

For Victims

DP 426/02

17th 12/02

FROM: ANNE COLVILLE
VICTIMS LIAISON UNIT
13 December 2002

cc See distribution list below

1. Anne O'Connell
2. Parliamentary Section

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: 1479/02

Issue: Parliamentary Question for ordinary written answer
tabled by Mr Nigel Dodds.

Timescale: Extension of time until Tuesday 17 December 2002

Recommendation: That reply issues as per attached draft.

Mr Nigel Dodds/Belfast North -

“To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which recommendations of the Bloomfield Report on Victims in Northern Ireland have been implemented”.

I attach a draft reply for your consideration.

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DRAFT FOR WRITTEN ANSWER

Nigel Dodds – Belfast North

“To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which recommendations of the Bloomfield Report on victims in Northern Ireland have been implemented.”

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

A summary of the recommendations and progress towards implementation to date is detailed below.

- (a) There should be a comprehensive review of the “fitness for purpose” of Criminal Injuries compensation in serving the needs of victims of violence (para 5.11);**

The Government in accepting Sir Kenneth’s recommendation asked him to conduct a review of the scheme. Sir Kenneth undertook a public consultation exercise, and the views expressed informed his report to the Secretary of State in June 1999. Legislation giving effect to many of the recommendations was passed in April 2002 and a new Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme introduced in May 2002.

- (b) Employers should be sensitive to the special circumstances of victims and their carers, and specific action should be taken by public sector employers to assure this (para 5.13);**

Government Departments have reflected victims’ needs in their corporate planning documentation and information on work with victims has been issued to welfare officers in all Departments and Agencies.

Employment policies in both Boards and Trusts have been amended to take account of the recommendation.

- (c) In dealing with victims within the social security and other systems officials should be sensitive and understanding in their approach (para 5.16)**

A training brief on awareness of victims’ issues has been developed by the Social Security Agency. It has been mainstreamed into induction and customer care training and the training brief has also been shared with other Northern Ireland Departments.

(d) Effective targeting of the special needs of victims should be a specific sub-set of the Targeting Social Need objective (para 5.17);

‘To provide support to victims of the Troubles’ was included as an objective in the New Targeting Social Need (New TSN). The actions which Government implemented in association with this objective are:

- To distribute funding for groups supporting victims of the Troubles.
- To work with the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund to explore the possibility of developing and funding programmes to assist disadvantaged victims of the Troubles.

To date, Government has allocated:-

- £8.5 million + to groups working in support of victims and survivors.
- £7 million + to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund.

Targeting Social Need has been reflected in both the 2001 consultation paper on a victims’ strategy and the strategy, “Reshape, Rebuild, Achieve” launched on 11 April 2002.

(e) A senior official should be designated to take immediate responsibility for a better co-ordinated approach to the problems of victims within Government (para 5.17);

As a direct response to the Bloomfield Report, the Government appointed Adam Ingram as Victims’ Minister in June 1998. Des Browne, who took over as Victims’ Minister in July 2001, has met numerous victims’ groups to hear at first hand the issues that concern them. In this way, victims have a voice and an input to policy making.

(f) The recommendations of the SSI-led study on “Living with the Trauma of the Troubles” should be energetically implemented by those interests to which they are directed (para 5.23)

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has considered, as a top priority, the recommendations of the SSI Report and has implemented them as follows:

- Boards have produced a directory of services and advice leaflets.
- All Trusts are providing flexible and responsive services.
- A review of counselling was completed by the Social Services Inspectorate and a report “Counselling in Northern Ireland” was published in May 2002. A key recommendation was that “all counsellors and psychotherapists should be subject to statutory regulation and registration by the introduction of all arrangements currently under development in Great Britain”.

- Registers of all known current local services have been compiled by Trusts. The registers are being maintained and updated as additional services become known or existing services change.
- Trauma Advisory Panels have been set up in each Board area. Trauma Advisory Panels Co-ordinators are also now in place.
- In order to address their perceived negative image and the lack of trust in Social Services which exists in some communities, Boards and Trusts have reviewed the situation locally and have drawn up appropriate plans to address perceived difficulties. Strategies have included meetings, publications, engagements with key community organisations and establishing partnerships within local communities.
- Boards are working with relevant community groups, many of which have received funding from the EU Peace Fund initiatives.
- Boards and Trusts have developed community Crisis Support Teams/ Out of Hours Services.
- A workforce group set up by the Department's Special Advisory Committee on Clinical Psychology is looking at long term manpower recruitment and training requirements of the speciality.
- Boards and Trusts have discussed with GPs how to progress training needs. Staff training needs for Crisis Support Team members has been provided. Some Trusts have provided multidisciplinary training sessions to raise staff awareness of the impact of the Troubles on their local population.
- Boards and Trusts have encouraged expansion of training courses/initiatives for volunteer helpers working with traumatised people. Crisis Support Consortium has provided training for voluntary and community groups.
- The Department's Central Personal Social Services Advisory Committee (CPSSAC) has established a small working group to consider ways of identifying and disseminating examples of good practice.

(g) Victims should be given the best comprehensive advice, locally differentiated, on where to turn for support (para 5.25);

Trauma Advisory Panels have been set up in each of the Health and Social Services Board areas. Panels have produced Directories of Services for their areas. Government has funded the appointment of workers in each Panel to co-ordinate activities and develop partnerships.

(h) Victims must, as the barest minimum, be as well served as former prisoners in terms of their rehabilitation, future employment etc (para 5.26);

The Northern Ireland Office was responsible for the management of funding to ex-prisoners and victims groups under Measures 4.4 and 4.6 of the EU Special Support programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace 1).

Victims and ex-prisoners have received the following amounts under both Measures:-

Ex-Prisoners = £4.3m

Victims = £2.8m

When it was introduced in 1995, the European Commission's (EC) aim was to use the funding to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation. Measure 4 of that programme was designed to promote social inclusion of those who were at the margins of social and economic life. Specifically, Measures 4.4 and 4.6 were aimed at both ex-prisoners and victims groups as the EC considered that it was particularly appropriate to support these groups in order to achieve the objectives. In the event, many more projects were put forward by ex-prisoners groups than by victims groups and therefore the majority of this funding was allocated to ex-prisoners.

In the main this funding has been used to provide training and development officers and counselling services for ex-prisoners and their families. Victims groups were also successful in securing funding from these Measures for similar projects. However, victims of the Troubles have access to other support in addition to the £2.8 m awarded under Peace I.

Since 1998, Government has committed £19 million + to support victims of the Troubles.

In addition, Peace II contains a specific measure for victims with funding of approximately £5.8 million, targeted mainly at re-training and re-employment.

- (i) In the interests of giving victims an effective 'champion' existing organisations meeting their needs require more and more secure funding, and there is a strong case for a powerful 'umbrella' organisation to give them a stronger voice in bidding for resources and urging changes in policy or practice (para 5.27);**

Government has allocated over £8.5 million to groups working in support of victims and survivors. This is in addition to the £5.8 million available to victims and victims' groups under Peace II.

Government is currently considering how victims can improve existing links with and influence policy makers.

- (j) In the longer term, the interests of victims should be made the concern of a Standing Commission or a Protector or Ombudsman for Victims;**

A question on whether a Victims' Commissioner should be established was asked in the 2001 consultation paper on a victims' strategy. A wide range of responses was received with a diverse range of opinions being expressed, but no clear view emerged as to whether a Commissioner should be appointed. This recommendation has therefore not been taken further at this stage but the situation will be kept under review.

(k) A much higher priority should be given to treatment of and local research into chronic physical pain (para 5.30); the question of a Trauma Centre and the availability of residential psychiatric care for young people should also be addressed (para 5.30)

- Victims of the Troubles have been fast-tracked towards pain relief clinics through funding from the Memorial Fund.
- A Family Trauma Centre has been established for young people and their families who have had their lives affected by the Troubles.
- £1.5 million has been allocated for the establishment of a regional Trauma Centre in Omagh.
- The DHSSPS issued a Policy Statement on Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in January 1999. The Chief Medical Officer commissioned a review of psychiatric services for children and young people. A key recommendation is to provide 19 extra beds, and to date 10 extra beds have been provided in South and East Belfast HSS Trust. A working group is determining how other recommendations can be taken forward.

(l) The recent Code of Practice for Victims of Crime should be conscientiously observed and critically monitored (para 5.35)

The recommendation is strengthened by the specific recommendation of the Criminal Justice Review that the interests of victims should feature in the codes of practice and plans of all organisations that interface with them. This work is being taken forward by each criminal justice agency.

(m) The possibility of benefiting from some form of Truth and Reconciliation Commission at some stage should not be overlooked (para 5.37);

In his report Sir Kenneth Bloomfield gave careful consideration to the issue of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. From his extensive dialogue throughout the community in Northern Ireland he concluded that the time was not appropriate for the establishment of such a Commission, noting that 'if any device were to have a place in the life of Northern Ireland, it could only be in the context of a wide-ranging political accord'.

The recent Healing Through Remembering Report has made a number of recommendations on the issues of Truth and Truth Recovery. Government is currently considering these recommendations.

(n) Every effort should be made to persuade and enable those with information about the 'disappeared' to disclose it (para 5.38);

An Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains was established in May 1999 by International Agreement between the Government of

the United Kingdom and the Government of Ireland. Two Commissioners were appointed, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield and John Wilson. The objective of the Commission was to facilitate the location of the remains of violence. Since its establishment 3 bodies have been recovered.

Government will continue to look for opportunities to press those who may have information about the 'disappeared' to reveal what they know.

(o) Government should not overlook the special claims of communities uprooted from their homes and farms (para 5.39);

Government examined how this recommendation might be taken forward, and a number of avenues have been explored. After careful consideration, Government has concluded that the schemes which are currently available for victims and victims groups probably offer the best way forward for the members of such communities and others who have been similarly affected.

(p) Consideration should be given to the creation of a fund to assist in particular children and young people affected by the death or injury of a parent (para 6.5);

The Government has funded various projects aimed at meeting the needs of children and young people affected by the Troubles. These include:

- £700,000 for the establishment of The Family Trauma Centre which provides a specialist service for the psychological assessment and treatment of children and their families suffering from trauma.
- £300,000 for an Education Bursary Pilot Scheme which was launched to provide educational bursaries to children and young people whose education has been adversely affected by the Troubles.
- Establishment of the **Northern Ireland Memorial Fund**. The Fund is an independent charity which provides practical help and support to individuals and families that have suffered as a result of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Government has allocated £7 million + to the Fund which has put in place a number of schemes. Those of a particular benefit to children and young people are :-
 - **The Short Break Scheme**. This provides individuals and families with short breaks away from their usual surroundings, responsibilities and commitments.
 - **The Education and Training Scheme**. This provides grant assistance to children and adults whose education or vocation has been affected by their experiences. It enables them access to education and training opportunities to help them realise their ambitions and improve their employment prospects.

- (q) The Government should consider the possibility of supporting efforts towards peace and reconciliation originating in Great Britain and not just in Northern Ireland (para 6.6);**

In July 2001 the Victims Minister, Des Browne, announced the allocation of £500,000 for initiatives aimed at supporting victims of the Northern Ireland Troubles who lived in Great Britain.

£250,000 of this funding has been allocated to the Legacy project, an initiative of the Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Trust. Initially the Project, which is based in Warrington, will seek to identify best methods for accessing victims and to carry out a needs analysis. As the work of the Legacy Project develops, further areas for funding may be identified.

- (r) Consideration should be given, if and when the churches consider it appropriate, to the designation of a “Memorial and Reconciliation Day” (para 6.19);**

In response to the Bloomfield recommendation the Government consulted with the leaders of the Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Northern Ireland. It was concluded that the time was not yet appropriate to take forward the recommendation of a Memorial and Reconciliation Day.

Work has recently begun to work with Churches and Faith Communities to look at their role in relation to work with victims. Views emerging from this work will inform consideration of this issue. The Healing Through Remembering Report which Government is considering also made recommendations on Memorials and Remembering.

- (s) At the appropriate time, consideration should be given to a Northern Ireland Memorial in the form of a beautiful and useful building within a peaceful and harmonious garden (para 7.13);**

One of the key findings of the 2001 consultation on a victims’ strategy was the view that the provision of practical help and support to victims should be the first priority. No conclusion has been reached on the question of a lasting memorial. Such considerations will need to involve extensive consultation with interested parties, including victims and their families and representatives.