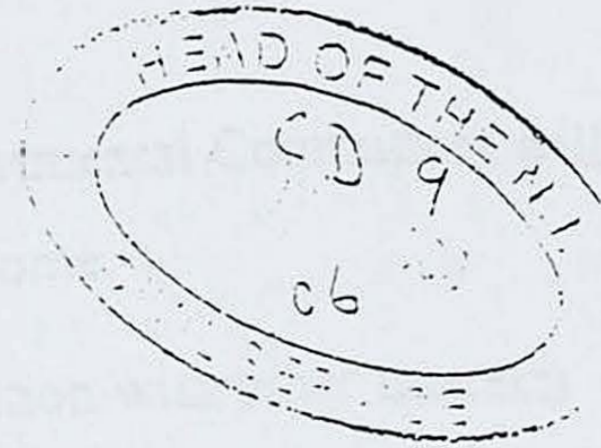


Department for
Regional Development



MEMO

From: Peter Robinson
Minister

Your Ref:
Our Ref:

CD MR WILL HAIR

Tel: (028) 9054 1175/6

cc: Minister for DFP
Secretary to the Executive
Mr Spence

Date: 4 January 2000

To: First Minister
Deputy First Minister

PROGRAMME OF GOVERNMENT

1. I am responding to your minute of 22 December seeking a first contribution from DRD in the preparation of a Programme of Government.
2. I attach a short, initial input which identifies three cross-cutting themes and sets out four DRD priority areas.
3. I recognise the need to take full account of current public expenditure realities and the relationship which has to be forged between the Programme and negotiations with the Treasury on the 2000 Spending Review. However, I am concerned that the approach which is being adopted to the preparation of the Programme could, in the time available, result in little more than the rolling forward of nearly all the key policies and priorities inherited from Direct Rule and is less likely to demonstrate any innovative local thinking.
4. There will, in fact, be an expectation, that a devolved Administration is capable of making a real difference. The business sector, trade unions and the voluntary sector who are to be consulted will want to see at least some significant changes in

DRD'S FIRST CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROGRAMME OF GOVERNMENT

Introduction

1. This paper has been prepared in response to the FM/DFM's minute of 22 December to Departmental Ministers seeking a first contribution in the preparation of the Programme of Government.
2. In preparing this response, account has been taken of the need to relate production of the Programme of Government to current public expenditure realities and negotiations with HM Treasury in the 2000 Spending Review. However, we have sought to avoid using this occasion as part of a PE bidding process.
3. At this initial stage in the preparation of the Programme, the DRD contribution has deliberately been presented briefly, and in broad terms, which will permit fuller analysis to be provided when the overall shape of the Programme has begun to emerge.

Cross-cutting themes

4. There are a number of cross-cutting themes which will justify inclusion in the Programme, including Equity, TSN and Human Rights considerations. From DRD's perspective, three primary themes are being highlighted:-
 - 4.1. Strategic Planning. The Regional Strategic Framework should form a central and fundamental part of the Programme, since the strategy will

provide the over-arching and co-ordinated framework for the long-term spatial development of Northern Ireland. The legislation requires that all Departments should have regard to this strategy. DRD has also responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of the strategy, including providing appropriate strategic planning policy guidance and advice, and facilitating the public sector in respect of those elements of its strategies which have a spatial development perspective. The implementation process will link to existing work on city visions (Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Craigavon and possible other areas) and will include the preparation of a small number of sub-regional strategies. The draft regional strategy was published in December 1998; after an initial consultation period, an Examination in Public was held in the autumn of 1999; a report from the Examination is due shortly; present intentions are to bring forward final proposals to the Assembly in the late Spring.

- 4.2. Modernising Government. Any fundamental review of public administration in NI will impact on DRD's responsibilities for delivery of its public services and the measures necessary to implement the regional strategy. It is important that any review is thorough and comprehensive, dealing with public services at all levels – regional, area, district and community. The review should cover issues of political and financial accountability as well as the quality of delivery of regional and local services. Such an exercise will require time and care and it would be a



mistake to focus on only some parts of the jigsaw, such as district councils, Area Boards or the functions of Departments.

- 4.3. A better Integrated Approach. There is a need to develop further the integrated approaches to social and economic regeneration in specific areas. For example the "Belfast Executive" created under Direct Rule brings together key officials in DRD, DSD, DOE, Belfast City Council, (Laganside Corporation and the Housing Executive) to discuss key strategic issues in relation to the future development of the city. Also, the City Vision process is producing Action Plans to implement the agreed vision statements and these cross various departmental boundaries. The Programme of Government should either confirm and reinforce these mechanisms or suggest alternative arrangements for better co-ordination at local level.

Departmental Issues

5. In addition to the regional strategy etc described above, four key Departmental issues which should feature prominently in the Programme of Government are:-
- 5.1. Transport. The intention is to produce a 10 year regional transport strategy which would take a comprehensive and sustainable approach to improving rail and bus services, maintaining the existing road network, developing the strategic road network, tackling urban congestion, and giving priority to people (not cars) in city and town centres. This will involve changing

attitudes to transport. It will also require much higher levels of investment – perhaps rising to up to an additional £150m per year; the options will include exploring new ways of raising money from road users, developer contributions, payments for use of roads by public utilities, and public private partnerships. Part of the new approach will include the introduction, within 2 years, of free public transport for the over 65's.

- 5.2. Sea Ports. An early priority will be to determine the future of Belfast Port, because there are clear budget implications across a number of Departments and also a need to end the uncertainty for the Port. An options paper is currently being prepared for consideration by the DRD Committee and the Assembly. What we can say on this subject is dependent on the publication date of the Programme of Government. New legislation to broaden the powers of the other Trust Ports is being planned to enable them to meet the commercial challenges ahead.
- 5.3. Energy. [Depending on clarification of DRD's role]. It is the intention to prepare an energy strategy for Northern Ireland. This will involve wide consultation and the commissioning of expert studies. The aim would be to publish a significant report during 2001 which would be the first published Government strategy for energy in Northern Ireland; this would, in itself, be innovative.

- 5.4. Water and Sewerage Services. Heavy investment (some £2.5 billion over the next two decades) is needed to enable the Water Service to meet EU standards, public health requirements and rising customer demands and to replace a decaying infrastructure. Agreement is needed to guarantee the flow of resources from the regional rate beyond the present PE period.
6. These DRD priorities have also significant implications for other Departments. For example, DETI will be concerned about roads, ports, energy strategy, water and sewerage services and the complementarity between the Regional Strategic Framework and Strategy 2010; DHSS & PS will be concerned with the health aspects of water and sewerage services and patients' journey times viz roads and public transport; DOE will be concerned with the relationship between DRD's strategic planning role and its development control function, the road safety issue and control of water quality and effluent discharges; DARD will be concerned about the state of the extensive rural road network. As indicated earlier, DRD's work on regional planning will impact on all Departments.