

Plenary JC 7 February 2008

NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

SIXTH PLENARY MEETING

DUNDALK, 7 FEBRUARY 2008

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The sixth plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was held at the Dundalk Institute of Technology on 7 February 2008.
2. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern T.D., who chaired the meeting. The Northern Ireland Executive delegation was led by the First Minister, The Rt Hon Dr Ian Paisley MP MLA and deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA. A full list of the members of both delegations is attached as an Annex.
3. Ministers had a broad discussion and exchanged views on matters aimed at delivering practical benefits such as, co-operation on EU issues and the North West Gateway Initiative. Ministers welcomed the opportunity to discuss these and other important issues.

NSMC Progress Report

4. The Council noted a report on key developments in the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) through the thirteen Ministerial meetings held since the last Plenary in July 2007.
5. The Council endorsed the progress made, including agreement on a management structure to take forward the decisions on the A5 (North West Gateway to Aughnacloy) and A8 (Belfast to Larne) road projects and welcomed progress to date on the Narrow Water Bridge proposal.
6. It welcomed agreement on the modalities for taking forward the re-opening of a stretch of the Ulster Canal between Clones and Upper Lough Erne.
7. The Council looked forward to the early assessment of options for the future development of the Dublin/Belfast Enterprise rail service especially in relation to increased service frequency and reduced travel times.
8. Ministers agreed that co-operation on Road Safety will continue to be a high priority

including recognition of driver disqualification and penalty points and road safety in border areas.

9. The Council agreed that the tourism sector is making a major contribution to economic growth and employment and welcomed Tourism Ireland's challenging targets of increasing tourism revenue growth of between 6.6-7.5% per annum, visitor growth of between 4.2-5.1% per annum and promotable growth of 14.0 to 17.2% over the next 3 years.

10. The Council looked forward to reports from the Working Groups established at the NSMC meeting in Institutional format on the transfer of pensions on a cross- border basis and on cross-border banking issues which are of direct relevance to greater cross-border mobility.

Child Protection

11. The Council welcomed the opportunity to discuss Child Protection issues within the NSMC and to consider how effective child protection measures could be developed through enhanced collaboration and co-operation.

12. It noted and welcomed current cross-border co-operation on Child Protection involving Departments, agencies and policing bodies;

13. It requested the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Office of the Minister for Children to establish and co-chair a cross- border group of officials from relevant departments to intensify co-operation on Child Protection including:

- a. early progress on an all-island Child Protection awareness campaign;
- b. the identification of other medium/long term measures to improve Child Protection, including an examination of an all-island approach to child protection, focusing in particular on vetting and exchange of information;
- c. any areas for co-operation on children's services emerging from the North South Feasibility Study on health and social services.

and to report progress to the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

St. Andrews Agreement Review

14. The Council noted the progress made to date by the St Andrews Agreement Review Group in taking forward the Review and the intention to bring forward a final report to a NSMC Plenary meeting later in 2008.

North South Consultative Forum

15. The Council noted the Irish Government’s consultation with their social partners on the subject of the North South Consultative Forum and also noted the position as previously outlined for reviewing the Civic Forum in Northern Ireland.

North South Parliamentary Forum

16. The Council noted the ongoing discussions between the Houses of the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly on the North South Parliamentary Forum and agreed to keep this matter under review.

Next Meeting

The Council agreed that its next meeting in Plenary format, will be hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive and will take place in October 2008.

The Council conveyed its thanks to the President, Mr Dennis Cummins, the staff and the students of the Dundalk Institute of Technology for their co-operation in the organisation of the Council meeting and for the provision of excellent facilities.

Joint Secretariat

7 February 2008

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Bertie Ahern TD (Taoiseach)	Rt Hon Dr Ian Paisley MP MLA (First Minister)
Brian Cowen TD (Tánaiste and Minister for Finance)	Martin McGuinness MP MLA (deputy First Minister)
Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for Transport and Marine)	Peter Robinson MP MLA (Minister of Finance and Personnel)
Dermot Ahern TD (Minister for Foreign Affairs)	Arlene Foster MLA (Minister of the Environment)
Micheál Martin TD (Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment)	Edwin Poots MLA (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure)
Seamus Brennan TD (Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism)	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA (Minister of Agriculture and Rural

	Development)
Éamon Ó Cuív TD (Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)	Caitriona Ruane MLA (Minister of Education)
Mary Coughlan TD (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)	Michael McGimpsey MLA (Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety)
Mary Hanafin TD (Minister for Education and Science)	Margaret Ritchie MLA (Minister of Social Development)
Eamon Ryan TD (Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources)	Ian Paisley Jnr MLA (Junior Minister)
Brendan Smith TD (Minister for Children	Gerry Kelly MLA (Junior Minister)