

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND THE ADJOURNMENT POLICY

Note of a meeting held in Stormont Castle on Thursday 16 April 1987

Present:     Mr N Hamilton, Cent Sec     Mr Q Oliver, NICVA  
              Mr T Johnston, DENI     Ms B Hinds, NICVA  
              Ms R Brown, DOE        Ms V Anderson, North Belfast Resource  
              Ms R Flynn, DHSS        Centre  
              Mr D Carson             Mr H Casey, Shankill Community  
  Centre, Craigavon

1. The purpose of the meeting was to provide voluntary sector representatives with the opportunity to outline their concern about the impact on voluntary services in Northern Ireland of the adjournment policy adopted by Unionist-controlled local Councils, following the representations in their letter of 9 February to the Secretary of State.
  
2. Mr Oliver and his colleagues emphasised the points made in their letter of 9 February that the temporary measures implemented by the Government, while welcome, had themselves proved inadequate to deal with the totality of the problems which existed in four areas ie:
  - (a) difficulty in Belfast because miscellaneous grants were not paid during the financial year 1985/86 with the result that debts were being carried by many small groups;
  - (b) difficulties which existed in other Council areas outside Belfast;
  - (c) problems arising because new initiatives could not be started and grants could not be paid to new groups; and
  - (d) inability to formalise plans for future development.

Mr Oliver was concerned that the financial and other difficulties had led to apathy and disillusionment amongst certain voluntary group workers, with a danger that in some areas voluntary services may cease to operate. This was happening at a time when the Government was looking to the voluntary sector to assume a greater burden for community services.

3. The **Departmental Officers** present explained that:-

- (a) DENI grants for voluntary and community groups were being paid to all District Councils, except Craigavon and that during the financial year 1986/87 only approximately £6,000 grants were not claimed out of a total provision of £450,000;
- (b) the Government's policy of intervention under local government emergency powers only applied where essential Council services or jobs were under threat and as a measure of last resort. On those occasions where such intervention was necessary however the person appointed had also taken opportunity to approve grants due to voluntary and community bodies;
- (c) the Departments and Ministers concerned were very sympathetic to the problems facing the voluntary sector;
- (d) the funding of such groups however was a local government function and so it was for District Councillors to assume full responsibility for their actions.

4. During subsequent discussion, it was agreed that the areas of immediate concern to the voluntary bodies were:-

- (a) the specific problems in Craigavon; and

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- (b) the inability of the voluntary sector to take new initiatives and the inability of new groups to receive priming grants.
5. The merits and difficulties in arranging alternative or supplementary funding for the voluntary sector organisations were considered at length in light of current responsibilities and policies. There was discussion of the four alternatives proposed in Mr Oliver's letter of 9 February but the difficulties in each option were also recognised.
6. In conclusion, it was agreed that:-
- (a) within the terms of current policy about Government intervention in Council areas, where such action was necessary consideration would continue to be given to the interests of the voluntary sector;
  - (b) NICVA would consider the information and explanations given during the meeting and would also consider whether it was possible to suggest alternative ways of funding new initiatives and of making finance available in the Craigavon area; and
  - (c) NICVA would then write further to Central Secretariat with any proposals which they might produce. These would be considered collectively by the Departments involved before further detailed policy and advice was submitted to Ministers.

Central Secretariat

22 April 1987

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