

Meeting Notes 8th September 1998 Re. New Departments; Structures Review
Mark Durkan, Jane Wilde, Monica McWilliams (not present throughout), Jane
Morrice, Kate Fearon

1. NIWC preferred position is a root and branch strategic review of the administration. Yet NIWC see the need for the Assembly to be seen to be acting on this issue, and the timetable is tight.
2. Neither NIWC nor SDLP were impressed with the prepared paper – arbitrary allocation of Ministers and Departments was not the way to progress. NIWC suggested asking Departments for their aims and objectives, not just outlining what they currently do.
3. SDLP indicated it envisaged 10 Departments plus several others to be housed in the office of the First and Deputy First Minister. These to include:

(Freestanding) **Office of Public Service** (to include 'Personnel' from the old DFP)

- Finance** (to include local government)
- Infrastructure** (including all infrastructure matters: communications, transport, water (rivers ?) ports, possible telecommunications (licensing?))
- Social Support (& development ?)** (to include Housing from the DoE, add community development, take social security from HSS)
- Environment** (with greater emphasis on public safety. To include management, planning, consumer interests, road safety, fire service – a watchdog department)
- Agriculture and Natural Resources** (move agri-food to ??; Rural development to stay in with agriculture)
- Education** (which would deal with pre-school primary and secondary issues, selection etc. concern over current brief being too broad) NIWC would emphasise Education and Child Development/ Youth, but caution against having reductive titles of Departments.
- Employment and Applied Learning** (to deal with tertiary education issues and integrated training, and make impact on economic front. Caution about social and human sciences place in this)
- Tourism, Arts, Culture, Heritage, Sport** (Big brief, but integrated tourism strategy would incorporate)
- Health and Social Services** to remain largely as is, with some small tidying up changes.
- Economy** (??)

In the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers

Cross department ministers (Implementation Ministers) dedicated
“to assist with the implementation of the programme of government”
(junior ministers, who can be selected outside the d'hondt system)

Department of Equality (initially in this office, maybe to develop into Equality and Law Reform)

Information Issues (envisaged in the NIO document as being essentially a Department of Spin. What about a more 'outreach' type approach –explaining, and 'translating' Assembly workings and policies for the public and communities.)

NIWC notes re. Department Reshuffle

Are we satisfied that the following NIWC manifesto commitments in terms of *structure* will be accommodated under the proposed NIO documents, or the SDLP thinking:

Community Development
Food Safety
Public Health
Life long learning
Minister for Children and Families
Economic Development
Housing Needs
Inter-departmental planning, a strategic plan
Integrated transport
Environmental Protection and promotion
Sustainable Development
Agricultural and Rural Affairs (and Economy)
Equality and Social Justice
Putting the Conflict behind us
Young people

Key Points to emphasise:

- Little point in allocating arbitrary posts – need to develop clear thinking
- Need to balance strategic thinking, not to lose opportunity to reshape governance, with need to be seen to be doing things
- Like the idea of involving Assembly members in the review, leads to sense of ownership, increase stake in new administration
- Many Departments contain balancing if not potentially conflicting interests – e.g. Agriculture and Food Safety; Roads and Transport, Food, Farming and Environmental Policy.
- What is function of non-Executive NDPBs.

Specific Responses to NIO document

Option 1

- Odd to create Equality by transferring CCRU, *and*, create a 10th department from community relations.
- Where is transport?
- Prefer Office of Public Office to Department of Civil Service

- Re. Information Services – no to giving this portfolio to one Minister. Better to change nature slightly (to outreach ++) and to house in office of Minister 1,2, or to a committee of the Assembly.

Agree broadly with SDLP proposals. Need only to tweak to promote our own manifesto ideas.