

The Rt Hon David Trimble MP
First Minister
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX



[29] December 1998

[*Dear David,*]

RE-STRUCTURING OF NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENTS

I am delighted that you and Seamus have produced a set of proposals on the structure of the NI departments. I look forward to their endorsement by the Assembly at the debate on 18 January.

I am anxious that we should proceed with all due haste to make the necessary preparations to give effect to these proposals. An Order in Council will be required to establish the new departments and re-name existing ones. Officials have been working on a draft Departments (Northern Ireland) Order which will take this forward and which also consolidates the existing law dealing with the administration of public services in Northern Ireland by government departments, much of it dating back to 1921. A Transfer of Functions Order will also be needed to redistribute statutory functions between departments. Work is being taken forward urgently on this in order that the restructuring of departments can be completed prior to devolution.

Under Order in Council procedures a Proposal for a draft Order is normally published for public consultation with a 6 week period allowed for the submission of comments. Given the special circumstances of this Order, particularly that the proposals to which it gives effect will be debated by the Assembly, I am proposing to omit publication for consultation, so that the draft Order can be progressed as quickly as possible after 18 January. The Order will contain a commencement

provision so that it can be brought into effect before the transfer of power to the Assembly.

However, in light of these special circumstances I would like to offer you the opportunity to consider a working draft of the Order, entirely without prejudice, of course, to the debate in the Assembly. I would welcome any comments you have on the attached by 11 January. The Order as currently drafted makes no mention of junior Ministers. If you have any proposals relating to the role or functions of junior Ministers which could require legislation to give them effect, I would be happy to consider them.

I would then intend to let the other Assembly parties have sight of the draft Order after 11 January, again making clear that this is without prejudice to the debate on the 18th.

I am writing in similar terms to Seamus.

[*Marjorie*]

MARJORIE MOWLAM

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