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COMMUNITY RELATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND VICTIMS DIVISION
OFMDFM
24TH JANUARY 2003

DES BROWNE (L&B)

LAUNCH OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS CONSULTATION

Summary

Objective:

Issue: Further briefing for the launch of the community relations consultation.

Timescale: Urgent.

Presentational issues: The key issue is likely to be alleged 'foot dragging' on this issue.

Recommendation: To consider the attached question and answer briefing.

Background

1. The launch of the community relations consultation is scheduled for 15 00hrs on Tuesday 28 January, in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings. Mary Bunting and I will support you during the event, and will brief journalists prior to the launch. Colleagues from the Executive Information Service are developing a media handling plan, which will follow under separate cover.
2. My submission of 23 January enclosed a draft Press Release and speaking note. I now enclose further question and answer briefing material, divided into 'probables' (Annex A) and 'possibles' (Annex B).

3. A pre-brief has been arranged for on 14 00 hrs on Monday
27 January.

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ANNEX A

Nigel Hamilton, HOCS
Will Haire
Mary Bunting
Rosalie Flanagan
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Denis Ritchie
Don McAleer
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CR POLICY CONSULTATION PAPER

PROBABLE QUESTIONS: LINES TO TAKE

SUMMARY NOTE

	Community relations is a complex issue and there is no quick fix with regard to such deep-seated community divisions as exist in Northern Ireland. Consequently the paper required to be considered very carefully and at length before publication. This has been a high priority for me since coming to office some three months ago.
Why a consultation paper, why not concrete proposals for action?	We are taking action. I have established a Community Action Group to drive forward short-term action on issues as diverse as improving communication between communities at interfaces, tackling the manifestations of sectarianism through environmental improvements, and underpinning the work of community organisations. This consultation is about longer-term strategic action to promote a shared society. This cannot be forced upon people, but must be based on consensus. That requires widespread discussion and debate before proposals are finalised.
What about flags, graffiti and emblems?	Of course I want to see the removal of offensive manifestations of sectarianism that blight communities. Experience has shown that success depends on local communities themselves deciding to act. We will look for ways to support local initiatives by providing finance and access to specialist expertise, and through the promotion of good practice. This is a priority for the Community Action Group, which is looking at short and medium-term measures to tackle sectarianism. It is also a key issue for discussion during the consultation.

LAUNCH OF CR POLICY CONSULTATION PAPER

PROBABLE QUESTIONS: LINES TO TAKE

SUMMARY NOTE

Why the delay?	Community relations is a complex issue and there is no quick fix with regard to such deep-seated community divisions as exist in Northern Ireland. Consequently the paper required to be considered very carefully and at length before publication. This has been a high priority for me since coming to office some three months ago.
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What has the Community Action Group achieved so far?	The Group was established at the end of last year. It has focussed initially on identifying existing good practice, and projects and approaches that are already proving to be successful. It is clear that there is already a great deal of work being done successfully in many areas, and we are looking at ways to underpin and expand that work, and promote the spread of good practice.
Do you agree with the Alliance Party proposals for greater community integration?	I welcome the fact that the Alliance party has published its proposals. I want to hear from all political parties, key stakeholders throughout civic society, and the people of Northern Ireland on what they see as the right way forward. We need to have wide-ranging dialogue on this issue. I firmly believe that a shared society with greater integration is the right way forward. However, this cannot be forced upon people – it must be based on consensus.
Segregated Housing	This is a key question for consultation. We are seeking views on whether people wish to see greater integration in housing and, if so, how we might promote this. There is already evidence that many people would prefer greater integration in housing.
Integrated Education	This is a key question for consultation. We are seeking views on whether people wish to see greater integration in education and, if so, how we might promote this.
Need for new CR Policy/Strategy	Deep divisions remain in NI communities eg sectarian violence, segregated housing, separate schools. Improved community relations are essential to underpin the political process and provide a stable base for a prosperous future, which all in NI can enjoy.

Purpose of the Consultation Paper	To stimulate the widest possible debate on what the aims and objectives of policy should be and also views on specific measures and actions to support these aims and objectives.
Limitations of previous policy	Previous policy dates back to the late 1980s. Although much valuable work has been done, there has been limited success at an overall level and a more co-ordinated approach is needed, with action at local government, regional and central government level.
Is the Government's mind already made up?	No decisions have yet been taken. We want to hear people's views. However, we are expressing the strong belief that the only viable way forward is based on the vision of a shared but pluralist society.
What is the Government doing in the interim to address sectarian violence and other acute problems?	Cross-departmental Community Action Group under Ministerial Chairmanship is looking at various short-term measures to address acute problems, eg improving communication between communities at interfaces; tackling the manifestations of sectarianism through environmental improvement.
Consultation Process: Way Forward	The consultation will be broadly based, inclusive and proactive. Meetings will be arranged with the political parties and officials are also planning a series of workshops with key stakeholders throughout Northern Ireland.
Future of Community Relations Council (CRC)	Views are being sought as to whether functions at a regional level would be best delivered as at present by an independent body such as CRC or if they should be centralised within Government. Pending consideration of the views expressed in the consultation, no decision has been taken.

Future of District Council Programme (DCCRP)	Local Government is in the best position to develop and co-ordinate action at local level. However currently the DCCRP is not a permanent programme and has limited scope. We therefore need to examine the options for a new enhanced, permanent locally based programme and views on this are sought.
Monitoring and Evaluation	There is a need to improve on our current approach. Monitoring and evaluation must be built into the new strategy and we are seeking views on how this should be carried out in the consultation paper.
Role of the Equality Commission	The Commission has a duty to offer advice to public authorities and others in connection with the obligation to promote good relations under Sec 75(2) of the NI Act 1998. <i>I am aware that the Commission is</i> It will be actively considering what further advice and guidance it might offer. <i>This area</i>

SHORT-TERM MEASURES**Tackling violence at interfaces – improving communications****Line to Take:**

- I have already had useful and constructive discussions with political parties on this issue. One of the key themes to emerge from those discussions is the importance of improving communication between interface communities, and the role that mobile telephone networks can play in this.
- I am looking at ways to develop and build on good practice, with the aim of ensuring a more comprehensive approach at interfaces throughout Northern Ireland.

SHORT-TERM MEASURES

Underpinning community development

Line to Take:

- There is a need to underpin the excellent work that already takes place within communities. We all know that healing the divisions of Northern Ireland and building trust and confidence requires more than Government action.
- I want to see how we can support local communities to make a real difference to their own lives and to help them to develop the skills and the capacity to speak up for themselves and to work in partnership with other communities.
- I want to ensure that we can get support quickly to the many people who are working hard within the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. The often precarious nature of funding arrangements for many groups must also be tackled to ensure stability and longer-term sustainability.

INTERFACES

Line to Take:

- The Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (CRC), which is funded through OFMDFM's Community Relations Unit, has been working to address difficult problems at interfaces in partnership with local people and community workers. This includes supporting local mobile phone networks, mediation and community dialogue initiatives and discussions with district councils and local political representatives to establish local community forums and networks so that the concerns and needs of local communities can be identified.
- Many of the organisations funded by CRC are playing a key role in defusing sectarian tension and opening lines of communication between communities, eg The Mediation Network NI and Counteract, the trade union anti-intimidation unit.
- Work such as training in conflict transformation and mediation skills, church-based work on reconciliation, victim support projects, community dialogue, developing cultural diversity awareness, workplace anti-sectarian and anti-intimidation work, and adult community education on community relations themes continues with the support from CRC.

NORTH BELFAST COMMUNITY ACTION UNIT

Line to Take:

- The North Belfast Community Action Unit has been established to take forward work on:
 - building community capacity;
 - developing a long-term strategy for North Belfast;
 - encouraging partnerships; and
 - addressing interface issues.
- For this purpose, a budget of £3m a year over the next three years has been provided.

MONITORING OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS IMPROVEMENT

Line to Take:

- Currently the benefits of money allocated to community relations are appraised in three main ways:-
 - by attitudinal surveys;
 - by research projects; and
 - by independent evaluations of funded groups.
- However, it is clear that there is a need to improve our approach to assessing the impact and effectiveness of community relations initiatives and projects. Monitoring, evaluation and review must be an integral part of the new strategy. Consequently we will be seeking views on how this should be carried out in the consultation document issued today.

FUNDING

Line to Take:

- The Community Relations Unit (CRU) has, for the current financial year, an allocation of some £5m. Of this, £2.8m is grant-in-aid to the Community Relations Council and £1.7m goes to District Councils for their community relations programmes. These are the main channels for the provision of funding to voluntary community groups and community relations projects.
- Co-operation Ireland also receives financial assistance from CRU and this year £200,000 has been provided towards its activities promoting better community relations. The remainder of CRU's budget is largely taken up by its capital programme, which provides assistance towards the establishment of local cross-community facilities.
- Besides the Community Relations Unit's budget, there is also a research provision for community relations amounting to £310K, which is administered by the Research Branch of the Equality and Social Need Division.
- The Department of Education's Community Relations Branch also has a budget of £3.4m for the improvement of community relations among young people up to the age of 25 years. This largely involves the provision of assistance towards projects based on schools and youth organisations.