



SEVENTH GUIDING PRINCIPLE AND ASSOCIATED RECOMMENDATIONS

LOCATION

Introduction

1. The Commission's role is to safeguard the interests of staff and to ensure their smooth transfer to new organisations established as a consequence of Government decisions on the Review of Public Administration, taking into account statutory obligations, including those arising from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
2. In pursuance of that role, the Commission's approach to location is represented in the Guiding Principle and Associated Recommendations described below. In formulating the Guiding Principle and associated recommendations, the Commission has also had due regard to Government's commitment, as set out in the statement of 22 November 2005, that "Every possible effort will be made to avoid redundancies."
3. The Public Service Commission has consulted the Executive, the sectoral Staff Commissions and representatives of NIC/ICTU about the most appropriate way to safeguard the interests of staff and ensure their smooth transfer into new organisations with respect to changes in workplace location.

Guiding Principle

4. The Commission recognises that workplace location is of major importance to staff and that as the Review of Public Administration is implemented decisions will have to be taken on location. The Commission **recommends** that, in consultation with Trade Unions and other staff representatives, the Executive should develop an overarching location framework strategy for all public services. In developing such a strategy, full consideration should be given to safeguarding the interests of staff. The Commission considers that any decision on the location of a workplace must be objectively justified and reflect, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of Public Sector jobs.

Associated Recommendations

5. The Commission **recommends** that:
- Employers should aim to minimise hardship and domestic disruption as far as possible, within management needs, of those staff who face a change of workplace location. This should require ascertaining the personal preferences of staff, taking into account, for example, the domestic circumstances of employees, any relevant health factors or employee commitments such as caring for dependants.
 - The Executive should ensure the consistent and effective application of the overarching framework strategy across the public sector. The

overarching framework and its detailed application at sectoral level should:

- Be subject to consultation with trade unions and other staff representatives;
- Stress equality considerations, Lifetime Opportunities - Northern Ireland Anti- Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy, A Shared Future Policy Framework and Rural Proofing.
- Require a business case to justify significant staff relocations;
- Emphasise effective communication to ensure that all employees are made aware of the location strategy and policies;
- Support the full use of technology e.g. video conferencing, E-Government initiatives to mitigate against workplace location disruptions;
- Establish what constitute reasonable travel to work distances, taking account of, for example, access routes and the availability and frequency of public transport;

- Offer flexible working practices and any other relevant HR policies which have regard to management needs and which would help to alleviate staff difficulties associated with a change in workplace location;
- Detail the mechanism by which staff may appeal against a change of workplace location;¹

And in addition;

- Where contractual entitlements do not provide for reimbursement of expenses in respect of re-location, employers should make provision for reimbursement of reasonably incurred additional travelling or other removal expenses as a consequence of a change of workplace location on a basis which is comparable to that provided by other employers in the RPA Affected Group.
- Employers should, on a case by case basis, provide for reimbursement of reasonably incurred expenses outside this where they consider that exceptional circumstances exist.
- In line with the 3rd Guiding Principle employers should in addition provide compensation for employees who suffer other

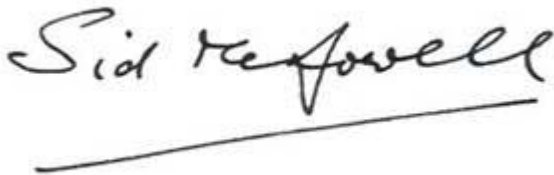
¹ This mechanism will be contained in a Code of Practice on Staff Transfers.

material detriment as a consequence of a relocation outside the scope of any applicable mobility clause².

- Ensure that employers, in consultation with Trade Unions, support those employees whose place of work, or work function changes. Such support should include, but not be limited to capacity building, retraining and career counselling as appropriate.

6. Commentary

Commissioners have already recognised the tensions which could arise between the range of principles contained in the document “A Policy and Guiding Principles for the Location of Public Sector Jobs”. Commissioners considered that any decision on location needed, in particular, to be consistent with established Government policies on equality, Regional Development and Sustainable Development and that compensation should be made to staff who suffer material detriment as a consequence of a relocation outside the scope of any applicable mobility clause².

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sid McDowell". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

SID McDOWELL – PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

CHAIRMAN – 12 OCTOBER 2007

² A mobility clause is a term in a contract of employment that identifies the degree to which employees may be required to move from one workplace location to another. Alternatively this could be known as location/base arrangements.