

**PROGRESS TOWARDS A LOCAL ADMINISTRATION:  
MINUTES OF INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEETING HELD ON 6  
MAY 1998**

145/5  
08 MAY 1998  
CENT SEC

Present: Mr McCusker (chair)  
Mr Quinn  
Mr Hunter  
Mr McKeown  
Mr Radcliffe  
Mr Cornick  
Mr Hamilton  
Mr Warnock

Mr Ferguson  
Mr Carson  
Mr Gray  
Mr McCartney  
Mrs Angus  
Mrs Madden  
Mrs McGill (Secretariat)

*Mrs Murphy  
Damb.*

*RJM  
12/5.*

Apologies: Mr Peover  
Mr Timms  
Mr Kelly

*11/5*  
1. Mr Lynch  
2. Mr Leach *Pls.*  
3. Mr. ↑

*U8/5*

**INTRODUCTION**

1. Mr McCusker distributed a copy of the updated project plan with the health warning that it should not be distributed further without authorisation and that the old version should be destroyed.

**Update on Referendum Planning (Mr McCusker)**

2. Uncertainty over the role of Ministers in the referendum campaign had delayed the issue of Guidance on the Conduct for Civil Servants. The Guidance was being drafted by the NIO and CPG were feeding in a number of suggested amendments. TUS would be consulted before issue and on current plans it would be available by 8 May.
3. The Referendum Group had launched its 'Yes' campaign on the 26 April. It was being well supported financially and had good links with most of the parties with the exception of the UUP. The government were keeping a discreet distance from the Group and were funding only the postage for leaflet drops for the 10 eligible parties. The Prime Minister would be visiting NI on the evening of the 6 May and would likely be campaigning for a 'Yes' vote. The Secretary of State and Ministers would be undertaking more

events throughout the Province in the next 2-3 weeks, in particular, 'street events'.

4. The latest findings from the polls conducted by the Information Services had indicated a high level of support among Nationalists, though Unionists had split with a high level of 'don't knows'.
5. It was confirmed that all referendum costs would fall to the NIO. In response to a concern raised by the Secretary of State, work was ongoing in identifying the additional costs of the referendum campaign.

#### **DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURES (Mr Ferguson)**

6. The future structure of Departments could not be fully resolved until the Committee Structures had been settled after the Elections. In the meantime, Mr Semple and Permanent Secretaries were keen to give some thought on advice to parties on options which might be feasible in the short term and options which might take longer to implement for technical reasons.
7. Informal discussion on departmental structures had taken place with the parties. Their initial views were as follows, Unionists preferred 8, with a further 2 on EU and Reserved Matters; Alliance favoured a Department of Culture; Sinn Fein, in part, and also the SDLP favoured a Department of Equality and more than one party had expressed an interest in splitting up DOE. The parties had not made it clear whether they wished additional departments or portfolios. Mr Ferguson had prepared a paper which embraced the parties and Permanent Secretaries views for discussion with the latter on 8 May. The importance of efficiency in the final decision, in particular, the co-ordination of common services would be a key consideration. A series of informal meetings would continue with the parties and a final decision would only be reached after discussion took place with the new administration. The timing of this was still uncertain as it was not yet clear when the full Shadow Ministerial Team would be appointed.

## **FINANCIAL PLANNING (Mr Quinn)**

8. Mr Carson was taking action on working up the estimates and resource requirements for the new Assembly between now and mid-July and beyond. Mr Quinn would be meeting the Treasury to discuss devolution finance issues which have a HMT dimension on the evening of 6 May. A submission would be made to Ministers by 8 May. [Action: Mr Quinn]
9. Mr Ferguson was taking the lead in determining the resource requirements of the N/S Council. Following discussion it was agreed that rather than a single, hybrid, centralised vote for implementation bodies, departments should set up and be accountable for their own individual vote arrangements. Existing vote structures should accommodate existing machinery for joint action, with new arrangements only being required for new implementation bodies.
10. Mr Ferguson's paper to departments on feasibility assessments of areas for N/S co-operation, had included a request for an estimate of the financial and accounting requirements of the recommended form of enhanced co-operation. This issue, along with decision making models and definitions of policy, strategy etc. on N/S bodies would have significant effects on financial planning and policy formulation and would need to be discussed urgently with PFOs. [Action: Mr Quinn/Mr Ferguson]
11. Estimates for the Civic Forum were being considered.

## **STRUCTURES AND STAFFING (Mr Hunter)**

12. Mr Murphy was content with the main thrust of the paper on structures and staffing. He wished however, to consult with the parties on the position of the Clerk to the Assembly before making a final decision. A decision was now likely early in w/c 12 May.
13. It was important to formally commence recruitment of staff to ensure they were in place by the beginning of July. A paper would be submitted to Mr Semple on this and the need for the Secretary of State to announce, through an inspired PQ, that a

whole range of preparatory work would be going on before the 22 May, but subject to the outcome of the referendum.

14. Posts identified as 'opportunity posts' would be filled, time permitting, via competitive selection. It would be likely that all posts would be filled on a temporary basis to allow the Assembly the option of filling their own posts. A decision on the nature of the notices that would issue had not been finalised, although it was likely that Grade 7 posts would be trawled from existing Grade 7s and those on the Grade 7 promotion pool. Ministerial support posts would be trawled and a pool of staff held for selection by incoming Ministers.
15. The Secretary of State was keen to update civil servants on the changes which would take place under a local administration. Work on this had commenced and it would be recommended that some written communication should take place through departments supplemented by briefings in in-house magazines, with a potential helpline to discuss concerns.

#### **ACCOMMODATION (MR HAMILTON)**

16. Discussions had taken place with the parties on the location of the Assembly. The only outright opposition on using Parliament Buildings had come from Sinn Fein, with the SDLP declining to offer a strong view. The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy will decide within the next few days whether to consult further or to make their own decision on where parties should locate. They are currently leaning towards Castle Buildings. A decision on the location of Shadow Ministers had not yet been taken.

#### **PROJECT PLAN (MR McCUSKER)**

17. The project plan had been updated taking account of decisions made over the last 2 weeks. Mr Gray confirmed that new legislation would be required to make any changes to the current status of Departments. This could be facilitated in the Bill, or by Assembly measure, or by Order in Council. It was agreed the issue was too complex to include in the Bill within the timescale. There was a need to feed activity 1.12 (on the issue of legal counsel for the Assembly) into the Bill. Activity 1.13 covered the

Code of Conduct both for civil servants and incoming Ministers. The handling of public appointments had been included under activity 2.11. Activity 2.15 involved a programme of work to ensure Shadow Ministers and senior civil servants had a common understanding of their respective roles and would cover a 6 month period. Departments would be formally commissioned to prepare first day briefs after the referendum. In the meantime, informal preliminary work could be initiated internally. Ministerial guidance would be sought on a steer for issue to departments on the degree of disclosure. [Action: Mr McCusker]

18. The first meeting on N/S structures would take place with the Irish government on 9 May. A meeting with PEOs on staffing of N/S bodies needed to take place. This would be included in the meeting with PFOs. [Action: Mr Ferguson/Mr Hunter] The preliminary view on the staffing of the N/S Secretariat suggested it might be Grade 5/3. The N/S Council may meet before the end of July. The role of Direct Rule Ministers beyond the shadow period was not yet clear. Work on East/West relations was being taken forward by the NIO. The need to establish concordats with other Whitehall Departments and the relationship on EU matters needed to be addressed and included in the plan. [Action: Mr McCusker] There were a raft of other issues which needed to be addressed, including the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Ombudsman and PCA. Further issues needed to be identified. [Action: All members]
19. Mr Ferguson would be the liaison point on all matters in relation to the Settlement Bill and any matters of relevance from departments needed to be fed urgently through him. There was a need to include a lawyer, who understood the NI Consolidated Fund and how it operates, in all future meetings on the Bill. [Action: Mr McCusker/Mr Quinn/Mr Whysall/Mr McCartney]

#### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

20. The issue of whether those elected to the Assembly could also be members of public bodies and whether guidance needed to be issued to them, would be further examined. [Action: Mr Radcliffe] In response to a query from Mr Warnock, Mr McCusker advised that each department had put in place a

transitional team to deal with devolution issues and members of the Inter-Departmental Group would take the lead on this.

21. A draft paper on the legislative programme was being produced. It would be submitted to Ministers before the referendum and circulated to departments thereafter.

**Date of next meeting:** 20 May at 1.00pm

*Deirdre McGill*

**Deirdre McGill  
Secretariat  
ext 21356**