

RESTRICTED***REGLEG Conference***

3. The First Minister said that the fifth annual Conference of Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG), held in Edinburgh on 29 and 30 November, had been a great success. Although Margot Wallström (the EC Vice President with responsibility for Communications and Institutional Relations), had been unable to attend due to illness, the end of the First Minister's Presidency of REGLEG had been marked by the announcement of a new pilot project which would examine how Scotland works with the European Commission and other devolved governments to influence the EU agenda. **The Cabinet recorded** its thanks to all those involved in organising the event.

Visit to Brussels and Paris

4. The Deputy First Minister said that he had made a successful visit to Brussels and Paris. He had met Mr Charles McCreevy, Internal Market Commissioner on Monday, 29 November to discuss better regulation, and on Tuesday, 30 November he had met Mr Francois Fillion, the French Education Minister and signed the Franco-Scottish Education Declaration of Intent. He had also met Ms Janine Haddad, Vice President, Ile de France and attended a St Andrew's Day reception to mark the end of the centenary celebrations for the Entente Cordiale.

Minutes of Meeting held on 24 November 2004

5. The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November (SC(04)35th Conclusions) were approved.

Parliamentary Business (Paper SC(04)158)

6. Ms Curran outlined the planned business in the Parliament during the weeks commencing 29 November, 6 and 13 December, as set out in the tables attached to paper SC(04)158. She said the First Minister would make a statement on institutional child abuse immediately before the Petitions Committee debate on petition PE535, in place of the planned statement on REGLEG. The brief statement would include an apology to victims of institutional child abuse on behalf of the people of Scotland.

Institutional Child Abuse

7. Mr Peacock said that during the Petitions Committee debate he would set out what the Executive had been doing to try to address the issues raised by petition PE535. In particular, he would indicate that:

- (a) All relevant Executive held files would be open for public inspection from January 2005;
- (b) He had written to religious and charitable organisations, and to local authorities, asking that they similarly open their files for inspection;
- (c) He had asked the Scottish Information Commissioner to verify that the Executive was taking all reasonable steps to trace and open its files, and to highlight any deficiencies so that these could be rectified;

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(d) The Executive would establish a further short life working group on child sex abuse, including the issue of institutional care;

(e) The Executive would fund improved counselling services for survivors of child abuse; and

(f) He would be appointing an expert to examine independently why the abuse was allowed to happen; the policy and regulatory requirements of the time; the systems in place to monitor the operation of those requirements; and how monitoring was carried out in practice.

8. In discussion, it was noted that while the First Minister's statement would address the desire for a public apology, the Executive could expect to be pressed further to agree to a public inquiry. Although the Executive had the greatest sympathy for the victims, it would be important to set out very clearly why it was felt that a public inquiry was not the best way to proceed. The Executive had also to avoid any action that might prejudice cases currently being pursued through the courts.

9. **The Cabinet agreed** that copies of the First Minister's statement and Mr Peacock's speech for the debate, along with supporting briefing, should be circulated to Ministers as soon as possible. **(Action: Mr Peacock and Education Department).**

Efficient Government Plan

10. Mr McCabe said that the Executive's Efficient Government Plan had been published, as planned, on Monday, 29 November and would be debated in Parliament on Thursday, 2 December. Although there had been some negative commentary, the overall response in the media had been balanced. Mr McCabe said that further close scrutiny of the plan could be expected and every portfolio would need to be able to demonstrate that their planned efficiencies were robust, that they could identify further improvements in the coming months, and that agencies and NDPBs were playing their full part. He said that this would form a substantial part of the agenda for his forthcoming bilaterals with portfolio Ministers.

SCANCE (Paper SC(04)159)

11. The First Minister introduced SCANCE paper (SC(04)159).

Pre Budget Report

12. The Deputy First Minister said that although the Chancellor's report on Thursday, 2 December was likely to include details of increased public borrowing, the Treasury was likely to maintain that the so-called 'golden rule' would be met, and the main focus would be on the steady growth forecast for the UK economy. Mr McCabe said that there had been speculation of increases in funding for English local authorities. Depending on how this was achieved it could create presentational difficulties for the Executive.