



NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

16 April 1986

The Minister responsible for local government, Mr Richard Needham MP, announced today that the Department of the Environment has now taken the necessary action to ensure the continued provision of essential services to the citizens of Belfast.

Mr Needham said: "I have made it clear repeatedly in recent months that Government will act as necessary to prevent citizens and ratepayers being deprived of those services and facilities to which they are entitled, and to safeguard the jobs of council employees put at risk through the action of councillors.

"In Belfast a range of essential services have been put under immediate threat because of the failure of Belfast City Council to authorise its officers to award contracts for the supply of goods, materials and services for 1986/87 which would result in the imminent closure of a number of facilities and the laying off of a substantial number of council employees.

"It was quite clear that a number of services were in danger of collapsing unless a responsible decision was quickly made by Government in the public interest. The action which has been taken today by the specific and selective use of the emergency provisions recently approved by Parliament will secure the delivery of services to which the citizens of Belfast are entitled. Under these powers the Department authorised a former local government auditor to procure the exercise of certain specific functions and this has now been done. The nature of the action taken means that Belfast City Council continues to have responsibility

for all its range of functions, but council officials have now been given the necessary legal authority to award contracts for goods, supplies and services, and to complete certain necessary land transactions, and certain regulatory and licensing functions.

"The opportunity has also been taken to protect those in our society who are most vulnerable, by authorising the release of funds to community groups so that they can resume normal activities."

Note to editors:

Under the terms of the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, if in the opinion of the Department a council is unable or unwilling to perform all or any of its functions duly and effectually, then the Department may take action to secure the discharge of all or any of the functions in question. The Department has therefore made a Statutory Rule which came into effect on 15 April under which a person has been authorised to secure the discharge of a selective limited category of duties. The duties relate to:-

- (a) the award of contracts for goods, supplies and services;
- (b) grants to community groups;
- (c) certain land transactions; and
- (d) certain regulatory and licensing functions.

The Department appointed a former local government auditor to secure the discharge of these functions and the person appointed has authorised the officials of the City Council to award the contracts, pay the grants and complete the other functions.

This intervention has been made by Government on a limited basis to the degree necessary to protect the services and jobs at risk. Now that the authorisation has been given the council services can continue and the immediate threats have been lifted. Having given the legal authority to the council officials to take the necessary action, the person appointed has no continuing

responsibilities and the Order appointing him ceases to have effect on 17 April. The future responsibilities for all council functions still remains with the elected councillors. The Government has therefore taken such action as it thought necessary to overcome the council's default by the specific and selective use of the emergency provisions recently approved by Parliament.