

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

FIRST DAY BRIEF

1. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) was established as a new Department following the devolution of power to Northern Ireland in December 1999.
- 1.2 The Office is headed by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, supported by two Junior Ministers who have a range of Departmental policy responsibilities. They are supported by over 300 civil servants headed by the Head of the Civil Service, who is also the Head of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and also Secretary to the Executive.
- 1.3 OFMDFM aims to assist the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in the discharge of their duties, which include – chairing the Executive, co-ordinating and developing a coherent policy direction for the work of the Executive; and the response of the Northern Ireland Administration to external relationships.
- 1.4 The Department seeks to promote good government in Northern Ireland through the following strategic aims:
 1. Supporting OFMDFM Ministers and the Institutions of Government;
 2. Building a Programme for Government and a Modernising Government programme;
 3. Promoting better community relations and a culture of equality and human rights and to target social need;
 4. Developing the organisation; and

2. STRUCTURES

2.1 As a Department, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, is organised around seven main Directorates, these are:

- The Equality Directorate;
- The Executive and Corporate Services Directorate;
- The North/South Ministerial Council;
- The Executive Information Service;
- The Economic Policy and Public Service Directorate;
- Legal Services; and
- The Office of the Legislative Counsel.

2.2 An organisation chart for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is set out in Figure 1 below. The functional responsibilities of the Divisions and Branches that make up OFMDFM are described in the following pages.

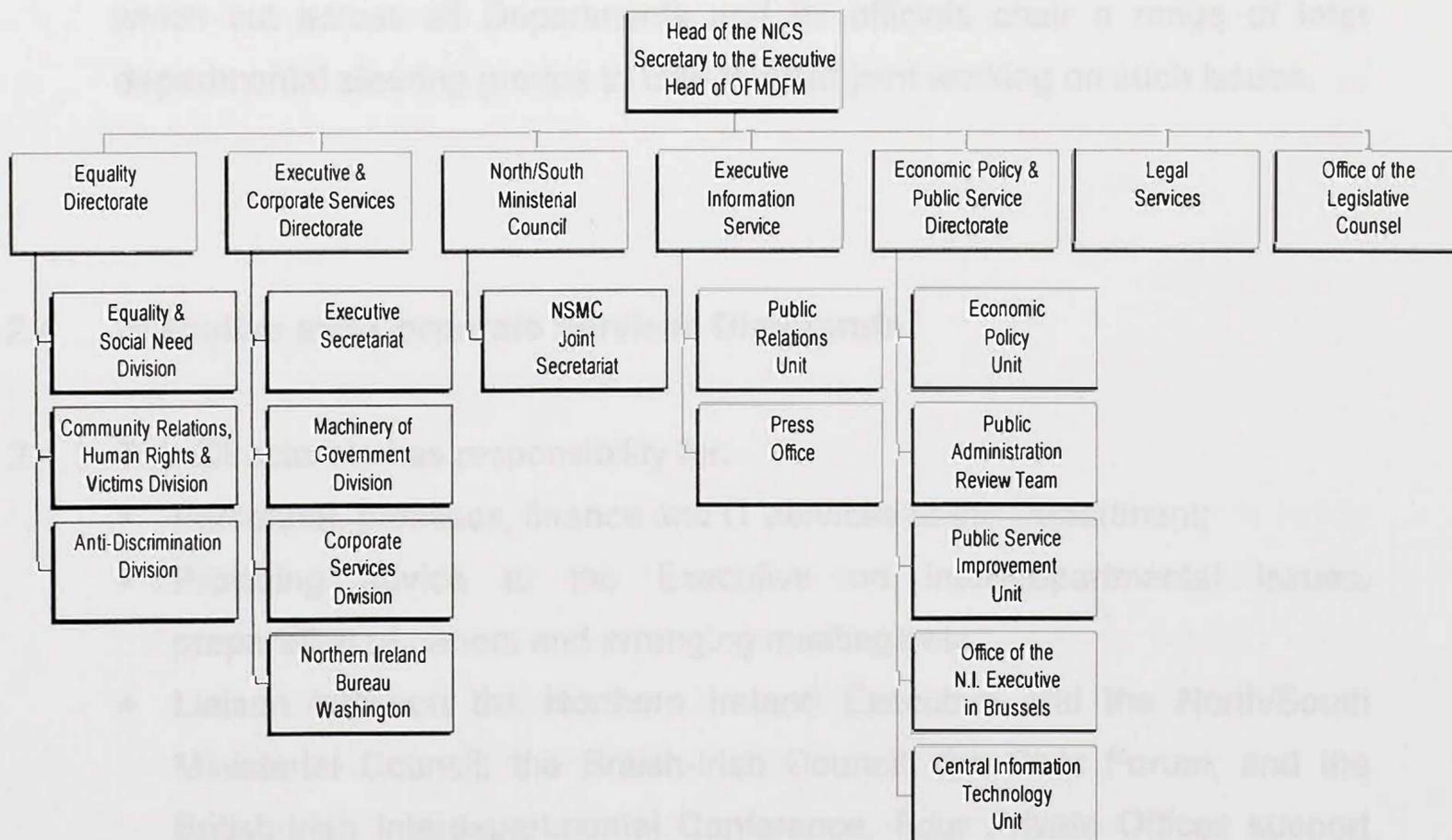


Figure 1 – Organisation chart for OFMDFM

2.3 Equality Directorate

2.3.1 This Directorate has responsibility for:

- Equality and anti-discrimination policy and legislation including the development of a Single Equality Bill for Northern Ireland;
- Promotion of effective implementation within the devolved administration of obligations under the Human Rights Act;
- Victims policy and strategy;
- Establishment of a Children's Commissioner within the context of a wider children's strategy for Northern Ireland;
- Community relations policy and strategy;
- Overseeing implementation throughout the devolved administration of the New Targeting Social Need Policy and statutory duties arising from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

2.3.2 This Directorate comprises three Divisions – Equality and Social Need Division, Community Relations, Human Rights and Victims Division and Anti-Discrimination Division. Much of the work of the Directorate involves issues which cut across all Departments and its officials chair a range of inter departmental steering groups to take forward joint working on such issues.

2.4 Executive and Corporate Services Directorate

2.4.1 This Directorate has responsibility for:

- Personnel, premises, finance and IT services to the Department;
- Providing advice to the Executive on inter-departmental issues, preparation of papers and arranging meetings etc;
- Liaison between the Northern Ireland Executive and the North/South Ministerial Council; the British-Irish Council; the Civic Forum; and the British-Irish Interdepartmental Conference. Four Private Offices support the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and two Junior Ministers;

- Providing a central point of advice and guidance for Departments on procedures.
- Scheduling of Executive business in the Assembly;
- Liaison with the Assembly authorities on OFMDFM business including Assembly Questions, debates, statements and legislation and laying any reports/documents by OFMDFM.
- Acting as the primary point of contact between the OFMDFM and the Committee of the Centre;
- Managing, co-ordinating and monitoring the Northern Ireland legislative programme;
- Providing written and verbal guidance to Northern Ireland Departments on primary legislation and subordinate legislation procedures;
- Monitoring the Westminster programme of primary legislation and liaison with Northern Ireland Departments as appropriate on implications;
- Advice and guidance to Northern Ireland Departments on public appointments policy;
- The administration of Honours nominations;
- Central emergency planning on civil protection in Northern Ireland.

2.4.2 This Directorate comprises Executive Secretariat, Machinery of Government Division, Corporate Services Division and the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington.

2.5 **North/South Ministerial Council**

2.5.1 The NSMC Joint Secretariat supports Ministers and their Departments North and South, arranging Council Meetings in various formats, marshalling the necessary papers for each meeting and recording decisions made by the Council. The Secretariat is staffed by members of both the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Irish Civil Service. Its duties include:

- arranging the schedule of Council meeting in different formats;

- securing prior political / Ministerial agreement to agendas for meetings of the Council;
- preparing or commissioning papers for meetings of the Council, including in relation to its work programme;
- drafting communiqués and records of decisions of the Council;
- communicating decisions of the Council and monitoring their implementation;
- drafting an annual report on the proceedings of the Council;
- acting as a channel of communication with Implementation Bodies;
- carrying out such other tasks as the Council may direct.

2.6 Executive Information Service

2.6.1 The functions of the Executive Information Service are:

- The development of an information strategy for the Executive;
- The compilation of a weekly/rolling schedule of events and Ministerial engagements to enable the activities of Ministers and Departments to be co-ordinated in such a manner as to make the greatest public impact;
- Media relations involving - close liaison with the media on issues relevant to Government as well as advising Ministers and officials on publicity issues. It also includes the close monitoring of media output and responding as necessary. A 24-hour media service is provided to Ministers and Departments;
- Public relations which includes the handling of publications, advising on effective advertising, the provision of Internet service, handling of overseas information and dealing with media visits from outside Northern Ireland; &
- Events Management. This involves the complete handling, from a press and public relations point of view, of the arrangements for events ranging from day-to-day Ministerial outings to major events such as VIP visits or meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council.

2.7 Economic Policy and Public Service Directorate

2.7.1 The Unit has responsibility for assisting the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in:

- undertaking, together with the responsible Northern Ireland Minister and the Secretary of State, negotiations with HM Treasury on the size of the Northern Ireland Block grant and on EU (European Union) and IFI (International Fund for Ireland) funding;
- determining, within the Executive, the Administration's detailed strategic goals and inputting them into the Programme for Government and the allocation of financial resources including the use of joint financing working in conjunction with the Minister for Finance and Personnel;
- arbitrating on competing funding demands and making final determinations thereon;
- The effective co-ordination and development of cross-cutting policies; including the establishment of a Performance and Innovation Unit;
- Responsibility for the co-ordination of overall policy research including the work of the Northern Ireland Economic Council (NIEC);
- The Public Service Improvement Unit;
- Major, strategic, non-economic cross cutting issues such as the proposed Review of Public Administration and Freedom of Information.
- Modernising Government in Northern Ireland
- The formulation and implementation of the Executive's EU strategy;
- The Service First Unit, including promotion of the Charter Mark initiative;
- Developing policies, strategies, standards and guidelines for IS/IT (Information Systems/ Information Technology) in the public service in Northern Ireland and taking forward government initiatives in respect of the electronic delivery of services;
- Providing leadership and guidance to Northern Ireland Departments and the wider public service in delivering customer centric electronic government services consistent with the requirements of the Modernising Government programme; and
- The Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels.

2.8 Legal Services

2.8.1 The functions of the unit are to assist in the work of OFMDFM by providing legal advice and services particularly in relation to the Northern Ireland Act and associated legislation, international agreements and relationships between devolved institutions.

2.9 Office of the Legislative Counsel

2.9.1 The principal function of the Office is to draft primary legislation for Northern Ireland. The Office is also responsible for ensuring collaboration with Parliamentary Counsel in Whitehall, so that Westminster Bills which extend to Northern Ireland contain appropriate adaptations to take account of the differences in Northern Ireland law and practice.

3. RESOURCES

3.1 OFMDFM BUDGET 2001/02

Department Expenditure Limit (DEL)	£k
Equality Programme (includes Equality Commission for NI Grant of £6749k)	7,198
Community Relations Programme	5,660
EU Peace Programme	2,013
North South Ministerial Council	675
Civic Forum	318
International Fund for Ireland Secretariat*	594
Northern Ireland Economic Development Office Grant	512
Departmental Running Costs	13,536
Other direct Expenditure	694
Total DEL	31,200

* running costs of secretariat

4. LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME

4.1 The legislative programme for 2001 –2002 includes one piece of primary legislation from OFMDFM - The Commissioner for Children (NI) Bill.

4.2 In addition the Department expects to make the following subordinate legislation in the 2001-2002 session:

- Fair Employment (Monitoring) Amendment) Regulations.
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Order (NI)
- Disability Discrimination (Providers of Services) (Adjustment of Premises) Regulations (NI) 2001
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Commencement No.8) (NI) Order 2001
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Commencement No.9) (NI) Order 2001
- The Disability Discrimination Code of Practice (Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises) Order (NI) 2001
- Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) Order (NI) 2001

5. DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

THE COMMITTEE OF THE CENTRE

5.1 The Committee of the Centre is a Standing Committee of the Assembly set up to examine and report on specific areas of the work of OFMDFM. The terms of reference of the Committee are set out in Standing Orders as follows.

Standing Order 59

- (1) There shall be a Standing Committee of the Assembly to be known as the Committee of the Centre, to examine and report on the following functions carried out in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and on any other related matters determined by the Assembly:
 - (a) Economic Policy Unit (other than the Programme of Government);
 - (b) Equality Unit;
 - (c) Civic Forum;
 - (d) European Affairs and International Matters;
 - (e) Community Relations;
 - (f) Public Appointments Policy;
 - (g) Freedom of Information;
 - (h) Victims;
 - (i) Nolan Standards;
 - (j) Public Service Office;
 - (k) Emergency Planning; and
 - (l) Women's Issues.
- (1A) This Committee shall also have the functions conferred by virtue of Standing Orders 31 (1A) and 41 (1A).
- (2) This Committee shall replace the Standing Committees on European Affairs and Equality, Human Rights and Community Relations. Standing Orders

'Standing Committee on European Affairs' and 'Committee on Equality, Human Rights and Community Relations' are, accordingly, revoked.

- (3) The Committee shall consist of 17 Members.
- (4) The Committee shall have the power to send for persons and papers.
- (5) The procedures of the Committee shall be such as the Committee shall determine.

5.2 Standing Orders have now been amended to give the Committee of the Centre the same role in the scrutiny of primary and subordinate legislation made by OFMDFM as the Statutory Committees of other departments.

5.3 The Committee is staffed by a Principal Clerk, Debbie Pritchard and two Committee Clerks - Hugh Farren and Stella McArdle – along with administrative and research staff. Departmental liaison with the Committee is handled by Assembly Section in Machinery of Government Division. The current membership of the Committee by political party is:

Alliance

Mrs Eileen Bell

Democratic Unionist Party

Mr Edwin Poots (Chairperson)

Mr Oliver Gibson (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr James Shannon

Progressive Unionist Party

Mr David Ervine

Sinn Fein

Ms Michelle Gildernew

Mr Alex Maskey

Mr Conor Murphy

Social Democratic and Labour Party

Mrs Annie Courtney

Ms Patricia Lewsley

Dr Alasdair McDonnell

Mr Eugene McMEnamin

Ulster Unionist Party

Mr Roy Beggs Jnr

Dr Esmond Birnie

Mr Fred Cobain

Mr James Leslie

Mr Ken Robinson

Further information about the Committee including copies of Reports and minutes of meetings is available on the Assembly website www.ni-assembly.gov.uk

1. Consideration of proposals for changes to the Gene Relations legislation.
→ submitted by ECR.

6. Current Issues

2. The Northern Ireland Executive response to the Disability Rights (Work) Report is under review for consultation.
The closing date for responses is 14 December 01.

6.1 Equality Directorate

6.2 Economic Policy and Public Services Directorate

6.3 North/South Ministerial Council

6.4 Executive and Corporate Services Directorate

6.5 Executive Information Service

6.6 Legal Services

6.7 Office of the Legislative Counsel