

EC(M)(00)11

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING: 27 JULY 2000

Those Present: First Minister
Deputy First Minister
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Minister of Education
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Minister of Environment
Minister of Finance and Personnel
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment

In Attendance: Secretary to the Executive Committee
Mr Loughran
Director, OFMDFM

INTRODUCTION

1. The Executive Committee noted that this would be the last Executive Committee meeting attended by Sir John Semple, who is about to retire. The Committee expressed its gratitude to Sir John for his service to the Committee, as well as a lifetime of public service, and wished him well in his retirement.
2. The Committee noted that all of the papers for this week's meeting had been circulated by the Secretariat to the Minister for Social Development and the Minister for Regional Development with the exception of papers EC (00) 98, 105 and 106.

3. The Executive Committee noted that the Minister for Social Development and Minister for Regional Development would be resigning their posts that afternoon, and expressed concern at the proposed rotation of the Ministries held by their Party Members.

FINANCIAL ALLOCATIONS: DEPARTMENTAL RUNNING COSTS 2000-01

4. The Committee discussed the proposed DRC allocations presented by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety expressed concern about the way in which the allocations had been reached and the lack of evidence that consideration had been given to priority policy areas. The First Minister asked for more details relating to the bid from the Department for Regional Development. The Deputy First Minister sought an explanation of how two Departments were able to identify substantial amounts for money in-year on a previous occasion.
5. In response, the Minister of Finance and Personnel explained that the DRD allocation was to meet an inescapable bid resulting from audit obligations. He also assured the Committee that all the bids were given due consideration and allocations were not simply the result of a proportional allocation.
6. The Committee noted the concerns raised, agreed the need to improve processes for allocating DRCs in the future and endorsed the proposed allocations.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR HANDLING THE DEBATE ON SELECTION

7. The Committee considered the paper presented by the Minister of Education. After some discussion of the issues, the Committee agreed to endorse the principle of a review body and the draft terms of reference. Ministers were asked to provide any comments on the terms of reference, and to suggest names of suitable individuals for the review body, to the Minister of Education. The Minister agreed to return to the Committee in September to seek final endorsement for the composition of the body and the terms of reference.

NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

8. The Committee discussed the paper presented by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
9. There was agreement that the office should develop links with the Irish Permanent Representation as well as the Scottish and Welsh offices in Brussels. It was agreed that Departments would have responsibility for contacts with their European counterparts, but that the new Brussels office would be available to provide support where necessary. All requests for support from Departments should come through OFM/DFM. It was also noted that the office should perform a wider representational role assisting NI visitors (including members of the Assembly) to the EU. It was also agreed that the issue of securing Ministerial representation at European Council meetings should be actively pursued, and that contact would be made with the Northern Ireland representative(s) on the Economic and Social Committee.

10. In relation to proposed discussions about a role for NICE, it was noted that the conflict of interest resulting from Ministerial membership of the board of NICE would need to be addressed.

11. In conclusion, the Committee agreed the proposals set out in the paper including: the model of the office; the budget of £455k; that work should proceed immediately to set up the office; and that discussion should take place with the board of NICE about its role in Brussels and the basis for any financial assistance.

EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS: MONITORING AND DELIVERY MECHANISMS

12. The Executive Committee discussed the paper presented by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development reported that the matter of securing representation which covered both rural interests and the agriculture community was being discussed between the relevant groups, and it was hoped that a resolution acceptable to all would be reached soon.

13. It was agreed that OFMDFM should be represented on both of the programme monitoring committees.

14. The Executive Committee agreed the proposals in paragraph 19 of the paper. The proposals on locally based delivery mechanisms were endorsed by seven votes to 2.

PROPOSED REVIEW OF SCS APPOINTMENT AND PROMOTION PROCEDURES

15. The Committee discussed the paper presented by the Minister of Finance and Personnel and agreed the terms of reference, proposed timing for the review, and the broad approach to the membership of the review team. It was agreed that the review team would include the Head of the Civil Service. The Minister of Finance and Personnel agreed to consider a proposal from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that a member of the community sector could be included on the team. However, it was noted that those on the review team are not selected to represent particular sectors, but rather for the experience they can bring to consideration of the issues, and that individuals may bring experience from more than one sector.

PROCEDURES FOR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

16. The Executive Committee considered the paper presented by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. The necessity of ensuring that the approach to the spending review was aligned with and supported the development of the Programme for Government was noted. The Committee endorsed the recommendations on the process and timetable for SR 2000 and on resource accounting and budgeting.
17. On in-year monitoring the Minister of Finance and Personnel agreed to undertake further work to establish more fully the implications of the proposed changes and to submit a further paper to the Committee for consideration at its next meeting.

NICS PAY NEGOTIATIONS

18. The Executive Committee noted the proposed negotiating remit set out in the paper presented by the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

NIO CONCORDAT

19. The Committee noted the proposed changes to the Concordat.

DATES FOR NSMC AND BIC PLENARY MEETINGS

20. The Committee noted the dates for the plenary meetings.

RESPONSE TO PAC REPORT ON THE IDB

21. The Committee noted the paper and agreed that there should be further discussion of the issues arising from the report at the next Executive Committee meeting.

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

22. The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2000.
23. It was noted that the Minister for Social Development had submitted a response to queries, raised by the Executive Committee at the 6 July meeting in relation to Belfast City Centre Retail Developments. It was agreed that Ministers should consider the response and raise any further issues at the next meeting.
24. The Minister of Finance and Personnel advised Ministers that he would be circulating a paper on intervention aid for Harland and Wolff. The paper

would identify options for handling decisions which may need to be taken in relation to this aid over the summer recess.

25. It was noted that the Executive Committee Secretariat had issued a paper to Ministers on the process for appointing members to the advisory committee of the Food Safety Promotion Board, using the written procedure.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

26. The Committee noted the following papers which were circulated under the "take note" procedure:

- EC (TN) (00) 11 – Report from NSMC on Food Safety and Health Matters
- EC (TN) (00) 12 – Office Accommodation Strategic Review
- EC (TN) (00) 13 – Consultation Arrangements with the Construction Industry
- EC (TN) (00) 16 - Paper on Sectoral North South Ministerial Council on Education held on 3 July
- EC (TN) (00) 17 - Paper on Ministerial Directions to Accounting Officers

27. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment advised that he had some concerns about EC (TN) (00) 15 - Paper on Non Domestic Rate Revaluation, and agreed to discuss the paper separately with the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

28. The Committee endorsed the amendment proposed by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the line to take in paper EC (TN) (00) 14 – Harassment and Bullying in the NICS.

29. The Committee noted the intention of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give a press conference on 31 July

addressing the immediate issues facing health and social services in Northern Ireland.

PRESS RELEASE

30. The Committee agreed a press release for issue after the meeting.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

31. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held at 11am on Thursday 7 September 2000.