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1. Mrs McKnight } for info.
2. Mr Priestly }
3. PA



cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP & L)
PS/Mr Atkins (DOE, DED & L)
PS/Lord Arran (DHSS, DANI & L)
PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B & L)
PS/PUS (B & L)
PS/Mr Fell
Mr Ledlie
Mr Thomas
NI Perm Secretaries
9/8 Working Group Members
Mr Bell
Mr Steele
Mr Lyon
Mr Wood (B&L)
Mr Leach
Mr McCusker

From: D J Watkins
US, Cent Sec

28. July 1993

To: PS/Secretary of State (B & L)

Mr Priestly OIA
Recommendations J.K.
N, O, P, R, S, U & V
will have implications
for the Compensation
Agency; and for the Civil
Damage review.
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REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON POINTS TO LEARN FOLLOWING TERRORIST INCIDENTS

1. In October 1992 the Secretary of State asked that a working group be set up to review the Government's response to the civil dimension of security incidents, particularly those involving personal and social hardship, following bombings at Belvoir and Glengormley. The terms of reference for the Working Group were:

"To consider what steps are necessary to achieve a position where the Government is capable of dealing with and seen to be dealing with hardship, both commercial and domestic, arising from the actions of terrorists."

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2. The Working Group, under my chairmanship, was made up of representatives from the Department of Health and Social Services, the Social Security Agency, the Housing Division of the Department of the Environment, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Compensation Agency, the Information Service, Criminal Justice Services Division, Political Affairs Division and Security Policy and Operations Division.

3. Sections 2-5 of the Report provide the substantive review of existing arrangements and Section 7 contains the main conclusions and recommendations. The following paragraphs highlight the main findings and recommendations.

Section 2: Method of Approach

4. Section 2 of the Report sets out how the Group set about the task and outlines the main aspects of the study. The group reviewed the existing arrangements very thoroughly through a series of bilateral meetings with Departments and Agencies and then considered various options to improve the response to major incidents. The work of the Group concentrated on the impact of incidents where the level of damage to domestic property was high, though lessons may prove relevant to a wider range of incidents.

Section 3: Notification Systems

5. Section 3 reviews the notification systems for different agencies and notes that, although no single Department is tasked with the responsibility for ensuring that all appropriate statutory agencies are informed about a major incident, the system seems to work effectively.

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The Group goes on to recommend that no single Department or Agency needs to be tasked to co-ordinate arrangements, but that the RUC notification to chief executives of district councils should be reviewed by DOE.

Section 4: Immediate Responses

6. Section 4 of the Report examines the immediate response of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, District Councils, Social Security Agency, Social Services, Compensation Agency and Central Secretariat and the Northern Ireland Office. Issues arising from this analysis are then further discussed in Section 5, though section 4 recommends that any requests for contributions to relief funds should be treated with caution.

Section 5: Major Issues for Consideration

7. Section 5 of the Report considers a number of major issues which arose during the Working Group's examination of the response of statutory agencies to incidents. The issues were considered under a number of broad headings:-

- Co-ordination
- Housing
- Compensation
- Social Fund
- Additional expenditure burdens.
- Managing Publicity

Co-ordination

8. Co-ordination of various statutory agencies in response to any particular incident is essential, though the Group did not conclude that it would be appropriate to allocate

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specific responsibility to any particular department or agency at an operational level. It was agreed, however, that departments and agencies should operate within an agreed response framework which is outlined in the Annex to the report. It was also agreed that Central Secretariat should provide a co-ordinating role for briefing the Secretary of State and Ministers about the response of departments and agencies. This is already in place and continues to work effectively with all departments and agencies reporting on their immediate response to major incidents to Central Secretariat. Central Secretariat then provides a comprehensive report to Ministers and Senior Officials.

Housing

9. A number of issues are dealt with in this section, but the main issue for consideration is the question of the assignment of compensation rights. In October 1992 the Secretary of State announced special arrangements following the Belvoir incident whereby the Northern Ireland Housing Executive would offer to undertake repairs to owner-occupier property on assignment of compensation rights. This special arrangement was introduced by administrative action which involved amendment of the scheme for emergency house repairs to allow the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to carry out permanent repairs on assignment of compensation to the named area of Belvoir and subsequently to Glengormley. In the event there has been very little take-up of the scheme and subsequent consideration by officials has also revealed that a significant uptake of the assignment scheme could cause a major administrative burden, particularly in relation to the £200 deduction from any compensation due from the

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Compensation Agency. The Group accepted the presentational advantage in having the present arrangement and also believed that a withdrawal of the arrangement would cause even greater difficulty given the precedent which has been set. The Group went on to recommend, however, that the DOE should carry out a full review of the arrangements and submit a report to Ministers later this year.

Compensation

10. The main issue on the compensation side relates to the question of the requirement under present legislation to deduct the first £200 from compensation payments. This has come in for much criticism: the particular incidents in Belvoir and Glengormley brought into sharp focus the problems of large numbers of low income families pursuing relatively modest damage claims and facing the prospect of (relatively) heavily discounted settlements. The Group does not make any particular recommendation in this area, but in recognising the major hurdles which any proposal for change would have to surmount, suggests that the question might hopefully be re-examined.

Social Fund

11. This section examined the question of meeting immediate hardship faced by families affected by incidents and points to the inappropriateness and inadequacy of the existing arrangements with the Social Fund for this purpose. It goes on to recommend that it might be worth exploring further whether an immediate hardship payments provision could be introduced separate from the Social Fund, perhaps on condition of an assignment of compensation. This is to

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be considered further by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Compensation Agency and a report will be submitted to Ministers later this year.

Additional Expenditure Burden

12. Section 5 also looked at the additional expenditure burden created for the different bodies over and above compensation requirements. For example, the Belvoir incident was estimated to cost public bodies some £0.5m (in addition to compensation costs). This is an inescapable burden for departments and agencies and the Group concluded that any significant net additional costs arising as a result of terrorist incidents should be considered as a charge on the Block rather than to each department or agency which incurs the additional expenditure.

Managing Publicity

13. Finally this section looked at the important area of publicity management following an incident. The group recommended that departments and agencies should review their current PR arrangements, and that Ministers, subject to the advice of SPOB, PAB and Central Secretariat, should visit the scene of major incidents as soon as possible after the event, in order to reassure the public in cases of widespread damage to social and economic amenities. We recognised of course that such visits can raise wider questions which need to be weighed up in each case.

Section 6: Long Term Response

14. The main thrust of the Report concentrates, quite rightly, on the immediate aftermath of major terrorist incidents. This section makes the point, however, that there is a

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longer term dimension and suggests that Departments and Agencies must try to strike a balance between a structured and sensitive disengagement from areas with a recognition that the physical and mental wounds take some time to disappear.

Section 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

15. Section 7 makes some concluding remarks and sets out the various recommendations for Ministers to consider. In presenting these recommendations the Group pays a warm tribute to the work of all the statutory agencies in the immediate aftermath of the various incidents over the past year. As the Secretary of State and Ministers have witnessed, many people have worked extremely hard to alleviate suffering and hardship and they deserve much praise.
16. The review has in my judgement proved a valuable task. While we have, for good reason, not secured radical change which might have been expected in some areas, the fresh examination of notification and co-ordination arrangements has, I believe, helped departments gain a clearer appreciation of the many linkages involved; and in establishing Central Secretariat as the formal co-ordinating mechanism, the basis has been laid for early and comprehensive briefing for Ministers on economic and social damage to complement the SPOB assessment. This should put Ministers in a much better position to direct the Government response and put across to the public the actions it has taken.
17. The Secretary of State is invited to:
 - i. note the report of the Working Group established to consider points learned following terrorist incidents;

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- ii. note, in particular, the conclusions and recommendations in Section 7 of the report;
- iii. agree that departments should now consider the various recommendations with a view to implementation as soon as possible; and
- iv. agree that departments should be asked to report on the implementation of the Working Group recommendations by the end of November.

DJW.

D J WATKINS

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