

BUSINESS COMMITTEE MEETING: 4 MAY 1992

Government Team

Mr Hanley
Mr Bell
Mr Hill

Alliance Party

Mr Close
Mr Morrow

UDUP

Mr Robinson
Mr Vitty

Talks Secretariat

Mr May

Also Present

Mr Smyth

SDLP

Mr Farren
Mr Durkan (part)
Mr Haughey (part)

UUP

Mr Cunningham
Mr Empey

The meeting began at 14.34 and concluded at 16.20.

2. The Government Team circulated the revised version of the Common Themes paper on which there were no further comments. It outlined a possible handling plan, in which the Common Themes paper and the Government paper on Realities would be submitted at the start of the Plenary Session on 5 May, with the intention that the papers should be noted rather than discussed at length. The UDUP and UUP delegations indicated that they might wish to make comments on the Realities paper in writing at some point, although none of the delegations would be seeking to amend the Government paper. The delegations agreed that little discussion of the Common Themes paper should be needed in Plenary in the light of the Business Committee's deliberations, although other members of delegations might have points to raise. It was agreed these comments would be noted in the minutes, rather than seeking to revise the paper further.

3. The SDLP delegation indicated that they were likely to table a paper giving their views of the two identities on 5 May. It was agreed that it would be desirable if the paper were not spoken to at the 5 May Plenary, but that the other Party delegations would respond to it in writing, within a day or so. The Business Committee could then consider whether, and if so how, the issue should be discussed by Plenary. It would also be for the Business Committee to recommend whether or not a Government draft, drawing

together agreed elements from the papers produced on identities and any responses to them would be useful.

4. In response to a UDUP delegation request for clarification, the Government Team explained that not all papers produced by the Party delegations would necessarily be discussed in Plenary. One of the roles of the Business Committee was to ensure work was structured to best effect.

5. The Government Team suggested that the Plenary Session on 5 May after the presentation of the Common Themes and Realities papers and any the tabling of from the Party delegations, should move to discuss the first section of the Government paper "Options for New Political Institutions" (paragraphs 6-16). Each delegation would be asked to make a short oral presentation incorporating their views on the principles required of new political institutions. The Party delegations agreed it would not be possible to predict with certainty how long that discussion might last, but that the aim should be to complete it by the end of business on 5 May. If that aim was met, the Government Team would produce a short paper drawing together the common principles resulting from that debate to be tabled at the start of business on 7 May. It was agreed this paper would be circulated to the Parties by 10.00 am on that day, to allow the delegations to reflect on it, and ensure discussion proceeded as swiftly as possible.

6. On 7 May, the aim would be to complete discussion on the second section of the Options paper headed "The Institutional Framework" (paragraphs 17-26). This discussion might take the form of a Second Reading debate, indicating a broad framework within which the more detailed consideration of specific issues might proceed.

7. The UDUP delegation emphasised the importance of making swift progress in discussion of this paper given the large amount of work remaining in Strand I and the short time available and asked whether discussion on the second section of the Options paper should not be remitted to a sub-committee first.

The Government Team argued that it was desirable to proceed with a plenary discussion of the general issues raised in the Institutions paper as this would make it easier subsequently to remit more detailed issues to sub-committee.

8. The SDLP delegation outlined the importance they placed on defining the problem before looking at the prescription required. Substantial agreement on the first section of the Options paper would be needed before the second section could be addressed. The UUP delegation recognised the different approach the SDLP were recommending, and suggested that the consideration of papers on identities, in parallel with consideration of the institutions paper, meant that both approaches were being addressed.

9. It was provisionally agreed that the next meeting of the Business Committee would take place fifteen minutes after the end of Thursday's Plenary Session.

TALKS SECRETARIAT