



NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

NINTH PLENARY MEETING

LIMAVADY

14 DECEMBER 2009

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The ninth Plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was held in Limavady on 14 December 2009.
2. The Northern Ireland Executive delegation was led by the First Minister, The Rt Hon Peter Robinson MP MLA and the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Brian Cowen TD. A full list of the members of both delegations is attached as an Annex.
3. Ministers noted that the public finances in each jurisdiction were facing significant challenges. Against this background, they exchanged views on the respective measures they are implementing to promote growth and protect employment and discussed the scope for future mutually beneficial cooperation in dealing with the economic downturn. They noted that the two Finance Ministers plan to meet in the New Year. They also discussed progress on the implementation of the North West Gateway Initiative.

JOINT SECRETARIES' PROGRESS REPORT

4. Ministers noted the Progress Report on the 15 NSMC meetings which have been held since the last Plenary meeting in July 2009 and welcomed the mutually beneficial co-operation taken forward including:
 - continued progress on the A5 (Aughnacloy to North West Gateway) and A8 (Belfast-Larne) road projects. Contractor/designers were appointed in early December 2009

for the A5 project. A payment of €9m has been made by the Minister for Transport to the Northern Ireland Consolidated fund in accordance with the agreed procedure;

- the reopening of the Belfast to Dublin rail line on 16 November and the promotional efforts by the rail companies to recover passenger numbers;
- discussion of the options for adopting a coordinated approach to the introduction of new lower blood alcohol limits;
- the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications between the UK and Ireland which will become operational in late January 2010;
- cooperation on planning and preparedness for dealing with the H1N1 virus (swine flu) including the establishment of a well functioning coordination structure;
- progress in cooperation on child protection, including the exchange of information on internet safety and social networking sites, research and knowledge transfer and steps towards establishing a joint protocol on children in care, or on the child protection register, that go missing and children moving across the border where there are concerns;
- the commencement of a Service Level Agreement between the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) for Northern Ireland and Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin (OLCHC) to support provision of paediatric congenital cardiac services (PCCS);
- agreement of a Framework relating in the first instance to the removal of illegally dumped waste at two priority sites, at Slattinagh, Co Fermanagh and near Trillick, Co Tyrone. This will form the basis for action on the remaining 18 sites. Work on these two sites is expected to commence in early 2010;
- discussion on the CAP Health Check Agreement and the challenges facing the agriculture sector, in particular in relation to greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets and the current situation of the dairy industry; and
- the progress in the construction of the new accommodation for the NSMC Joint Secretariat in Armagh and the decision to hold future NSMC meetings there, where practicable.

MIDDLETOWN CENTRE FOR AUTISM

5. The Council welcomed the decision by the Irish Government to lift the pause on capital funding for the Middletown Centre for Autism in County Armagh.
6. It noted that the Minister for Education and Science and the Minister for Education propose to prepare an updated phased multi-annual plan for the future development of the Centre, in conjunction with the Board. This will take account of international best practice and the development of autism services on the island of Ireland since the Centre was established.
7. The Council looked forward to the commencement of interim capital works on-site in Middletown consistent with the development plan as soon as possible.

ST. ANDREWS AGREEMENT REVIEW

8. The Council noted that the St Andrews Agreement provided for a Review Group to report with recommendations to the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and that the Review Group intends to provide a final report to the next Plenary.

NORTH SOUTH CONSULTATIVE FORUM

9. The Council noted the Northern Ireland Executive's ongoing review of the Civic Forum and paragraph 22 of the St Andrews Agreement. It noted that the Irish Government submitted its proposals to the Northern Ireland Executive in September 2008 and that the Irish Government facilitated a consultative conference on 15 October 2009 with the participation of social partners and other civil society groups from across the island.
10. The Council agreed to bring to an early conclusion discussions on the North South Consultative Forum.

NORTH SOUTH PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

11. The Council noted that the establishment of a Forum is a matter for the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Paragraph 21 of the St Andrews Agreement was noted as was the proposal by the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly to hold a North South Parliamentary Conference.

FUTURE NSMC MEETINGS

12. The Council considered and approved a schedule of NSMC meetings to take place in the New Year and agreed that its next meeting in Plenary format will be hosted by the Irish Government in June/July 2010. It noted that, where practicable, future NSMC meetings will be held in the new NSMC Joint Secretariat accommodation in Armagh.

**Joint Secretariat
14 December 2009**

ANNEX A**MEETING OF THE NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
LIMAVADY
MONDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2009**

Northern Ireland Executive	Irish Government
The Rt Hon Peter Robinson MP MLA (First Minister)	Brian Cowen TD (Taoiseach)
Martin McGuinness MP MLA (deputy First Minister)	Mary Coughlan TD (Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment)
Sir Reg Empey MLA (Minister for Employment & Learning)	Brian Lenihan TD (Minister for Finance)
Conor Murphy MP MLA (Minister for Regional Development)	Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for Transport)
Margaret Ritchie MLA (Minister for Social Development)	Micheál Martin TD (Minister for Foreign Affairs)
Caitriona Ruane MLA (Minister of Education)	Éamon Ó Cuív TD (Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)
Robin Newton MLA (Junior Minister)	Brendan Smith TD (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)
Gerry Kelly MLA (Junior Minister)	Batt O'Keefe TD (Minister for Education and Science)