

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

TWELFTH INSTITUTIONAL MEETING

NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH

16 DECEMBER 2020

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twelfth North South Ministerial Council Institutional meeting was held at the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, on 16 December 2020. The Northern Ireland Executive was represented by the First Minister, the Rt. Hon. Arlene Foster MLA, and the deputy First Minister, Michelle O'Neill MLA. The Irish Government was represented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD. The First Minister and deputy First Minister chaired the meeting.
2. The Council noted that discussions have taken place across the various NSMC Sectors on how to promote economic and social recovery from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ministers welcomed the engagement there has been to date across both jurisdictions in responding to Covid-19, particularly in the field of health, and noted that both Administrations will continue to cooperate, whenever it is practicable to do so, to ensure the best response to the challenges posed by Covid-19.
3. Ministers noted that the Council has discussed the implications of the UK withdrawal from the EU for co-operation in each of the NSMC Sectors and that Ministers and officials will continue to engage to ensure co-operation is maintained following the end of the transition period. The Council also noted that

Senior Officials from The Executive Office, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs will meet regularly to discuss issues arising from the UK withdrawal from the EU and will provide updates to both Administrations and the NSMC on a regular basis.

4. The Council noted that discussions have taken place on the various New Decade, New Approach commitments with a cross-border dimension at NSMC meetings and bi-laterally between Ministers. A Group of Senior Officials from both jurisdictions has been established to maintain strategic oversight and progress delivery of the various projects focusing on connectivity and infrastructure; research and innovation; and investment in the North West and Border Communities. This group will meet regularly and will provide updates on its work to both Administrations and the NSMC.
5. Ministers noted that the Shared Island initiative and the associated Shared Island Fund, with €500m to be made available in the period to 2025, has been established by the Irish Government to support investment in new shared initiatives including delivery of commitments outlined in New Decade, New Approach. Updates on the various New Decade, New Approach commitments with a cross-border dimension will be provided to future NSMC Plenary meetings.
6. The Council noted that the North South Bodies continue to deliver on their remit, as outlined in the Agreement of 10 March 1999 establishing the Implementation Bodies or their Articles of Association, and that the NSMC maintains oversight of the work of the Bodies. Ministers noted that the Bodies have now been in existence for over 20 years and recognise that there have been changes to their operating environments during this time and agreed that officials should review the operating framework of the Bodies to explore if it remains appropriate and bring forward recommendations, if required.
7. Ministers noted that discussions have taken place at NSMC Sectoral Meetings with the aim of ensuring that Work Programmes within the various NSMC Areas for Co-operation remain up-to-date and reflect the priorities of the NI Executive and the Irish Government, and that the Council will continue its consideration of Work Programmes at sectoral meetings in early 2021.
8. The Council agreed that Ministers should regularly review Work Programmes to ensure they reflect the priorities of both Administrations and noted that the NSMC had previously agreed that consideration on longer term sectoral priorities was required and that a paper on this will be brought to a future Institutional meeting.
9. The Council approved the appointment of a number of Board Members to North South Implementation Bodies.
10. The NSMC approved the North South Language Body Business Plans and Budgets/Grants for 2018, 2019 and 2020, and the 2017-2019 Corporate Plan, which had been completed in accordance with agreed guidance issued by the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform,

and had been agreed by Sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers. The Council noted that following the necessary approvals, the North South Language Body 2020-2022 Corporate Plan and 2021 Business Plan will be tabled at a future NSMC meeting.

11. Ministers noted the North South Language Body Annual Reports and Accounts for the years 2016 and 2017, which had been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Council noted that the North South Language Body Annual Reports and Accounts for 2018 had been certified and would be submitted to the NSMC at a future meeting and that the field audits for the 2019 accounts had commenced in both Agencies.
12. The NSMC noted that Waterways Ireland had prepared its Business Plan and Budget for 2020 in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance and approved the Waterways Ireland 2020 Business Plan and recommended the budget/grant provision of €32.77/£29.49m.
13. The NSMC noted that Waterways Ireland had prepared its Business Plan and Budget for 2021 in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance and approved the Waterways Ireland 2021 Business Plan and recommended the budget/grant provision of €35.19/£30.61m.
14. The Council consented to the granting of an easement by Waterways Ireland to Dublin City Council for installation of ducting across the Royal Canal at Broome Bridge, Dublin.
15. The NSMC approved the InterTradeIreland Business Plan for 2021 and recommended that Budget/Grant of up to £17,032,170 for 2021 is made available, subject to affordability. The Plan had been completed in accordance with agreed guidance issued by the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and had been agreed by Sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers.
16. The Council approved the InterTradeIreland 2020-2022 Corporate Plan, which had been completed in accordance with agreed guidance issued by the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and had been agreed by Sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers.
17. The NSMC agreed to meet again in Institutional format in May/June 2021 as required.

Joint Secretariat
16 December 2020