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CENTRAL SECRETARIAT**

2 JULY 1999

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PS/Mr Murphy (DFP, B&L) - O

MEETING OF CABINET CIVIL CONTINGENCIES COMMITTEE

Summary

Issue: Ministerial meeting of the Civil Contingencies Committee (CCC) to be held at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 6 July 1999.

Recommendation: That Mr Murphy notes the topics to be covered at this meeting.

Timescale: Urgent.

Introduction

1. It has been agreed that Mr Murphy will attend a meeting of the Civil Contingencies Committee to be held in the Large Ministerial Conference Room, House of Commons, at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 6 July 1999.

Background

2. In 1997 the then Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) of the Cabinet Office was restructured to form a Civil Contingencies Committee (Policy) (CCC(P)) at Official level and a Ministerial level Civil Contingencies Committee (CCC) under the chairmanship of the Secretary of State for the Home Department.
3. Initially it was expected that routine development of policy would fall to the Official level committee and that the Ministerial Committee would normally only meet in anticipation of, or the aftermath to, a major emergency which affected the provision of the essentials of life to the community. Increasingly CCC has been seen as having a role in overseeing the preparation of central government plans, and in particular, in ensuring plans are in place for dealing with non-date change aspects of the millennium.

4. As a result of this change of role the question of nominating a Northern Ireland member at Ministerial level was raised in my submission of 29 June as a result of which the Secretary of State has asked Mr Murphy to represent Northern Ireland interests.
5. The agenda and papers for the meeting which were received only today from the Cabinet Office will cover the following items:-

Item 1. The work of the CCC;

Item 2. Role of the CCC over the Millennium;

Item 3. Media Co-ordination in the run-up to the Millennium;

Item 4. Media Co-ordination over the Millennium; and

Item 5. Evaluation report on Exercise Hydra

Item 3 was a late addition asked for by the Home Secretary and the paper may not be available until the meeting. Papers relating to Items 2, 4 and 5 are attached.

Item 1. The work of the CCC

6. This will be an oral report by the Home Secretary.

Item 2. Role of the CCC over the Millennium

7. This paper highlights what CCC's role will be over the millennium period, namely:-

- it's normal one of allocating responsibility for action in response to an emergency, where this is disputed or unclear, and for determining the best use of resources;
- to send out messages that are reassuring, if events allow, and to ensure that a rash of minor problems is not interpreted as doomsday; and
- to take operational decisions about millennium celebrations.

8. The paper also suggests that:-

- CCC meets at 6.00 pm on 31 December, probably at official level, when consideration could be given to reports on public order to date. Reports should also be available of any early impact from the bug in countries such as Australia and New Zealand. A further meeting might be required after midnight to deal with issues that had arisen overnight.
- CCC reconvenes at 9.00 am on 1 January, under the Chairmanship of the Home Secretary, to hear reports on how the celebrations went and how any major

problems were being dealt with and decide any necessary action, including lines for the media. It would be for Ministers to judge whether to attend in person or nominate an official.

- Between now and December CCC would be supported by a Secretariat who would work with the Media Co-ordination Unit (MCU) and Y2K team to prepare papers, support meetings and prepare for operations over the millennium period. It would concentrate on information gathering, analysis and delivering advice to Ministers.

Conclusion

9. The Committee will be invited to:

- (a) note the suggested meeting arrangements;
- (b) instruct further work on developing information flows; and
- (c) agree that arrangements should be developed to handle and analyse this information for CCC.

The Minister will be invited to endorse these recommendations. On the question of developing information flows the Emergency Planning Unit has held preliminary discussions with the Cabinet Office's Year 2000 Project Team to ensure that Northern Ireland arrangements are in line with Cabinet Office plans. The Unit will consult with them further over the coming months to confirm the details.

It would be desirable that NI interests be represented at the meetings proposed for the date change period.

Item 3. Media Co-ordination in the run-up to the Millennium

10. This is an additional paper requested by the Home Secretary and is still being drafted. It is not likely to be available until the day of the meeting.

Item 4. Media Co-ordination over the Millennium

11. A paper will be presented outlining the role of the MCU over the millennium period. The MCU was set up earlier this year to co-ordinate Government communications on the millennium bug. It has now expanded its role to ensure that the Government response to millennium issues (over the end year period) is proactive, swiftly reactive and co-ordinated and that the public remains confident, careful and calm over the millennium period. The paper will invite Ministers to agree to a number of recommendations including that they:

- take a personal interest in the development of their Department's Millennium Operating Regime (MOR) to include the handling of communications and liaison with the MCU and CCC secretariat;

- note the preparations being taken by MCU and officials for handling presentations over the millennium period;
 - endorse the issue of regular bulletins by MCU; and
 - agree a list of Ministers available to undertake interviews over the millennium period.
12. The Minister will have noted that an Information Management Centre is being planned for Northern Ireland to monitor events over the corresponding Millennium date change period. The Centre will operate along similar lines to that proposed by the Scottish Office. It will collate information from NI Departments and others and will provide briefing to Ministers, Secretary of State and others, as appropriate. It will also provide information to, and receive information from, the central Information Management Centre. This will ensure a co-ordinated approach including the handling of the media. Discussions will be held with the Northern Ireland Information Service to ensure that they are represented in the local centre and linked to the MCU. Details of how the Centre will operate will be refined over the coming months. The question of the availability of Ministers over the millennium period has already been brought to the Secretary of State's attention.

Item 5. Exercise Hydra

13. An evaluation report on Exercise Hydra prepared by the Home Office will be presented for approval.

Background

14. Exercise Hydra was designed and organised by a Planning Group comprising representatives of the principal participating Departments, under the chairmanship of the Home Office. The main aspects of the exercise were:-
- that it took place on 11 May 1999 and comprised two meetings of the Civil Contingencies Committee (CCC) held at the Cabinet Office;
 - the meetings were convened to consider, and respond to, fictional scenarios occurring on 31 December 1999 and 4 January 2000;
 - the scenarios were designed with the end of the year as the particular focus, to provide Ministers with realistic, rigorous, real-time practice in the operation of CCC arrangements for dealing with potential or actual large-scale disaster or emergency;
 - the scenario was designed to be credible and to reflect latest compliance and threat assessments.
15. The Committee will be invited to note and approve the report which will include recommendations on the following:
- media handling arrangements for the Millennium;

- suitability of existing emergency powers legislation;
- procedure for assigning military assistance; and
- co-ordination with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

16. The Minister will be invited to endorse the report. The recommendations are welcome and should be endorsed.
17. The Minister should be aware that Emergency Planning Unit is planning a similar exercise for early October 1999 which will be designed to test the NI Crisis Management Group (CMG) arrangements. The CMG, which would normally be chaired by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, would meet when there was a need to co-ordinate the Government (and more generally, the public service) response to a major emergency. Planning for this exercise will take into account the lessons learned from Exercise Hydra.

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