

Billy Gamble

22/09/2003 12:28

To: angela.clarke@dsdni.giv.uk
Subject: Letter about flags

Angela, I have made some tracked changes to the DRD template letter which is to go to Mark Durkan in response to flags at Sevenoaks, Derry. Grateful for any comments views etc



Flags letter from Mark Durkan.doc

Billy

Dr Neil Fleming
Honorary Research Fellow
Institute of Irish Studies
Queen's University of Belfast
8 Fitzwilliam Street
BELFAST
BT9 6AW

Date:

Your Ref:

Our Ref: 6964

Dear Dr. Fleming

Thank you for your e-mail dated 11 August 2003 about Roads Service's policy on the removal of sectarian flags from lampposts.

First of all, I should explain that Roads Service does not condone or support this unauthorised use of Departmental property. However, I am sure you will appreciate that the problem of unauthorised flying of flags is widespread throughout Northern Ireland. 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. While we would wish to respond as positively as possible to this problem, taking into account our statutory obligations including those arising under Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, there are some sensitive aspects to be considered.

Our experience has been that work carried out to remove 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 we have a duty of care to our staff and thus the immediate and ongoing safety of personnel tasked

with the removal work must always be taken into account.

Accordingly, our policy is to remove from our property any flags that are considered a danger to road users.

In other instances, where complaints are received and there is no danger to road users, we endeavour 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.

In the wider context, I trust you will appreciate that 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. You ~~will~~ may be aware that, on 24th April 2003, Des Browne, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for the Department for 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.~~

Clearly a bottom up approach with local community support is essential. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has, therefore, commissioned action based research to identify best practice and options for further action to deal with this ongoing problem.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

D M McKibbin (Dr)
Chief Executive