

**MINUTES OF THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE ULSTER-SCOTS AGENCY,  
HELD IN THE HOLIDAY INN HOTEL, UNIVERSITY STREET, BELFAST ON  
FRIDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2000**

**PRESENT:**

Lord Laird (Chairman)  
Mr John Erskine  
Mrs Lyn Franks  
Mr Jim Devenney  
Dr Linde Lunney  
Dr Pádraig deBhál  
Dr Philip Robinson  
Mr John McIntyre

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr John Hegarty (Chief Executive)  
Miss Fiona McDonald (Secretary)

**1. APOLOGIES:**

There were no apologies, all the Board members being present.

**2. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING ADDRESS**

The Chairman opened the meeting, remarking that this inaugural meeting of the Ulster-Scots Agency was an historic occasion, and that he was sure all Board members would enter into their roles in a positive, forward-thinking spirit. He then asked everyone to formally introduce himself or herself, as some of those present had not previously met.

**3. REMUNERATION, TRAVELING EXPENSES ETC**

Members agreed to the Chief Executive's proposal that, as an interim measure, the Agency should pay travel and subsistence expenses to Board members at the appropriate civil service rate for the relevant jurisdiction. It was also agreed that Board members' stipends would be paid on a quarterly basis. The Chief Executive undertook to contact Board members individually regarding payment arrangements.

He also advised that the Agency would investigate the question of taxation on Board members' travel and subsistence expenses, and report back in due course.

**4. BOARD MEETINGS; FREQUENCY, LOCATION**

It was agreed to hold meetings on a monthly basis, with a drop out during the summer, and to rotate the venue between Belfast, Donegal and Dublin, with 2 Belfast meetings for every meeting held in Donegal or Dublin.

## **5. BOARD TRAINING**

The Chief Executive recommended that Board members should undergo training in their responsibilities as Board members, and also on Equality issues. He advised that he had been in contact with CIPFA/IPF Northern Ireland, which provides Board training, and that organization, together with its Dublin counterpart, CIPFA/Institute of Public Administration would be prepared to tailor a course as required, as standards in the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are different. It was agreed that this training should be arranged in the near future.

## **6. SECRETARY TO THE BOARD**

The Board appointed Fiona McDonald as secretary.

## **7. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIARY**

The Chief Executive's diary was noted.

With regard to the meetings of the Interim Chief Executives' Forum, the Chief Executive explained that this body had been set up to ensure that, where possible, all the North/South Bodies operated in concert. For instance, the Forum was considering appointing consultants to examine the personnel functions of the North/South bodies.

In response to a question from Dr deBhál, the Chief Executive explained that all papers for the North/South Ministerial Council must go before the Assembly Scrutiny Committee, which, in practice, is mainly to keep members informed, and the North/South Ministerial Council ensures that the various North/South bodies operate within the policies of the two governments.

## **8. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT (VERBAL)**

The Chief Executive reported that the Agency had procured a small suite of offices, the lease of which would expire in October. After this, he presumed that further temporary offices would be required. The offices had been equipped with second-hand furniture from the government stores, and a computer system. A bank account had been opened with First Trust, but the Agency had not yet received its budget, and bills were being met by DCAL, which would recover the money at a later date. He recommended that the North-South Language Body Board should seek to draw down the first tranche of money, which would be from the government of the Irish Republic.

He also advised that there were now three members of staff in place, all on secondment from the NICS, but that it was intended that the North-South body would eventually become the employer. Seconded staff would then have the opportunity to return to their home department should they not wish to leave the civil service.

## **9. PARTNERSHIP/BENCHMARKING**

The Chief Executive reported that he had met with Dónall Ó'Riagáin, the Special Advisor to the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, who had offered his assistance in getting the Agency off the ground, and could prove extremely useful in helping to identify other areas of Europe which have experience in similar work. The Board agreed to the Chief Executive's request to make study visits, as outlined in paper US004

## **10. STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE**

The Chief Executive went through the statement of expenditure, and the Board gave retrospective approval to the items of expenditure detailed therein. It was also agreed that each Board member would receive, at the next meeting, a copy of the Accounting Officers letter sent to the Chief Executives of North-South bodies.

## **11. EXPENDITURE PROTOCOLS AND PERMISSIONS**

The Chief Executive explained that the signatories for the Agency's bank account were currently himself and Pat McAllister of Linguistic Diversity Branch in the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure. It was agreed to amend this arrangement, to make the Chief Executive and Chairman co-signatories. The following conditions were also agreed:

- (i) The Chief Executive's signature alone would be sufficient for cheques of up to £5,000, with both signatures being required for higher amounts;
- (ii) Neither signatory would, at any time, be the sole signatory on any cheque made out to himself; and
- (iii) The Chief Executive would sign all cheques made out to Board members.

## **12. OFFICES: LOCATION/FUNCTION**

The Chairman encouraged Board members to visit the Agency's offices as often as possible.

### **(i) LOCATION**

The Chief Executive recommended that the Board should start thinking about the Agency's long-term office requirements, both in Belfast, and in the Republic of Ireland. It was agreed that premises would need to be fairly prestigious, and make a positive statement about the competency and quality of the Agency. As the lease on the Franklin House offices expires in October, and is unlikely to be renewed, further temporary offices may be required, until a suitable permanent home is found.

With the regard to the Belfast headquarters, it was important that the long-term offices be user-friendly, easily accessible to the public, preferably with car-parking facilities, and either in the city-centre, or in a suburban setting which was seen to be accessible to both

communities. The Chief Executive suggested that, in the current political climate, there might be a window of opportunity for accessing substantial funding, possibly via the EU, for purpose-built or converted premises, and recommended that the Board give further consideration to its accommodation requirements.

It was agreed that a regional office would be established in Donegal, once suitable premises had been identified, and consideration would be given to a presence in Dublin, possibly in the Irish language office.

Mr Devenney reported that enormous interest in Ulster Scots had been created in Donegal, by the press coverage following the setting-up of the Agency, and he had received many telephone calls from interested parties all over Donegal, including the Gaeltacht area.

## **(ii) FUNCTION**

The Chairman reminded the Board that the Agency's purpose was not to promote the Ulster-Scots Agency, but the Ulster-Scots language and culture, and that two of the most important tasks ahead were to build up the status of the language, and the confidence of the Ulster-Scots community.

The Chief Executive reminded the Board that it would shortly have to decide on a permanent name for the organization, which would then have to be ratified by the North-South Ministerial Council. He advised that the Agency had drawn up its own temporary letter-headed paper, but that the whole corporate image would have to be addressed once a name had been decided upon.

The Chief Executive also suggested that, once the Donegal office was established, the Agency's functions should be divided up between Belfast and Donegal.

Pádraig deBhál suggested that there could be scope for promoting the Ulster-Scots language and culture in intellectual circles in Dublin.

John McIntyre advised that Jim Fenton had been invited to recite some of his Ulster-Scots poetry at an event in Dublin in June. He added that the Heritage Council would probably be seeking funding towards the publication of the revised version of Jim Fenton's book "The Hamely Tongue" in order that it could be ready before June, and that this might well be submitted as an agenda item for the next meeting.

John also advised that there has been a massive increase in interest from community groups in the Belfast area, and that piping and drumming and Scottish dancing have been taken up by many local schools.

John McIntyre expressed the opinion that the issue of the status of Ulster-Scots within the school system needed to be addressed, as under Human Rights legislation children have a right to their own culture and language. However, as many teachers are simply not aware of Ulster-Scots, children in Ulster-Scots speaking areas are not being catered for. John Erskine advised that Education has recognized the need to acknowledge "the language

children bring to school” and there is a need to produce awareness materials, and later build the confidence and improve the competence of teachers and children in the language.

### **13. OFFICES-BOARD COMMUNICATION**

The Chief Executive suggested that Board members might like to consider an electronic connection with the office, either by fax machines or personal computers, which would be provided by the Agency. He undertook to prepare a paper for the next Board meeting.

### **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chief Executive requested that all Board members provide him with potted biographies by the next meeting. A photography session would be arranged for the Board for use in Board publications, annual reports etc.

It was agreed that, until further instructions, the Chairman would be the only member of the Board to speak to the media on behalf of the Agency.

### **15. DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that a two-day session would be arranged, for a suitable Friday/Saturday in the near future, at which Board members would receive Board and Equality training on the Friday and have a Board meeting on the Saturday, with a view to developing a clear strategic framework for the Agency. The Chief Executive would try to arrange for Dónall Ó’Riagáin from the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages to attend. The secretary would consult Board members, and arrange a suitable date.