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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING BETWEEN PSNI, DRD AND  
HOUSING EXECUTIVE TO DISCUSS TRADITIONAL ARCHES  
AND FLAGS ON PUBLIC PROPERTY AS PSNI H.Q. 11/03/03**

**1. ATTENDEES**

Supt. G. White  
Insp. A. Cooke  
Ch. Insp. C. Taylor  
Insp. Paul Robinson  
Sgt. G. Dodds  
Ms. A. Chambers  
Mr. S. Graham  
Mr. J. Carlisle

Operations Department  
H.Q. Operational Planning  
Belfast North DCU  
Belfast North DCU  
CMDU  
Legal advisor  
Housing Executive  
DRD

ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY  
HEADQUARTERS  
'D' DEPARTMENT D1(2)  
21 MAR 2003  
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT  
DEVELOPMENT UNIT

**2. INTRODUCTION (Opened 1500hrs)**

Supt. White opened the meeting and thanked all present for attending. He then asked the officers from Belfast North what they wanted to gain from the meeting. Insp. Robinson stated that although his DCU was working on local guidelines, they would like some form of guidelines to be issued from HQ. Sgt. Dodds then outlined the past and current positions on the issue. Mr. Carlisle notified the meeting of a ministerial working group that was looking at urban renewal via cash injections as a method of removing problems caused by flags/emblems.

**3. TRADITIONAL ARCHES**

Mr. Carlisle informed the meeting that DRD was in the process of appealing the findings of the judicial review relating to the Glengormley Arch in 2001, with specific reference to their decision not to prosecute after the arch was erected. The Judgement had stated that the DRD had not done enough research into the erection of the arch and had not spoken to PSNI about their contacts with the lodge. As a result, the DRD plan to ask PSNI DCU's if they have had any contact with local lodges/groups about arches and to specifically ask if police have advised these groups that a legal requirement exists for them to seek permission from DRD for arches to be erected. They

would not be asking police to explain the requirements, just whether they had told any groups that a requirement existed. Ms. Chambers stated that police could not be involved in explaining requirements, but that there would be no conflict in police advising local groups about the requirements if they were asked about traditional arches. Supt. White stated that it was hard to say if police were advising groups of the law, as there had been no instruction to do so.

Mr. Carlisle pointed out that not all arches are erected by lodges, with some being erected by loose groups of individuals. The Orange Order had been asked to write to their lodges, but they would not do so as they stated they had no over-all control. DRD would be placing adverts in a range of newspapers to advise all groups who erect traditional arches of the legal requirements for erecting arches. Supt. White said that DCU's could be asked to log enquiries received about arches and whether groups had been advised that legal requirements existed with regard to DRD and permission.

#### **4. FLAGS**

Mr. Carlisle stated that placing flags on lamp standards and traffic lights was covered by offences in the current Roads (NI) Order. The DRD have a duty of care to ensure road safety and would remove anything that was a risk. All removals, however, were usually done in consultation with the local community and its representatives. Police advice would also be sought, as the DRD also had a duty to protect its staff who would have to carry out removals and carry out their normal work in the areas in which removals had taken place. If either the police or community did not support the removal for safety or other reasons, the DRD felt that it could not attempt to remove any flags.

C/Insp. Taylor pointed out that the Holy Cross dispute had been caused by flags and highlighted the problems that were caused by their erection or removal. He felt it was best if the erection could be prevented in the first place. C/I Taylor outlined a North Belfast scheme to have Sector Inspectors mark potential trouble spots for flags on maps in order for police to plan a local response with some indication of where trouble may occur. Mr. Carlisle stated that flags could not be removed without clear community agreement or his staff would face a serious risk. The police could not protect them all the time and staff would not be able to carry out their normal duties if they were known to have been involved in the removal of flags.

The meeting discussed whether it was in order for police to stop individuals or groups from entering streets to put up flags if they did not reside there or it was at an interface/flashpoint location. Ms. Chambers stated that she did not feel police had the power to stop people entering streets, even if they did not

live there and were carrying flags to erect. She felt police could only stop them putting flags up after they had started to do so. The police could then stop them and order them out of the area.

Supt. White stated the community policing approach was central to this issue. Any guidelines issued should outline the legal powers available but should stress that different circumstances apply in different areas. Consultation and agreement should be stressed as the way forward in resolving these disputes. Local problems should be resolved by local agencies and people. Mr. Graham agreed with this, stating that in different areas the various agencies may have different degrees of influence and may be better placed to resolve disputes in a local manner. Supt. White stated that the new District Policing Partnerships may be the way forward.

Mr. Carlisle stated that the government, and thus his department, needed community support and police advice before agreeing on a policy of removal of items like flags.

Insp. Cooke felt that any policy should be set locally by DCU commanders, as any HQ policy would not work province wide.

Supt. White stated that the position on arches was clear. DRD was the lead agency and PSNI would act in support as agreed in 2001 instructions issued by ACC McQuillan. In relation to flags, it would only be possible to highlight the complex nature of the situation and advise DCU's to work on local solutions in partnership with statutory agencies. Insp. Robinson and Sgt. Dodds both stated that operational officers would be assisted by some form of guidelines to act as a basis for their decisions. It would not have to cover everything, but could provide options for officers to design local policing solutions. Insp. Cooke suggested an MHS could be issued to provide the broad guidelines.

Mr. Graham felt that local councils would also need to be consulted by local agencies/police. Supt. White said the association of council chief executives could be used by officers. Mr. Carlisle stated companies like BT would also be useful.

Supt. White said he would consider the issuing of a general order in relation to the agreed policy on arches. In relation to flags, the matter was clearly in the control of DCU's and a central policy may not solve anything. This issue would also be considered by Operations Department

**The meeting closed at 1700 hrs.**

**Sgt. Graham Dodds  
D1 (2)  
11/03/2003**