

**SUMMARY OF PERMANENT SECRETARY GROUP MEETING – FRIDAY
12 SEPTEMBER 2003 IN STORMONT CASTLE, GD.10, AT 8.45 am – 10.30
pm**

Present: Pat Carvill
Clive Gowdy
John Hunter (until 9.40 am)
Andrew McCormick
Aideen McGinley
Gerry McGinn
Stephen Peover
Stephen Quinn
Bruce Robinson
Alan Shannon
Pat Toal
Edgar Jardine (for Will Haire)

Apologies: Nigel Hamilton
Will Haire

In Attendance: Leo O'Reilly
Richard Pengelly
Kathryn Menary (Secretary)

1. Minutes

The minutes of 5 September were agreed.

2. Matters Arising

North East Institute

The post of the Director of the North East Institute was discussed.

Industrial Action

The social worker industrial action continues.

3. Budget/PfG

Dr McCormick reported that the paper he circulated provided a revised summary following the extensive dialogue between Supply and Departments on the scenario circulated at the previous Friday's meeting. He highlighted that it had been possible to relieve some of the more acute pressures, however many awkward issues remained.

Dr McCormick asked members to note that this exercise is not a Spending Review and that no new money was available for new cost

pressures to be met. The bids put forward were highly unrealistic highlighting the classic problem of political ideas moving ahead of resources and the only option would be the redeployment of accidental spare resources. In the final year, colleagues should assume flat cash of 2.5%.

Mr Carvill reported that even more than usual this was a zero sum game and Dr McCormick explained that the objective was now to narrow down the range of issues to take to the decision-making meeting on Monday 22nd September.

[Action- All members]

Mr O'Reilly and Mr Pengelly joined the meeting to listen to the round table discussion that followed with respect to each Department's requirements and proposed allocations. Within these discussions the move towards the 3-year Spending Review was welcomed.

4. N+2 Update

Dr McCormick reported that the weekly report again revealed spending well below target. It was highlighted that lack of action to maximise spend and Departmental performance was particularly worrying as this is the prime point under Departments control. He also expressed concern that some of the measures employed may get Departments through December but could be the cause of a major drought in spending next year and at this time Departments would not have the option of swapping.

Dr McCormick highlighted the need to maximise effort now and asked for comments from colleagues in all Departments but particularly the poor performers. Members provided brief verbal reports on action in play, problems and future outcomes.

5. Committee D update

It was agreed that both this item and the updates from Committees E and F would be placed on the agenda for the 19th September. These should be brief verbal updates.

[Action – Secretary]

6. Tour de Table

Fluoridation of Water

Mr Gowdy reported that the Fluoridation of Water issue was back on the agenda and would be discussed at the forthcoming Health Ministers Conference. Local politicians are strongly opposed to this issue, however this policy decision will have to be taken in the near future.

SIB Advisory Committee

Mr Jardine asked members to note that the SIB Advisory Council was being pulled together.

New Director of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington

Mr Jardine advised that Mr Tim Losty took up post as the new Director of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington on 1 September 2003.

Conflicts of Interest

Mr Peover raised the issue of potential conflicts of interest arising in applications to NDPBs and other bodies. Mr Jardine was asked to take this point back to colleagues in OFMDFM.

[Action – Mr Jardine]

Memorial and Museum

Dr McGinley reported that debate on this issue was ongoing.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Quinn explained that he had read Greg McConnell's draft paper on RPA, noting that format was now fairly fixed, and examining the request for comments from Departments. Mr Quinn and several other members expressed concern as to the type of response (formal/informal) that should be returned. It was agreed that further discussion on this issue was required and that it would be placed on the PSG agenda in two weeks time (on Mr Hamilton's return). Mr McConnell would be invited to this meeting.

[Action – Secretary]

Further Education Fees

Mr Shannon reported that there had been significant development in the Universities UK Conference where the Vice Chancellor had decided to support Charles Clarke's stance on fees. Mr Clarke will try to push legislation on fees through this autumn. Mr Shannon asked members to note that this was liable to have significant financial implications.

NICS Pay

Mr Carvill asked members to be aware of recent bulletins issued regarding this issue and reported on current discussions with NIPSA.

Date of next meeting- 19th September 2003.

KATHRYN MENARY
12 September 2003