



NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

TWENTY-SIXTH PLENARY MEETING

NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH, AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

30 JULY 2021

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-sixth plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was held at the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, and by videoconference on 30 July 2021.
2. The Irish Government was led by the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, who chaired the meeting. The Northern Ireland Executive was led by the First Minister, Paul Givan MLA, and the deputy First Minister, Michelle O'Neill MLA. A full list of the members of both delegations is attached as an Annex.
3. Ministers expressed their best wishes to all athletes from the island of Ireland competing in the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, and to those preparing to compete in the upcoming Summer Paralympic Games.

JOINT SECRETARIES' PROGRESS REPORT

4. The Council received updates on the NSMC meetings which had taken place since the last plenary meeting in the Health, Food Safety, Trade and Business Development, Transport, Inland Waterways and Education sectors. Ministers noted that cooperation between the two Administrations continues across all the NSMC sectors and that further updates will be provided at future meetings.

5. Ministers noted that the intention is to return to ‘in person’ meetings of the Council at sectoral level, taking account of public health guidelines, as soon as it is safe to do so, and that the Joint Secretariat will arrange future meetings on this basis.
6. The Council noted that an Annual Report on the work of the NSMC during 2020 has been published.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

7. The Council was briefed on the current public health situation and the ongoing close cooperation in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Ministers discussed the current position in the two jurisdictions, including progress on the roll-out of vaccines.
8. The Council recognised the significant loss and challenges experienced by so many as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ministers reiterated their appreciation to all those involved in responding to the pandemic, particularly frontline health and social care workers and the wider workforce who kept essential services and facilities operational.
9. The NSMC recognised the impact of the pandemic on society and the economy, and welcomed the measures put in place by both Administrations to support communities and businesses affected by the crisis and to assist economic recovery.
10. Ministers welcomed the significant progress in the roll-out of vaccines, which have played a key part in the gradual reopening of society.
11. The Council noted that the issue of the response to Covid-19 was considered at relevant meetings of the Council and that, where appropriate, sectors will continue to consider how agreed collaborative approaches can contribute to the promotion of economic and social recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

NEW DECADE, NEW APPROACH COMMITMENTS

12. The NSMC noted the positive developments in delivery of New Decade, New Approach commitments.
13. The Council noted that the Interim Report from the Planning Appeals Commission on the deliver of the A5 Western Transport Corridor was published on 16 March 2021, together with the Department for Infrastructure’s response to all recommendations made by the Commission.
14. Ministers noted that both Administrations continue to work together to progress the Ulster Canal restoration project, that the Irish Government provided funding of €12.2 million through the Shared Island Fund and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for Phase 2 of the project (Clonfad to Clones), and that substantial completion of the main infrastructure works is expected in 2023. Ministers also noted that the approval of €1 million in funding from the Shared Island Fund has enabled acceleration

by Waterways Ireland of Phase 3 pre-development work to a point where three substantive sub-sections will be brought forward for funding approval later in the year.

15. The Council noted that the development of the Ulster Canal Greenway, covering a 22km section of greenway along the route of the disused canal from Smithborough, Co. Monaghan to Middletown, Co. Armagh, is progressing and that an application for planning permission for the Monaghan to Middletown section has been submitted.
16. The Council noted the joint launch of the all-island Strategic Rail Review by Ministers Ryan and Mallon in April 2021.
17. Ministers noted the commitment of €3 million from the Irish Government's Shared Island Fund to bring the Narrow Water Bridge project to tender stage based on existing design plans, and reiterated the priority attached by both Administrations to the project.
18. The NSMC noted that the Department of Transport is progressing the review into air connectivity and has engaged with project stakeholders, including representatives from Cork Airport, City of Derry Airport, Dublin Airport and the two Belfast airports, as well as with the Department for the Economy and the Department for Transport (UK). Substantive analysis has been completed and the review documentation, which will consider regional connectivity, sustainability and climate change, is being prepared.
19. Ministers noted the work being undertaken by Leitrim County Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council to take forward the development of the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway as a joint project, including the issue of a tender for technical consultants in April.
20. The NSMC noted that senior officials from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Department for the Economy continue their cooperation and outreach to stakeholders regarding higher education provision in the North West Region.
21. Ministers noted that discussions between all stakeholders (including the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the Department for the Economy, Science Foundation Ireland and UK Research and Innovation) on All-Island Research Hubs are ongoing, with broad agreement in relation to thematic priorities.
22. The Council noted the commitment of €40 million from the Irish Government's Shared Island Fund for a new five-year North-South Research Programme to foster collaboration between higher education institutions across the two jurisdictions.
23. The Council noted that a statement of updated strategic priorities for the North West Region has been submitted to the NSMC by Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council, to inform the ongoing engagement of both Administrations with the North West Strategic Growth Partnership.
24. Ministers noted that discussions on arrangements for a further phase of the North West Development Fund are underway; that an additional allocation of €1 million from the Irish Government will be provided in 2021 to extend the current phase of the Fund;

and that consideration is ongoing in relation to arrangements for a second phase of the Fund.

25. The Council agreed that New Decade, New Approach commitments should remain on the agenda of relevant NSMC sectoral meetings and that further updates will be provided to the Council at future NSMC plenary meetings.

PEACE PLUS PROGRAMME

26. The NSMC recalled that both the Executive and Irish Government noted draft programme proposals for a PEACE PLUS programme prior to the launch of a public consultation on the proposals.
27. Ministers noted that a public consultation on the draft PEACE PLUS programme was held by the Special EU Programmes Body from March to May, and received over 400 responses.
28. The Council noted that the exact quantum of the PEACE PLUS programme has yet to be finalised, but is expected to be in excess of €1bn, and that the final detailed programme proposals for the PEACE PLUS programme will be submitted for approval to both Administrations and to the European Commission, as well as to the Council, at the earliest opportunity.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE MATTERS

29. The NSMC approved the Loughs Agency's 2021 Business Plan, which has been completed in accordance with agreed guidance issued by the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and has been agreed by Sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers, and recommended the 2021 budget/grant provision of £5.147/€5.916 million.
30. The Council agreed that the term of the appointment for the post of Chief Executive of the Loughs Agency will be permanent.
31. The Council approved Tourism Ireland's 2021 Business Plan and recommended the 2021 core budget/grant provision of €67.238/£58.497 million (including pension costs) reflecting a change to the established ratio for 2021.
32. Ministers approved the revised 2021 Business Plans for both Agencies of The North/South Language Body and recommended the revised budget provision of €16,082,967 (£13,992,181) for Foras na Gaeilge and £2,548,978 (€2,929,860) for the Ulster-Scots Agency for 2021.
33. The Council noted the process for the recruitment, and subsequent appointment of a Chief Executive Officer for Foras na Gaeilge, subject to already established NSMC and Finance Department procedures, and approved the interim arrangements that will be put in place to manage the business of the agency in the event that a candidate is not in post before 2 December 2021.

34. Ministers agreed the terms of reference for an independent organisational review of the Special EU Programmes Body.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

35. The NSMC appointed Ian Doherty and Conor McGuinness to the Board of Foras na Gaeilge for the period from 30 July 2021 to 29 July 2026, with Mr McGuinness to serve as Vice-Chairperson of the Board for the period up to 29 January 2024. The Council also appointed Trevor Wilson to the Board of the Ulster-Scots Agency for the period 13 December 2021 to 12 December 2026.
36. The Council appointed Nóirín Hegarty as a Director to the Board of Tourism Ireland CLG, and as Vice-Chairperson of the Board, for the period from 19 December 2021 to 18 December 2026.
37. The Council appointed Alan Lewis to the Advisory Board of the Food Safety Promotion Board (*safe*food) for the period 30 July 2021 to 29 July 2026.
38. The Council appointed Danny Kennedy to the Board of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (the Loughs Agency) for the period 30 July 2021 to 29 July 2026.

FUTURE NSMC MEETINGS

39. The Council approved an indicative schedule of future NSMC meetings and agreed that the next NSMC plenary meeting will be held in December 2021.

Joint Secretariat
30 July 2021

www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org

**MEETING OF THE NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
30 JULY 2021**

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Micheál Martin TD Taoiseach	Paul Givan MLA First Minister
Leo Varadkar TD Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Michelle O'Neill MLA deputy First Minister
Eamon Ryan TD Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications and Minister for Transport	Deirdre Hargey MLA Minister for Communities
Michael McGrath TD Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform	Naomi Long MLA Minister of Justice
Simon Coveney TD Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence	Gordon Lyons MLA Minister for the Economy
Norma Foley TD Minister for Education	Nichola Mallon MLA Minister for Infrastructure
Catherine Martin TD Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Michelle McIlveen MLA Minister of Education
Stephen Donnelly TD Minister for Health	Conor Murphy MLA Minister of Finance
Simon Harris TD Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	Edwin Poots MLA Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Charlie McConalogue TD Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Declan Kearney MLA Junior Minister, The Executive Office
	Gary Middleton MLA Junior Minister, The Executive Office