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MINUTES OF MINISTERIAL MEETING HELD ON 19 JULY 1999

(F)

**Present:** Mr Murphy  
Mr Ingram  
Lord Dubs  
Mr McFall  
Mr Pilling  
Mr Semple  
Mr Jeffrey

Mr Watkins  
Mr McCusker  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Kelly  
Mr Barr  
Mrs Cassells

**Wider Government Issues**

1. Nothing to report.

**Departmental Ministerial Reports**

Lord Dubs

2. The Minister reported that the ad hoc Assembly Committee had now reported, although he had not yet seen the report. While the politicians are now on board the Harbour Commissioners are not happy. The Minister is to meet the Commissioners at 11.30am on Thursday. It is essential that their agreement to proceed is secured before an approach can be made to the Treasury for "bridging money". Lord Dubs agreed to discuss the outcome of Thursday morning's meeting with Mr Murphy on the VCR on Thursday afternoon.
3. The Minister listed a number of announcements he expects to make over the next couple of months including:
  - City of Derry Regeneration - announcement of grant aid;
  - the outcome of the Water and Sewerage consultation exercise;
  - outcome of a transport and roads study;
  - hopefully a positive announcement on beef exports (this is dependent on sufficient farmers complying with EU conditions).

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Mr McFall

4. The Minister had no immediate announcements to report. However, he had a list of announcements to be made over the next couple of months including the launch of a meningitis vaccine, the EMU report, and Millennium licensing. Decisions are needed on issues such as the review of the Northern and Southern Health Boards and the abolition of GP fundholding among others.

Mr Ingram

5. The Minister reported that he has asked DED officials to consider ways in which to be proactive in promoting the NI economy in the coming months. He expects to make announcements on jobs and hold high-powered meetings with business leaders. He highlighted the need to ensure that investors, particularly from the USA, are kept on board and will be considering what action to take in that regard - possibly arranging high-level trade missions to the US with local business and civic leaders. An announcement on appointments to the Equality Commission should issue very soon. The Minister stated that he would supply a list of all proposed announcements etc.

Mr Murphy

6. The Minister stated that he would provide a similar list of announcements anticipated by DFP.
7. There was some discussion about the presentation of Government policy announcements in the coming months. In order to consider how best to deal with the situation Mr Murphy suggested the raft of such announcements and decisions should be presented in a written format for Ministers to consider prior to the next Ministerial meeting. Mr Semple agreed to co-ordinate a paper setting out, in chronological order, policy announcements expected between now and the end of September. Mr Kelly suggested that Mike Snowdon of the Information service should be closely involved in drawing up this paper.

**(Action: Mr Semple/ Mr Snowdon)**

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**NIO/NI Departments Update**

Mr Pilling

8. Mr Pilling reported that the Saville tribunal, which was expected to begin public hearings in September, is to make a statement to say that it will hold one week of hearings in September and will not reconvene until March 2000. The reason for this is that their resources have been stretched due to a number of judicial reviews and there is a much larger volume of information to work through to prepare for the hearings than was expected. While the Secretary of State is concerned at this development Mr Pilling believes that it would be politically damaging to intervene in the workings of the tribunal.

Mr Semple

9. Mr Semple reported that there is a need to examine the relationship with the Scots and Welsh. He indicated that the Scots in particular do not appear to be co-operating with NI Departments in the exchange of information in the same way in which they did prior to Scottish devolution. Lord Dubs suggested that he could raise the matter at a forthcoming meeting of territorial Agriculture Ministers convened by Nick Brown.  
**(Action: Lord Dubs)**

**Information**

10. Mr Kelly reported that there is a feeling of depression amongst reporters following last week's events. George Mitchell, however, is held in high esteem and there is optimism that he can achieve a positive outcome to the review. He will be meeting the two Prime Ministers in Downing Street on Tuesday, but that event is expected to be low key. The secretary of State is on her way to the USA to promote the message that the Agreement is still alive and dispel pessimism there.
11. Mr McFall sought advice on how to handle the media in the coming days. Mr Kelly stated that the line should be that everyone is focused on September, refer to a September review, hope that a way forward can be agreed soon and that we want the Agreement to work.

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**Security Issues**

12. Mr Murphy reported that there were three main security issues: -

- the Patten report - Mr Ingram reported that he would be holding a meeting on Tuesday to discuss handling the report and would be advising the Secretary of State to write to No. 10.;
- Parades - the peak of the season has passed peacefully, discussions are continuing on Drumcree but progress is slow, the next contentious parade is the Apprentice Boys parade in Londonderry which has a feeder parade from the Ormeau road. It was also noted that the Parades Commission have written to the Prime Minister expressing concern about their position following comments he is reported to have made recently.
- the normalisation paper - a submission is expected to issue this week canvassing views on the normalisation paper.

13. Mr Watkins reported that everything is generally quiet on the streets and that the additional troops which were brought in recently will all have left by the 23rd. Army patrolling in south and east Antrim has now stopped as the RUC have advised that the threat of violence in that area has receded.

14. Mr Watkins also reported that the HMIC report is due to be published on Wednesday and is expected to be quite critical of the RUC in terms of management, financial control, use of IT etc. He agreed to work with Mr Kelly on the handling of issues raised by the report.

**Political Update**

15. Mr Jeffrey reported that there would be a Summit meeting in No. 10 on Tuesday when the two Prime Ministers will meet George Mitchell to discuss the terms of the review. Senator Mitchell will meet David Trimble in London and that he may come to NI later in the week to meet with the parties.

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16. Senator Mitchell believes that the timing of the Patten report will make things difficult, but it will have to be dealt with; it cannot be avoided.

**Any other business**

17. Mr Murphy advised that the secretary of State had asked for a number of items to be progressed in her absence:

- the abortion review - Mr Murphy suggested that this should be handled in a low key manner, Mr Ingram agreed to action;
- Theatre in Belfast - Mr McFall
- Josephina ?
- Gun Salutes and Flags - Mr Murphy;
- Market Garden at Hillsborough - Mr Ingram;
- Review of Civil Servants - Mr Semple;
- Millennium Bug - Mr Murphy;
- Festival at Kennedy Centre (Boston) - Peter Holmes;
- Nelson/Finnucane cases - Mr Ingram/Mr Murphy.

**Date of the next meeting**

18. The next Ministerial meeting will be held in the VCR on Monday 26 July.

*Joan Cassells*

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