

CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES

This private symposium, involving political advisors and senior officials, will explore the challenges facing the Northern Ireland Executive in achieving real spending cuts of the order of 10–15 per cent over the next three years. The challenges ahead are undoubtedly major ones. Indeed it would be hard to overstate the pain of cuts of this order.

The symposium will look to developing a shared understanding of what lies ahead—of the difficult, essentially political choices that may have to be made, and of the extent to which in giving them practical effect a redrawing of services will be necessary. Effectively it will be about retrenching: gauging and mapping priorities, shrinking the boundaries of government intervention and support across the wide range of functions legislated for by the Assembly.

10.45 – 11.15 **Coffee**

Time for people to gather and to meet and greet over coffee

11.15 – 11.30 **Welcome and introduction | John Hunter**

What we are here to discuss and why now...The state of the public finances...Starting point is May 2010 and the difficult fiscal decisions that any newly elected government at Westminster will face as a direct result of the financial crisis and the ensuing recession...How Northern Ireland Block funding is likely to be affected—Northern Ireland's Barnett share of the pain. Key Assumptions: Growth in public expenditure has peaked and will be reversed, to the extent that political priorities will have to be recast; lesser priorities will not be funded so that alternative means of funding will have to be considered; the efficiency of all services will come under close scrutiny, and radically different ways of providing some services will have to be contemplated. The extent to which all of this will prove the case and what is to be done about it is of course what we will explore during the symposium.

11.30 – 12.00 **Where the money goes | Mike Brennan**

Using the current year, 2010–11, as the base year an analysis of Northern Ireland public expenditure plans following the £375M round of cuts agreed in the New Year:

- Statutory spend
- Demand-led spend
- Discretionary spend
- The Executive's priorities as reflected in the New Year round of cuts

Discussion: Getting to grips with the facts

- 12.00 – 12.30 **What if the Northern Ireland Block was to be cut | Mike Brennan**
- (1) ...by 3.5% in each of the three years to 2013–14?
 - (2) ...by 5.25% in each year?
- Discussion:** What assumptions are being made and how realistic are they?
- 12.30 – 1.30 **Lunch**
- 1.30 – 2.30 **Facilitated Group Discussions**
- (1) Assuming both the existing set of policies and brigading of functions, what is the scope for efficiency savings including closer budgetary co-operation between departments and delivery bodies? – Expert facilitator: **David Watkins CB**
 - (2) What is the scope for structural reform, for more sharing of services and facilities, and for greater technological innovation? – Expert facilitator: **Paul Wickens**
 - (3) What additional or alternative sources of income might be considered and how else might services be delivered? – Expert facilitator: **David Gavaghan**
- 2.30 – 3.00 **Plenary Discussion | John Hunter**
- Reporting back of key points emerging from Group Discussions plus an opportunity for general comment
- 3.00 – 3.15 **Summing Up | John Hunter**
- A summarising of the key points arising from the morning's discussions plus some thoughts on what next
- 3.15 **Close...**
- with tea and coffee available