

FROM: MRS DOREEN BROWN
29 NOVEMBER 1999

EX/51/00

(PA)

PS/MR SEMPLE

**POINTS TO BE COVERED WITH FIRST AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTERS
RE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

I attach, as agreed, a list of points which would need to be covered at your meeting tomorrow with Messrs Trimble and Mallon so that we can have a clearer idea of how they envisage running the meeting of the Executive Committee on Thursday.

I spoke to Frank Woods about **media involvement**. His thinking is to avoid having any media presence at any stage during the meeting, and certainly no group photo. He has not had a chance to get the views of Mr Trimble or Mr Mallon on this; he will try to do so, but would appreciate if you could raise it tomorrow in any event.

The list makes reference to the **Chairman's draft brief**. It is not yet available.

I have had a go at **seating plans**, on the lines we discussed this morning. Some rather rough versions are attached (all, or some, of which could be tidied up for you to take to tomorrow's meeting). In my view, the best of the three versions which have been drawn up on the basis of the Ministers sitting in Party blocks is the one which has all the unionists on one side of the table and all the nationalists on the other; the other two versions are less attractive in that they place all of one grouping in the seats near the top of the table, and all of the other grouping towards the bottom.

I have also included a version which arranges the Ministers around the table according to their portfolios; the difficulty here is that we do not as yet know what parties will take what portfolios. I would like to have a chance to revisit that diagram once d'Hondt has been run.

Work is in hand to ensure that all the necessary **housekeeping arrangements** are made for Thursday.

(Signed DAB)

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(P+)

POINTS TO BE COVERED WITH FIRST AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTERS RE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Notification of Meeting - [propose to issue][issued] from the Executive Committee Secretary to each Minister.

Expected attendance - First Minister, Deputy First Minister and 8 Ministers, ie excluding the DUP, although spaces will be allocated for them at the table.

Seating arrangements - various options available (see diagrams attached); much depends on whether the Ministers are to be seated as Party blocks (with due regard to the sensitivity of even this arrangement) or according to their Ministerial portfolio. It will be essential to have nameplates on the table to avoid scope for confusion (or worse) on the day.

Attendance of officials - The seating plan envisages the Executive Committee Secretary being seated at the main table. An Assistant Secretary would be present for minute taking, seated separately from the main table.

Departmental Officials would be available to attend as business requires (including at the first meeting). They will be on call within Parliament Buildings.

Is there a need for anyone else to attend? For example, should an Information Officer be present if it is necessary to agree a media line and to define the amount of information which should be made available publicly?

Media involvement - per Frank Woods – nothing decided as yet. His preference is for a low-key approach so as not to highlight the fractured nature of the Committee and the empty seats at the table. Therefore, he proposes having no media access, either for a group photo or even for a shot of the Ministers sitting round the table. An official cameraman could take still pictures to record the event. The media would have a chance to speak to the attending Ministers on the way in and/or out. A press statement should be agreed, to which the First and Deputy First Ministers could speak after the meeting. This would record that the Committee had met, would refer briefly to the business which had been covered and would give some sort of positive line for the future.

Chairman's brief - draft brief prepared for consideration, to work through the business of the Executive Committee meeting. This consists of a brief description of each topic to be covered and the decision which it is thought the Chairman will want to achieve.