

CONSULTATIVE MEETING 7 SEPTEMBER 1998

Present: Mr David Trimble, First Minister
Mr Seamus Mallon, Deputy First Minister
Mr Dermott Nesbitt, Ulster Unionist Party
Mr Reg Empey, Ulster Unionist Party
Mr John Hume, SDLP
Mr Mark Durkan, SDLP
Mr Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein
Mr Alex Maskey, Sinn Fein
Mr Sean Neeson, Alliance
Mr Seamus Close, Alliance
Professor Monica McWilliams, NIWC
Ms Jane Morrice, NIWC
Mr David Ervine, PUP
Mr Billy Hutchinson, PUP
Mr David Ferguson, Head of Support, Office of the First and
Deputy First Minister
Mr David Crabbe, Private Secretary to First Minister
Miss Maura Quinn, Private Secretary to First Minister
Mr Geoff Beattie, Private Secretary to the Deputy First Minister
Mr David Campbell, Special Adviser to Mr Trimble
Mr Hugh Logue, Special Adviser to Mr Mallon

The meeting was jointly Chaired by **Mr Trimble**, First Minister (Designate) and **Mr Mallon**, Deputy First Minister (Designate).

Mr Trimble opened the meeting by thanking all present for attending and explaining that the meeting was the beginning of a progress of consultation on the issues on which he and **Mr Mallon** were required by resolution to report to the Assembly on 14 September. He acknowledged that the arrangement for the meeting had not been ideal with papers unavoidably issuing at short notice etc. However, he explained that he and the Deputy First Minister would be proceeding with further consultation on a Party by Party basis later in the week. Responding to an interjection from **Mr Adams**, **Mr Trimble** gave details of the Officials and Special Advisers present and acknowledged receipt of a letter from **Mr Adams** requesting a number of items to be included on the Agenda. **Mr Trimble** said that all of the items **Mr Adams** had requested were dealt with in the papers for the meeting. He went on to say whilst no firm agenda had been set his priority would be to deal with the question of the number of Northern Ireland Departments required to discharge Government post-devolution,

and then go on to deal with arrangements for the inaugural meetings of the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council which it was anticipated would take place before the end of September. He acknowledged that there were both technical and political problems which would have to be overcome and stressed that all aspects pertaining to the Agreement would be discharged and it is believed that all Parties, especially those with paramilitary linkages, ensure that their responsibilities were fully discharged. **Mr Trimble** said that one other matter not included in the papers would also have to be dealt with and that was the question of what the Assembly does following the next scheduled meeting on Monday, 14 September 1998.

Mr Mallon welcomed all participants to the meeting and went on to say that progress on a work programme had been difficult given the number of crises in Northern Ireland which had occurred since the establishment of the Assembly on 1 July. He said he was confident that the challenges could be risen to and that this would start with an agenda for this meeting being based on the resolution of the Assembly of 2 July 1998.

Mr Trimble informed the meeting that he and **Mr Mallon** would be meeting with NIO Ministers on a weekly basis to ensure a two-way information flow on progress for the work of the Assembly. He stated that they would be using the meeting on 8 September to seek timetables for the transfers of power with particular regard to the indications of what would be required to be done on behalf of the United Kingdom Government.

Mr Hume said it was important that when the Assembly meets it should discuss the outcomes of consultative meetings such as this, and that it was important that the Assembly should not meet in future without a fixed agenda of business.

Mr Empey said that the major challenge facing the Assembly is to overcome temptation to keep the status quo ante with regard to Departments and delivery of service. He stated that there would be a need to look closely at the role of public bodies as well as Government Departments but that cognisance should be taken of the

fact that reviews can be both time consuming and costly thus there was a need to take a structured look at the way forward.

Mr Trimble said that it was important to stress that the papers tabled at the meeting had been produced by officials and were not therefore the views of the First and Deputy First Minister, and that both were agreed that would like to see a more critical assessment of all aspects of the present delivery of Government in Northern Ireland. Agreeing with this **Mr Empey** said that it was necessary to have a structured debate within the Assembly not least to ensure ownership by the Assembly of any outcome.

Mr Adams said he welcomed the prospect of bilateral consultative meetings with Parties and requested in addition to this private and separate meetings with **Mr Trimble** and **Mr Mallon** subsequent to the bilateral with Sinn Fein. He said he agreed with the sentiments of the need to look critically at the delivery of Government in Northern Ireland, and it would be necessary to take this forward in such a way as to build confidence within the whole community. He stressed that it was Sinn Fein's view that there was a need to establish a Shadow Executive as soon as possible, even if portfolios for Ministers could not yet be clearly defined. He said that all Parties have a mandate to be involved in the delivery of Government and thus there was a need to have an early meeting of a Shadow Executive.

Acknowledging the concerns raised **Mr Trimble** said that it would be necessary to sort out the Departmental structures as soon as possible. Referring to the establishment of a Shadow Executive he said the position would be eased if all Parties, especially those with paramilitary linkages, discharged their full responsibilities under the Agreement. **Mr Adams** said that this raised a serious concern that all Parties might not be allowed to form the Executive as democratically mandated to do so.

Mr Ervine stated the need to keep in mind what was trying to be achieved by the Assembly and the Shadow Executive. In essence he said it was important to concentrate not on what constituted a Minister but what had to be delivered. Agreeing **Mr Close** said that there was no point in calling the Assembly without giving a clear steer as to what was to be achieved. He said the Assembly was a new

body pointing towards change and that it must be seen to be prepared to address change. To this end there would be a need to agree the number of Departments as soon as possible and that it was the Alliance view that no constraints should enter into this thinking. He queried whether the **First Minister** and **Deputy First Minister** would ultimately produce their views on departmental structures etc.

Mr Trimble said they had no chance to consult to date and reiterated that he would like to see a more critical appraisal of the status quo ante. With regards to other aspects **Mr Trimble** said that he saw less difficulty with the question of North-South bodies being positively addressed before the proposed meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council by the end of September. However, the question of Departmental structures and non-Governmental organisations was a vast area to be covered and therefore there was a need to be able to come forward with more precise proposals. Agreeing **Mr Mallon** said that he saw a need to develop a framework that was workable and to move forward quickly in consultation with all Parties. He stressed that nothing was yet written in tablets of stone.

Mr Durkan said it was the SDLP's view that there was an opportunity now to change the status quo ante, however a quick decision would be needed to agree the number of Departments. He stressed that there was a need to design public service policy and delivery with "the customer" in the forefront of the Assembly's mind. There were strong implications for both the public and the Civil Service thus it was imperative to have departmental structures founded on a considered policy.

Mr Maskey acknowledged the political and technical problems with the creation of new departmental structures in the appointment of the Executive. However he referred to the timetable to get the implementation of the Agreement achieved and thus the Shadow Executive appointed as soon as possible. He stressed there would be a need to deal with issues such as the appointment of junior Ministers at an early date and this made the appointment of the Executive at an early date all the more crucial.

Mr Trimble said that it should be borne in mind that cross-departmental issues could also be discharged under the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. With regard to junior Ministers he stressed that there was nothing to prevent more than one

Minister being responsible for a Department. He pointed out that there were some difficulties still to be overcome legislatively with these issues.

Professor McWilliams said that she welcomed the consultative meeting which was taking place and agreed with the views that there needed to be a more critical approach of the delivery of Government. She stressed it was important to take account of the role the Secretary of State had to play and in particular the ongoing reviews relating to equality and economic development. The outcome of these reviews could inform the Assembly in its thinking and thus it was important to have early sight of these as soon as possible. Acknowledging this **Mr Mallon** said that both he and the **First Minister (Designate)** would be using the weekly meetings with NIO Ministers to update their thinking on these matters. **Mr Trimble** said they would also be stressing the need for timetables for the transition to devolution.

Mr Adams stressed that while this inaugural meeting was useful to break the ice on such issues it would be necessary to have further meetings collectively beyond the planned bilaterals. He suggested that a timetable be agreed to allow consultation both intra-Party and inter-Party. **Mr Trimble** said that both he and the **Deputy First Minister** were keen to ensure the consultation would be as full as possible and that this would include the two Parties [DUP and UKUP] which were not present at the meeting. In the meantime bilaterals would be proceeded with later in the week.

Mr Nesbitt stressed the importance of the need to establish the number of Departments by looking at functional areas. He said that the Agreement did not bind a specific time for this to happen. Acknowledging this **Mr Trimble** said that he and **Mr Mallon** were required to report to the Assembly on 14 September regardless of the state of progress.

Mr Ervine stated that the PUP's position was that 10 Departments would be required plus a number of junior Ministers over and above those with direct departmental portfolios. He stressed there was no self-serving interest in the appointment of junior Ministers but that there would be an absolute requirement to ensure that all issues were dealt with. **Mr Neeson** said that the position with regard to junior Ministers had been looked at during the negotiations of the Agreement and that with regard to the

question of Departments the figure of 10 should be looked at as a guideline, but should not constrain thinking.

Mr Mallon said that the only real starting point was to establish what Departments were required functionally, in other words to look at functions first and the number of Departments required thereafter. Whilst reviews of the delivery of Government would undoubtedly be necessary the business of the Assembly could not wait for such reviews to take place.

Ms Morrice said that the number of Departments was a political decision and not just a technical one and an agreement would have to be reached on this sooner rather than later. She also stressed that it should be borne in mind and put on the record that the day saw the funeral of Mr Sean McGrath, the 29th victim of the Omagh bombing, and that the meeting should acknowledge this point.

Mr Adams said he endorsed Ms Morrice's viewpoint. He went on to say that he was treating the meeting as informal in deference to **Mr Trimble** as **First Minister (Designate)** however he felt he should express an impatience amongst Parties to see progress. He suggested that a further meeting such as this should take place either on Monday 14 September or as close as possible to that date to ensure that everyone could see that progress was being made. He queried what communication structures would be put in place for the relaying of views to the **First and Deputy First Ministers**.

Mr Durkan agreed that there was a need to be seen to keep the process moving forward and stressed that bilaterals between Parties would assist this. He acknowledged the difficulties of identifying the numbers of Departments and the appointment of junior Ministers which he felt the UK Government were reticent about because of the implications for devolution in Scotland and Wales.

Referring to **Mr Adams** point about the possibility of a meeting of Parties on 14 September **Mr Trimble** said that the meeting of the Assembly had already been established for 10.00 am on that date and therefore such a meeting would not prove possible. He went on to say that he would need to discuss with **Mr Mallon** as to how

question of Departments the figure of 10 should be looked at as a guideline, but should not constrain thinking.

Mr Mallon said the starting point was Department's responsibilities. A logical case could be put for a number of proposals.

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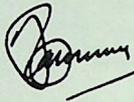
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to proceed in bringing forward the views following consultation and would relay this to Parties during bilaterals. Agreeing **Mr Mallon** pointed out that the enormity of the work to be done should not be understated and that everything would be done to move the process forward as soon as possible.

Mr Trimble said that a note of the meeting would be distributed on 8 September and dates and times of the bilaterals promulgated as soon as possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Crabbe', with a horizontal line underneath.

DAVID CRABBE
Private Secretary First Minister (Designate)