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Office of the First Minister
and Deputy First Minister

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FROM: EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
20 JULY 2001

TO: EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE PAPER FOR WRITTEN PROCEDURE

1. Please see attached Executive paper.

E (WP) (01) 61 AGENDA FOR GOVERNMENT FINAL PROGRESS
REPORT

2. **The Executive is invited to note the content of the Agenda for Government final progress report.**
3. Ministers are asked to provide their response to the Executive Secretariat.
4. Responses should be sent to the Executive Secretariat by **noon on Friday 27 July 2001** by e-mail to execomm.secretariat@ofmdfmni.gov.uk.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

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MEMORANDUM E (WP) (01) 61

From: Sir REG EMPEY

SEAMUS MALLON

To: Executive

AGENDA FOR GOVERNMENT FINAL PROGRESS REPORT

Background

1. The Executive's Agenda for Government (AfG) was launched at the end of June 2000 and set out a range of issues that the Executive planned to tackle during the remainder of the 2000/01 financial year. These issues were grouped under 5 main themes and supported by a range of actions. Some actions were to be achieved from within existing resources while others required additional funding. A total of £38.2m was provided in two tranches during 2000/01 to support these actions.
2. The attached paper sets out the background to Agenda for Government and includes, as an annex, the full end-year progress report, highlighting those actions that were fully achieved as well as those where there was some slippage.

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Recommendation

3. That the Executive notes the content of the Agenda for Government final progress report.

SIR REG EMPEY

SEAMUS MALLON

AGENDA FOR GOVERNMENT – FINAL PROGRESS REPORT BY OFFICIALS

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to advise the Executive of progress made under Agenda for Government.
2. The Agenda for Government was launched at the end of June 2000 and set out a range of issues that the Executive planned to tackle during the remainder of the 2000/01 financial year. The key issues were identified under five main themes. The Agenda included some completely new ideas along with some actions that were urgently needed. An initial allocation of £27.6m was provided to support these actions. A further tranche of funding - £10.6m - was provided in the autumn as part of the October monitoring process, to allow for further action under the priority areas identified.

Progress and achievements

3. Agenda for Government focused on making progress under five broad themes. Additional resources were provided for each (the amounts are shown below in brackets), although many actions were to be delivered from within existing resources. The Agenda was designed to deliver:
 - A step change in economic development (£2.7m)
 - A firm basis for better education and health (£16.8m)
 - A better and safer environment (£5.7m)
 - Practical steps to tackle disadvantage (£12.2m)
 - Improved, modern, accessible services (£0.6m)

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4. A list of the actions under the five themes is provided at Annex A. A full progress report by departments on each of the actions set out under both tranches of Agenda for Government is attached at Annex B. The key achievements are summarised below.

A step change in economic development

5. Actions under this heading focused in issues including the reorganisation of the DETI economic development agencies; the promotion of the Information Age society; enhancing the level of university research and revitalising the rural economy.
6. The main achievements have included linking the 31 Local Enterprise Agencies throughout the Province under the Leapfrog Information Age initiative and the establishment of the Support Programme for University Research (SPUR).
7. Good progress was also made on the rural economy actions. New ICT training suites, including open access computers, have been provided at the agricultural colleges and a new initiative aimed at alleviating rural stress has been launched. There were some delays in identifying suitable locations for the provision of 30 ICT access points across Northern Ireland but all the necessary hardware has now been procured. This has been installed at 12 sites but DARD explained that severe weather, followed by the Foot and Mouth situation, resulted in a delay in completing the roll out of the project and in running a major training programme for support staff. The FMD situation also has prevented formal launches of some projects.

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A firm basis for better education and health

8. Actions under this heading focused on issues including the development of ICT skills in schools and the improvement of school buildings; tackling waiting lists; and initiatives to improve public health, in particular the health and wellbeing of older people.
9. The main achievements have included the enhancement of facilities in some 200 schools to improve the condition of buildings and facilitate disabled access. The plans to roll out the Classroom 2000 project in all schools have not, however, been realised due to difficulties in reaching agreement on a PFI contract for managing the project.
10. The £5m available to tackle waiting lists has been focused on improved planning of services, greater efficiency and clinical initiatives. On the public health front, a key objective has been to extend availability and improve uptake among older people of the flu vaccine. An uptake rate of 67% was recorded at the end of December 2000, a considerable improvement over last year's rate of 49% and a higher rate than elsewhere in the UK. In addition, the number of community care packages has increased from 15,400 to 16,300.
11. Additional funding of £0.7m on October 2000 for improving access to Library Services was used mainly for Adaptive Technology, the purchase of a site for a new library in Irvinestown and access and health and safety improvements to several libraries. Actions were also take to provide additional reading material to schools.

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A better and safer environment

12. Actions under this heading focused on rail and road safety; the Belfast Metropolitan Plan and improving health and safety at sports grounds.
13. The main achievements have included the agreement of a schedule of works to address urgent issues of railway safety and the completion of the largest element of this schedule, the replacement of the Connswater rail bridge. In road safety, a new anti-drink driving commercial has been launched. The proposed appointment of additional Road Safety Education Officers has been delayed slightly, largely because of the unprecedented level of interest in the posts, but appointments are expected to be made in May.
14. On safety at sports grounds, Agenda for Government resources have been used to allow 16 clubs to address urgent health and safety concerns and a further 20 to upgrade spectator accommodation and improve the safety of spectators.

Practical steps to tackle disadvantage and exclusion

15. Actions under this heading focused on implementation of new disability rights; widening appreciation of cultural diversity; taking forward work on a Single Equality Bill; and research focused on New TSN.
16. The main achievements have included completion of a research project on disability awareness in the retail sector and an additional 920 housing adaptations to meet the needs of disabled people. The timing for a promotional campaign planned to highlight disability issues has, however, slipped and this will now take place in 2001/02. A new Belfast Community Arts initiative has increased participation in the arts from among the most

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socially disadvantaged communities in the city. A full programme of commissioned research has been established covering three themes: New TSN; statutory equality obligations; and employment equality.

17. Research into the needs of victims and activities to meet those needs has taken place as part of the Agenda for Government actions. A major research exercise has been commissioned, a website has been developed and work in the areas of trauma, facial disfigurement and prosthetics has been supported. Capacity building programmes for both victims' groups and policy makers have been carried out.
18. The provision of an additional £4m to bridge the gap in EU funding has allowed for the sustaining of over 400 projects in the voluntary and community sectors.

Improved, modern, accessible services

19. Actions under this heading included tackling planning application backlogs; taking forward work on a North/South basis; developing Northern Ireland's external links; and considering the structure of public administration.
20. The main achievements include a 21% reduction, at February 2001, in the backlog of planning applications. The new all-island tourism company, Tourism Ireland Ltd, has been established and work is underway on the studies on overcoming barriers to mobility and an independent North/South Consultative Forum. Although the Executive's office in Brussels was not opened within the timescale originally envisaged, premises are now being fitted out and a Head of Office is in place in Brussels and the new office has now been opened.

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Expenditure position

21. Many of the actions pursued under the Agenda for Government banner were delivered within existing resources. Other key actions required additional funding. Of the £38.2m in total that was allocated to Agenda for Government actions, some £36.7m (98.7%) had been allocated by the end of the financial year on the relevant Agenda actions.

Conclusion

22. Agenda for Government covered the 9 month period from July 2000 – March 2001. Additional funding of £38.2m was provided to support a range of actions across all departments. Good progress was made across all areas, with relatively little slippage in either actions or expenditure and this has been identified in the attached full progress report.
23. Finally, it is worth noting that the experience of monitoring and reporting on Agenda for Government will inform work to develop an effective system for reporting to the Executive on progress against Programme for Government actions and Public Service Agreement targets.

ECONOMIC POLICY UNIT

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