

post suspension

FROM: **PS/Des Browne**
18 November 2002

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Mary Bunting, OFMDFM -E

TACKLING INTERFACE VIOLENCE: THIRD ROUNDTABLE

Des Browne chaired the third Interface Initiative Assembly Party roundtable on 14 November at 14.00. Present were **Fred Cobain and Mark Neale** for the UUP, **Gerry Kelly and Joe O'Donnell** for SF, **Alex Attwood** for the SDLP, **Billy Hutchinson and Wilson McArthur** for the PUP, **Monica McWilliams and Rachel Stewart** for the NIWC and **John Cobain and Tom Sheridan** for the UKUP. (Marjorie Hawkins of Alliance showed up at the office at 16.00 having got the time of the meeting wrong.) You, Chris Maccabe, Mary Madden, Chris Stewart and I attended.

Summary

The meeting was not quite what the Minister hoped. The parties were not yet ready to sign up to the NICICTU mobile phone network. Further information and a further meeting required before that can happen. The capacity building money was welcomed. Gerry Kelly has some reservations about CAG but otherwise it was well received

Detail

2. Des Browne opened by noting that the suspension of devolution now meant that he was in possession of the type of information on actions in departments that he had previously asked the MLAs to research.
3. On the **mobile phone network**, he noted that the NICICTU project was at an advanced stage and, subject to some operational details, he had in principle approved funding for a year. He opened the floor for questions.
4. Fred Cobain stated that he had not been contacted by NICICTU and that he had some questions on the detail of the project. Monica McWilliams said the same and was concerned that it should not impact adversely on existing networks, she cited Springfield Road in particular. Gerry Kelly noted that he understood NICICTU had made contact with all the



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parties but, if that was not the case, it should happen quickly. He noted that he had expected a paper on the project before the parties signed up and felt a further meeting was necessary. He then cautioned on the need for speed in getting the networks operational. Billy Hutchinson reported that the PUP had been consulted but would not sign up to the project until some of their concerns on the operation of the network had been discussed. Alex Attwood said that if there were some gaps yet to be filled a further meeting was justified.

5. Des Browne responded that the operational details were a matter for NICICTU, although he had been provided with a list of those parties consulted and it included the UUP. He undertook to ask NICICTU to ensure that they spoke to all the parties and particularly the party spokespersons nominated to this group. His approval related to the broad thrust of the project; the operational details were for NICICTU to work through with those on the ground. He reminded the meeting that the parties had advised him that it would have been the kiss of death to have NIO fingerprints on the detail of the project. Although he had hoped this meeting could have signed off the project, it would be put on the agenda for a further meeting in the very near future. He would have NICICTU provide detail on the operation of the project and share it, on a confidential basis, before then. **[Chris Stewart to take forward the agreed action and liaise with Private Office for dates.]**

6. Des Browne went on to report that given events since the last meeting he had been unable to undertake his promised round of meetings on the **clearing house**. This was still a live issue. He would meet the parties and provide a paper at a future meeting.

7. He turned to his announcement earlier in the week on **North Belfast**. Discussion focussed on the **£3m capacity building project**. Gerry Kelly noted that there was a number of valuable capacity building projects already in place. He wanted to be clear that this was intended to be additional funding. You confirmed that this would be new funding, in response to the Dunlop report. John Cobain asked whether the Minister was now setting aside his standing golden rule that he would not tread on the toes of devolved Ministers in taking action on the interfaces. The Minister noted that given the changed constitutional situation the answer to that question was obvious. Although it was HMG's earnest hope that direct rule would be as short as possible there were decisions that needed to be made in the short term and NIO Ministers would make them.



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8. Fred Cobain noted that capacity building was vital for the Protestant community in North Belfast. He wanted to ensure that the funding would not just go to groups already getting funding. A strategic approach was necessary. Gerry Kelly sought the Minister's commitment to consult on the shape of the capacity building package and an assurance that the funding would not simply be directed to QUANGO's. It was also important that the funding was targeted to projects aimed at maintaining capacity in communities. He agreed with others that HMG should look beyond the usual suspects in developing the funding mechanism. Billy Hutchinson, in cynical mood, said that if the proposal was based on the Dunlop report and the North Belfast Unit we were building on sand. We needed to think afresh on managing this initiative, to go back to brass tacks and get it right.

9. Des Browne shared some of their concerns on the shape and aims of the initiative. It was important that the communities were involved in its design and it was for precisely this reason that he had announced a £40k design exercise. He wanted a framework that worked for the benefit of the people of North Belfast.

10. He turned to the **Community Action Group**. He reported that he intended to establish this group to co-ordinate activity already underway across departments and with other interests. He outlined the shape of the CAG and the short, medium and long-term measures it would be pursuing. Alex Attwood found the Minister's outline of the group helpful and thought it positive. He took the opportunity to ask for an update on the current position of the Harbison report. He suggested that given the make-up of the interests to be represented on the CAG it should be referred to as cross-sectoral rather than cross-governmental.

11. Gerry Kelly queried the relationship between the CAG and political representatives. He wanted to know whether the idea was embryonic or if an announcement was pending. He and Monica McWilliams queried the nature of the local government involvement. Monica felt that if this were at official level there would not be a difficulty. Fred Cobain was concerned that those who currently engaged in what he termed anti-social behaviour should not be excluded from projects and initiatives under CAG. The vast majority of those engaged in anti-social activity came from the most deprived areas and the CAG should look to the causes of their behaviour to find a solution to it.



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12. Des Browne noted that he wanted to move forward quickly on CAG and was not planning to make a big splash. He emphasised that the outcomes from CAG initiatives would be inclusive. The intent with the policy would be to emphasise that government would reward and support good behaviour in communities, not simply weigh-in in response to violence – HMG wanted to build communities, not just turn up with cash when they were burning down.

13. Monica McWilliams said go for it, there was nothing to loose and it was a positive step. Gerry Kelly wanted to bring some of the proposed measures back to his party before commenting further. He had some reservations and asked for a paper in advance of the next roundtable. Alex Attwood agreed a paper would be helpful. John Cobain was happy with CAG and said it was what he had wanted to happen much earlier. Des Browne agreed to provide a paper for the next meeting.

Signed

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Jonathan Phillips - O
David Watkins - O
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Stephen Leach - O
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Margaret O'Mara - O
Anita Bharucha - O
Robert Crawford - O
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