach said he could not confirm such figures but said "that could be the case".

"Given what has happened in Ukraine, it is likely to increase" said Mr Martin.

"The latest Central Statistics Office data on wages show that average hourly earnings in the fourth quarter of 2021 were up 2.6% from a year earlier and were up 8.2% from the fourth quarter of 2019. The average annual consumer price index inflation rate was 2.4% in 2021 and -0.3% in 2020" said the Taoiseach.

Asked about the possibility of a 4-day week in the public service, Mr Martin said the Government has not given it consideration. "There have been various discussions and debates but in real terms I consider that this proposal is some time off yet in terms of where we are now. Full research needs to be undertaken in respect of such an initiative, which would have a very significant impact all around", he said.