

## ANNEX B I

### THE RELATIVE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AND COMMITTEES

1 In circumstances where executive responsibilities rested with Departmental Committees of the Assembly the efficient conduct of business and the need to ensure an appropriate, fair and significant role for all main traditions in Northern Ireland would require clear guidance to be drawn up on the respective roles of Committee Chairmen and the Committees as a whole.

2 Administratively, it would be appropriate for Chairmen alone (and perhaps Deputy Chairmen in certain circumstances) to have full access to Departmental officials and papers in the same way as Ministers do at present. It could also be appropriate for the Committee as a whole to be serviced by Assembly staff, rather than Departmental staff. The Committee's power to call for persons and papers would enable it to have access to Departmental officials and papers but conventions would need to be established to preserve the distinct role of the Chairmen and protect certain information which requires to be kept confidential (eg relating to inward investment decisions).

3 The Committee would have a significant role in determining policy directions, eg through being required to authorise the Departmental Estimates going before the Assembly, to approve the Department's bid to the Business Committee for a legislative programme for the year and to approve capital expenditure decisions above a certain level. It could also establish broad lines of policy in particular areas on foot of reports it might make following detailed consideration of a particular issue.

4 The Chairman, supported by the Department, could be expected to have a major influence on all such decisions but would then be expected to act in conformity with them.

5 At the level of day-to-day administration, decisions could be categorised in a number of ways. One possibility would be to distinguish:

- (a) those which Departments would make on their own initiative;
- (b) those which in the judgement of the Committee Chairman would not require prior Committee approval and which the Committee Chairman would make on his or her own initiative, within the general policy framework established by the Committee (see paragraph 3). All or some of these would be notified to the Committee as a whole, giving the Committee an opportunity to indicate its satisfaction or otherwise and to determine whether similar decisions should in future be handled in a different way or brought to the Committee for consideration;
- (c) those which in the judgement of the Committee Chairman would require the prior approval of the Committee as a whole. Some guidance would be drawn up in advance to illustrate which types of decision would be likely to fall into this category. The circumstances of the individual Northern Ireland Departments vary and it is unlikely that a standard formula could apply equally to all; but the types of decision which would be politically sensitive or crucial to the Department in policy terms, are likely to be reasonably clear in each case.

Arrangements on these lines could result in a committee Chairman being held accountable (see paragraph 10(c) of Annex B) in the Assembly for policies which he or she did not personally support. In those circumstances arrangements analogous to those which apply when an Accounting Officer is overruled by his or her political Head might come into play and enable the Chairman to discharge the accountability requirement by pointing to a formal record of his or her views being overridden by the Committee.