

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

EC(M)(00)1

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: TUESDAY
11 JANUARY 2000**

**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 the Environment
Minister of Finance and Personnel
Minister of Further and Higher Education, Training and
Employment
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety**

Secretary to the Executive Committee

Ministers expressed their condolences to the Minister of Finance and Personnel on the tragic death of his niece.

.....

The Minister of the Environment referred to the lack of consistency in flying the Union Flag on Government offices on Christmas Day. It was agreed to seek legal advice and to bring forward a paper to allow a discussion of the issue, in the wider context of symbols and emblems in the Agreement, before the next flag flying day on 6 February.

.....

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

ITEM 1: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING – EC(M)(99)3

- 1.1 The Executive Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting of 14 December.
- 1.2 **BIC/BIIGC:** The Executive Committee noted the proposed report to the Assembly on the meetings of the BIC and BIIGC and agreed that the report should be made by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- 1.3 **Assembly staffing:** The Minister of Finance and Personnel confirmed that his officials were pursuing the issue of the scope for reducing the resource pressures of the Assembly, but formal meetings had not yet taken place.

ITEM 2: DEVOLUTION: MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPLEMENTARY AGREEMENTS – EC(00)1

- 2.1 The Committee discussed the Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements which will underpin relations between the UK Government and the devolved administrations and endorsed the Memorandum of Understanding and the supplementary agreements on the establishment of a Joint Ministerial Committee, on Financial Assistance to Industry, on International Relations and on Statistics.
- 2.2 The Committee agreed that further consideration would be given to the Concordat on European Policy Issues and noted that the draft concordat between NIO and the Executive Committee would be brought forward for consideration in the near future.

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

ITEM 3: PUBLIC EXPENDITURE: DECEMBER MONITORING ROUND – EC(00)2

3.1 The Minister of Finance and Personnel presented EC(00)2 which set out proposals for the reallocation of resources which Departments had identified as easements because of underspending in a range of programmes. Decisions were required as a matter of urgency to enable the Spring Supplementary Estimates process to be taken forward. In future Monitoring Rounds, Ministers would be involved at an earlier stage and would have a greater opportunity to consider the proposed reallocations in detail.

3.2 It was agreed that the process to be used in future should identify easements at an earlier stage in the financial year to enable resources to be reallocated to maximum effect.

3.3 The Executive Committee agreed the need to adjust the proposed reallocations to address the resource pressures facing the Health Service as a result of the current flu epidemic.

3.4 The Executive Committee:

- noted the room to manoeuvre available;
- agreed the recommendations of the Minister of Finance and Personnel subject to an additional £1.5m being allocated to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to meet the current pressures. Corresponding reductions would be made in three of the allocations proposed in EC(00)2: Schools Maintenance would be reduced by £0.375m, FE College Maintenance would be

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

reduced by £0.125m; Roads Structural Maintenance would be reduced by £1.0m;

- agreed the reduction in the Block over-commitment to £20m;
- noted that the outcome of December Monitoring would be reflected in Spring Supplementary Estimates;
- noted that the Minister of Finance and Personnel would inform the Finance and Personnel Committee of the agreed position.

ITEM 4: APPROPRIATION BILLS – EC(00)3

- 4.1 The Executive Committee agreed to the proposal from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that Appropriation Bills should be taken through the Assembly by means of accelerated passage, and that he should discuss the matter with the DFP Committee and the Speaker.

ITEM 5: FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY – EC(00)4

- 5.1 The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety presented EC(00)4, which set out options for future arrangements in Northern Ireland for the development of the food safety and standards system, and indicated that her recommendation was for a separate Northern Ireland Agency.
- 5.2 The Executive Committee agreed that a further paper should be produced to examine the two options of establishing a separate NI Agency or participating in a UK-wide Agency. The paper should set out the practical differences between those two options and should clarify their financial requirements, consulting DFP. Assurances should also be sought from

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Whitehall on the access to scientific expertise which would be given if Northern Ireland were to establish a separate Agency.

ITEM 6: NORTH/SOUTH IMPLEMENTATION BODIES – CHAIRPERSONS AND VICE CHAIRPERSONS – EC(00)5

- 6.1 The Chairmen acknowledged that there had been difficulties in the process of coming forward with nominations for the Chair and Vice Chair posts in the North/South Implementation Bodies.
- 6.2 The Executive Committee discussed the proposals from the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The Committee was unable to reach agreement on whether the Chairperson of the Food Safety Promotion Board should be drawn from consumer interests or from the food production sector. It was decided to resume the discussion of the nominations for the Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons of the Bodies at the Executive Committee's next meeting.

ITEM 7: NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL SECTORAL MEETING

- 7.1 The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety confirmed that the sectoral meeting of the Council to discuss matters relating to the Food Safety Promotion Board and areas for co-operation on Health was not expected to meet until the week commencing 24 January.
- 7.2 It was agreed that the Executive Committee Secretariat should draw up a programme of forthcoming sectoral meetings so that Ministers would have adequate notice of the range of meetings which they might be required to attend. The programme should then be revised and updated on a regular basis.

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

ITEM 8: PROGRAME OF GOVERNMENT – EC(00)8

- 8.1 The Chairmen reported the written comments put forward by the Minister for Social Development on EC(00)8.
- 8.2 The Executive Committee noted and approved the process described in the paper which would be put into effect as a matter of urgency, with Ministers giving priority to the exercise.

ITEM 9: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 9.1 It was agreed that the next meeting of the Executive Committee should take place on Tuesday 18 January at 11.00 am.

ITEM 10: DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

- 10.1 The Executive Committee revised and agreed the terms of the draft Press Release which was circulated at the meeting.

ITEM 11: OTHER ISSUES

- 11.1 It was agreed that Section 3 of the draft Ministerial Code would be considered at the next meeting of the Executive Committee.
- 11.2 The Minister of the Environment reported on errors in the calculations carried out by his Department of levels of financial support to District Councils. These had been rectified but could attract media interest. The Executive Committee agreed that Ministers' public response should focus on the positive steps taken to correct the error.

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE