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FROM: GERRY COSGRAVE

DATE: 24 JUNE 1998

TO: PS/MR SEMPLE

TRANSITION PROGRAMME: CONSULTATION WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES

1. I spent last week and the early part of this week meeting with the main Political Parties to gain their reaction to the outline proposals for the Transition Programme. I have so far managed to speak to all but two of the Parties - UK Unionists and UDP - and these I am still pursuing. Because of election commitments only a limited amount of consultation time was made available to me. Nevertheless in that time some valuable feedback was received which will help shape the way forward and, as a consequence, promote ownership of the Programme by the Parties.
2. Summary of Views

General

There is widespread support for the concept of a 'Development' programme for new Assembly members. This is particularly the case for the smaller and less experienced parties who acknowledge that they are on a steep learning curve and are thirsty for information and insights into the processes and systems of Government. Two of the main parties (SDLP and UUP) are more guarded in their support yet they acknowledge that it is important from the outset that members are comfortable with the new arrangements for operating within the Assembly. They wish to see a low key approach being adopted and meaningful consultation as the Programme evolves.

A number of the Parties (Sinn Fein, PUP, Alliance) believe the Programme should be accessible to selected Party workers and, once appointed, Ministers Special Advisers. It has been suggested that places should be allocated to each party eg 2 per party, for them to send appropriate staffers.

Seminar/Workshop Series

The parties are generally content with the structure and timing of the Programme. Some believe the Seminars are being run too soon, others too late, but overall timings are acceptable. The proposal to repeat seminars as necessary is considered important. Sinn Fein is concerned about the proposed venue for the seminars and I am waiting on a response from them regarding alternatives.

The proposed content of the functional seminars/workshops is thought to be about right. A number of additional suggestions have been received and these are being introduced into existing seminars or new seminars developed. The UUP wishes to ensure that the seminar on "external relationships" ie East/West is given the same prominence as the seminar on North/South co-operation.

North America

The offer of assistance from the US administration is generally welcomed but there are divergent views about how the North American component should be organised. The following views were expressed:

- no strong feeling either way about a North American programme for all members. It is impossible to find date(s) that will suit all, so fix dates and the Assembly can work around them (PUP, Sinn Fein, DUP).
- will support a single North American Programme but only if it takes place at the beginning of September; otherwise a series of programmes for smaller numbers is best (Alliance).
- have strong concerns about the public perception of a week long programme for all members in the US. Not convinced it is justified. Query whether the development needs of a diverse group of Assembly members can be met in a single event. Could it not be organised in NI? (UUP, SDLP and Women's Coalition).
- Could a more flexible approach be adopted that might involve a series of events, perhaps to run later in the programme, more closely targeted at the emerging needs of Assembly and Executive members? (SDLP).

In light of the views expressed particularly by the main parties I will be re-examining options for the North American component with Dr Sean Rowland in the next few days.

Brussels

The Brussels visit is considered an essential element of the programme. Notwithstanding the logistical challenge of sending all members to Europe in November, the Parties acknowledge the importance of seeing at first hand the workings of the European Union and learning from the experience of other European countries. The proposal to run a core seminar on Europe in early September is thought to be vital preparation for the Brussels visit.

Launch Event

There is little enthusiasm for the proposal to hold a high profile launch of the Programme. At best the smaller parties are ambivalent; at worst the larger parties (SDLP, Alliance and UUP) are strongly opposed to the idea. The consensus is that the Programme is a sensible first step in the life of the new Shadow Assembly and that a launch might only expose division and provide an opportunity for political point scoring. Instead the Programme should evolve incrementally in response to the emerging needs of Assembly members.

3. Way Ahead

I am meeting in London tomorrow and Friday with Sir Ken Stowe, Professor Paul Corrigan and Dr Sean Rowland to consider the responses from the Parties with a view to producing an overview of the Programme for distribution to Assembly members at their first meeting next week. It is envisaged that the overview will contain:

- a description of the key components of the Programme;
- outline details of the 5 core seminar/workshops (which will be followed quickly by finalised programmes)
- a calendar of events covering July/August.
- nomination procedures for above.
- preliminary details of the functional seminar/workshops, international and supplementary components; and
- information on proposed phased approach to the further development of the programme, to include appropriate consultation arrangements.

I will leave details of where I can be contacted in London should Mr Semple wish to speak to me. In the meantime I will carry forward the planning work, taking on board the views of the Parties, as outlined above.


GERRY COSGRAVE

Doc 309/GMC/June 1998

cc PS/Mr Murphy (L&B)
PS/Mr J Pilling (L&B)
Sir K Stowe
Prof P Corrigan
Mr T Colman
Dr S Rowland
Mr J Dougal
Prof P Bew
Mr J Hunter

Janis
Please copy to William
Stuart and
return.
J 23/6

Note for File

19 JUNE 1998

MEETING WITH MARK DURKAN AND SEAN FARREN, SDLP
(SEAMUS MALLON JOINED THE MEETING)

The SDLP representatives expressed general reservations about the concept of the Transition Programme believing that it might be construed as occupational therapy or programming of Politicians in the early days of the Shadow Assembly. However, they acknowledged that it was important from the outset that Assembly Members were comfortable with the new arrangements for operating within the Assembly. They were therefore generally supportive of the proposals but wished the following points to be considered in the implementation of the Programme:

- Early attendees were likely to be more junior and less experienced members of the Party.
- Early content should not be too high level and should be pitched more at imparting information.
- Whether planned or not, there was a presentational/political aspect to this Programme and therefore as much time as possible, particularly in the early stages, should be spent consulting with the parties on potential content.
- In some circles there is a serious misunderstanding of the respective roles of NI Departments, Agencies and NDPBs. The early seminars/workshops should therefore concentrate on an introduction to broad departmental functions, an understanding of how the inter-relationships between departments and their agencies should operate.
- An additional functional seminar should be considered to include the legislative process.
- *Launch Event*: There should be no high-profile launch of the programme. They believed that this would provide the opportunity for people to score political points and that the Programme should be seen as a natural first stage in the life of the new Assembly.
- *International Programme*: Serious concerns were expressed about the proposed American programme in September for all Assembly members. The SDLP were appreciative of the funds being made available by the US administration but asked if it could not be used in a much more flexible form. Mr Mallon suggested that we needed to tailor the use of funds to the need and therefore we should explore options for directing the money to similar projects later in the Shadow period eg training for Executive members etc.

William

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NOTE OF MEETING

18 JUNE 1998

MEETING WITH ALEX MASKEY AND SIOBHAN O'HANLON, SINN FEIN PARTY

1. At the outset of the meeting the Sinn Fein representative^s expressed their disgust at the announcement today by the Secretary of State that the Shadow Assembly would hold its first meeting in Castle Buildings and thereafter in Parliament Buildings. I undertook to convey their comments to Mr Semple.
2. In relation to the Transition Programme, the Party had received Mr Murphy's correspondence and was aware of the broad outline of the proposed programme. I began by explaining the further thoughts we had had in the interim and in response the following main points were raised:
 - Sinn Fein would like the Transition Programme to start as soon as possible after the Elections, ie in July, but acknowledged that the earliest practicable date was probably towards the end of July.
 - With such a heavy programme of seminars and workshops they wondered when the Shadow Assembly would find time to do its business.
 - They were generally content with the subject matter proposed for the seminar/workshop but made a particular request for the Equality Workshop to address issues such as human rights, language and cultural expression.
 - They welcomed the undertaking to repeat seminars as many times as was necessary and thought that this would facilitate the conducting of Assembly business.
 - In respect of the International Programme, they believed that it added an important dimension to the programme but were sceptical about the prospects of getting all or most of the Assembly members to attend.
 - The location of the seminar/workshop series is of particular importance to them. I undertook to speak again to them once I had finished exploring the list of possible venues.

Conclusion

2. Sinn Fein agreed to give me their response to the proposals by Tuesday, 23 June. Thereafter, I would write to them with further proposals. It was also

left that I would telephone Siobhan O'Hanlon once I had made progress on securing suitable seminar locations.

GERRY COSGRAVE
18 June 1998

GMC/303/June98

NOTE FOR FILE

17 JUNE 1998

MEETING WITH DERMOT NESBITT, ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

Mr Nesbitt was not aware of the correspondence from Paul Murphy to Mr Trimble. He was therefore not briefed on the proposed format and contact for the Transition Programme. I began by outlining the proposals for a 3-track approach.

(a) Seminar/Workshop Series

I outlined the concept of 5 core seminars/workshops series designed to be attended by the majority, if not all, of the Assembly Members. Mr Nesbitt was in general agreement with the subjects that were proposed but had some concern about the 2 seminars in relation to external relationships and North/South co-operation. He believes that this is a very sensitive area for Unionists and will want to consider further how these might be designed and delivered. He also had some concern about the proposal to locate part of the North/South seminar in Dublin. He was content with the functional seminars/workshops as proposed.

(b) International Component

Mr Nesbitt was supportive of the idea of taking Assembly members to Brussels. He felt that this would familiarise members with the programmes and institutions associated with this important aspect of Assembly business.

He expressed concern about the proposal to run a week-long North American programme. It was not so much the content proposed - in fact he felt that the organising Institutions were of the highest calibre - but he was concerned that opponents of the Assembly would criticise members for attending such an event. He acknowledged that the Programme was likely to be paid for by the Americans but nevertheless he remained concerned.

(c) Supplementary Programme

Again Mr Nesbitt was supportive of the concept of a flexible supplementary programme provided clear parameters were set for the type of event(s) that would be supported.

Conclusion

Mr Nesbitt thanked me for the broad overview of the proposed programme. He undertook to consult with Party colleagues, particularly in relation to those areas where he had expressed concern and to give me his views by Tuesday, 23 June. In the meantime I confirmed that I would be meeting with the other Party representatives and would continue planning along the lines outlined. I stressed that I would do my best to accommodate the views of the various parties. In the final analysis, however, it was likely that the programme would meet some but not all of the needs of each of the Parties.

GERRY COSGRAVE
17 June 1998

GMC/301/TransProg/June 98

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NOTE FOR THE FILE

TUESDAY 16 JUNE 1998

MEETING WITH DAVID ERVINE, PROGRESSIVE UNIONIST PARTY (PUP)

The PUP is very supportive of the proposal to organise a transition programme - an education and awareness programme for newly elected Assembly members. The Party is extremely conscious of its lack of experience in all aspects of governance and would be putting its own training process in place in any case.

The following key points emerged from the discussion:

- Seminars/workshops should be organised over July and August. The Party is eager to begin the learning process as soon as the election process is over.
- Seminars should be scheduled to run more than once.

Subject matter should include:

- Europe.
 - relationships between, NI and Westminster
Assembly and Civil Service
NI and European Commission/Parliament.
 - How the system of governance works.
 - legislative process.
 - functions of departments/NDPBs etc.
- Content with the proposal to travel to North America and Europe.
 - Believe strongly that the programme should be accessible to Party officials ie Personal Assistants and Researchers.
 - Individual members should be invited to nominate for all/some aspects of the programme.