



Head of the Northern Ireland
Civil Service
John L. Semple CB

29 OCT 1998
DF/157/10

CD 26 (SA)

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hj:

1. Copy to Paul if he hasn't already got one.
2. Files (Structures and Qualities etc.)

HCS/922/98

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28 October 1998

Mr Colm Larkin
Office of the Deputy First Minister (Designate)
New Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST BT4 3XX

John Semple

Thank you for sending me a copy of the SDLP proposals for departmental structures.

You have asked for a technical assessment of these proposals and, having consulted with Permanent Secretary colleagues, the following views are offered:

Department of the Executive

Whilst a broad area of functions here can logically exist in a central department, there is some difficulty over the terminology used. For example, under the Equality Unit is it envisaged that this would include linguistic diversity or would this be seen as part of the Culture, Leisure and Tourism Department? Would it include community relations which is currently the responsibility of CCRU inside Central Secretariat?

There is a reference to a Victims' Unit - there needs to be clarification here of exactly what role such a Unit would undertake - for example, is this to oversee victims' support in other Departments or is this to drive forward centrally victims' related initiatives? The relationship between the NIO responsibilities (as a reserved matter) will need to be examined.

There are some responsibilities currently carried out centrally under the Central Secretariat which are not outlined in the proposal, such as Access to Government/Freedom of Information; the Northern Ireland Bureau (USA); Honours; the Ombudsman; Emergency Planning; Visits; Public Appointments



policy etc - can it be assumed these are also envisaged as being part of the Department of the Executive or are they intended to be placed elsewhere? Presumably the Department would provide the Secretariat for the Executive Committee. I am not quite clear about the reference to the Office of the Legal Counsel Attorney General. It could be appropriate to brigade the Departmental Solicitors' organisation at the centre rather than in DFP. This area would seem to need further consideration.

Finance

Whilst there can be some rationale in envisaging a separate Department of Finance, the logic of attaching local Government to this Department may be questionable. The only current linkage here is with the Valuation and Lands Agency, which is currently brigaded under the Department of Finance and Personnel banner. The vast majority of the work of local authorities is more closely related to environmental aspects (and to some extent health areas) rather than pure funding.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

IRTU is an industry-facing body which inter alia provides assistance to industry along broadly similar lines as IDB and LEDU. Energy functions are almost entirely of a regulatory kind and sit easily with other commercial regulatory responsibilities. There is no direct Government responsibility for the generation or distribution as the energy industries in Northern Ireland are entirely in the private sector. It should also be noted that renewable energy in fact consists of licensing the regulation of that particular aspect of energy and again should be placed alongside energy regulations.

Infrastructure (and related services)

As mentioned above the inclusion of energy is not appropriate in the Northern Ireland context. There does not appear to be a strong case to be made for divorcing the strategic planning role from planning control (placed in the Environment Department). Otherwise the brigading of infrastructural aspects is a comfortable fit.

Employment and Applied Learning

The placement of employment statistics in this Department would involve duplicating a statistical service which would still be required in the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Department to collect not only employment statistics but a range of other material, including manufacturing outputs and exports. The Training & Employment Agency include some industry-facing functions, for example, grants to manufacturing and tradable services, it would thus be necessary to restructure the T&EA in order to retain those industry-facing responsibilities within the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Department whilst



the vocational training functions could move to the Employment and Applied Learning Department. The placing of Higher Education in this Department has some logic, however, there is a counter-argument which would revolve around maintaining a coherence in the retention of higher education alongside schools and libraries to ensure the development of a curriculum and inter-institutional links and facilitate progression along the qualification of framework which effectively begins at age 14.

Agriculture and Rural Development

This retains the core activities of the Department of Agriculture as is. However, there would need to be confirmation that this also would include the three professional services with a new existing Department: Science, Veterinary and Agri-food Development. The term food processing needs clarification. There is a logic to retaining this here if it is intended to cover advice to the industry, administration of marketing and processing grants and training for the sector there is no difficulty. If, however, it implies industrial support in the broader sense, this would probably be better handled within the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Department.

Environmental and Natural Resources

The transfer to a Natural Resources Department of Forestry; Fisheries and Inland Waterways is feasible and easily achieved, but however it has to be said that as they fall under MAFF in GB read-across linkages for example in the context of public spending may become more complicated. The term Fisheries and Inland Waterways would require some clarification. As at present Fisheries comprises two distinct components: responsibility for sea fisheries and the common fisheries policy; and the management and development of inland fisheries. Inland Waterways represents only one part of the work of the Rivers Agency which also has responsibility for flood defence, urban and rural drainage and water-borne recreation. There would be potential inefficiencies to sub-divide the existing Fisheries and River Agency demands, though the wholesale transfer of either or both to a new Department would be feasible. Minerals responsibilities are concerned primarily with licensing and regulations and thus may be more feasibly brigaded within the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Department.

As mentioned above the separation of Planning (presumably referring to development control) from the strategic planning role does not have strong foundation.

Culture, Leisure and Tourism

The assumption is that heritage refers to the natural and built heritage side of



the current DOE Environment and Heritage Service. No difficulties are foreseen with brigading the functions listed, however, it should be borne in mind that tourism is de facto an industry and therefore has close linkages with the Industry Department. The assistance offered to the tourism industry is broadly speaking the same Selective Financial Assistance offered to manufacturing companies and requires the same type of evaluation and skills. To this Department could be added with some logic the Public Record Office and responsibility for Lottery-related issues.

Education

Other than the comments above regarding higher education, no difficulties are foreseen in restructure.

Health, Social Care and Public Safety

There are no major difficulties seen with this grouping, however, the inclusion of food safety might be considered here.

Social Support and Development

To include Housing in this grouping would divorce it from Planning and Infrastructure which would open up the prospect of the difficulties in these areas experienced prior to the local government reorganisation in 1973. The terms community development and social regeneration require a clarification as to what functions are intended to lie beneath these. It is presumed that the bulk of functions would be taken up by DOE's present Urban Regeneration responsibilities and perhaps DHSS's Voluntary Activity Unit. It is unclear whether this Department would also seek to house the Child Support Agency and Social Legislation. Acknowledging this Department would take the lead on TSN it would be important to recognise that this role needs to be exercised on a cross-departmental basis and might perhaps be better placed in a more over-arching portfolio arrangement.

Summary

The above is a quick first cast of comments and is by no means intended to be definitive. It is clear that there are a range of functions not included in the above groupings, for example: Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency; Rent Collection Agency; Land Registry; Ordnance Survey; the Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency; Business Development Service etc etc. Whilst it is recognised that a reasonable broad brush approach will have to be taken, particularly in assessing the numbers of Departments and portfolios, sight should not be lost of all the functions currently carried out in the six Northern Ireland Departments.



John Semple would be happy to arrange a meeting with relevant officials to discuss any of the above in more detail at your convenience.

If you require any further information or amplification of the above please let me know.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Crabbe', written over a faint rectangular box.

DAVID CRABBE
Private Secretary to John Semple CB