



Review of Public Administration

Guiding Principles for the Location of Public Sector Jobs in Northern Ireland

Consultation January 2007



Department of
**Finance and
Personnel**

www.dfpni.gov.uk

Contents

	Page
Review of Public Administration background	1
Context	2
Review of UK and ROI policy	4
Current requirements, policy and guidance in Northern Ireland	5
Conclusion	10
What is needed in Northern Ireland?	12
Maximising impact	16
Interim decisions	16
Equality	17
Consultation	18
Annex A: A review of policies for location of public sector jobs in other jurisdictions	20
Annex B: Dispersal of civil service jobs policy	24
Annex C: The Spatial Development Strategy for Northern Ireland	26

Review of Public Administration background

1. The Review of Public Administration (RPA) represents a real opportunity to revitalise public services in Northern Ireland, to replace current structures with a new, more accountable public sector, which achieves greater efficiency and effectiveness and works together with a common purpose to meet the needs of the 'on-demand' lifestyles that people now lead and have rightly come to expect from our public services. It is an opportunity to realise the vision of a world-class Northern Ireland.
2. The Review of Public Administration reached a conclusion in March 2006. It was a comprehensive examination of the arrangements for the administration and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. It covered over 150 bodies, including the 26 district councils, the Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts, the five Education and Library Boards and about 100 other public bodies.
3. The Review was launched by the Northern Ireland Executive in June 2002 and, since the suspension of devolution in the autumn of that year, was progressed by direct rule ministers taking account of the views of the local political parties and others. The Secretary of State announced the final outcome of the review in two parts: in November 2005 he announced final decisions on the future of local government, Education and Health and Social Service structures; and in March 2006 he announced decisions on the remaining public bodies.
4. Implementation is now being taken forward by the relevant government departments. In addition there are a series of cross-cutting themes, which affect or impact on more than one department, that are being overseen by the RPA Steering Group.

5. One of these cross-cutting themes is focused on Estates issues. The implementation of Ministerial decisions in relation to the RPA could potentially result over time in some relocation of public sector jobs across Northern Ireland. While there is considerable current guidance on relocation and accommodation, including HM Treasury and Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) guidance, the scale of change provides opportunities to review the policy framework and in particular the principles which need to underpin decisions resulting from the RPA.
6. Accordingly an Estates working group¹ has been set up to collate the estates strategies and plans in the various RPA areas and to stimulate their effective co-ordination taking account of other reform programmes so that decision making by Ministers and Local Authorities on the location of new bodies is well informed and soundly based, having regard to service delivery needs, providing the best value for money, the rights of staff and consistent with government's wider social policy objectives and its statutory obligations, including those under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
7. This consultation paper invites your views on the proposed guiding principles to underpin decisions on the location of public sector jobs resulting from the RPA.

Context

8. The appropriate relocation of relevant staff will be an essential part of the successful delivery of the benefits of the RPA. These benefits should include reduction in levels of bureaucracy, streamlined management structures, improved partnership working, the delivery of fully integrated services and fuller public engagement in determining priorities and shaping services. Such

¹ The Estates working group has been set up as a DFP led cross-sectoral group reporting to the RPA Steering Group. The working group, chaired by DFP Permanent Secretary John Hunter, includes senior departmental representatives closely involved in the RPA implementation and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). It meets monthly and reports progress to the RPA Steering Group.

changes are also critical in ensuring continued compliance with Government targets to improve quality of care and to assist in the delivery of Government's commitments on sustainable development and climate change.

9. There is a significant body of growing evidence concerning best practice in office design which informs initiatives such as Workplace 2010² and which should be taken into consideration. The evidence recognises that the physical workplace can have a significant impact on efficiency and effectiveness and aims to create better working environments using new technology, improved processes, more focused and intensive use of resources and the potential for much greater flexibility. It demonstrates that there are tangible benefits to be gained from workplace and organisational change which could play an important role in establishing a new culture for the new organisations and support its management aims. This creates an opportunity in the context of rationalising public sector organisations to seek to rationalise the estate, maximising the use of existing public sector assets, with the presumption that new buildings will be procured only if the need cannot be met from within the existing public estate. Decisions on location should be made on the basis of whole-life costs with a view to releasing savings which can be directed to front-line delivery.
10. The Terms of Reference for the RPA noted the following in relation to the co-ordination and integration of services:

'In considering sub-regional or local delivery mechanisms it may therefore be sensible to examine the potential of creating the same geographical units for the organisation of functions and how far this might allow better co-ordination, including services provided on a cross-border basis.....An integrated approach also needs to examine how best we can facilitate the essential interconnection between key public services such as social services, housing and education.'

²Workplace 2010 is an initiative to rationalise and improve the Civil Service office estate. Public consultations on this programme have been completed. Details can be found at www.workplace2010ni.org

11. Location decisions therefore need to be coordinated across the public sector to support the achievement of these benefits, recognising that the nature of the RPA implementation – a phased programme – will require such decisions to be taken over the next 3-4 years.
12. In the longer term, post-RPA implementation, there is likely to be greater scope for changes in the location of public sector jobs than will be achieved through the shorter-term implementation of the RPA. The proposed principles set out in paragraph 28 below would provide the framework for these longer term decisions and should therefore be considered in this context.

Review of UK and ROI Policy

13. A summary review of relocation policy across the UK and ROI is included at **Annex A**. The policies across all of the jurisdictions have a number of common themes, primarily:
 - a. Economy and efficiency
 - b. Decentralisation and devolution;
 - c. Assisting areas with particular social and economic needs.
14. In each of these countries, the policies are set within a broader context of legislative and value for money obligations which apply in respect of new public sector investment (eg. the need for economic appraisal). In some instances, they are supported by specific targets for the relocation of a proportion of existing public sector jobs. There are clearly lessons to be learned from the experience in these jurisdictions, although it is also important to recognise that the size of Northern Ireland in both spatial and population terms provides a rather different set of challenges.

Current requirements, policy and guidance in Northern Ireland

15. The main considerations of current requirements, policy and guidance which apply in Northern Ireland in relation to the issue of relocation are as follows:

- a. In any use of government resources, Departments and other public bodies must achieve value for taxpayer's money and the methodology for achieving this is set out in the Treasury Guide to Economic Appraisal and Evaluation, otherwise known as the *Green Book*. The Northern Ireland Practical Guide to the Green Book along with specific guidance issued on an ad hoc basis by DFP in relation to investment and option appraisal are also relevant.
- b. DFP guidance on 'Dispersal Of Civil Service Jobs', produced in March 1999, provided Departments with detailed advice on option appraisals for the location of functions and staff across the NICS. In addition to outlining the normal steps required in an option appraisal, it focussed on dispersal options for NICS posts. In doing so it drew on the findings of a research study undertaken in 1997 by independent consultants Coopers and Lybrand. The latter study included a post project evaluation of dispersals to Derry/Londonderry which occurred in the early 1990's and provided suggestions regarding the methodology to be used for appraising future dispersal options. It is important to recognise that the current policy states that 'the possibility of dispersing Civil Service functions should be considered in the context of reviews and/or appraisals in which the location of the work is a significant cost element.' There is thus no extant proactive dispersal policy – it relies on taking advantage of opportunities, of which RPA is clearly a prime example. A fuller statement of the policy is attached at **Annex B**. It is clear that there are significant costs to dispersal options and this will provide a

driver towards seeking to get the best use out of existing assets through initiatives such as Workplace 2010 (which is described in more detail later).

- c. Section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that public authorities should, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, have due regard to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation, between men and women generally, between persons with a disability and persons without and between persons with dependents and persons without. Without prejudice to these obligations, public authorities are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.
- d. The current policy framework for eliminating poverty is set out in the recently launched Government “Lifetime Opportunities” action plan and its associated objectives, goals and targets. ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ has two overall objectives. These are to :
 - work towards eliminating poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland by 2020; and
 - end child poverty by 2020 - based on the estimate of approximately 130,000 children in Northern Ireland in relative income poverty in 1998/99, this means lifting 65,000 children out of poverty by 2010 on the way to eradication by 2020.

The new strategy retains the key principle of New Targeting Social Need which is to direct resources within government programmes at those areas, groups and individuals in greatest objective need.

It is important that the principles of the strategy are reflected in the policies and programmes of the new organisations, including District Councils, which will be established through the Review of Public Administration. For that reason, sponsoring departments of these organisations will ensure that the principles are firmly embedded in business plans.

- e. The Government's policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland is set out in *A Shared Future*, published in March 2005. This document sets out that we need to establish over time a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance.
- f. The Public Service Commission's guiding principle on 'Managing Vacancies Effectively' was produced in July 2006. It recommends that, in order to minimise the risk of redundancies as a result of decisions arising from the Review of Public Administration, and recognising the need to keep open all possible means to redeploy staff, existing employing authorities should avoid creating new posts, and should also use all available expedients to manage vacancies which might arise within defined groups. It also sets out principles for the filling of vacancies and comments on the need to ensure that service delivery is not adversely affected.

16. In addition to these overarching parameters, and other legislative requirements such as the Human Rights Act, there are a number of key current policies which apply in considering the issue of relocation.

17. **The Regional Development Strategy, 2001** highlights that even on a modest scale a dispersal policy of civil servants throughout Northern Ireland could bring local economic benefits, support town centre revitalisation, underpin and encourage private sector investment. It commends an appropriate level of decentralised public and private sector investment which would have environmental and economic benefits, reducing commuting to the Belfast metropolitan area and relieving congestion as well as contributing to the equitable sharing of resources. The Strategy includes an objective to promote a balanced spread of economic development opportunities across the Region focused on the Belfast Metropolitan Area, Londonderry, Craigavon and the other identified urban hubs/clusters, as the main centres for employment and services. An appropriate extract from the Strategy is contained in **Annex C**.
18. In 2004, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development published '**A Guide To Rural Proofing**' aimed at ensuring that all significant policy proposals submitted to Ministers for endorsement will specifically identify any likely impact which that policy might have on rural areas or communities, and an assessment of how any differential impact can be addressed. Driving factors for the Guide were outlined as 'to encourage a more equitable distribution of public and private investment' and 'to promote social inclusion and target interventions at economic black spots.'
19. **The Terms of Reference for the Review of Public Administration** (March, 2005) included a number of relevant obligations including a commitment to Equality and Human Rights and ensuring that Section 75 and New TSN policies are fully considered and opportunities to decentralise services, and related employment opportunities are also examined. It also recommended that in considering sub-regional or local delivery mechanisms it would be sensible to examine the potential of creating the same geographical units for the organisation of functions and how this might allow better co-ordination, including services provided on a cross-border basis.

Central DFP responsibilities and guidance

20. The current policy on dispersal of civil service jobs is outlined in paragraph 15(b) and is produced in more detail in **Annex B**. That policy is essentially reactive to opportunities rather than a pro-active policy of dispersing specific jobs or functions from the Greater Belfast area. The RPA clearly provides those opportunities.
21. **The Programme For Government** made a commitment to investigating the dispersal of Civil Service jobs as part of the Strategic Review of Government Accommodation placing significant emphasis on the role of New TSN in deciding the possible location of dispersed posts as an element in reducing socio-economic differentials between the two communities in Northern Ireland.
22. In May, 2001 a DFP commissioned Strategic **Review of Government Office Accommodation** identified a number of potentially competing issues in relation to the structure of the Government estate, dispersal policy and space utilisation. The Assembly Committee for Finance and Personnel subsequently commissioned a **Research Paper (no.20/02-26th March, 2002)** which discussed the potential implications of a Dispersal Policy including a 'reactive' and 'proactive' approach. This document concluded that there are tensions between the prima facie financial costs and benefits; the 'softer' socio-economic costs and benefits and the political commitments identified in the DFP Report.
23. In early 2004 work re-commenced on the development of the office accommodation strategy and this work culminated in the production in October 2004 of a Strategic Development Plan entitled **Workplace 2010**.

This outlined a new policy focus around:

- The provision of a modern, flexible, open plan office estate that would enable the NICS to transform the way in which it delivers public services;
- Rationalisation of the estate providing a smaller number of larger buildings for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness, and disposing of surplus accommodation; and
- Achieving value for money through a “total property PFI” solution with a private sector partner.

24. The procurement of the partner is now well underway with a contractual target date during 2007. The contract has been scoped and will be developed to allow for decisions on dispersal by taking a phased approach to implementation and including costed flexibility options within the requirement.

Your comments on the existing policy framework and how that might be positively developed would be welcomed.

Conclusion

25. While a wide range of relevant policies exist in Northern Ireland, there are no guidelines to assist decision makers in the management of the location of public sector jobs. At a time of increasing political focus on the jobs issue, significant organisational change and the increasing need for investment in public sector infrastructure to meet future service needs, there are dangers that a failure to develop practical guiding principles could lead to criticism that the public sector is failing to capitalise on opportunities for integration and/or co-location of key public services whilst achieving optimum value for money in how it uses assets across the public sector. The legal and policy

frameworks established by Section 75, the Regional Development Strategy and Rural Proofing place requirements on the public sector to achieve an equitable distribution of public sector investment across Northern Ireland.

26. There is also a significant body of growing evidence concerning best practice in office design which informs Workplace 2010 and should be taken into consideration. This recognises that physical workplace can have a significant impact on efficiency and effectiveness and aims to create better working environments using new technology, improved processes, and the potential for much greater flexibility. It demonstrates that there are tangible benefits to be gained from workplace and organisational change which could play an important role in establishing a new culture for the new organisations and support its management aims. And it provides a framework within which the estate can be rationalised providing efficiency savings which can be redeployed to the front line.
28. **Accordingly, it is proposed to collate the estates strategies and plans in the various RPA areas and to stimulate their effective co-ordination, taking account of other key reform initiatives, so that decision making by Ministers and Local Authorities on the location of new bodies is well informed and soundly based, having regard to service delivery needs, providing the best value for money, the rights of staff and consistent with Government's wider social policy objectives, including those under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.**

What is needed in Northern Ireland?

28. Clearly, therefore, we need a coherent and integrated public sector framework in Northern Ireland which incorporates current requirements, policies and guidance, and is underpinned by common key principles. The proposed principles are set out below:

a) Improving Service Delivery

- Providing workspace that will enable the provision of more efficient, effective and accessible public services;
- Providing local public services where demand exists;
- Exploiting opportunities for co-location and co-operation in key public services; and
- Promoting the provision of more integrated services which meet customer and business needs and achievement of economies of scale.

b) Taking Account of Staff Interests

- Respecting staff rights, terms and conditions;
- Engaging fully with staff during the decision making process;
- Location should, where possible, provide sustainable career development opportunities for staff within the local area; and
- Location should, where possible, take account of the mobility and travel to work needs of staff.

c) Achieving Value for Money

- Releasing funding to priority front line services;
- Maximising value for money for the taxpayer in line with Green Book guidance; and
- Minimising, where possible, transitional costs such as recruitment, travel, staff costs, training, programme management, and parallel running.

d) Effective Working

- Providing flexible accommodation that is predominantly open plan and determined by function rather than grade (in line with Workplace 2010 principles);
- Maintaining and enhancing services and ensuring skills retention;
- Ensuring convenient and/or accessible location to key stakeholders; and
- Maintaining operational efficiency and effectiveness including responsive policy advice to Ministers.

e) Effective Asset Management

- Providing a co-ordinated approach to the asset management of the public sector estate;
- Rationalising, where possible, the public sector estate to deliver a smaller, more efficient portfolio of larger properties;
- Maximising value for money on the basis of whole life costs;
- Making best use of existing assets avoiding, where possible, unnecessary expansion of the estate; and

- Contributing to a public estate that optimises sustainability in line with the Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland.

f) Maximising Social and Economic Benefits

- Supporting development in areas of social and economic deprivation (in line with the Anti Poverty Strategy);
- Contributing to local economic growth and sustainability;
- Building on the regional hubs as identified in the Regional Development Strategy; and
- Taking account of the impact on public employment within the new Council boundaries.

g) Promoting Equality and Good Relations

- Contributing to the equitable distribution of public sector employment opportunities;
- Promoting equality and good relations and creating opportunities to address inequalities in access to services and employment opportunities for vulnerable groups and communities;
- Creating a decision making process that is objective, open and transparent;
- Ensuring open communication and consultation with the public and their representatives during the decision making process; and
- Promoting good relations between different sectors of society as set out in 'A Shared Future' – the framework for good relations in Northern Ireland.

h) Sustainable Development

- Procuring operating and managing the estate sustainably;
- Leading in the sustainable procurement of works, supplies and services;
- Maximising resource efficiency;
- Making efficient use of space and ways of working, in buildings that are exemplars of energy, water and carbon efficiency in operation and maintenance;
- Conserving and sustainably managing land and encouraging biodiversity; and
- Integrating the principles of sustainability fully into working practices.

29. The Estates Working Group has not sought to rank these proposed guiding principles into a priority order because depending on the different sectors and issues appropriate to those sectors and the specific circumstances of decisions, decision-makers would have to consider the varying levels of importance of the individual principles. In addition, the relative importance of the principles may change over time reflecting the impact of early decisions. The intention is to provide a practical, but not overly rigid, framework against which decisions on location can be taken.

30. We also need an overarching structure to promote the consistent and effective application of the framework across the public sector. It is thus proposed that the Estates working group of the RPA Steering Group would continue to fulfil that role for the foreseeable future.

Maximising Impact

31. While these principles can be applied in relation to each decision on the location of public sector jobs, the impact of the guidelines could be increased by bringing together decisions which are due to be made in the same broad timeframe and it is so proposed. By this means we would seek to ensure that decisions complement each other in a positive way.

Interim decisions

32. The work to develop and agree guiding principles, including consultation, will take several months to complete. In the meantime, any early decisions required (e.g. in relation to HPSS Trust Headquarters which are planned to be in place on an initial basis from April 2007) would be taken on the following basis:

- decisions will be taken with appropriate reference to the central co-ordination arrangements (i.e. the RPA Steering Group and Estates working group);
- decisions will be taken on an interim basis i.e. temporary accommodation arrangements will be secured and decisions on the location of the new permanent headquarters would then be taken in line with central guidance agreed following consultation and taking into account key RPA location decisions relating to other sectors;
- the current statutory requirements, together with the policies and guidance described in paragraphs 15-24 above will be fully taken into account;
- the draft principles referenced in paragraph 28 above supplemented by appropriate base data on the current position in relation to the location of jobs, deprived areas, and vulnerable groups will be considered;

- taking full account of the new Local Authority boundaries; and
- decisions will be subject to consultation with staff, trade union and stakeholder groups.

Equality

33. From our research to date it is highly likely that decisions on the location of public sector jobs will have implications in terms of equality and good relations.
34. All future decisions on the location of public sector jobs will be subject to equality screening and to consultation on the outcomes of the screening exercise. If screening identifies that the decision would have significant implications for equality of opportunity it will be subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).
35. As proposed at paragraph 31, where decisions on the location of public sector jobs are due to be taken around the same time or similar times, we will seek to brigade them, undertaking a combined screening and EQIA process and thereby reflecting the aggregate implications and impacts.

Consultation

36. This consultation is a key part of the process of developing a set of guiding principles to act as a framework within which decisions can be taken on the location of public sector bodies set up under RPA and affected by other key reform initiatives. **We look forward to receiving your comments on the approach outlined in this document to dealing with location issues. In particular we would welcome views on:**

- **the overall policy framework set out in paragraphs 15 to 24;**
- **the principles outlined in paragraph 28 above;**
- **how these, and/or other principles might be developed into a practical framework; and**
- **the relative importance of the principles.**

37. A twelve week period for submission of comments will extend from 26 January 2007 to 20 April 2007. Correspondents are asked to submit their views as early as possible during this period to allow as much time as possible for consideration. In light of the requirements of the Code of Practice on Access to Government and the Freedom of Information Act, all responses may be made available to the public on request, to Parliament or the Northern Ireland Assembly. You have the option of indicating that you wish your response to remain confidential and the Department will generally respect your request. If it is in the public interest to override your request the Department will contact you before disclosure and, if appropriate, provide an opportunity for your response to be withdrawn.

38. Responses must be made in writing before the closing date to:

Emma Wilson
Department of Finance and Personnel (NI)
Room S21
2nd Floor
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Bangor
BT19 7NA

Or by email to: Emma.Wilson@dfpni.gov.uk

Or by fax to (028) 9185 8048

39. Enquiries:

If this document is not in a format that meets your needs, or if you have any other queries, please contact us at the above address or call (028) 9185 8245.

A Review of Policies for Location of Public Sector Jobs in other Jurisdictions

The policies across all of the jurisdictions have a number of common themes, primarily:

- a. Economy and efficiency
- b. Decentralisation and devolution
- c. Assisting areas with particular social and economic needs

In each of these countries, the policies are supported with appropriate obligations in respect of new public sector investment and in some cases specific targets for the relocation of a proportion of existing public sector jobs. There are clearly lessons to be learned from the experience in those jurisdictions, although it is also important to recognise that the size of Northern Ireland in both spatial and population terms provides a rather different set of challenges.

Wales

In 2001 the Welsh Assembly agreed the **Relocation Strategy 2002-2007**. This embedded a number of principles for a location review: These included:

- An overall objective to increase the proportion of staff working outside Cardiff
- Bringing the delivery of services closer to customers
- Operational efficiency and effectiveness, including maintaining a responsive policy advice to Ministers

- Accommodating the wishes of the Assembly's staff
- Local economic impacts
- Value for money
- Promoting sustainable development

Scotland

In September 1999, the Scottish Executive introduced a relocation policy. This policy covers the Executive's Departments and Agencies, Non-Ministerial Departments and the sponsored public sector. Implementation is overseen by a Relocation Policy Team in the Executive's Public Service Reform Group. It has developed guidance for implementing the relocation policy titled **The Relocation Guide, June 2005**. Its overarching objectives are to:

- Ensure that the government in Scotland is more efficient and decentralised
- Provide cost effective delivery solutions
- Assist areas with particular social and economic needs
- Provide cost effective delivery solutions
- Assist areas with particular social and economic needs.

England

In March 2004 Sir Michael Lyons published an **Independent Review Of Public Sector Relocation** in England which outlined the policy context as being:

‘The Government is committed to improving the efficient delivery of public services, boosting regional economic growth and bringing government closer to people, through greater decentralisation and devolution’ concluding that ‘the pattern of government needs to be reshaped...In particular this pattern fails fully to reflect the large cost disparities between London and other parts of the UK and the revealed benefits of dispersal for the efficient delivery of government business and for regional economies.’

The Report recommended taking forward urgently dispersal of 20,000 jobs as a first tranche from London and the South East. The Report’s recommendations were accepted by the Government who endorsed the principles in November 2003 as follows:

The concentration of Government activity in London and the South East must be determined by the service needs of the regional population and the interests of effective national Government. The current degree of concentration is not optimal in terms of efficiency, effective delivery and the needs of the United Kingdom outside London and the South East.

The Government is committed to realising the benefits of well-planned dispersals of public sector activity from London and the South East. These benefits include enhanced efficiency and service delivery, social and economic benefits across the United Kingdom, and improved governance, including paving the way for further devolution of national Government responsibilities. Importantly, Lyons concluded that, where dispersal did take place, it was done in such a way to allow units of a sufficient size that could support sustainable career progression for local people.

Responsibilities

Heads of departments and sponsored bodies will be responsible on a continuing basis for realising the benefits of relocation and will be held accountable for exercising this responsibility.

Public sector relocation is a key strand of modernising and reforming Government.

Heads of departments must integrate relocation with their wider reform programmes, in particular the search for greater efficiency, and the development of pay and workforce strategies.

Republic of Ireland

In December 2003, the Irish Government announced through the annual Financial Budget statement and a policy document titled **Public Service Decentralisation. Governance Opportunities And Challenges**, a commitment to the voluntary decentralisation of over 10,300 posts in civil service departments/offices and agencies to over fifty locations across twenty-five counties throughout the country. It also specified that the location of any future bodies should be in areas compatible with the new programme. In the document **'Sustainable Development-A Strategy For Ireland'** one of the primary considerations should be to avail of the opportunity that arises for the new government offices to make a positive contribution to the life and fabric of the selected towns.

Date: 22 March 1999

Dispersal of Civil Service Jobs

The purpose of this note is to provide Departments with detailed guidance on the implementation of the revised Government policy on the possible dispersal of Civil Service jobs.

In John Semple's minute of 16 February 1996 to Permanent Secretaries, he confirmed Ministers' approval to the commissioning of a research study into the economic and social benefits of dispersal of Civil Service jobs. Following receipt of the report of the study by external consultants, and consideration by the Civil Service Management Board, the Secretary of State, in response to Paul Murphy's note of 15 September 1998, has agreed that dispersal policy should be linked to accommodation planning, but should take into account wider policy imperatives, including New TSN and the regional planning strategy and associated commitments in the "Partnership for Equality" White Paper.

The effect of the revised policy is that the possibility of dispersing Civil Service functions should be considered in the context of reviews and/or appraisals in which the location of the work is a significant cost element. This might include the renewal of leases and major refurbishment, but consideration of dispersal should certainly be triggered by a requirement for new sizeable accommodation.

Where Departments identify a requirement for new accommodation at a significant cost, a rigorous examination should be carried out to determine whether dispersal of the function for which the accommodation is required is feasible in operational terms taking account of such factors as the current disposition of the function, the relation between the function and clients and providers, the nature of the function's work and any other relevant issues. In

examining this issue, Departments will be expected to take a strategic look at the disposition of their staff against the accommodation currently available and the options for rationalising this disposition. The aim is to ensure that the examination of the requirements for new accommodation takes account of service delivery needs, but also aims to provide, where possible, the opportunity for Ministers to consider the costs and benefits of serious candidates for dispersal, rather than have new accommodation aimed solely at functions which are inherently unsuitable for dispersal.

The conclusions of the examination of the feasibility of dispersal should be included in the initial business case put to the Office Accommodation Branch (OAB) supporting a new accommodation requirement.

The economic appraisal should be undertaken in accordance with the specific guidance on the appraisal of options for dispersal of NICS jobs in the attached booklet and the general guidance in the Northern Ireland Preface to the Green Book, which was circulated to Departments with DAO (DFP) 16/97. The appraisal should cover, inter alia, the need for the proposed accommodation, the cost of all the options under consideration, and the impact of all the options upon equal opportunities, New TSN and the regional planning strategy including transportation. In the case of dispersal options, there should also be an assessment of the economic impact upon the areas which would be losing and gaining the dispersed jobs.

It is recognised that the policy and the guidance may need to be amended to reflect any different approach introduced by the Assembly, but it is important to have in place a process which can be adapted as necessary. The First and Deputy First Ministers have been advised and are content to proceed on this basis.

The Spatial Development Strategy for Northern Ireland

In the context of achieving the optimal balance between Belfast and the rest of the Region, the Strategy promotes the decentralisation of public sector employment to Londonderry and the main towns thereby augmenting their range of service functions. Even on a modest scale this could bring significant local economic benefits, support town centre revitalisation, underpin and encourage private sector investment. **An appropriate level of decentralised public and private sector investment would have environmental and economic benefits, reducing commuting to the Belfast Metropolitan Area and relieving congestion as well as contributing to the equitable sharing of regional assets.**

Renewal and revitalisation of run down sectors of towns will continue to be targeted, particularly the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, as an integral feature of the Strategy to reinforce the main hubs. Facilitating economic development in, or in close proximity to, the most disadvantaged urban areas of the main towns will help to achieve regional balance and tackle long-term unemployment as part of the 'New Targeting Social Need' initiative.

In designating the main towns as hubs for significant growth, **the SDS recognises that future levels of growth for each town, or cluster of towns, will vary. Some centres will generate much more growth than others**, reflecting the interaction of such factors as strategic location, the size of population in the town and its catchment, the range of employment, infrastructure and services available, and the quality of environment and living conditions which increase the 'draw' of a town.

A number of the main hubs already have a well established sub-regional role and a more extensive sphere of influence reflecting their larger size and the availability of a wide range of higher order urban functions. These centres generally have larger populations of over 20,000 persons and include high numbers of retail, financial and other businesses, and a diverse provision of administrative, education, health and leisure services. For example, they include Ballymena to the North, Newry to the South, and Omagh in the West. Such centres are expected to generate higher levels of future growth reflecting their established role and strength as local engines of economic activity in their respective sub-regions.

KEY DIAGRAM 4

THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Centres with Strategic Role for Employment and Services

- Major Regional Cities
- Belfast Metropolitan Area
- Londonderry - City of the North West
- The Towns
- Main Hubs
- Local Hubs
- Rural Community Potential
- Regional Gateways
- International European Port
- Ports
- Belfast International Airport
- Airports
- Major Inter-Regional Gateway Role
- Trans-Regional Development Linkages and Opportunities
- Regional Strategic Transport Network
- Key Transport Corridors
- Link Corridors
- Trunk Roads
- Railways
- Strategic Natural Resource
- Major Tourism Development Opportunity
- Belfast Metropolitan Area Green Belt

