

Note of the meeting between PUS and NICS Permanent Secretaries in Stormont House on Tuesday 22 April 1980

<u>Present:-</u>	PUS	Mr Mais
	Mr Bell	Mr Parkes
	Mr Bloomfield	Mr Shimeld
	Mr Dugdale	Mr Young
	Mr Erskine	Mr Palmer
	Mr Finney	Mr Gee
	Mr Irvine	Mr McGrath
	Dr Quigley	

1. PUS gave a short summary of the Secretary of State's visit to Dublin.
2. On security PUS referred to progress with the Area Reviews by the Planning Staff and suggested that the opening section of the Londonderry report would be of interest to Permanent Secretaries.

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3. De Lorean Mr Finney highlighted two distinct issues at De Lorean. First, on recruitment practice, he explained that during the Appropriation Debate Mr Fitt MP had raised the matter and asked Mr Shaw to ensure that more jobs went to local people. Both DOC and DMS were satisfied that the Company's procedures were fair and that the present distribution of vacancies reflected the nature of the posts themselves ie skilled engineering. Mr Shaw was keen however to placate Mr Fitt and was in favour of asking De Lorean to set a quota for local recruitment. Neither Department was enthusiastic about interfering in the Company's recruitment policy and an alternative formula was proposed involving circulation of all vacancies to Employment Service Offices and the introduction of a premium for the long-term unemployed in DMS schemes. Mr Rossi would discuss this with Mr Shaw shortly.
4. Mr Finney then reported that DMS was increasingly concerned at the state of the training operation at De Lorean. The DMS staff attached to the Company had been withdrawn because the programme was behind schedule; assistance with systematic training was unlikely to be required before August and it seemed that no cars would be produced before the end of the year. Mr Finney emphasised that this information had only come to light from the reports of the DMS staff whose sole function was to assist with the Company's training programme. It did raise the question of whether a specific 'watchdog' presence - on technical matters - was needed.


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5. Mr Mais said that while DOC had always been worried about the timetable, they had not been aware of these technical problems and would need to examine this question. A complete review of the Company's financial position was in progress. The line in public was that all was going ahead on schedule and it would be extremely serious if this were not the case.
6. PUS said that the response to Mr Fitt should be decided by Mr Rossi and Mr Shaw. The key issue was the viability of the Company, taking priority over social factors. The matter might have to be put to the Secretary of State for a decision if not resolved.
7. Children's Homes Mr Dugdale reported on the problems coming to light at several children's homes. At the home in East Belfast 3 staff had been charged with offences dating back to 1966. Allegations of child prostitution etc were ^{also} being investigated by the RUC although there was no evidence to date. At the home in Co Down the cleric in charge had been removed following allegations which the RUC were pursuing. Allegations concerning a former home in Belfast were also being examined by the Northern Board. It was possible that some response from DHSS to these cases would be needed - an enquiry into the management of the homes. While it was unlikely that charges would result against Eastern Board Staff the question of negligence would need to be examined. The concept of single-sex institutions would also need to be reconsidered.
8. Mr Irvine then revealed that as a result of the RUC investigations, a former member of staff at one of the NIO institutions had admitted offences also. The position differed in this instance since Government ran these institutions directly and Mr Allison would be updated on this new development.
9. Gas Industry Mr Mais said that preliminary discussions had taken place with the undertakings which were prepared to close. The Gas Employers' Association however had engaged Cooper and Lybrand to report on the feasibility of a pipeline and it was not clear how the undertakings would react to this. Belfast Council was to meet in committee on 28 April to consider the means of continuing as a viable undertaking. The Council had also asked DOE to increase their borrowing powers by £1 million. Mr Bloomfield said that it was intended that this request should not be refused outright but approval should be withheld pending further information on the viability of the undertaking. He added that in running the gas operation at a loss the Council would not be acting

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illegally - the burden could be passed on to the ratepayers.

10. It was pointed out that the Government had no commitment to cover the Belfast Gas deficit. Mr Mais said that the Council had not been able to consider the rundown terms before. Mr Bloomfield suggested that following the forthcoming meeting Government (DOC) should take up the issue of closure with the Council - on financial rather than statutory grounds.
11. Higher Education Review Group Mr Parkes explained that the Chilvers Group had been asked to report on teacher training facilities as part of the wider review. The most logical solution to the diversification of facilities would be the creation of one establishment for Northern Ireland. The Group seemed likely to recommend the amalgamation of the three colleges, Stranmillis, St Joseph's and St Mary's, located at the Stranmillis site. This course would be vigorously resisted by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, who were already at odds with Government over the proposals of the Astin Committee on parent/teacher representation on school management. Lord Elton had suggested to Chilvers that the Group should spell out the case for amalgamation of all 5 institutions, so that a decision to combine only the 3 colleges might prove more acceptable.
12. PUS remarked on the crucial nature of the decision and asked that the Secretary of State be briefed on the sensitivities on this front. It was possible that Cardinal O'Fee might raise the matter in a meeting with the Secretary of State.
13. Physical and Environmental Improvement PUS said that he had read with interest the PCC discussion on this and endorsed their conclusion. He suggested that Ministerial involvement might be appropriate and that a speech on the matter covering the PCC points should be considered. Mr Bloomfield commented that random unco-ordinated initiatives were not the answer - modest but comprehensive efforts aimed at specific areas were more credible


J G McGRATH

6 May 1980

cc: Those present
Mr Hannigan
Sir Maurice Oldfield