

NOTE OF A MEETING WITH THE FIRST MINISTER HELD ON
2 DECEMBER 1999

ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Present: The Rt Hon D Trimble, MP
Mr J Semple
Mr D Lavery
Mr D Campbell
Mr D Crabbe

M
9/12/

The meeting had been called to discuss practical arrangements for the first meeting of the Executive Committee to take place on 2 December 1999.

Logistics

Mr Trimble said that the current round table in Room 21 was much too large and was a waste of space. He asked that arrangements be looked at for either reducing the size of the table or producing a smaller table.

It was agreed that a notetaker could sit at a side table away from the main table at which the Executive Committee would be seated. Mr Trimble suggested that an additional notetaker would be a useful asset.

Mr Trimble said that he would think about whether the Press should be allowed in to photograph the Executive Committee on arrival and advise Mr Semple of his decision in this matter.

Agenda Items

Mr Trimble expressed concern about the Ministerial Code and said that, in its current format, it ignored the Committee structure which would be so important in the new administration. He said that, whilst he was not prepared to formally adopt the Code on a temporary basis, the Committee could work in

accordance with it. He would treat the document as a working draft for comments to be invited.

Mr Trimble said that Departmental reports should not be invited at the inaugural meeting as this would take up too much time and there was a need to "train" Executive Committee members to be brief in dealing with matters efficiently.

Acknowledging the need for the paper on the legislative calendar, Mr Trimble said that it lacked information and he requested that the paper and, especially the table, be reordered to group or classify the various pieces of legislation under headings, such as: "Routine", "Parity"; etc, this would enable analysis to be made for prioritising, etc.

Understanding the need for the senior appointments (Deputy Secretaries) paper, Mr Trimble asked for a further note on what posts would need to be filled in quick time and what posts could perhaps wait for public advertisement, etc.

With regards to vetting, Mr Trimble said that he did not want to drop vetting entirely for Special Advisers and would be keen to take Seamus Mallon's view on the subject.

North South Ministerial Council

Mr Trimble said that matters were straightforward for the initial meeting. However, he had some reservations over the cost for the inaugural meeting to be held in Armagh on 13 December 1999.

With regard to the frequency of sectoral meetings, Mr Trimble said he would prefer to see June 2000 and not March 2000 as mentioned in the paper for the completion deadline.

Mr Trimble was very keen that BIC should mirror the NSMC with regards to frequency of meetings, etc.

Annex E (the areas for co-operation)

Mr Trimble said that neither he nor his party had been consulted on the substance and was very dismayed to learn that this was apparently being presented as a "fait accompli". He stressed that he did "not ever want to see any papers again coming forward without prior consultation". In the meantime, he would like to see the North South Co-operation paper being pulled from the meeting.

Mr Trimble made a comment that, in general, too many of the papers being presented expressed an Irish viewpoint.

Mr Trimble was keen to meet with Terry Smyth who was to be the Acting Secretary to the NSMC as soon as possible.

Special Advisers

Mr Trimble said it was an imperative that his Special Advisers had both the resources and authority necessary to complete their work. He asked if he could have a separate meeting with Mr Semple about this at an early date.

Economic Policy Unit

Mr Trimble said that the staffing of the EPU was an important issue and this should be given some priority.

BIIGC

Mr Trimble said that he wanted to be involved at every meeting of the BIIGC and would involve Ministers at those meetings where it was deemed necessary.

Draft Press Release

Mr Trimble said that the draft Press Releases for both the NSMC initial meeting and the Executive meeting should be kept as short as possible. It was likely there would be a brief Press conference following each meeting.

Attendance at NSMC

Mr Trimble said he was dismayed to learn that the Irish Cabinet would be attending the inaugural NSMC meeting almost en toto. He said he would raise this matter with John O'Donoghue (Irish Minister for Justice) and Liz O'Donnell (Minister of State for Foreign Affairs) when they were attending the transitional meeting on 1 December. He asked that the papers be presented in such a way that it gives him an opportunity to raise this issue. Mr Trimble went on to say that there was a misapprehension with officials as to the role of accompanying Ministers to NSMC. It was his view that these Ministers carried equal authority as the Departmental Ministers.

Information Service

Mr Trimble said that the Information Service structure needed to be looked at and that perhaps a consultancy exercise should be carried out to draw a structure which would be more suitable to the new dispensation. Mr Semple pointed out that a consultancy exercise had been carried out some time ago but that this focussed on the direct rule situation. He agreed that this was an important issue and suggested that some detailed attention be given to the post of Head of Information Service. If the "right" person was attracted to this job they would be able to form a structure which was more suitable to the new administration.



DAVID CRABBE
☎ 28146