

PS/Mr Patten

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DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENT (N.I.)

MINISTERS MEETING WITH MR GLENDINNING ON 16 NOVEMBER TO DISCUSS DIVIS COMPLEX

1. A note of the meeting is attached together with a draft letter from the Minister to the Chairman of NIHE.
2. Following the meeting the Minister indicated that he would have liked an NIHE official to have been present at the briefing and the meeting which followed. There are arguments for and against this.
3. On the one hand there is the danger especially if tenants representatives are present that a meeting could degenerate into a discussion of insignificant detail or worse that elected representatives could take the opportunity to play the Department off against the NIHE particularly in cases where both may have responded in writing on an issue.
4. On the other hand there could be certain political mileage if the Minister was seen to be in a position to respond to detailed questions at the time rather than to have to write later.
5. Perhaps it is inadvisable to go for a straight decision to include or exclude NIHE officials. Circumstances will differ and it might be better to leave it to officials to judge in each situation whether the NIHE should be present.
6. Before issuing the letter to the NIHE you may wish to take the views on this point of those to whom this note is copied. On foot of that you will be in a better position to judge whether the paragraph in brackets in the draft should be included. This para seeks Mr Brett's views on whether NIHE officials should attend briefings/meetings.

John Crowther

JOHN CROWTHER
Belfast Development Office

23 November 1983

| | | |
|----|---------------|--------------------|
| cc | Secretary | without enclosures |
| | Mr McAllister | " " |
| | Mr McConnell | " " |
| | Mr Boyd | (for information) |

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTER'S ROOM ON

WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 1983 TO DISCUSS THE

DIVIS COMPLEX

1.00

PRESENT:-

The Minister
Mr C Thompson Belfast Development Office
Mr J King Belfast Development Office
Mrs M Hood Belfast Development Office
Mr W Glendinning

2.00

The meeting was arranged at the request of Mr W Glendinning, who led a deputation of 6 women from Divis Flats to discuss problems in the complex.

3.00

Mr Glendinning explained that he wished to talk to the Minister on 3 aspects viz:-

- (1) problem of Divis Tower;
- (2) Whitehall and Farsset blocks; and
- (3) the future of the complex.

4.00

DIVIS TOWER BLOCK

The deputation of women from this block expressed their concern about deteriorating conditions in the block. The problems highlighted included:-

- (1) lack of security cover. A recent fire at the block demonstrated the lack of security cover. It had been 3 hours before the alarm was raised despite the fact that a security firm was employed to provide cover. In their view the security cover was inadequate and that frequently the personnel employed were not in fact in post.

They were particularly concerned that there could have been fatalities because of the number of frail and elderly people housed in the 19 storey block.

- (2) there was also a problem with noise levels since new windows had been installed. It appeared that those on social security had had draft excluders fitted but this did not apply to the remainder of the tenants.
- (3) there was also dissatisfaction with the level of compensation for redecoration following the window installation.
- (4) there were additional electricity bills because workmen employed used tenants electricity for power drills etc. No compensation had been made for this.
- (5) the present intercom system installed was not operational. In the tenants view a system was required whereby those ill could summon

help. One instance was quoted of a dead tenant not being discovered for several weeks.

- (6) concern was expressed about the general upkeep of the block. Problems were arising particularly because of the allocation to the block of families with young children.

5.00

WHITEHALL AND FARSET BLOCKS

Problems for those tenants remaining in these two blocks were highlighted viz (1).

FLOODING

One tenant for Whitehall block complained of flooding of her flat from adjacent property. Problems of dampness and fungi on the walls meant that bedrooms could not be used. Mr Glendinning said that he had written to the Housing Executive in July concerning compensation claims but that these had not yet been dealt with. Similar complaints of flooding were made in relation to the Farset block.

- (ii) there were complaints about the inefficiency of the immersion heaters, exacerbated by the fact that these had no lids. This led to problems with very high electricity bills.
- (iii) those tenants remaining in the 2 block scheduled for demolition were concerned about where they would be rehoused. Rehousing in Cullingree Phase 4 had been mentioned but the tenants concerned had not been notified if they were to be rehoused here.

The Minister agreed to write to the Chairman of the Housing Executive on those points raised and subsequently write to Mr Glendinning.

6.00

Mr Glendinning raised the question of the future of Divis as a whole. In his view, Divis should be demolished in the long-term.

The Minister said however that he could not give a commitment to future demolition. The Housing Executive had put forward proposals to upgrade the estate including a pilot rehabilitation of the Milford block, vertical segregation and environmental works. He felt that the Executive should be given the opportunity to try to upgrade the complex.

He urged that the best course for the tenants to pursue would be to give the go ahead for substantial improvements so that they could be implemented quickly. He appreciated the residents fears that if large sums of money were spent this reduced prospects of demolition but said that the improvement of the residents present living conditions would not necessarily prejudice the longer term strategy for the flats. Demolition could not be absolutely ruled out as a long-term option but clearly it was impractical to think in these terms presently. Meantime in the absence of agreement there just would not be any significant improvement.

24 November 1983

DRAFT LETTER - MINISTER TO CHAIRMAN NIHE ABOUT DIVIS FLATS ISSUES RAISED AT

MEETING OF 16 NOVEMBER 1983 - MINISTER AND WILL GLENDINNING

Mr C Brett
Chairman
NI Housing Executive
Belmont House
Adelaide Street
BELFAST

On Wednesday 16 November 1983 I met Mr Glendinning and a deputation of 6 women from Divis flats. The meeting was to discuss problems in the complex. Four of the women were residents of the tower block and the other 2 were from the blocks scheduled for demolition.

The deputation raised a number of specific points as well as the future of the complex.

The representatives of the Tower Block residents came to express their fears that the tower block was in danger of deteriorating in a similar way to other blocks in the complex. Specific points raised with me were:

1. TOWER BLOCK

i. LACK OF SECURITY COVER

It was alleged that a recent fire at the tower block had highlighted a long standing problem over lack of security cover. It had been some 3 hours before the alarm was raised despite the fact that a security firm was employed to provide 24 hour cover. Residents further alleged that the security personnel were frequently not where they ought to be. There was concern that there could have been fatalities amongst the occupants particularly among the frail and elderly who predominate in the block. The delegation were anxious to ensure that there would be no repetition of what they considered to be grossly inadequate warning of the outbreak of fire.

ii. NOISE LEVELS

These were said to have increased when the new windows were fitted and are particularly noticeable on windy days. There were complaints that only those on social security seemed to have been provided with draught excluders on their windows and doors.

iii. COMPENSATION FOR REDECORATION, ETC

Dissatisfaction was expressed with the level of compensation for redecoration following the fitting of the new windows and residents said that no allowance had been made for the use of tenants' electricity by workmen.

iv. INTERCOM SYSTEM

The present intercom system was said to be non operational. In the tenants' view a different system, whereby those who were ill could summon help, was required (one instance was quoted of a dead tenant not being discovered for 3 weeks).

v. ALLOCATIONS

Concern was expressed that married couples with young families were being allocated flats in the tower block and there was apprehension lest there should be a further increase in squatting.

In general the type of accommodation suited the tenants reasonably well and the flats had provided from the outset a good standard of accommodation. The representatives said that they were genuinely concerned about the deteriorating conditions and indicated that certain people would be happy to see this and accelerate the process.

2. WHITEHALL AND FARSET BLOCKS

i. FLOODING

Tenants representing these blocks complained of occasional flooding of the flats which remained occupied and of intolerable delays in eliminating the source. There were problems of dampness and fungi on the walls which made bedrooms unusable.

ii. COMPENSATION

Mr Glendinning said that he had written to NIHE in July complaining of delay in the processing of tenants' compensation claims for dampness and flooding. He claimed that he had not yet received a response.

iii. IMMERSION HEATERS

There were complaints about the inefficiency of the immersion heaters. It was said that the heaters had no covers and that this was a major factor in pushing up electricity bills which residents found difficulty in coping with. One lady claimed massive quarterly savings through not using her immersion heater.

iv. REHOUSING OF TENANTS

Residents claimed that they did not have any firm indication about where they were going and the timing of their moves. An appeal was made for rehousing if possible in advance of Christmas; *at least, it was agreed, tenants who were going to be rehoused should have confirmation of this before Christmas.*

Finally I would be grateful for your views on the general issue whether there should be an NIHE presence at meetings such as this. It only became clear late in the day that a group of residents would accompany Mr Glendinning and that other than policy matters would be raised. I can see arguments for and against discussing detail at this kind of meeting and I am of course aware of the danger that such detail could turn into a dispute about the facts.

I should be grateful if you could have the various matters look into and let me have a reply so that I may respond to Mr Glendinning.