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CB/17685/92/HC

FROM: C BARBOUR
11 March 1992

cc. Ms McAllister - B ✓
Mr Kyle

MR MCCUSKER - B

DRAFT NOTE OF A MEETING AT MARYFIELD TO DISCUSS THE GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF IRISH LANGUAGE POLICY

I am attaching the draft note of the meeting which took place at Maryfield on 11 March to discuss the Irish language policy review. I would be grateful for any amendments you might wish to make (and corrections to my Irish spelling) by 19 March, before the note is circulated more widely.

[Signed]

CLIVE BARBOUR

Mr Barbour,

*please see amend-
ments in CCRI.*

Mrs D. Wainwright 19/3

PS/Mr T. McCusker

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DRAFT NOTE OF A MEETING TO DISCUSS THE GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF IRISH LANGUAGE POLICY

A meeting took place at Maryfield on 11 March 1992 to discuss the Government review of Irish language policy. Mr McCusker and Ms McAllister were present from CCRU and the British side of the Secretariat was represented by Mr Kyle and Mr Barbour. Mr O'Donovan and Mr Barry represented the Irish side.

2. Mr O'Donovan thanked Mr McCusker and Ms McAllister for coming to brief the Irish side. He was well aware that the review had been under way and he looked forward to hearing what the results of it would be. Mr McCusker said, by way of introduction, that a decision had been taken last summer to look at the Government policy on the Irish language. There had been some developments in this area over the past few years and there now existed a desire to draw all of this together in order to afford an opportunity for Ministers to review the overall policy. Against that background, there was also the forthcoming Council of Europe's Charter on minority languages. There would be a need for the Government to respond to it and to take into account the extensive legal implications which this would have. As a result, officials were drawing up a paper which would go to Ministers for consideration which would address the overall policy throughout Government towards the Irish language and also the implications the Charter might have. Although policy towards the Irish language had never been stated within a broad context, Ministers had stressed from time to time that the Government did support the Irish language but not to the extent that

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it wished to develop a bilingual policy. There were various areas in which the use of the Irish language was considered and supported:

(i) Public Administration

The policy was that letters in Irish would be accepted from the general public but that a reply would always be given in English. Names with an Irish spelling would be used whenever they were requested. There was, however, no provision for direct contact with, say, a Social Security Office if a claimant wished to apply for a benefit in Irish, although it was noted that the Charter said that people ^{might} ~~should~~ be given that right subject to the widespread use of the language in a given area.

(ii) Education

there would now be provision for certain statutory bodies to make available, in particular circumstances, material in Irish for use by teachers in Irish medium schools

It was possible, of course, to study Irish as part of the core curriculum and there ^{was} ~~were~~, at present, ~~two~~ ^a grant-supported schools which taught through the medium of Irish, ~~one in Londonderry and one in Belfast~~. *And an Irish medium stream in an English speaking school in Derry.* An application for a second Irish medium primary school, ~~the Caol Scoil Nua~~ ^{Coilscoil na hFál} was under consideration. Mr McCusker went on to say that ~~some tension had developed when~~ *whereas* certain Education reports had been published in English ^{only} (although the groups concerned had discussed and reported in Irish), ~~there would now be provision for Irish medium schools to be provided with a report in Irish on request, as an alternative to the English publication.~~ *following a recent decision by Lord Belfast* The implications of this had still to be worked out with DENI.

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(iii) General Support for the Irish Language

Mr McCusker reported that the Government continued to make funding available for organisations such as the Ultach Trust which ~~he understood~~ now had an endowment fund which was approaching £1 million. Half a million pounds had been obtained ^{by Government} from the EC and a further quarter million had been made available from the Government, together with about £100K from the International Fund for Ireland and other private charitable donations. This meant that the Ultach Trust now had between £60-80K available each year for funding, together with £20K which the Government would contribute for Irish language projects, in addition ^{around £65K would be provided} to covering core costs ^{such as} renting accommodation and staff etc. It was envisaged that the Ultach Trust would concentrate on small projects with the Government supporting any larger ones that were beyond the figure of, say, £5K. The Government was also committed to providing about £180K for the Irish place names project at the Department of Celtic Studies at Queen's University, Belfast. This was a long term project which hoped to strike a balance between academic research and popular appeal. It was intended to ^{begin} publish ^{ing} the report, barony by barony within each county until the whole Province was covered. In order to ^{give} ~~make~~ the research ^{a wider} ~~have a more~~ popular appeal, QUB had been encouraged to include an Annex which, as well as giving the ^{translation} ~~interpretation~~ of the Irish place name, would also include its pronunciation by means of both the international phonetic alphabetic and an anglicised version. There would also be

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funding towards other projects and Mr McCusker was pleased to report that the initial problems which had been experienced ^{encouraging} ~~in~~ groups ^{to} ~~approaching~~ the Government for funding had ~~now all~~ been resolved and that it appeared that no group was now unwilling to ^{accept} ~~receive~~ Government support. Mr O'Donovan wondered, wryly, whether this applied to Glor na nGael. Mr McCusker ^{the jury was still out on that one, though} said that ^{for ACE support} he understood that this group intended to put in a further application to the DED ^{and would be} providing details of its new management committee, ~~but that in~~ ^{However,} ~~the end~~ any funding would be a decision for others to make.

NP [Support had also been given to Belfast Community Radio for some funding towards Irish language programmes and it was known that UTV intended to apply for support for some pilot programmes in Irish. The Independent ^{Film} TV Company, Northlands, ^{had completed a pilot drama} ~~was also considering a programme~~ in Irish ^{for TV} and BBC Radio had a significant amount of Irish broadcasting in the evenings with some primary school programmes in addition. Funding was also being given to the Irish language newspaper "Lá" and he understood that the Arts Council for Northern Ireland ^{literature and} supported ^{an} Irish language drama company ~~which worked out of the Falls Road~~. ACE and Belfast Action Team gave support to ^{for} language groups ~~by means of year-long posts and playgroups and other activities~~ ^{and other activities} were ~~also being supported~~. Under the community relations programme ~~there were~~ 22 District Councils ~~who~~ had been given grants to promote ^{Community relations programmes} ~~cross-community contact~~, and it was noted ^{Some, like Borough} that ^{quietly} Ards ^{ed} District Council in particular was supporting Irish language tuition ^{through organisations such as the Workers Educational Association}. This was all the more significant because ^{in the programme} of the need ^{to ensure cross-political support for such a} programme.

(iv) Courts

It was noted that English was the language ^{Prescribed} for ^{use in} the courts, ~~but there could well be implications for~~ the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737 ~~as a result of the European Charter~~, which forbade ^{ids} the use of Latin, French and other languages in the day-to-day running of the court.

(v) Prisons

About £20K was being spent on Irish books and materials for prisons, but there was still a requirement that prisoners should conduct their correspondence in English. This, however, was under review.

3. In conclusion, Mr McCusker reminded the meeting that the overall funding for 1991/92 amounted to £1¹/₂ million, ^{and} although this ~~included~~ ^{not} ~~excluded~~ ^{include resources required for} the teaching of Irish in English speaking schools, ^{which was difficult to quantify}.

The European Charter

4. Mr McCusker said that the European Charter was due to come before the European Ministers in May. Mr O'Donovan wondered if there had been any contact between the respective northern and southern bodies to consider common problems. Mr McCusker said that he was not aware of any such contacts but that the UK representative (who was from the Welsh Office but also looked after Gaelic in Scotland and Irish in Northern Ireland) might have had some dealings

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with his counterpart from the Republic. Mr O'Donovan undertook to enquire about the possibility of some sort of joint meeting in order that common difficulties could be shared. Mr McCusker said that he would take advice on this but thought that such a meeting might be useful in exploring where joint difficulties lay.

Questions from Mr O'Donovan

5. Mr O'Donovan wondered ~~why the~~ ^{that} 200 pupils ^{were} needed for the setting up of a new Irish speaking primary school and 300 for a secondary school; ^{the figures} ~~seemed to be so high.~~ Mr McCusker said that there was a need to demonstrate that the school would ~~have eventual viability and~~ ^{be viable} ~~that.~~ ^{for example} In the case of a secondary school, there would be a need ~~for to~~ ^{that the} ~~yearly intake of the school would eventually provide a viable un-~~ ^{demonstrate} ~~an entry of about 60 pupils each year over a period of 5 years to~~ ~~prove that viability.~~ Mr O'Donovan enquired whether the 1949 Act which prohibited the display of Irish street names was in the review. Mr McCusker confirmed that it was. Discussion then turned to the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. Mr McCusker replied that the approach ^{had} ~~was not~~ ^{been about} ~~so much for~~ funding but rather for support for ^{an approach from the UK} ~~the Bureau.~~ ^{to FCO} Although the Bureau had contended that they had made contact with the Scottish and Welsh Offices, this was not the case and the Scottish Office did not receive an approach for some time. ^{The} ~~A~~ Foreign Office ^{recently indicated to the Bureau} ~~Minister~~ had ~~decided~~ that it was for the Territorial Departments to decide what action they wished to take in ^{matter} ~~However,~~ ~~and the~~ Welsh Office ~~in particular~~ did not feel that the Bureau would add ^{significantly} to the development of Welsh. The three Departments were to meet ^{soon} ~~and to~~ ^{discuss the issue again} ~~decide what support, if any, would be given.~~ Mr O'Donovan then enquired about the overall figure for funding Irish

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from all sources

language in Northern Ireland/ Mr McCusker said that this was a figure which might be difficult to arrive at, although it was possibly something that the Ultach Trust could supply. In any event, he did not feel that it would be much beyond the £1.5 million which he had referred to earlier.

6. Mr O'Donovan said, by way of comment, that the Government had, either intentionally or unintentionally, been seen to stress the fact that Northern Ireland was not going to become a bilingual society, rather than put forward its attitude in a non-contentious and quiet way which he had learnt from the meeting that Ards District Council were doing. He felt that the Government did not need to be so defensive. In conclusion, he wondered how the Government intended to make public its report when it reached its conclusions. Mr McCusker replied that Ministers would decide whether or not a report would be issued but it had been ~~decided~~ ^{*made clear in the recent response to SACH*} that ~~the public would in any event be made aware of the outcome.~~ ^{*outcome would be announced*} The meeting concluded with Mr O'Donovan thanking those who had come to Maryfield to provide the briefing.

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