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ANNEX I

BELFAST AREAS OF NEED WORKING GROUP
CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTIONS - SPEAKING NOTE

1. I would like to welcome everyone to the first meeting of the Belfast Areas of Need Working Group. It has taken some months to arrive at this point since my announcement last November about the Belfast Co-ordinating Committee and the 2 Working Groups for Housing and for the Belfast Areas of Need and we would have liked to proceed more quickly but as you may know the announcement about the Co-ordinating Committee gave rise to discussion with the City Council and the new Belfast machinery was finally launched on 27 February with the first meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee. Since then the Housing Group has met twice and we have now been successful, at the third attempt in finding a date for the BAN Group which suited all the members.
2. During the apparent inactivity of the inter-regnum some of you may have justifiably thought that the BAN concept had been dropped by Government and had perhaps become a casualty of our public expenditure policies. Well, this is not so. Our concern with the problems of the whole Belfast Urban Area is very real and is expressed in the new Committees which I have set up. Within this framework we shall continue to work at the difficult and long-term task of alleviating deprivation in the Areas of Need.
3. We may well be obliged to tackle this job slightly differently in the future and how we should decide to proceed is very much the substance of today's meeting. We are working within a tighter public expenditure situation but nevertheless we must try to ensure that the neediest areas are protected as far as possible and that the allocation of scarce resources will be channelled

in directions in which they can achieve the greatest impact.

4. The work of the Belfast Areas of Need Group will also be taking place within a different Department and within different organisational arrangements. Our thoughts on these are set out in some detail in the discussion papers for today's meeting and I shall look forward with interest to the views of the Group about our suggestions.
5. I am not entirely unfamiliar with the problem of the Belfast Areas of Need. Housing is one of my major responsibilities and one of the major problems in BAN. Soon after my arrival in Northern Ireland Belfast Household Survey came to my attention. It contains many stark facts about the socio-economic conditions of households in each of the 51 Wards of the Belfast City Council area. A few weeks later I was presented with another report which asked me to reach decisions about the demolition of a number of blocks of flats throughout the City. I went out to see for myself the conditions associated with this form of housing much of which is situated in BAN areas. In numerous other visits since, and as part of the general business of the Department in roads, water and sewerage, our general environmental work as well as in housing I feel I have become very well acquainted with the special problems of BAN and am convinced of the special attention which must be paid to conditions there through the work of all our Committees but in particular through the work of this BAN Group.
6. In the months ahead therefore I hope that we shall be able to continue the long-term task of alleviating social deprivation through inter-departmental and inter-agency approach. Today we are making a beginning to our renewed efforts by taking the opportunity to familiarise all members of the Group with the new administrative structures for Belfast; by taking stock of where we stand in BAN and by trying to agree the new procedures through which we shall all work together in the future to improve conditions throughout the Areas of Need.
7. I would now like to turn to today's agenda.