

Annex A

Letter from Sinn Fein to the First Minister

From: Office of the Sinn Féin Vice President {redacted}

Sent: 18 May 2022 14:07

To: First Minister [redacted]; [redacted] [redacted]

Subject: Nicola Sturgeon MSP

18 May 2022

Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG
[redacted]

Dear First Minister,

I thought it best to write to you personally following our recent Assembly elections earlier this month, and to set out my commitment to advancing the already strong relationship that we both enjoy, and how we may develop our intergovernmental relations in the time ahead.

I know that we both share a commitment to helping workers and families through our leadership and action in order to help lift the burden of those struggling during this difficult cost of living crisis, and to ensure that where local Ministers do not have the powers to act that we make sure the Conservative Government in London do so for the many thousands who depend on our support.

Regrettably at this time our Assembly, Executive and other political institutions are not yet functioning due to the DUP boycott, despite the electorate having spoken very clearly and who demand that the parties form a Government to get down to business without delay.

However, those of us who are committed to the values of genuine power-sharing and equality are determined that democracy will not be delayed for much longer, and I very much look forward to strengthening the close bonds of friendship that those of us on this island share with the people of Scotland, and that our administrations can work together in our shared interests.

I would very much welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person at a time of mutual convenience to discuss this common agenda for change.

Best wishes,

Michelle O'Neill
First Minister (Designate)

Annex B

Request for advice from Ministerial Private Office and advice from senior official in response. Personal information has been redacted under section 29(1)(d) and section 38 (1)(a).

From: [redacted] [redacted] **On Behalf Of** First Minister
Sent: 18 May 2022 17:08
To: Cameron DA (Donald) (Constitution and UKR) <Donald.Cameron@gov.scot>; [redacted]
Cc: McAllister C (Colin) [redacted] First Minister [redacted]
Subject: FW: Nicola Sturgeon MSP

Donald, [redacted]

Please see attached letter below from VP of Sinn Fein.

I would be grateful for urgent advice by 0900 tomorrow morning please.

Many thanks
[redacted]

[redacted]
First Minister Private Office | T: [redacted] | M: [redacted]

Below is the full extract of the advice from Senior official, personal information has been redacted under section 38 (1) a.

From: Cameron DA (Donald) (Constitution and UKR) <[redacted] >
Sent: 19 May 2022 12:05
To: First Minister <[redacted] >
Cc: McAllister C (Colin) [redacted] Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery < Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture [redacted] < Permanent Secretary [redacted] >; Rogers D (David) (Constitution and Cabinet Director) [redacted] Wightman S (Scott) [redacted] Johnson M (Martin) [redacted] Bruce A (Andrew) [redacted] Mackie C (Christopher) [redacted]
Subject: OFFICIAL SENSITIVE: Invitation from Michelle O'Neill MLA
Importance: High

Thanks [redacted], you asked for advice in response to a letter from Michelle O'Neill MLA which asks for a meeting with the First Minister.

Ms O'Neill has indicated that she would like to discuss actions to tackle cost of living pressures and more generally how inter government relationships can be developed. A meeting would also be an opportunity to take stock of the implications for Scotland of any decision by the UK Government to alter or repeal aspects of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

By way of background, our understanding is that the current delay in establishing the Assembly and Executive means that no-one individual has any official status or designation at this stage – although, clearly as the leader of the largest party following the election, Ms O'Neill is entitled to the position of First Minister. It for Ms O'Neill to judge whether she is acting in accordance with the post-election arrangements in NI, but in any meeting or communications activity the SG should avoid commenting on, or endorsing, any description of Ms O'Neill status beyond the fact of her being the leader of the largest party, and to avoid being drawn into debate about the application of the NI constitutional legislation.

Given that Ms O'Neill wishes to discuss the urgent challenge of tackling the cost of living crisis and inter-government relationships, a discussion of those issues would be appropriate as they are relevant to government business in Scotland. It would, however, be important to conduct the meeting and any communications in a way that avoids implying that Ms O'Neill is already in government, or to appear to prejudge the executive-formation process in NI.

As the First Minister knows, a key principle to be applied to engagement with Northern Ireland is even handedness. In applying, and being seen to apply that principle, FM might want to consider offering to meet other potential parties to the Executive. While proactively offering to meet the DUP might be portrayed as an attempt to exert influence on the NI executive formation process as a whole, there would be value in understanding the implications for Scotland of decisions around the Protocol from both the DUP and Sinn Fein perspectives. Alternatively, the First Minister may consider that it sufficient to rest on the fact that Ms O'Neill has requested a meeting and for it to be made clear in any public communications that the she is willing to extend the same courtesy to others if that is something they would find of value.

As the First Minister aware, a decision to meet Ms O'Neill at this stage of developments around the Protocol in particular will be viewed with keen interest in Belfast, Dublin, Brussels and London and it would be important to have in place actions to manage any impact on the Scottish Governments wider relationships.

In conclusion, my view is that should the First Minister wish to discuss the matters proposed by Ms O'Neill it would be appropriate to do so, but that care is needed to ensure that a meeting and related communications activity reflects the points above.

I can provide a draft response to Ms O'Neil. Similarly should FM decide to extend an invitation to other party leaders I could provide a draft letter to that effect.

Donald

Annex C

Briefing to Ministerial Private Office from the senior official supporting the meeting. Personal information has been redacted under redacted under section 29(1)(d) and section 38(1)(a).

From: Cameron DA (Donald) (Constitution and UKR) [redacted]

Sent: 19 May 2022 21:27

To: First Minister [redacted]

Cc: First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture < Permanent Secretary DG Strategy and External Affairs Rogers D (David) (Constitution and Cabinet Director) Wightman S (Scott) Johnson M (Martin) Bruce A (Andrew) Mackie C (Christopher)

Subject: RE: OFFICIAL SENSITIVE: Invitation from Michelle O'Neill MLA

Importance: High

Thanks [redacted],

I attach briefing covering the operation of the Northern Ireland Protocol and IGR (with a focus on cross UK action needed to address cost of living pressures). I can prepare a note on government formation in NIE if the FM would find that helpful, but it is unlikely to shed more light than is currently available in the media – and Ms O'Neill will no doubt update the FM at the meeting. But please let me know if having a factual note of the process would be helpful.

I also attach draft letters for the FM to send to the leaders of the DUP (25 seats) and Alliance (17 seats) as the two parties with the most seats after Sinn Fein (27 seats).

Please let me know if the FM considers that an invitation should be extended further. The next tranche is: Ulster Unionists (9 seats); and the Social Democratic and Labour party (8 seats). Vote share falls sharply away to parties attracting less than 2% gaining 2 or fewer seats.

(these are the two e-mail addresses I have for the parties – neither are the direct addresses for the party leaders – perhaps PO colleagues can help with that?)

[redacted] , [redacted]

A draft press release is planned for issue after the meeting. Comms colleagues sent that to you earlier this evening – attached for reference). The draft reflects advice in my earlier note about the importance of avoiding any impression that Ms O'Neill is already in government or of appearing to pre-empt the outcome of post-election processes.

I will provide official support. Please let me know if you need anything further.

Best wishes

Donald

From: [redacted] **On Behalf Of** First Minister

Sent: 19 May 2022 17:38

To: Cameron DA (Donald) (Constitution and UKR) [redacted] First Minister [redacted]

Cc: McAllister C (Colin) [redacted] ; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture < Permanent Secretary [redacted] DG Strategy and External Affairs [redacted] Rogers D (David) (Constitution and Cabinet Director) [redacted] Wightman S (Scott) [redacted] Johnson M (Martin) [redacted] ; Bruce A (Andrew) [redacted] Mackie C (Christopher) [redacted]

Subject: RE: OFFICIAL SENSITIVE: Invitation from Michelle O'Neill MLA

Donald,

The First Minister has noted with thanks.

The meeting with Michelle O'Neill will take place at Bute House tomorrow afternoon at 1300.

The First Minister would be grateful if you could, as suggested, draft letters to other relevant party leaders setting out that tomorrow's meeting is at Ms O'Neill's request and that she would be more than happy to meet them also.

Best wishes

[redacted]

First Minister Private Office

Attachments to the email. Personal information has been redacted under section 38(1)(a). Some information has been redacted under section 29(1)(a). A further document has been withheld under 30(b).

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister of Scotland



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
T: 0300 244 4000

Jeffrey Donaldson MP

Leader of the Democratic and Unionist Party

By e-mail

20 May 2022

Dear Jeffrey,

I am writing to make you aware that I have accepted an offer of a meeting with Michelle following the outcome of the election.

The meeting is taking place later today in Bute House, and is likely to cover developments on the operation of the Protocol, which as you know has a significant impact on businesses in Scotland. More generally, we will discuss the need to see a step change in the quality and effectiveness of inter-governmental relations across the United Kingdom if we are to tackle the common challenges we face.

I appreciate this is an important moment in establishing devolved institutions in Northern Ireland and in the spirit of good inter-governmental relations I would be very happy to extend an invitation to you to discuss these important matters. I have written in similar terms to Naomi Long.

With all good wishes

Nicola Sturgeon

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Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister of Scotland



St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
T: 0300 244 4000

Naomi Long, MLA

Leader of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

By e-mail

20 May 2022

Dear Naomi,

I am writing to make you aware that I have accepted an offer of a meeting with Michelle following the outcome of the election.

The meeting is taking place later today in Bute House, and is likely to cover developments on the operation of the Protocol, which as you know has a significant impact on businesses in Scotland. More generally, we will discuss the need to see a step change in the quality and effectiveness of inter-governmental relations across the United Kingdom if we are to tackle the common challenges we face.

I appreciate this is an important moment in establishing devolved institutions in Northern Ireland and in the spirit of good inter-governmental relations I would be very happy to extend an invitation to you to discuss these important matters. I have written in similar terms to Jeffrey Donaldson.

With all good wishes

Nicola Sturgeon

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister of Scotland



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
T: 0300 244 4000

Doug Beattie MLA

Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party

By e-mail

20 May 2022

Dear Doug,

I am writing to make you aware that I have accepted an offer of a meeting with Michelle following the outcome of the election.

The meeting is taking place later today in Bute House, and is likely to cover developments on the operation of the Protocol, which as you know has a significant impact on businesses in Scotland. More generally, we will discuss the need to see a step change in the quality and effectiveness of inter-governmental relations across the United Kingdom if we are to tackle the common challenges we face.

I appreciate this is an important moment in establishing devolved institutions in Northern Ireland and in the spirit of good inter-governmental relations I would be very happy to extend an invitation to you to discuss these important matters. I have written in similar terms to Jeffrey Donaldson and Naomi Long.

With all good wishes

Nicola Sturgeon

Copy of the Cost of Living Document

Inter-government relations

Background

Ms O'Neill indicated in her letter that she wished to discuss how inter-government relations can be improved for the benefit of people, families and communities across the UK.

The position in relation to participation in formal IGR structures following the election is that NI interests will continue to be represented by senior civil servants until the Assembly and Executive are formed and Ministers are appointed, including the offices of First and deputy First Minister. Usually, the FM and DFM prior to the election would continue to hold office during the period of executive formation. However, as the then FM resigned in February 2022, this is not the case for the 2022 election. Other Ministers in the Executive, other than the FM and DFM, do technically remain in post during this period but in practice have very limited scope to act since any issues that are 'significant or controversial' are required to be discussed in the executive committee.

More generally, Ms O'Neill indicates that she would like to discuss the development of the relationship between Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Ms O'Neill's letter highlighted the need for urgent cross government action to address the cost of living crisis – and cites the need to address the hardships experienced in Northern Ireland as part of the case for all parties in NI to take the steps needed to get the Assembly and Executive established as soon as possible.

Two upcoming ministerial discussions arranged as part of the new IGR structures provide an opportunity for agreement on actions to address cost of living pressures: the first is a meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) which will take place early next month and is being chaired by DFM; the second is a meeting also taking place in early June, of Finance Ministers – date to be arranged. The meeting with Ms O'Neill is a good opportunity to discuss any particular issues from her perspective – and to consider where common cause can be made in calling on UK Ministers to act, now and in the run up to the IMSC.

Cost of Living

SG support for households to mitigate cost of living

SG has taken the following decisions to get money to households now:

- **£150 council tax payments** – reaching 1.85 million (73%) of all households
- **£10 million to continue the Fuel Insecurity Fund** – direct support for households using any tariff or fuel type delivered via trusted third sector partners and includes same day support for households using prepaid meters, who are at imminent risk of self-disconnection.
- **Up-rating all Scottish benefits** by 6% putting more cash in people's pockets.
- Increasing the value of the **Scottish Child Payment** to £20 from April 2022 and to £25 from late 2022 – lifting an estimated 50,000 children out of relative poverty in 2023
- Increasing support for **home energy efficiency**, for example, increasing per property limits, widening eligibility

- **Free period products** – Act comes into force later this year making this a statutory right
- **Scottish Welfare Fund** – investment of £41m 22/23 (plus carry over plus LA can top up)
- Mitigating benefits cap and bedroom tax through **Discretionary Housing Payments** - expected investment in DHPs £86m in 22/23
- £113m investment in **Tackling Child Poverty** this year – including other items on this list, £53 million for Parental Employment Offer, £15m for Parental Transition Fund, £2 million for Challenge Fund
- C £12m investment in **debt and welfare advice** – includes Money Talk Team income maximisation service, and £6.5m to support provision of free debt advice through a variety of third sector providers
- **[Redacted – section 30(b) (i)]**
- Increase to **school clothing grant** – up to £120 for primary and £150 for secondary aged pupils

What does SG want the UK Government to do?

These include:

- a temporary cut in VAT on energy bills
- action on the Warm Homes Discount
- discussions to develop an effective response to the energy bill increases
- a one-off windfall tax on companies benefiting from significantly higher profits through the pandemic and energy crisis, so they shoulder a fair share of the burden people are facing
- reinstate the £20 uplift to Universal Credit
- Uprating UKG benefits in line with inflation
- halt the roll out and migration of people from legacy benefits onto Universal Credit until problems are fixed and Universal Credit becomes a benefit that works for the people. This would include removing the minimum wait of five weeks before receiving the first payment as well as stopping the use of sanctions, the two child limit and the benefit cap.

Approach in Northern Ireland

Action taken to date:

In March the NIE implemented a £55m energy payment support scheme, which paid £200 grants to about 280,000 people. It was targeted at people on benefits, with no application process required. It went to people claiming Universal Credit, income-based Jobseekers' Allowance, income support, income-related employment and support allowance and pension credit. Between January and March there was also a £2m emergency winter fuel fund, which paid £100 to successful applicants.

Current position:

Calls for responses to the Cost of Living have been tied to the wider political impasse associated with the NI Protocol, with all parties and poverty organisations calling for the DUP to restore Stormont in order to ensure action can be taken to reduce the cost of living.

Most parties have also called on the UK Government to do more. Specific manifesto calls to action are as below, focussing on support for reducing energy and child care costs, and proposals for household payments.

Sinn Féin: universal household payment and energy support

- Give every household in Northern Ireland a one-off payment of £230
- Rerun the energy payment support scheme, this time paying grants of £100.
- Reopen the emergency fuel fund with an increased pot of £8m.
- Other proposals include an extra £9m for an existing discretionary support scheme.

DUP: energy support and childcare

- Proposed an energy support scheme but with a redesign of the existing scheme so it can help more lower-paid workers.
- Childcare: in other parts of the UK, eligible working parents of three and four year olds are entitled to 30 hours of free childcare a week. That does not apply in Northern Ireland - instead all parents of three and four year olds can apply for at least 12.5 hours per week of funded pre-school education and the DUP wants to introduce a free 30-hours scheme to Northern Ireland.

Alliance: child payment support and energy support

- A child payment scheme would take the form of a per child weekly payment for any family with children in receipt of free school meals.
- It would also apply to pre-school age children in low-income households.
- Creation of a home heating support grant voucher scheme.
- This would target low-income households, which the party says will suffer a disproportionate impact from rising energy costs.

SDLP: universal household payment, energy support, free school meals payment scheme

Published a 6 point CoL Plan for the election which called for the following actions:

- NIA to pass emergency legislation to free up £300m of funding to tackle the emergency;
 - NIE should relaunch the free school meal payment scheme from 1st April for the remainder of the year including through the summer;
 - NIE should provide a direct payment of £200 to all households and extend the £100 emergency fuel payment scheme;
 - NIE and Utility Regulator should reduce the cap on energy market profits and ensure savings are passed onto consumers;
 - UK Government should introduce a one-year VAT holiday for domestic energy charges;
 - UK Government should introduce a windfall tax on energy companies.
- 1.

UUP: energy support

- Roll out the UK warm homes discount scheme in NI;
- Establish a fuel poverty task force.

- Design new packages of support with local councils to target those most exposed to the impact of the cost of living crisis.
- The party would also like home heating oil provision to come under the remit of the Utility Regulator; the supply of oil is not subject to any price regulation.

Annex D

Note of the meeting from officials after the meeting on the 20 May 2022. Personal information has been redacted under section 38(1)(a).

From: Cameron DA (Donald) (Constitution and UKR) [redacted]

Sent: 20 May 2022 17:33

To: First Minister [redacted]

Cc: McAllister C (Colin) [redacted] First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery [redacted] Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, [redacted] External Affairs and Culture Permanent Secretary [redacted] DG Strategy and External Affairs Rogers D (David) (Constitution and Cabinet Director) [redacted] Wightman S (Scott) [redacted] Johnson M (Martin) [redacted] Bruce A (Andrew) [redacted] Mackie C (Christopher) [redacted]

Subject: RE: OFFICIAL SENSITIVE: Invitation from Michelle O'Neill MLA

Thanks [redacted]

Note of meeting below. Grateful if you would let me know if FM is content.

Best wishes

Donald

First Minister
Ms Michelle O'Neill MLA

Stephen McGlade, Ms O'Neill's chief of staff

Colin McAllister, Chief of staff
Donald Cameron, Scottish Government

The meeting took place in Bute House, Edinburgh

The First Minister welcomed Ms O'Neill and offered her congratulations on the outcome of the election. The First Minister said that given the close relationship between Scotland and Northern Ireland she had written to the leaders of the other main parties with an offer to meet.

Ms O'Neill updated the First Minister about efforts being made to establish the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive following the election. She highlighted the importance devolved institutions formed as quickly as possible so that urgent measures, including to providing help to those most affected by rising costs, can be delivered when and where it is most needed.

In relation to the operation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, the First Minister highlighted the significant risks from a decision by the UK Government not step back from its threat of unilateral action, which would have severe economic and social impacts across all of the UK and Ireland. Flexibility and pragmatism was required on all sides, and it was clear that there was significant international support for the Good Friday Agreement, demonstrated by the visit of the delegation from the US Congress starting in Brussels today, and due in Belfast, Dublin and London in the week ahead.

The First Minister and Ms O'Neill agreed the importance of more effective inter government relations, and specifically the need for rapid action by the UK Government to mitigate hardships caused by the cost of living crisis. The First Minister updated Ms O'Neill on actions taken by the Scottish Government to help mitigate hardships, including increasing the value of the Scottish Child Payment, council tax rebates, and uprating by 6%, benefits paid under devolved social security powers.

The meeting concluded.

Donald Cameron
Deputy Director, Constitution and UK Relation Division

20 May 2022

Annex E

Please find attached emails concerning the drafting of the news release. Personal information has been redacted under section 38(1)(a).

{redacted]

Unfortunately 1300 is too late – the meeting is due to start by then and the news release will need to be cleared shortly.

Given those circumstances, please can you share this with JP for information, and let him know that relevant senior officials have cleared on his behalf.

Thanks for getting back to me so quickly.

Chris

Chris Mackie
Deputy director, News and Digital

From:

Sent: 20 May 2022 11:46

To: Permanent Secretary <{redacted} Mackie C (Christopher) [redacted] First Minister <[redacted]

Subject: RE: Immediate - News release to accompany Michelle O'Neill meeting tomorrow

Hi Chris

When's your deadline for sending to FM?

Perm Sec is out on a site visit but has a gap around 13:00 where we can run this by him.

Thanks
{redacted)

From: [redacted] **On Behalf Of** Permanent Secretary

Sent: 20 May 2022 11:39

To: Mackie C (Christopher) [redacted] Minister <[redacted] Permanent Secretary <[redacted]

Subject: RE: Immediate - News release to accompany Michelle O'Neill meeting tomorrow

Comms colleagues and Lisa if we can please use this copy list.

Kind regards,
Chris

From: Mackie C (Christopher) <[redacted]>
Sent: 20 May 2022 11:36
To: First Minister <[redacted]> Permanent Secretary [redacted]

Subject: RE: Immediate - News release to accompany Michelle O'Neill meeting tomorrow
Importance: High

PS Perm Sec,

Can I have some urgent guidance on whether Perm Sec will wish to comment on the below news release please? His opportunity to do so before it goes to FM for final clearance is now very short – and we would like to avoid having to present any proposed changes to FM after she has considered and cleared the final text.

Grateful for urgent advice. To note that it has been cleared from a civil service perspective by relevant officials and me.

Thanks

Chris

Chris Mackie
Deputy director, News and Digital

From: [redacted]
Sent: 19 May 2022 19:41
To: First Minister [redacted] Permanent Secretary [redacted]
[redacted] Wightman S (Scott) [redacted] Johnson M (Martin) [redacted] Bruce A (Andrew) [redacted] Mackie C (Christopher) [redacted]
Subject: Immediate - News release to accompany Michelle O'Neill meeting tomorrow
Importance: High

FMPO, Perm Sec PO,

Please see below a draft news release to issue following FM's meeting with Michelle O'Neill MLA tomorrow.

This has been agreed with policy colleagues and SpAds.

Grateful for confirmation FM and the Perm Sec are content for this to issue.

In terms of wider media handling we intend to issue a note to media tomorrow morning around 0830 to alert them to the fact the meeting is taking place.

We will have a media pen in operation outside Bute House which will allow media to gather to capture arrival shots of Ms O'Neill on the steps at Bute.

We intend to arrange pooled establishing shots of the meeting and will share a version of that picture alongside the cleared news release on social media.

Media bids will be considered and facilitated following the conclusion of discussions.

If you need anything else please let me know.

Many thanks,

[redacted]

**First Minister meets Michelle O’Neill MLA
Meeting to discuss shared areas of interest has taken place at Bute House.**

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon welcomed Michelle O’Neill MLA to Bute House today (Friday 20 May).

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss shared areas of interest including the current cost of living crisis, the importance of the Northern Ireland Protocol negotiated with the EU and the prospects for the formation of a new Northern Ireland Executive.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said:

“Today’s meeting was an excellent opportunity to discuss some of the shared challenges Scotland and Northern Ireland face and I thank Michelle for reaching out and enabling us to discuss these extremely important issues in person.”

“It was a particularly timely conversation which provided an update on the ongoing developments around establishing the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive following elections earlier this month.

“We also discussed the Northern Ireland protocol – most notably the extremely concerning announcement by the UK Government that they intend to legislate to enable unilateral action to dis-apply parts of the protocol – and the incredibly damaging effects this would have in communities right across the UK. In a cost of living crisis and teetering on the edge of recession, pitching us into a trade dispute with the EU could be what tips us over.

“Intergovernmental relations are essential when it comes to tackling shared challenges and it is clear that much more needs to be done by the UK Government to ensure a rapid and effective response to the devastating cost of living crisis facing households across these islands. No one should ever have to make a choice between heating and eating.

“Today’s meeting was a further example of the close relationship between Scotland and Northern Ireland. In that spirit, I have written today to the leaders of the DUP and Alliance parties with an offer to meet to discuss these important matters.”

Background

The meeting was arranged at the request of Michelle O’Neill.

The First Minister today wrote to the other main political parties in Northern Ireland to make them aware of the meeting and offer a similar engagement, should they wish it.

Annex F

The following information is an extract from an internal weekly briefing paper for the permanent secretary prepared by civil servants. It is provided as an extract because the document contains other information outside of the scope of your request.

On Constitution:

FM met with Michelle O'Neill on Friday 20th May at Bute House to discuss the cost of living crisis and a number of other issues. The meeting was at the request of Ms O'Neill, and FM has extended the offer of a meeting to other leaders in the NI Assembly.