

# **THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY -** **A FORCE FOR CHANGE**

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# **THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY -** **A FORCE FOR CHANGE**

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

1.1 In the course of its Review of the Beef Industry crisis in Northern Ireland, a report which was adopted by the Forum on 1 November 1996, Standing Committee D (Agriculture and Fisheries Issues) expressed concern about the dramatic effect of agri-health scares on all sectors of the agricultural industry and recommended an examination of the administration of Agriculture in Northern Ireland and of the potential benefits of instituting a Ministry of Food. The Committee undertook to progress this recommendation further.

1.2 In March 1997 the Prime Minister, while leader of the Opposition, invited Professor Philip James of the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen to make recommendations on the structure and functions of a Food Standards Agency. Professor James formally presented his report to the Prime Minister on 8 May 1997 - a report which was subsequently published for consultation. The Prime Minister gave firm support to the proposals contained in the report. He said

"The public has the right to expect the very highest standards of food safety. Confidence in the safety of the food we eat has been severely undermined in recent years and I am determined to rebuild that trust.

I thank Professor James for his detailed and considered report. It provides an excellent foundation upon which the Government can build. It confirms my belief that we will benefit from a powerful Food Standards Agency. We need to create a structure that is open and transparent, and which acts - and is seen to act - in the interests of consumers."

- 1.3 A summary of the "James Report" and of the public response to the recommendations contained in the report is at Annex C.
- 1.4 Standing Committee D (Agriculture and Fisheries Issues) and Standing Committee C (Health Issues) provided responses to the "James Report" in June 1997 - see Annex D. Both Committees supported the creation of a Food Standards Agency - but stressed the need for a separate Northern Ireland Agency.
- 1.5 In its response to the "James Report" the Agriculture and Fisheries Committee further indicated
  - that agriculture interests should be represented in the proposed Agency structures;
  - that the proposed Agency should be given responsibility for controlling imported products in addition to those which are home grown;

- that equal authority should be placed on Ministers appointed to the proposed Ministerial Council;
- that provision should be made for an appeal procedure to afford protection to those who are affected by decisions of the proposed Agency;
- that representation on the Agency Board should include not only local food interests, but also local elected representatives.

1.6 On 14 January 1998, Dr W B Smith, Head of the Health and Social Policy Unit of the Department of Health and Social Services wrote enclosing a copy of the White Paper 'The Food Standards Agency - A Force for Change', seeking views on the proposals contained therein. Comments were required by 16 March 1998 at the latest. A copy of the Introduction and Summary of the White Paper is attached at Annex E.

1.7 Standing Committee D (Agriculture and Fisheries Issues) has been gathering evidence on this topic for some time. Minutes of Evidence taken by the Committee are attached at Annex F, and a response prepared by Standing Committee C (Health Issues) is also attached at Annex H. The Committee wishes to express its gratitude to all who contributed to the production of this response.

2.

## **THE PROPOSALS**

### 2.1 The Agency's Guiding Principles

2.1.1 The Committee notes that the Government's aim in setting up the Agency is to strengthen food safety and standards, policies and procedures to rebuild the public's trust in the machinery for handling food issues. The Committee endorses the aim of protecting public health.

2.1.2 The Government has set out nine Guiding Principles within which the Agency will operate, and has indicated that these Guiding Principles will be contained in the legislation establishing the Agency and in the Agency's Management Statement. The Committee notes and endorses the Guiding Principles which are attached at Annex E - however it is the view of the Committee that an important requirement has been omitted.

2.1.3 In its earlier response to the James Report, the Committee indicated that provision should be made for an appeal procedure to afford protection to those who are affected by decisions made by the proposed Agency. Unfortunately it would appear that the Committee's view on this point has been dismissed by those responsible for the drafting of the White Paper.

2.1.4 The Committee once again stresses its firmly held view that if the agriculture industry is to have confidence in the proposed Agency and

its activities, it is essential to build into the Guiding Principles, an appeal procedure which will protect those affected by the decisions made by the proposed Agency. This point is also addressed in Section 3.

## 2.2 What the Agency should do

2.2.1 It is proposed that the Agency should take over responsibility from the Agriculture and Health Departments for advising Ministers on the UK policy framework in the areas of food safety and food standards including important aspects of nutrition. This would also include advising on the need for and content of legislation and implementation of policy. In addition, the Agency would also have responsibility for the following:

- public information;
- education on food matters;
- representing UK at EU and other international organisations;
- commissioning research and surveillance;
- monitoring standards for food law enforcement.

2.2.2 The Committee notes that in areas such as nutrition policy and food safety issues which relate to farming practices, the Health, Agriculture and Environment Departments will retain important policy and statutory responsibilities. The Committee endorses this approach and agrees with the identified need to define the relationship between the Agency and these Departments and to put in place mechanisms for co-ordination and collaboration which will allow the Agency effectively to discharge its responsibility to protect the public interest.

2.2.3 The Committee also welcomes the indication in the White Paper that the proposal to include food standards within the Agency's remit will

therefore require it to work closely with the food industry to ensure that the public interest is properly protected in this important area.

2.2.4 A Table showing the proposed functions of the Agency is attached at Annex E.

2.2.5 With regard to food law enforcement, the Committee notes the Government view that the Agency needs to be in a position to exercise influence over individual local authority enforcement activities and that the Agency should have a proactive role in encouraging consistency across the United Kingdom. The Committee endorses the need for the Government to enter into detailed discussion with local authority representative organisations and other interested parties on how the Agency and local authorities can work together to improve consistency. The Committee is also content that the Food Safety (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 should be examined to ensure that the necessary powers are adequate to deal with the new arrangements.

## 2.3 The Agency's Role in Food Safety

2.3.1 With regard to food safety on the farm, the White Paper states that it is essential that the Agency promotes food safety throughout the whole of the food chain - from plough to plate. However, the White Paper also indicates that to give the Agency operational responsibility for all aspects of farming practices would risk diverting it from its essential aim of protecting public health. The Government's proposals are therefore designed to ensure that the Agency can intervene if it needs to where farming practices impact on the safety of food.



- 2.3.2 The Committee welcomes and endorses this approach.
- 2.3.3 With regard to the surveillance and control of pathogens in live animals, the Committee welcomes the proposal to create a joint Agency/Agriculture Department's Committee to co-ordinate the surveillance programme. The Committee is also pleased to note that the powers available to Agricultural Ministers under the Animal Health Act will normally be the most effective vehicle for introducing statutory measures relating to live animals on the farm and will be the only vehicle for dealing with zoonotic diseases<sup>1</sup> which are transmitted through non-food routes.
- 2.3.4 The Committee welcomes the stress being placed by the Government on animal feedingstuffs, and the recognition that this is an area where public health and animal husbandry/health interests both have a place. The Committee is therefore content with the proposals for division of responsibility between the Agency and the Agriculture Departments - viz the Agency will take the lead on those issues where there are close links with arrangements for human food while Agriculture Departments will retain operational responsibility for controls on the use of mammalian protein in feedingstuffs.
- 2.3.5 The Committee particularly welcomes the proposal to create an independent advisory Committee on animal feedingstuffs (first proposed by Professor Lamming in 1992) and recognises the urgent need for such a Committee, particularly because of public concerns regarding the use of genetically modified feed ingredients.

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<sup>1</sup> diseases of animals which can be transmitted to man

- 2.3.6 The Committee is also content with the mechanisms and safeguards proposed to provide the Agency with effective input to the public safety aspects of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) (both Executive Agencies of MAFF). The Committee welcomes the Government's view that both PSD and VMD should continue as Executive Agencies of MAFF, should retain lead responsibility for authorisation of pesticides and the licensing of veterinary medicines, and should continue to develop policy on the use of pesticides and veterinary medicines.
- 2.3.7 The Committee is content with the proposals relating to Food Hygiene.
- 2.3.8 The Committee notes from the White Paper that responsibility for meat and dairy hygiene in Northern Ireland will be exercised on behalf of the proposed Agency by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland (DANI). The White Paper further explains that an agreement will be drawn up which sets out the detail of this arrangement. The Committee welcomes the clarification on this point provided by the DANI representative in the course of the recent evidence session. The Committee welcomes these arrangements and is confident that DANI will provide a first class service to the Agency.
- 2.3.9 The Committee endorses the Government's view that with regard to outbreaks of food borne illness, local investigations should continue to be managed at local level. The Committee also notes that in Northern Ireland, the Public Health Laboratory at Belfast City Hospital provides public health microbiological services covering food, water and environmental aspects. However the Committee also notes that a

review will be conducted to ensure that the necessary laboratory services are available in Northern Ireland for food safety/standards purposes. The Committee addresses this issue in Section 3.

2.3.10 The Committee is content with the proposals relating to novel foods and processes, food additives, chemical contaminants in food, radiological safety, food intolerance, food emergencies and bottled water.

2.3.11 The Committee is pleased to note that the Government does not consider it appropriate to give the Agency responsibility for subjects such as animal welfare or environmental policy where the primary focus of activity relates to issues other than food safety and standards.

## 2.4 The Agency's role in Food Standards and Nutrition

2.4.1 The proposal that the Agency should become responsible for food standards (which encompasses compositional standards, labelling requirements and food authenticity) extends its remit to include matters concerned with food quality, consumer protection and choice.

2.4.2 With regard to labelling, the Agency will become responsible for policy and legislation on the labelling of food at retail and catering level, including ingredient listing, nutritional labelling etc.

2.4.3 The Committee notes and endorses the proposals in this area, in particular those referring to the labelling of food, about which it has strong views which are outlined in Section 3.

2.4.4 The Committee notes the differing opinions which were received in relation to the proposals in the James Report relating to nutrition and endorses the Government's intention to assign responsibilities in this area between the Agency and Health Departments as follows:

- the Agency will become responsible for functions relating to public needs about food;
- public health functions will remain with the Department of Health;
- the interface between the two will become a shared responsibility.

## 2.5 The Structure of the Agency and its Accountability

2.5.1 The proposed structure of the Agency is as follows:

### AGENCY COMMISSION

- Headquarters to be located in London.
- Chairman plus 12 Members appointed by UK Health Ministers after consultation with Agriculture Ministers.
- Commissioners expected to take a special interest in particular areas of the Agency's responsibilities.

- Individual Commissioners to have special responsibility for Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland interests.
- Agency to be established as a single legal entity and Commission to be endowed with all of the Agency's policy and executive powers.

### ADVISORY COMMITTEES

- New advisory committees are proposed to provide advice on the implications of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2.5.2 It is proposed that the Agency should report to Health Minister, and that its Annual Report should be laid before Parliament, and in the case of Northern Ireland, before any devolved Assembly, which would have the powers to hold the Agency to account.

2.5.3 The Committee notes the structures for the Agency which are proposed. This point is further discussed in Section 3.

## 2.6 The Agency in Northern Ireland

2.6.1 The White Paper acknowledges that the "James Report" identified the need for the Agency's structure to reflect the constitutional arrangements in the different parts of the United Kingdom and that it was recommended that separate commissions should be set up in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In respect of the consultation process, the White Paper indicates that broadly speaking, respondents representing interests in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland supported the concept of separate structures.

2.6.2 The Committee makes further comment on this point in Section 3.

## 2.7 Financing the Agency

2.7.1 The Committee notes that the Department of Health is to be lead Sponsor Department and therefore that the Health Secretary should be responsible through normal parliamentary supply procedures for providing grant-in-aid to the Agency. It is also noted that resources associated with existing activities currently performed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be transferred to the Department of Health and that the Agency will also be financed by other means, eg charges to the food industry.

2.7.2 The White Paper indicates that the precise mechanisms for funding the Agency in Northern Ireland are still under consideration, and that the Government recognises that the Agency's work to raise standards may lead to a need for greater expenditure at local authority level. The Committee comments on this point in Section 3.

2.7.3 The Committee also notes that the Government believes the food industry should bear the bulk of costs for improving food safety and standards and considers the most effective mechanism for achieving this is to introduce a comprehensive system of registration or licensing with fees. This point is further addressed in Section 3.

## 2.8 The Way Ahead

2.8.1 The Committee notes that it is proposed to launch the Agency towards the end of 1999, and that in the meantime the Government will continue to take steps to strengthen the handling of food issues and to deliver improvements in the information given to the public, the advice that Ministers receive and the decisions that are taken.

### 3. **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 The Committee, in its letter dated 23 June 1997 to Mr Tony Worthington MP, (the Northern Ireland Health Minister) conveyed its initial views on the content of the James Report on the function and structure of a new Food Standards Agency. The Committee, while generally satisfied with the need for the proposed Agency, raised a number of points for the Government's consideration. These points, and others which arise from the proposals contained in the White Paper are addressed in the following paragraphs.

#### 3.2 **IMPORTED PRODUCTS**

The Committee takes the view that if the proposed Agency is to be effective in protecting the food which is eaten in the United Kingdom, it must be responsible not only for the safety of food produced within the United Kingdom, but also for food which is imported into the United Kingdom. The Committee is particularly concerned that while agricultural producers and processors in the United Kingdom deliver the high standard of food safety and hygiene which is required by consumers, the standard of food from other countries and areas is less strictly controlled. Such a situation places UK producers at a disadvantage, because they are unable to match the prices of cheap imported produce. The Committee therefore wishes to be assured that the standards which apply to farmers in the United Kingdom will be applied to all imported food.



- 3.3 The Committee recognises that it may be difficult under EU and international law to prohibit the import of sub-standard produce into the UK, and in these circumstances **the Committee recommends that the Food Standards Agency should introduce a labelling system which clearly draws the consumer's attention to the fact that the standard of imported the produce they are buying may be inferior or different to that produced in the United Kingdom. The Committee further recommends that the Food Standards Agency should require all UK produced food which meets the required Food Safety and Hygiene standards to be clearly labelled to indicate its status - perhaps by the clear display of the Union Flag or of a generic icon on the packaging.**

#### **APPEAL PROCEDURE**

- 3.4 While the Committee accepts that the Agency will be responsible for public health and will report to Health Ministers, it is concerned to ensure that the agriculture industry should be given confidence that the process of farming and agricultural production methods will not be put at risk. The Committee's concerns are heightened when it notes that the "James Report" proposal for an overarching Ministerial Council (which would inter alia include the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) has been rejected, and also that the Government is proposing that the Agency Commission should consist "of a body of individuals who have a proven track record in relevant fields who together provide a reasonable balance of relevant skills and experience and a majority of

whom come from a wider public interest background without any specific affiliation".

- 3.5 The Committee accepts the need for a strong, independent Agency which will be given the necessary powers to protect public health 'from the plough to the plate'. However it is the Committee's view that in creating the proposed Agency there is a clear need for Government to balance the Health and Agriculture influences. As pointed out by the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association in its evidence to the Committee

"there is an overkill of consumer influence in all this ..... it has to be realised that farms are not clinically clean ..... Farmers have mud on their boots ..... Consumer influence needs to be related to practical agriculture, practical farming and what happens on the ground."

- 3.6 The Committee recognises that the Guiding Principles of the proposed Agency indicate that decision making processes will be open, transparent and consultative, and that before taking action, the Agency will consult widely, including representatives of those who will be affected, unless the need for urgent action to protect public health makes this impossible. **However the Committee, for the second time, recommends that there is a need to amend the Guiding Principles to include an appeal procedure which will afford protection to those affected by decisions of the Agency.**

**3.7 The Committee also recommends that Government should re-draw the constitution of the Agency Commission to make it clear that representatives of the Agriculture industry will be eligible and welcome to serve on the Agency Commission and on the new Territorial Advisory Commissions.**

## **STRUCTURE**

- 3.8 The Committee notes that responses to the consultation document indicated that, broadly speaking, the concept of separate structures was supported in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Indeed, in its initial response, the Committee supported this view. Since making its initial response, the Committee has had the benefit of taking evidence from a number of sources. A number of those who gave evidence supported the creation of a separate Northern Ireland Agency - viz the Association of Livestock Auctioneers, The Livestock and Meat Commission, The Ulster Farmers' Union, The Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association, The Northern Ireland Meat Exporters' Association and The Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association.
- 3.9 The Committee is also aware that the Health Committee of the Forum considered this point and concluded that an independent Northern Ireland Food Standards Agency should be established. This conclusion was forwarded by the Forum Health Committee to the Minister for Health in Northern Ireland in response to the consultation document.
- 3.10 The White Paper proposes the creation of a UK body with full participation by Ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (and their successors from devolved Parliaments or Assemblies) in its accountability mechanisms and with appropriate arrangements to reflect the particular needs and interests of these countries. The Committee has given much consideration to these proposals. The Committee's initial approach, as indicated in its response to the "James Report" was

that a separate, independent Agency was required in Northern Ireland for the following reasons:

- the much greater emphasis on agriculture in Northern Ireland as part of the overall economy;
- Northern Ireland is the only region of the United Kingdom to share a land frontier with another country;
- Northern Ireland's unique position within the United Kingdom, eg separate statute book.

However the Committee listened carefully to the argument advanced by Dr Smith of the Department of Health and Social Services in favour of the White Paper Structure proposals (see Minutes of Evidence at Annex F) and is satisfied that these proposals provide

"a balance between the requirements of consistency and economy on the one hand and flexibility and responsiveness to local conditions on the other, by providing a single United Kingdom Agency and policy framework"

Dr Smith also explained that under the White Paper proposals, Northern Ireland will have its own executive staff, its own advisory committee and its own separate identity, and will operate under devolved food safety legislation and be accountable to Northern Ireland Ministers (currently Northern Ireland Office Ministers, but under

devolved arrangements to Ministers of a Northern Ireland Assembly or Parliament).

- 3.11 The Committee is therefore content to accept the Structures proposed in the White Paper, **but in respect of Northern Ireland representation on the Agency Commission in London the Committee recommends that the allocation should be increased to two places, one of which should be filled by a representative of the agriculture industry.**

## **LOCAL AUTHORITY RESOURCES**

- 3.12 The White Paper proposes that the Government, local authority representative organisations and other interested parties should enter into detailed discussions on how the Agency and local authorities should work together to improve consistency. The Committee is aware that significant resources are committed to food safety and standards work through local government funding and notes that the White Paper recognises that the Agency's work to raise food standards may lead to a need for greater expenditure at local authority level. **The Committee therefore recommends that if the workload of local authorities increases as a result of the creation of the Food Standards Agency, Government should immediately provide the additional resources required either from public funds or from the proposed new funding mechanisms.**

## **PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY**

- 3.13 The Committee welcomes the assurances given by Dr Smith that as a result of a recent review of the control of communicable diseases, the Department of Health and Social Services is examining the need to expand and develop laboratory services including the development of a public health laboratory in Northern Ireland which would significantly strengthen that provided at the Belfast City Hospital. **The Committee strongly recommends that the Department should complete this examination without delay to ensure that when the proposed Agency is created, laboratory services of the required standard are in place. The Committee also recommends that the necessary financial resources are put in place without delay to fund the developments needed.**

## **MEETING THE COSTS**

- 3.14 The Committee has noted that the White Paper proposals indicate that

"Against the background of a need for increased spending on the regulatory and enforcement activities carried out at national and local level, the Government believes that the food industry should bear the bulk of the costs of improving food safety and standards." (paragraph 8.15)

The White Paper goes on to state that the most appropriate mechanism for shifting the burden of cost away from the taxpayer towards the industry would be to introduce a comprehensive system of registration, or licensing with fees.

3.15 The White Paper also indicates that the Government intends to seek the assistance of local authority representatives as well as representatives of the food industry (including small businesses) and other interested parties in developing its proposals for a scheme.



- 3.16 While this consultation exercise will elicit opinions on the proposed mechanisms for funding the Agency, the Committee wishes to record its support for a system of registration and licensing. However, as **the beneficiaries of a successful food safety policy are the consumers, the nation as a whole, the Committee therefore recommends that the Government should meet the largest proportion of the cost of the provision of public health.**

#### **REPRESENTATION ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND ADVISORY COMMISSION**

- 3.17 The Committee has noted that membership of the Northern Ireland Advisory Commission will reflect a range of interests on food safety issues. **The Committee recommends that in appointing the members of the Northern Ireland Advisory Commission, the Secretary of State should ensure that the agriculture industry is represented, and that local elected representatives are included.**

4.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1      **The Committee recommends that the Food Standards Agency should introduce a labelling system which clearly draws the consumers attention to the fact that the standard of imported produce they are buying may be inferior or different to that produced in the United Kingdom. (Para 3.3)**
- 4.2      **The Committee further recommends that the Food Standards Agency should require all UK produced food which meets the required Food Safety and Hygiene standards to be clearly labelled to indicate its status - perhaps by the clear display of the Union Flag or of a generic icon on the packaging. (Para 3.3)**
- 4.3      **The Committee recommends that there is a need to amend the Guiding Principles to include an appeal procedure which will afford protection to those affected by decisions of the Agency. (Para 3.6)**
- 4.4      **The Committee that the Government should re-draw the constitution of the Agency Commission to make it clear that representatives of the Agriculture industry will be eligible and welcome to serve on the Agency Commission and on the territorial Advisory Commissions. (Para 3.7)**
- 4.5      **In respect of Northern Ireland representation on the Agency Commission in London, the Committee recommends that the**

**allocation should be increased to two places, one of which should be filled by a representative of the agriculture industry. (Para 3.11)**

**4.6 The Committee recommends that if the workload of local authorities increases as a result of the creation of the Food Standards Agency, Government should immediately provide the additional resources required either from public funds or from the proposed new funding mechanisms. (Para 3.12)**

**4.7 The Committee strongly recommends that the Department of Health and Social Services should complete its examination of the need to expand and develop laboratory services in Northern Ireland without delay, to ensure that when the proposed Agency is created, laboratory services of the required standard are in place. The Committee also recommends that the necessary financial resources are put in place without delay to fund the developments needed. (Para 3.13)**

**4.8 As the beneficiaries of a successful food safety policy are the consumers - the nation as a whole - the Committee recommends that the Government should meet the largest proportion of the cost of the provision of public health. (Para 3.16)**

**MEMBERSHIP OF**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE D**  
**(AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES ISSUES)**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**SUMMARY OF THE "JAMES REPORT"**  
**AND OF THE PUBLIC RESPONSE**

**THE "JAMES REPORT"**

**RESPONSES ISSUED BY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE C**

**(HEALTH ISSUES)**

~ and ~

**STANDING COMMITTEE D**

**(AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES ISSUES)**

## **WHITE PAPER**

# **"THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY - A FORCE FOR CHANGE"**

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- 1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**
- 2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**
- 3. FUNCTIONS OF THE PROPOSED  
AGENCY**



## **MINUTES OF EVIDENCE**

|                   |                                                     |           |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 11 September 1997 | - Safeway                                           | - Extract |
| 25 September 1997 | - NI Food and Drink Association                     | - Extract |
| 14 October 1997   | - Sainsbury                                         | - Extract |
| 6 November 1997   | - NI Meat Exporters' Association                    | - Extract |
| 13 November 1997  | - NI Agricultural Producers' Association            | - Extract |
| 27 November 1997  | - Ulster Farmers' Union                             | - Extract |
|                   | - Tesco                                             | - Extract |
|                   | - NI Grain Trade Association                        | - Extract |
| 2 December 1997   | - Association of Livestock Auctioneers              | - Extract |
| 3 December 1997   | - Livestock and Meat Commission                     | - Extract |
| 4 December 1997   | - Marks & Spencer                                   | - Extract |
| 26 February 1997  | - Department of Agriculture for<br>Northern Ireland |           |
|                   | - Department of Health and Social<br>Services       |           |

NB: In the time available to the Committee, it has not been possible in certain cases to include properly corrected transcripts of the evidence sessions.

**STANDING COMMITTEE C**  
**(HEALTH ISSUES)**

**RESPONSE TO WHITE PAPER**