

Muster - for your information J 1417.



Memo



W 21/7



From: R B Spence

Your ref:

BR 6 Jan

Our ref: PSE 366/98

BR April

Tel: (5)41175/6

Date: 16 July 1998

~~BR 7/8~~

To: 1. PS/Lord Dubs (DOE&L)
2. PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

cc: See distribution list below

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~~BR 2/NOV.~~

~~10/1000~~

RELOCATION OF PREMIER LEAGUE SIDE TO BELFAST

Summary

Issue: Approach to Alastair Campbell by an official of Wimbledon Football Club about Dr Mowlam's interest in the relocation to Belfast.

Timing: Routine.

Recommendation: A reply should issue from PS/Secretary of State along the lines suggested.

1. Alastair Campbell has been approached by a former journalist colleague who is now working for Wimbledon Football Club about the seriousness of the reports of the Secretary of State's interest in attracting the Club to Belfast.
2. The approach was probably prompted by the story in the Belfast Telegraph on 17 June containing a leaked copy of a possible draft letter which the Secretary of State might send to the Prime Minister about the possibility of Wimbledon being attracted to a new purpose-built stadium in Belfast. The story attracted a

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fair amount of interest, including strong support in a Belfast Telegraph editorial and a positive readers poll, showing 65% in favour.

3. Lord Dubs wrote to Tony Banks on 25 June alerting him to the possibility but recognising that there were significant hurdles to be overcome. The Prime Minister's PPS in a letter of 30 June conveyed Mr Blair's view that "it would be excellent if Wimbledon were to move to Belfast and we should encourage this as much as possible".
4. We want at this stage to encourage the private sector consortium to press their case to Wimbledon rather than to draw Government directly into the matter prematurely. If serious negotiations develop, it will probably become necessary to demonstrate Government support more clearly by direct contact with Wimbledon. In the meantime, a suggested reply from PS/Secretary of State to Mr Campbell's former colleague is attached, drawing largely on what Lord Dubs has already said to Tony Banks.

R B

R B SPENCE

cc. PS/Mr Worthington (DENI&L)
Mr N Hamilton
Mr J Walker

ADDRESSEE'S REFERENCE:

FILE NUMBER:

TO: Peter Miller Esq 3 Peek Crescent LONDON SW19 5ER	ENCLOSURES:	COPIES TO BE SENT TO: hcc: PS/Lord Dubs (DOE&L) PS/Mr Worthington (DENI&L) Mr N Hamilton Mr R B Spence Mr J Walker
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July 1998

**PROPOSED DRAFT REPLY FOR PS/SECRETARY OF STATE'S
SIGNATURE**

Alastair Campbell has raised with Dr Mowlam your recent call to him about the reports of her interest in a Premier League football club relocating to Belfast. The Secretary of State has asked me to reply on her behalf.

The background is that a private sector consortium is actively pursuing the possibility of building a new international standard sports stadium in Belfast and of attracting a Premier League club as the anchor tenant. Northern Ireland officials have been working with the consortium to ensure that the proposals are viable in financial terms and in terms of our existing strategy for sport in Northern Ireland.

In general terms, the Secretary of State would regard attracting Premier League football to a new purpose-built stadium in Belfast as offering significant benefits in terms of securing a sizeable capital investment by the private sector, making a positive impact on Northern Ireland's image, and providing a welcome opportunity

for substantial cross-community participation. Ministers or officials have, to date, had no direct contact with any Premier League side since the initiative properly rests with the private sector consortium. However, the preferred site for the Belfast stadium is in public ownership and Government has indicated its willingness in principle to make the site available for this purpose.

I hope that this information is helpful. A copy goes to Alastair Campbell.

Yours sincerely

PS/Secretary of State