

**FROM: JENNY PYPER**

**Our ref: SUB113/2020**

**DATE: 22 DECEMBER 2020**

**TO: FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

## **EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE CONDUCT OF EXECUTIVE BUSINESS**

1. In recent conversations we have discussed your priorities for the period that I expect to be in post, and I offered my initial views on the role of Head of the Civil Service (HOCS) particularly in relation to the leadership of the NICS.
2. I am very conscious that the post of HOCS has another, equally important, role as Secretary to the Executive. I would welcome an opportunity to offer some advice on the planning and handling of Executive business generally, perhaps early in the New Year. In the meantime, however, I would be failing in my duties as HOCS and Secretary to the Executive if I were not to express my profound disappointment over the events of the past few days and last night in particular.
3. I have two significant concerns; relating to the effect on our ministerial colleagues, and the effect on our capacity as civil servants to support the Executive efficiently and effectively. I must say to you candidly that the arrangements for last night's meeting placed wholly unreasonable demands on staff. Having learned, through social media, of the desire to hold a meeting, I then had to call in staff in Executive Secretariat, EIS and Private Offices across the NICS, who, having already worked throughout Sunday and well into the late evening/early hours of Monday morning, had also worked long into yesterday evening in preparation for today's Executive meeting. I trust that you will agree that staff fully recognise the unique circumstances in which we find ourselves, and have consistently gone the extra mile. However, there are clear and worrying signs of stress that I cannot ignore. The resilience of our colleagues is a finite resource that we should nurture carefully, and protect from unnecessary risk. We all have a duty of care in that regard.
4. Secondly, the ad hoc arrangements for the meeting made it well-nigh impossible for the NICS to properly support the work of the Executive. Colleagues need time to brief Ministers and prepare to support them. The lack of such preparation was evident during the meeting, when a number of requests for information simply could not be answered, because there had been no engagement with officials. And I do recognise that Ministers are also tired – it has been a long haul for everyone.

5. A further difficulty arises for EIS colleagues (often the last to finish) who face the challenge of presenting the Executive's message at the end of a long and exhausting day. When we add unnecessarily to that challenge, we risk blunting that message, and leaving the field open to the vicissitudes of social media commentary.
6. I would welcome an opportunity to discuss my concerns with you. I think it is essential that we urgently find a better way of doing business; one that avoids treating staff unreasonably, and enables us to provide the level of service that the Executive requires.

**Personal Data**

**JENNY PYPER  
INTERIM HOCS AND SECRETARY TO THE EXECUTIVE**