

CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

SECOND MEETING HELD ON

TUESDAY 30 JUNE 2009

11.00 HRS – 12.30 HRS

IN

ROOM 116, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, STORMONT, BELFAST

DRAFT MINUTES

Those Present:

Rt Hon Peter Robinson MP MLA	First Minister
Martin McGuinness MP MLA	deputy First Minister
Conor Murphy MP MLA	Minister for DRD
Michelle Gildernew MP MLA	Minister for DARD
Margaret Ritchie MLA	Minister for DSD
Richard Bullick	Special Adviser
Dara O'Hagan	Special Adviser
Bruce Robinson	HOCS
Damian Prince	OFMDFM
Heather Cousins	DSD
Nuala Kerr	DEL
Graeme Hutchinson	DETI
Henry Elvin	Ulster Bank
Kevin Kingston	Northern Bank
Michael Kidd	Bank of Ireland
Joseph McGowan	First Trust Bank
Frank Cushnahan	Member
Robbie Smyth	Member
Bob Barbour	NI Chamber of Commerce
Julie McGrath	Consumer Council
Jenny Boyd	NIE Consumer Supply
Frank Bryan	Institute of Directors
Bill McGinnis	Employment and Skills
Colin McCarthy	Construction Industry Group
David Strahan	Phoenix Natural Gas
Mark Prentice	Firmus Gas
Tom Gillen	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
John Corey	NI Public Service Alliance
Dr Ken Bishop	NI Local Government Association
Clarke Black	Ulster Farmers Union
John Armstrong	Construction Employers Federation
Robin Andrews	Ulster Federation of Credit Unions
Kieron Brennan	Irish League of Credit Unions
Patricia Lewsley	Commissioner for Children & Young People
Kate McCullough	Older Persons Advocate
Seamus McAleavey	NI Council for Voluntary Action

Marie Cavanagh

Anti Poverty Network

Apologies:

John Irvine

Almac Group Ltd

Deirdre O'Hara

Energy Generators

Iain Osborne

NI Authority for Utility Regulation

Wilfred Mitchell

Federation of Small Businesses

Eleanor Gill

Member

Dame Joan Harbison

Older Persons Advocate

1. INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 The First Minister opened the meeting by welcoming everyone present. A "tour de table" took place for the benefit of those deputising for members of the Group.

1.2 The First Minister indicated that since the first meeting of the Group in April there had been some public commentary that suggested that the worst of the recession was over. However, it was too early to be certain that the economic downturn was easing locally as latest official economic statistics were not yet available to confirm this. There was nonetheless some encouraging evidence from other sources such as the Ulster Bank Purchasing Managers Index which shows private sector business activity improving. There was evidence however that problems still existed. Recently released figures for unemployment in May show a continuing deterioration in labour market conditions, with claimant counts reaching 48,000, and a continued rise of unemployment at a rate of 2,000 per month. There have been some predictions of unemployment rising to its peak in the middle of 2010, or continuing into 2011. The First Minister concluded that we may be dealing with the effects, costs and casualties of the recession for many months to come.

1.3 The First Minister invited the deputy First Minister to make some introductory remarks and lead on the first two items of the agenda.

1.4 The deputy First Minister also welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that the purposes of today's meeting was to agree the minutes of the previous meeting; provide an up-date on the scope and membership of the six sub-groups; brief members on the Economic Development Forum's recommended package of measures for business in response to the credit crunch and departmental responses to this; discuss the position regarding the banking sector and credit availability; and cover social welfare matters, in particular the ongoing impact of the credit crunch on households and communities.

2. ITEM 1: MINUTES OF CSAF MEETING HELD ON 6 APRIL 2009

2.1 The minutes of the first meeting of the Cross Sector Advisory Forum

meeting held on 6 April 2009 were agreed without comment or amendment.

3. ITEM 2: CSAF SUB-GROUPS

3.1 The deputy First Minister explained that since the preliminary meeting held on 6 April, the Executive had decided at its meeting on 21 May 2009 to reduce the agreed number of sub-groups from 7 to 6. This was done by merging the sub-group looking at skills, training and education with the sub-group looking at jobs, innovation, tourism, manufacturing and employment. The new combined sub-group would jointly consider Business and Skills. The purpose of doing so was to remove any overlaps and promote synergy between the topics under consideration. The Executive had also agreed that the sub-groups should be chaired by Ministers. The deputy First Minister reported that the six sub-groups would be chaired as follows:

- **The Infrastructure, Planning and Procure sub-group** to be jointly chaired by the Ministers for the Environment and Regional Development.
- **The Business and Skills sub-group** to be jointly chaired by the Ministers for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Employment and Learning.
- **The Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy sub-group** to be jointly chaired by the Junior Ministers of OFMDFM.
- **The Agriculture sub-group** to be chaired by the Minister for Agriculture.
- **The Banking, Finance and Lending sub-group** to be chaired by the Minister for Finance and Personnel; and
- **The Housing and Property sub-group** to be chaired by the Minister for Social Development.

3.2 The deputy First Minister indicated that the CSAF sub-groups would support and advance the work of the Forum; and take forward key strands of work identified by it to fulfil the Forum's task to make recommendations for addressing problems arising from the economic crisis.

3.3 The scope of the work of each of the sub-groups, and latest progress were then reported to the Group.

3.4 **Infrastructure, Planning and Procurement sub-group:** The deputy First Minister reported that the Infrastructure, Planning and Procurement sub-group should consider key opportunities to use public sector capital spending to support local construction and other business sectors. It should also look at ways public procurement could stimulate the economy; and how planning and procurement regulations can be applied to help local business. He

invited Minister Conor Murphy to provide feedback on its first meeting.

3.5 Minister Murphy reported that the first meeting of the Infrastructure, Planning and Procurement sub-group held on 22 June 2009, chaired jointly by Minister Sammy Wilson and himself, was a meaningful discussion focussing on three main issues, as follows:

(i) Key opportunities to use public sector capital spending to support local construction and other business sectors:

It was reported to the sub-group that 28,000 people had lost their jobs in the construction industry; and other firms were likely to be unsustainable from the autumn. Whilst the Delivery Tracking System and ISNI portal were welcomed as having potential to improve supply information to different businesses, it was suggested future expenditure by all departments should be more visible on the ISNI portal. The construction industry also had difficulty in equating Executive capital expenditure last year with actual expenditure on the ground, and suggested that it would be useful to have a breakdown. It was hoped that DFP would be in a position to confirm provisional outturn figures on this shortly.

(ii) How Planning is assisting local business:

Minister Sammy Wilson took the lead on these discussions. He noted the Planning Service had reduced its live caseload by a third by introducing changes to operations that did not require legislative approval such as Pre-Application Discussions (PADS), streamlining the application process and targeting divisional offices where there was a backlog. Other improvements in the planning process included the joint Construction Employers Federation / Planning Service "Good Planning Guide" and e-PIC – an Electronic Planning Information for the Citizen. Larger firms would be prepared to pay more, for example to employ independent experts, if this resulted in speeding up the planning process. The high costs associated with Environmental Impact Assessments, as well as consistency of such assessments across the board when planning powers were devolved to Councils, were also raised.

(iii) Options for using Procurement to stimulate the economy:

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) had difficulty with time-scales and processes of the procurement of services. Barriers in relation to procurement for SMEs included:

- Unrealistic timescales;
- The process was too complicated;
- SMEs were too small to tender;

- The process was too long; and
- Accreditation requirements were too onerous.

It was reported that if SMEs received more funding from the Executive this would enable them to react more quickly and in turn stimulate the economy by increasing employment.

3.6 Minister Murphy concluded by reporting that the issues raised at the meeting on 22 June would be further discussed at its next meeting over the summer before making formal recommendations. Should the Forum consider any further issues for the sub-group to examine, these should be submitted before its next meeting.

3.7 **Business and Skills sub-group:** The deputy First Minister indicated that the main issues for the Business and Skills sub-group to consider are:

- Training initiatives to support business, people and the local economy;
- Measures to enable the unemployed to get back into work;
- Harnessing and supporting local innovation;
- Opportunities available from local tourism; and
- How best to support local job creation and retention.

The Business and Skills sub-group plans to hold its first meeting on 21 July 2009.

3.8 **Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy sub-group:** The deputy First Minister indicated that the main issues for the Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy sub-group to cover are:

- Initiatives to relieve the social and welfare hardships arising from the economic crisis; and
- The best initiatives for combating illegal money lending and helping local people and people in the management of debt.

3.9 **Agriculture sub-group:** The deputy First Minister reported that the Agriculture sub-group are to address the main issues of:

- How best to support the local farming industry through the current crisis; and
- To look at opportunities for renewables and the Green New Deal.

He invited Minister Michelle Gildernew to provide feedback on its first meeting held on 23 June 2009.

3.10 Minister Gildernew reported that the first meeting of the Agriculture sub-group was a most constructive meeting which agreed its terms of reference and forward work programme. It was recognised that the agricultural industry, one of our few indigenous industries, was well positioned

to grasp opportunities to deliver economic growth, with significant spinoff benefits for the wider economy. This was evidenced by the industry's willingness to invest under the various available schemes, such as the Farm Modernisation Scheme, Farm Nutrient Management Scheme and New Entrants to Farming Scheme. The sub-group felt that a coherent joined-up approach from Government would make a difference, and that the sub group should focus on a small number of issues that needed both short-term and long-term solutions. The sub-group agreed to meet on a monthly basis and its next meeting was planned to take place in early August. Meantime, it would drill down on some of the issues to be addressed and circulate a paper, to include the following areas:

- Opportunities afforded by land based renewable energy technologies;
- Role of government in stimulating the development of the supply chain for indigenous renewable energy providers;
- Potential of promoting local food and the link with our tourism sector;
- Potential of diversification using farm based assets and lessons to be taken from previous diversification initiatives; and
- Addressing planning constraints that are seen as limiting the potential of farm based diversification activities.

3.11 Banking, Finance and Lending sub-group: The deputy First Minister reported that the Banking, Finance and Lending sub-group would revolve around identifying the best means to secure a sufficient flow of credit to support local business and people.

3.12 Housing and Property sub-group: The deputy First Minister indicated that the main issues for the Housing and Property sub-group to consider are around identifying the best strategy for meeting the challenges in the local housing and property market. He invited Minister Margaret Ritchie to provide feedback on its first meeting held on 23 June 2009.

3.13 Minister Ritchie reported that the first meeting of the Housing and Property sub-group held on 23 June 2009 was an introductory session that provided an opportunity to explore the many serious effects the economic downturn has had and continues to have on housing and property; and the implications of these for banks, businesses, first-time buyers and the Housing Executive. The sub-group agreed its membership would be expanded to include three housing experts – a developer, an economist and the chair of a housing association; and that it would produce short-term and longer-term recommendations for addressing the downturn's effects on housing and property. DSD officials would liaise with sub-group members in preparation of a paper for discussion at its next meeting, anticipated to take place sometime in late July / early August. The main issues raised during the meeting which would be fleshed out in more detail were wide-ranging and included:

- The need to invest more in house building to try to stimulate the construction industry and maintain employment;
- New ranges of mortgages being developed by banks to cater for first time buyers;

- The potential to develop a new framework to streamline the negotiation process between developers, housing associations and banks;
- New procurement rules around social housing;
- The potential impact of the downturn on repossessions, homelessness and the social housing waiting list; and
- Restoring confidence to stimulate the property market.

On the final issue, Minister Ritchie indicated that restoring confidence was a huge and difficult issue which would take some time to overcome, in light of precarious employment conditions and inter-related uncertainty of future trends in property prices.

3.14 Minister Ritchie also indicated that the sub-group touched on the need for the various sub-groups to take a co-ordinated approach to dealing with the economic downturn. The next meeting would take place end July / early August.

3.15 The deputy First Minister stressed that the main issues for each of the sub-groups were not intended to be an exhaustive definition and were reflective of discussions at the previous meeting. He invited members' comments.

3.16 John Corey welcomed the Executive's decision that the sub-groups should be chaired by Ministers, which he considered to be a positive step. With regard to membership, John sought clarification on the processes for membership of the sub-groups, in particular whether membership of the sub-groups could be expanded beyond that of Forum membership and on what basis is membership determined. Also, he would welcome a report on how the Cross Sector Advisory Forum is resourced. The deputy First Minister responded that the decision for Ministers to chair the sub-groups was recognition of the need to address the issues at the highest level. He indicated that there would be a flexible approach to populating sub-groups.

4. ITEM 3: EDF PACK OF MEASURES

4.1 The First Minister explained that one of the actions arising from the package of measures to address the credit crunch announced by the Executive in December 2008 was the establishment of a sub-group of the Economic Development Forum (EDF), lead by DETI, to bring forward recommendations on what further steps might be taken to help business through the crisis. The First Minister reported that in February this year the EDF produced a report containing 52 proposals, of which 18 were identified as priority measures to help business. The priority measures covered the tracking system for the Investment Strategy; availability of bank finance for business; housing co-ownership schemes; tourism promotion; support for renewables; up-grading skills; and implementation of the recommendations of the MATRIX Panel. These priority measures are to be welcomed and compliment and build upon the Executive's package of measures announced in December last year. The First Minister invited Graeme Hutchinson to update the Group on action points recommended by the EDF to address the

credit crunch and in particular alleviate the impact on the business sector and the departmental response to this.

4.2 Graeme Hutchinson reported that Minister Arlene Foster established three sub-groups to address issues on:

- Economic downturn;
- Manufacturing; and
- Exports

4.3 Graeme up-dated the Forum on membership and composition; outputs and recommendations; and handling and next steps of the sub-groups.

4.4 Membership & Composition: Graeme explained that the sub-groups were private sector led with the manufacturing sub-group and export sub-groups chaired by the private sector; and comprised private and public sector membership to agree a prioritised set of proposals and recommendations. Proposals have been submitted to Minister Foster in her capacity as Chair of the Economic Development Forum and have been circulated where appropriate to Executive colleagues.

4.5 Output and Recommendations: The Economic Downturn sub-group put forward 18 proposals in the following 8 areas:

- Infrastructure - for example relating to the ISNI Delivery Tracking System and information portal;
- Finance - for example, to increase take up of the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme;
- Housing – for example to support the promotion of co-ownership;
- Construction – for example, to increase maintenance budgets in hospitals; education and roads;
- Energy – for example, capital support for renewable projects;
- Skills – for example, investment in business improvement training; and
- R&D – for example to implement recommendations of MATRIX.

4.6 The Manufacturing sub-group put forward proposals in the following three areas:

- To relieve immediate cost pressures in the sector – for example by working to reduce energy prices and strengthen NI competitiveness; grant manufactures a ‘rates holiday’ for a minimum of one year; press HM Treasury for 100% capital allowances;
- Ensure focused training and skills development – for example the STAS initiative was welcomed but needed to be publicised and extended to cover chain development; government to fund placement of unemployed graduates for one year (09/10) – employers provide structured training and government pays minimum wage; C4C to co-ordinate benchmarking visits and case studies within the sector;

- Identify catalysts for growth – a specific strategy to identify opportunities from the low carbon economy and renewable energy sector; progress with MATRIX; managerial skills investment – to grow network of talented and capable managers.

4.7 The Exports sub-group put forward proposals in the following 5 areas:

- Lack of awareness of existing support – for example consider an advertising campaign;
- Support companies at the pre-export level – for example introduce a piloted programme to assist companies to reach the ‘export ready’ stage;
- Product development;
- Invest in graduates to support product development for exports – for example government support for schemes such as INTRO to other areas;
- Help companies with costs associated with entry into export markets – for example promotion of the Group Accelerator Programme; and
- Improve market opportunities, information and expertise – for example matching suppliers with demand.

4.8 Handling and Next Steps: Graeme concluded by summarising that the proposals from the economic downturn sub-group have already been circulated to the Executive with an up-date provided at the last Economic Development Forum meeting held on 18 June 2009. Of the 18 priority recommendations, 14 are being or will be implemented; 3 cannot be implemented without additional funding (maintenance; capital support for renewable projects; public results from the Capital Realisation Taskforce); and 1 is being taken forward by the private sector (meeting between relevant stakeholders to improve availability of mortgage finance and improve credibility of current residential property valuations).

4.8 The recommendations relating to manufacturing and exports sub-groups were submitted on 18 June and will be circulated to relevant Ministers for comment and advice.

4.9 At the 18 June meeting, Minister Foster stressed the importance of consolidating and prioritising the proposals from the sub-groups. The three chairpersons of the sub-groups and senior officials from DETI will be meeting on 23 July 2009 to agree on the prioritised list and next steps.

4.9 The First Minister commented that the exercise would only be of value if driven by Ministers and departments that resulted in real outputs. He invited any questions.

4.10 Seamus McAleavey emphasised the importance of the Green New Deal initiative and the need to take forward initiatives centred on jobs creation in areas such as energy improvement for homes as well as public buildings, energy renewables, and climate change. He suggested that it would be useful if OFMDFM or another department reviewed this and worked with the

Group on Green New Deal. Graeme Hutchinson responded that Green New Deal had been discussed at EDF meetings which Minister Arlene Foster chairs, and recommendations are being actioned and a paper has been circulated for comment.

4.11 In a response to a suggestion to act quickly to gain momentum, the First Minister indicated that actions could be taken as a result of decisions made by sub-groups ahead of the Forum's consideration, should this be deemed necessary to avoid delay in making progress to tackle the economic downturn.

5. ITEM 4: CURRENT ISSUES IN THE BANKING SECTOR

5.1 The First Minister mentioned that promoting credit availability to local businesses was a key priority of the Executive. Both the First Minister and the deputy First Minister had met with all four main local banks earlier this year to discuss the impact of the global economic downturn and how banks were responding to the credit crunch in Northern Ireland. They questioned the banks about the availability of funds from local branches, the European Investment Bank scheme, as well as the UK Government Guarantee Schemes. The First Minister and deputy First Minister had also been informed that the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme, which guarantees loans to small businesses, is available from all four local banks, as well as from Barclays and HSBC who both operate here. In addition, it is understood that the First Trust, Ulster Bank and the Bank of Ireland have drawn down funds from the European Investment Bank for the purposes of lending to small businesses. The position continues to be monitored and the First Minister and deputy First Minister are arranging further meetings with building societies and Barclays.

5.2 The First Minister added that the Executive continued to receive reports about restricted access to credit, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister had recently written to the four main local banks for an up-date on their position regarding rollout of the UK Government Guarantee Schemes and availability of European Investment Bank loans to local businesses, and views on how this is progressing. Recognising that this was an evolving issue, the First Minister invited Henry Elvin, Ulster Bank, to provide an up-date on these issues from the Ulster Bank perspective, and the impact locally of the establishment of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) in ROI.

5.3 Henry Elvin, Ulster Bank, comments were set out in three main areas, as follows:

- (i) The property market: The property market was by far the largest and most pressing concern. The banks were working with developers and investors on how best to stimulate growth within the UK and ROI markets. With regard to the residential property market, there were some 'green shoots' but this was largely limited to first-time buyers, and there was little or no evidence of confidence beyond first time buyers. There was, therefore, a lot of

work yet to be done to stimulate confidence across the board.

- (ii) The commercial market: The commercial market was now beginning to feel the full impact of the economic downturn with increased vacancy levels across the sector and rental levels declining.
- (iii) The SME Sector: This is an area where banks are keen to work with customers and assist them during the current recession. Commitments have been given by all banks to support the sector; in particular the Ulster Bank as part of the RBS recapitalisation. However, customers were being very cautious in coming forward for funding for working capital funding or capital related projects. The level of bank approvals remains high suggesting funding is available.

5.4 Personal Banking: The personal banking market did not generate any great concern for the banks. There were some signs of deterioration in account operations and additional credit card strain. However, the number of repossessions remained low.

5.5 Henry Elvin indicated that the historic funding costs and the margins charged by banks were not sustainable given the increased pressure to increase Tier 1 and 2 capital ratios. However, in the case of the Ulster Bank specific commitments had been given around the SME Sector to maintain margins for 1 year as part of the recapitalisation programme. There have been a lot of discussions about the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme and European Investment Bank schemes. These systems are now better understood by banks and have proved to be a most beneficial facility and were now operating well. Henry reported that a lot of work had gone into the APS scheme in the UK and the corresponding NAMA scheme in the Republic of Ireland which were still being finalised by experts. The Bank of Ireland had welcomed NAMA, recognising that it was being formed with the best intentions. However, the Bank of Ireland have said to the Irish Government that it was very complex process. Liquidity has been identified as an issue for banks but it was difficult to assess the full impact and value of the NAMA scheme as it was still under development.

5.6 The First Minister thanked Henry Elvin for the overview and invited comments from the Group.

5.7 Kevin Kingston, Northern Bank, reaffirmed concerns about the impact of the economic downturn on the property and commercial markets, and the cost to banks of funding credit. He did not foresee any likelihood of a sustainable recovery in the near future. The Northern Bank remained committed to its customers, and whilst there has been an increase in mortgage arrears there have not been any re-possession.

5.7 Robin Andrews, Ulster Federation of Credit Unions, raised concerns for people on social security benefits who, he highlighted, could not be assisted

by the banking system. This was where Credit Unions had an important role to play in providing financial support for those most in need. However, Credit Unions were restricted financially and its workers were volunteers. He enquired whether the Forum could help Credit Unions financially and with training, pointing out that in GB Credit Unions are given financial support by Government unlike those in NI. The First Minister advised that DETI has responsibility for policy on Credit Unions here.

6. ITEM 5: IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITIES

6.1. The First Minister indicated that analysis by the NI Consumer Council in January 2009 suggested a rise in cost for 'essentials' of £346 annually from 2008 and 2009, or around £7 per week. This masks a number of important changes. Whilst petrol, oil and mortgage costs were down, food and electricity costs have risen. The impact of the credit crunch may therefore vary from household to household depending on patterns of expenditure. The First Minister invited Seamus McAleavey, NICVA, to provide an up-date on how the voluntary and community sector sees the credit crunch continuing to affect households and communities, and how this has changed since the beginning of the crisis.

6.2 Seamus McAleavey explained the composition and role of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. It comprised approximately 4,500 organisations and was comparable to the size of the private sector. It had a broad range of service delivery responsibilities. There are also about 42 housing associations. Combined, the sector employs approximately 27,000 people. The demand for voluntary and community organisations providing social services fall in particular on advice provision for people who are or have become unemployed and / or seek mental health advice. For example advice on stress management for people losing their jobs and homes.

6.3 With regard to sustainability of services during the economic downturn, resources received through donations from the public have remained constant, with people re-prioritising expenditure made in other areas. There has however been an immediate drop in funds received from the private sector, in direct line with decline in profits, which impacts on 10% of the voluntary and community sector income here. The sector is resilient and front line services are currently continuing at a sustainable level. This level of sustainability is not expected to be viable into the following year. The 46% funding received from Government was crucial for the sustainability of Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs), such as PRAXIS and Barnardos. This was a huge issue as SMEs are also under a lot of strain with overdrafts to meet gaps in funding. The Government Supporting People programme, which provides £61m to 118 voluntary organisations for delivery of support to some of the most vulnerable people, is matched with approximately 20% of the contracted voluntary and community organisations' own funds for the programme. Seamus pointed out that the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review will be an important factor influencing the impact of the economic downturn on the voluntary and community service provision in the

coming months and years; particularly in the areas of demand for advice on debt, mental health and stress. He reported that NICVA representatives would be meeting with the deputy First Minister the next day to discuss issues of concern.

6.4 The First Minister thanked Seamus McAleavey for his up-date which would feed into the work of the Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy sub-group.

7. ITEM 6: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 The First Minister invited the deputy First Minister to take any questions about the discussions from the Forum and conclude the meeting.

7.2 Patricia Lewsley suggested that when funding applications are being considered or contracts renewed for programmes, however small, that the wider picture is taken into consideration of the impact of loss of jobs and services in particular areas. This is particularly relevant when a few core workers are being funded for a project which manages a larger selection of volunteers.

7.3 Patricia also enquired about membership of the CSAF sub-groups and the dates for the Business and Skills sub-group and the Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy sub-group. With regard to the latter sub-group, the deputy First Minister confirmed that no date had yet been set but undertook to keep members informed. The former was having its first meeting on 21 July.

7.4 Making reference to 48,000 people claiming unemployment benefit, John Corey suggested that it would be useful if DEL / DSD would produce a reference guide outlining assistance and support to people losing their jobs, similar to that produced by DETI on financial support to businesses.

7.5 John Corey requested that measures taken to assist people into employment / training be a substantive item on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum. The deputy First Minister agreed to this suggestion.

7.6 The deputy first Minister thanked everyone for attending the Cross Sector Advisory Forum meeting which had been a wide-ranging discussion. He encouraged members to put forward any additional information on issues discussed at the meeting to the chairs of the relevant sub-groups over the summer. The deputy First Minister summarised next steps as follows:

- OFMDFM would circulate the minutes of the meeting for members' comments;
- The next meeting of the CSAF would aim to take place in the Autumn;
- CSAF sub-groups will meet over the summer to consider themes;
- Ministers who chair sub-groups should report back to CSAF initial findings of sub-group meetings at the next plenary;

The meeting ended at 12.30 hrs.