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HCS/8/78

cc. PS/Mr Stanley (B&L)-M
PS/Mr Needham (B&L)-M
PS/Dr Mawhinney (B&L)-M
PS/Lord Lyell (B&L)-M
PS/Mr Viggers(B&L)- M
PS/PUS (B&L) -M
Mr Burns -M
Mr Stephens
NI Perm Secs
Mr M Elliott
Mr Chesterton -M
Mr Spence
Mr McConnell
Mr G Hewitt
Mr Hamilton

PS/Secretary of State (B&L)-M

WEST BELFASTIntroduction

1. PCC has been giving some thought to what further action might be taken to tackle the problems in "Catholic" West Belfast and this minute seeks the Secretary of State's approval to the next steps in this process.

West Belfast

2. "Catholic" West Belfast is, probably, the crucial area in NI, in the sense that it contains the highest concentration of social and economic problems and remains the major stronghold of Sinn Fein/PIRA influence. Even if we make substantial progress in other areas of the city and NI, disaffection in West Belfast is of sufficient proportions to ensure the constant renewal of insurgency.
3. Substantial progress has been, and is being, made in overcoming the housing and environmental problems in West Belfast and in improving the training and short-term job opportunities for the young and unemployed of the area and in

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improving community health and social services. However, West Belfast will continue for the foreseeable future to display all the characteristics of an area of severe multi-deprivation. The prospects for attracting to the area significant numbers of reasonably well-paid jobs are very slim and sheer poverty is, and will, remain a central characteristic of the area. It is a very inward looking area with a strong ghetto mentality; but at the same time there is a strong sense of community spirit and self-help which is being, but could be further encouraged.

4. The hold which Sinn Fein exercises in West Belfast is explained in part by a deeply embedded lack of faith in government to respond adequately to local problems and by that party's effectiveness in representing the inhabitants' concerns over social and economic issues.

Why should we take an initiative?

5. There are two broad reasons why a further initiative should now be considered.
6. First, government is not perceived as being able to deliver the goods in West Belfast and to an extent this has been true. Notwithstanding, for example, the achievements of the Housing Executive or the promise of the local enterprise programme, it can be argued that Government has not succeeded in integrating and focussing its efforts sharply or effectively enough in West Belfast.
7. This is, of course, partly a reflection of the present arrangements for delivering regional and local services in NI through vertical functional organisations. These arrangements encourage public bodies to make decisions on grounds which are quite valid according to the assessment by each body of the needs and priorities for their particular service. They do not adequately take into account the cumulative and interactive effects of these separate decisions on particular areas. This weakness tends to be magnified in difficult areas of multi-deprivation.

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8. We have however already recognised this point to some extent and have sought to deal with it in several ways, for example the work of the Belfast Development Office and the current experiment with the Belfast Action Teams. One of the first Teams is dealing with the Shankill and Lower Falls and a further Action Team for part of West Belfast is planned for 1988. While the Action Team concept is still at the experimental stage, first assessments are encouraging.

9. Second, there are short-term and long-term political arguments for doing more in West Belfast. In the short-term, there are the pressures from the Irish Government through the Conference to try harder to overcome the real and perceived disadvantages of the minority community. If we are to devote a lot of attention in the coming months to making some progress with the majority population, we must not seem to be neglecting the minority. The inner city initiatives in GB and the announcement of special development arrangements for Laganside will stimulate demands for action in West Belfast. Looking to the longer-term, we want to reduce the hold of Sinn Fein and PIRA in West Belfast and indeed to change perceptions and attitudes fundamentally; we want to persuade many more of the people of West Belfast to follow a positive path (developments in education and training could have an important part to play here), to work through "the system" and not against it, to take the opportunities which are available, to help themselves, to develop enterprise and self-respect, and to look outward. This is a formidable agenda, but it is the challenge which must be faced in the long run.

What might be done?

10. It is sensible, first of all, to look at the case for doing nothing new, and for allowing the existing arrangements to continue with steady progress and modest advances being made wherever possible on the social and economic fronts. A

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high profile, but failed, initiative would be the worst possible outcome and could only strengthen Sinn Fein's position. It can be argued that only the attraction of a large number of new jobs to the area is likely to achieve any significant changes and there is little prospect of this happening as long as the paramilitaries exercise such influence.

11. A more positive approach, which has some local support from the SDLP and Catholic clergy (and may well surface from the Irish side through the Intergovernmental Conference) is the idea of some sort of West Belfast Development Agency. The supporters of such an agency have not defined clearly how it might work; they have talked vaguely about the agency not being "an alternative to the Government's authority and assistance measures, but rather to put the Government's initiatives in place and supplement them".
12. It is difficult to see how an agency outside Government would achieve much; it would in part duplicate the efforts of existing voluntary and community bodies; it could turn out to be simply another pressure group which would be seen as an SDLP creation or which could fall under Sinn Fein control. It is also difficult to see how a statutory agency would operate in practice, particularly in its relationships with IDB, LEDU, the Local Enterprise Programme and with the work of the other interested Departments and public bodies.
13. It is the case that a Development Corporation is to be established for another area of Belfast (Laganside). However, the West Belfast and Laganside areas are quite different. In Laganside we are dealing with land (much of it already is public ownership) which is either under-used or underdeveloped. The UDC model is specifically designed to achieve development in such circumstances.
14. In deciding what more might be done there are difficult questions to be resolved about what area would be covered by any new measures. The acute concentration of political, security and socio/economic problems makes "Catholic" West Belfast the main target (ie Lower and Upper Falls, Whiterock, Ballymurphy, Turf Lodge, Andersonstown and perhaps Suffolk

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and Poleglass). However, this is a large area. Moreover, it would be questionable in principle and perhaps politically unacceptable to concentrate on this area and to appear to ignore the deprivation in Protestant areas in West Belfast (such as Shankill, Woodvale, Glencairn, Ballygomartin, Highfield and Springmartin), and indeed similar Catholic and Protestant areas in adjoining North Belfast (eg Ardoyne, New Lodge, Duncairn and Lower Oldpark). However, the experience from the Action Team approach suggests that it is better to work within areas containing around 10 to 12000 people, rather than to target much larger areas and so blur the focus of the new effort.

The next steps

15. Our conclusion is that we need both a fundamental look at Government's approach to the long-term problems in "Catholic" West Belfast and an acceleration of activity in tackling the immediate problems in the most deprived areas of Belfast as a whole.
16. The strategic review might involve an examination of Government's medium and long-term objectives in "Catholic" West Belfast and of how these objectives might best be achieved. The review would, therefore, cover social and economic, political and law and order issues. It might be carried out by a small number of senior officials - led by Central Secretariat - from NI Departments and NIO who have had recent experience in handling Belfast issues.
17. At an earlier stage of our consideration of these issues, a different sort of review was envisaged and the possibility was raised of the review being NI's next contribution to Sir Robin Ibbs scrutiny programme. The scrutiny approach does not seem to be appropriate for the sort of strategic review which is now proposed.

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18. Accelerating action on the ground can, in our view, best be achieved through the action team approach. The existing teams are working in a cross-community area of manageable size, are developing a "bottom-up" approach in accordance with real established community needs (rather than officialdom's perception of what those needs are), and are harnessing the existing network of voluntary agencies already operating on the ground. However present plans are only to provide two teams in each of this and the following two years. A total of about eight teams would cover all the areas of multiple deprivation in Belfast.

19. Accelerating the establishment of Action Teams and providing the Belfast Development Office with the staff to direct and co-ordinate their efforts would require an additional commitment by all Departments and the public agencies working in Belfast, both in terms of releasing good people and in meeting the extra running costs.

20. Our view is that the early creation of additional action teams offers the best way of ensuring that real progress is made in achieving better co-ordination, targeting and presentation of the work of the public bodies in the selected areas and in developing closer contacts with the local community. DOE should now be invited to take the lead in drawing up detailed proposals, covering the resource implications and timing. DFP considers that re-phasing within the existing public expenditure allocations for the Belfast Initiative should be examined as a means of financing these proposals.

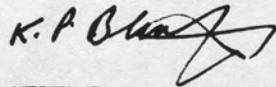
Conclusion

21. The Secretary of State's agreement is, therefore, sought to this "top down" and "bottom-up" approach:-
 - 21.1 a review by senior officials - to be led by Central Secretariat - of Government's medium and long-term strategy in "Catholic" West Belfast; and

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- 21.2 an acceleration of the action team approach in Belfast - to be led by DOE - subject to the resolution of the resources issue.
22. The public presentation of developments along these lines requires careful consideration. It would not be appropriate to say anything in public about the strategic review. A high profile announcement about accelerating the action team approach would probably be unwise as it could create expectations that dramatic new measures were being taken which would bring early benefits. On the other hand, it may be necessary - for wider political reasons or to balance statements about other Belfast developments - to make a fairly low-key statement at some stage.
23. The Secretary of State will no doubt wish to discuss.



K P BLOOMFIELD

21 August 1987

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