

COR 392/2000

THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER
URGENT

(CORRESPONDENCE)

Reference: COR/392/2000

Raised By: Maurice Morrow

Subject: COR 392/00 - PROGRAMME OF GOVERNMENT - PRIORITIES

ACTION REQUIRED

Please provide advice and a draft reply for signature by the PS/First Minister and PS/Deputy First Minister .

TO BE WITH PRIVATE OFFICE NO LATER THAN 13/09/2000 - Noon

Referred To:

MR HAIRE (EPU)

Date Referred:

30/08/2000

Copied To For Information

PS/First Minister
PS/Deputy First Minister
PS/Mr Haughey
PS/Mr Nesbitt
PS/Mr Loughran
Mr McCusker
Mr May
Mr McKervill
Mr Campbell
Mr Kerr
Dr Gudgin
Mr Larkin
Mr Logue
Mr Barrington
Mr Ross
Mr Larmour
Mr Pringle
Mrs Cosgrove
Ms Magee

Diane Smyth (Private Office)

THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Parliament Buildings Tel: 028 9052 1383

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER
CORRESPONDENCE DUTY CLERK - CHECKLIST FOR
INVITATIONS / CORRESPONDENCE / SUBMISSIONS / GENERAL MAIL

REF NUMBER: INV/ COR / SUB/ CM / /00

PRIORITY: IMMEDIATE / URGENT / 24 HOURS / NOT URGENT

NAME / TITLE / ORGANISATION /:

Maurice Motton

SUBJECT MATTER:

Reg No. Programme for Government - Priorities

INVITATION - DATE OF EVENT & VENUE:

DETAILS OF OTHER MINISTERS INVITED, CONTACT WITH ORGANISATION
YES / NO:

HANDLING ARRANGEMENTS:

NAME OF OFFICIAL(S) / DEPARTMENT(S) CASE REFERRED TO:

Mr Haine

ADDITIONS TO THE BASIC CC LIST (see 26/5/00 note):

usual.

TYPE OF REPLY - JOINT FM/DFM / FM / DFM / JOINT JM/ JMC / PPS / PS / APS /
OTHER MINISTER(S) / OTHER, additional information in the box below:

ANY OTHER INFORMATION, relating to the case:

X ref sub 336

NOT URGENT
FOR
GENERAL MAIL
MINISTER

The Minister for Social Development

Churchill House
Victoria Square
Belfast BT1 4SD

Tel: (028) 9056 9216

The Rt Hon David Trimble LLB BL MP MLA,
First Minister and
Seamus Mallon Esq MP MLA,
Deputy First Minister
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Our ref: SUB/362/2000

29 August 2000

Dear First Minister and Deputy First Minister

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Dermott Nesbitt's note of 7 August asked Ministers to provide suggestions for the half dozen or so priority policy areas that the Executive might wish to emphasise in the Programme for Government. He also attached a summary note prepared by EPU of the main points raised at the meeting of 27 July. In developing my suggestions, I have taken account of the main points together with the content of the three papers prepared for that meeting.

My suggestions follow the outline of the strategic aims discussed and agreed at the meeting on 27 July, although there is considerable overlap among them. In summary my proposed priority policy areas under each strategic aim are as follows:

1.

- i. Achieving a Cohesive, Inclusive and Just Society
 - child poverty

- ii. Improving the Quality of Life of all the People of NI
 - neighbourhood renewal
 - building communities
 - individual wellbeing

- iii. Increase Sustainable Economic Growth and Employment
 - infrastructure
 - fraud

Achieving a Cohesive, Inclusive and Just Society

I welcome the emphasis given by the Executive Committee to the achievement of a cohesive, inclusive and just society. In the context of this strategic aim, I believe that it is vitally important that the Programme for Government commits the Executive Committee to tackling unacceptable levels of social and economic disadvantage across Northern Ireland. While there are various government programmes for addressing this problem – a number of which are the responsibility of DSD – there is a particular area which I believe has not been sufficiently clearly identified in the work of OFMDFM to date. A key priority area for cross-government action in Northern Ireland should be poverty, and, in particular, child poverty. No group is more vulnerable to the life long consequences of deprivation than children. The eradication of child poverty should be one of our half dozen or so priority policy areas.

Child Poverty

Our statistics suggest that more than one in three children in Northern Ireland currently live in families experiencing poverty, significantly more than 20 years ago – an appalling situation. Children who grow up in disadvantaged families generally do less well at

...ol, are more likely to suffer unemployment, low pay and poor health in adulthood. This leads to a cycle of poverty through to the next generation of children. A priority must be to break this cycle. This is a genuine area for cross-government action particularly in the early years of children's lives, in raising educational standards amongst the most disadvantaged children, in providing extra help for families through benefits and in supporting families and vulnerable children and young people. I attach as an annex further development of my concept of child poverty as a priority area.

Improve the Quality of Life of all the People of NI

Within this strategic aim, I should like to see the Executive Committee give a priority to neighbourhood renewal, focusing on the most deprived areas. There is also an obvious read across to the achievement of a cohesive, inclusive and just society.

Neighbourhood Renewal

The aim of this priority policy area would be to develop cross-cutting policies and action programmes which would promote economic and social renewal, encourage community growth, strive for social inclusion and narrow the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest of our community.

Nigel Dodds developed this priority policy area in his preliminary contribution to the Programme for Government dated 18 January. He drew attention to the possible elements of such a priority policy area and concluded by proposing the designation of a number of Social Action Zone pilot projects, incorporating a range of cross-Government initiatives including Sure Start and Health Action Zones. He also proposed the development of electronic estates (e-estates) as a model not only for addressing the emerging "digital divide" but also for promoting the interactive engagement of communities with government and other providers. In the years to come, an inability to use or access IT will be as powerful a cause of social exclusion as illiteracy is today.

Moreover, the need more generally for government to deliver integrated, responsive, flexible and client centred services requires the speedier adoption of new technology. We need to demonstrate to the public the benefits of e-government and capitalise on the strengths of the Northern Ireland economy in developing and applying new techniques.

Building Communities

Within this priority policy area should be a commitment to building communities. Developing partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors is key to the development of a healthy society. Nigel Dodds' earlier submission highlighted the importance of promoting community involvement, targeting the most deprived communities and areas. He drew particular attention to the development of appropriate community infrastructures in those disadvantaged communities where it is currently weakest.

Individual Wellbeing

I believe that alongside a commitment to community development should be a commitment to individual wellbeing. This priority policy area should be designed to promote the health and wellbeing of all in our community. I see the need to move from a "sickness" view of health to focus on the requirements of a genuinely healthy community. To promote a healthier population, key issues relating to sustainable environmental development, good housing, engaged and active communities and decent jobs and incomes are required, as well as an effective response to ill health. To give but one example, recent research from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine suggests that 600 people die in NI each year from cold related illnesses. Tackling "fuel poverty" is an important priority for DSD.

Increase Sustainable Economic Growth and Employment

Infrastructure

A further priority for cross-government action should be the improvement of our infrastructure which is necessary to underpin progress in most other areas. Key components of such action must be the launch of the new Regional Strategy, supporting necessary transportation developments, continuing investment in housing stock and promoting sustainable development concepts.

In any grouping of priorities for cross government action the economic growth of Northern Ireland must feature. This of course requires emphasis on education, on training and the skilling up of our entire community, of promoting all those who can into work but also recognising the need to develop a social economy to facilitate wider economic development across all areas of our community. Any initiatives in this area should not lose sight of the importance of addressing the "digital divide" I referred to earlier.

Within this priority policy area, I wish to emphasis the importance of DSD's Welfare Reform Programme. It is designed to promote work as the best form of welfare for people of working age capable of work; to eliminate child poverty; to increase security for those who cannot work; and to modernise service delivery. It obviously has a read across to other strategic aims, not least in respect of the importance of social welfare provision for the most vulnerable in our society.

Fraud

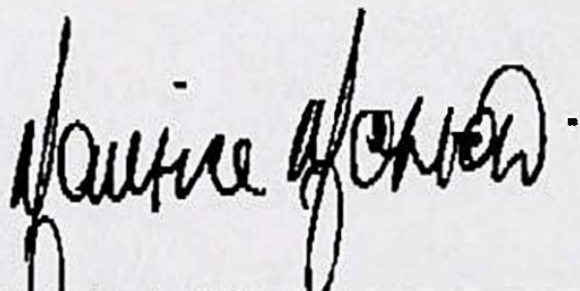
Finally, I believe that the Programme for Government should also commit the Executive to rooting out fraud – wherever it occurs. I have a major anti-fraud programme in the social welfare field, which I will be vigorously promoting. However the problem is not exclusive to DSD. It is important that our compassion for weaker members of our society is matched by our vigour in dealing with fraud. We cannot afford to have scarce resources siphoned off by those who abuse our public services, when genuine demands for those same services are so great.

Conclusion

As a general point, I wish to emphasise the need to ensure that the Programme for Government is seen as addressing the real needs of the public of Northern Ireland. The translation of strategic aims into overarching priority policy areas must be accompanied by the identification of tangible outcomes in terms of service delivery. For DSD, that should be seen in terms of my priorities for a continuing major investment in housing and urban regeneration plus the stimulation of the voluntary and community sectors and modernising social welfare provision.

I am copying this letter to Mr Nesbitt and Mr Haughey, Mr Loughran, Mr Haire, Dr McCormick and NI Permanent Secretaries, and to the PFG Drafting Group.

Yours sincerely



MAURICE MORROW MLA

Minister for Social Development