



Memo

From: Dr Malcolm McKibbin
Chief Executive
Roads Service

Your ref:
Our ref: 6890

Tel: 028 90 5 40511

cc: Copy list below

Date: July 2003

To: 1. Secretary
2. John Spellar MP
3. Secretary of State

FLYING OF FLAGS

Issue: A letter from Mrs Iris Robinson MP to the Secretary of State about the flying of flags in Millisle and Ballywalter.

Timing: Urgent

Presentational Issues: None

Recommendation: That you note the background below and forward the attached draft reply for signature by the Secretary of State.

Summary:

Detail

- 1 Mrs Iris Robinson MP wrote to Mr Paul Murphy, Secretary of State on 30 June 2003 enclosing a letter from [REDACTED] about the flying of flags in Millisle and Ballywalter.
- 2 Reports indicate that flags of varying types have been erected in these areas on equipment owned by various utilities. Flags in the Millisle area have been erected on electricity and telegraph poles and flags in Ballywalter have been erected on street lighting columns owned by Roads Service as well as electricity and telegraph poles owned by NIE and BT respectively.

3 Whilst Roads Service is aware of the illegal erection of flags on its street lighting equipment, no action has been taken to remove them as they are not deemed to be causing a safety hazard and action could result in RSD staff being threatened.

4 Ards Section Office has not received any other complaints this year about flags erected in Millisle or Ballywalter.

5 The breakdown of the flags as noted during a site inspection on 16 July 2003 is set out in Appendix A.

6 A self-explanatory draft reply is attached.

D M McKibbin (Dr)
Chief Executive

Copy list: Nigel Hamilton
PS/Secretary
Peter McWilliams
John White

Appendix A

Main Street, Millisle

Location of Flag

Type of Flag

Electricity Pole

1 x UDA

Electricity Pole

3 x UFF

Telegraph Pole

3 x UVF

Telegraph Pole

2 x UFF

Telegraph Pole

1 x UDA

Abbey Road, Millisle

Location of Flag

Type of Flag

Electricity Pole

1 x UFF

Electricity Pole

1 x UDA

Main Street, Ballywalter

Location of Flag

Type of Flag

Street Lighting Column

5 x UVF

Street Lighting Column

3 x Union Jack

Street Lighting Column

3 x Ulster Flag

Street Lighting Column

1 x YCV

Electricity Pole

3 x Union Jack

Electricity Pole

1 x Ulster Flag

Telegraph Pole

1 x Ulster Flag

Telegraph Pole

4 x Union Jack

Mrs Iris Robinson MP
2b James Street
NEWTOWNARDS
BT23 4DY

Your Ref: IR/JL/3205
Our Ref: COR/190/2003
July 2003.

Dear

- 1 Thank you for your letter of 30 June 2003 on behalf of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] requesting the removal of flags on electricity and street lighting columns in Millisle and Ballywalter.
- 2 I have very considerable sympathy with your constituents concerns and I wish to make it clear that I do not condone or support such actions. However I am sure you will appreciate that the problem of unauthorised flying of flags is widespread in Northern Ireland. The Department for Regional Development's Roads Service is responsible for the erection and maintenance of street lighting columns, but other public and private property is also misused in this way I am advised that, while Roads Service would wish to respond as positively as possible to this problem, taking into account its statutory obligations including those arising under Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, there are some sensitive aspects to be considered.
- 3 I understand that the experience of Roads Service has been that work carried out to remove such flags, without the near unanimous support of local residents, is likely to prove of little value. Indeed it can lead to a proliferation of such activity. You will also appreciate that Roads Service has a duty of care to its staff and thus the immediate and ongoing safety of personnel tasked with the removal work must always be taken into account. Roads Service policy is to remove from its property any flags that are considered a danger to road users. On the basis of a recent site inspection in Millisle and Ballywalter, Roads Service concluded that no risk to road users was involved. In other

instances, where complaints are received and there is no danger to road users, Roads Service endeavours to gauge community reaction to determine the likely success of any efforts to remove flags. This is generally done through consultation with the PSNI and/or local Councillors or other public representatives. Roads Service will undertake such consultation in respect of the flags in Millisle and Ballywalter.

- 4 In the wider context, I trust you will appreciate there are many public and private bodies affected by the unauthorised erection of flags or indeed painting of graffiti and it is clear that individual Departments or Agencies working alone cannot deal with the problem. On 24th April, Des Browne, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for the Department of Social Development, announced a programme of measures developed by the Community Action Group, which he established last November, to co-ordinate action across Government and key agencies to counter sectarianism and to build trust and confidence. Among these was the allocation of £350,000 to support local environmental improvement schemes under the auspices of the Creating Common Ground Consortium, which includes the Housing Executive, Community Relations Council and Groundwork Northern Ireland. Further information can be obtained from Creating Common Ground, The Housing Centre, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8PB.

- 5 I hope you find this reply helpful.

Yours sincerely