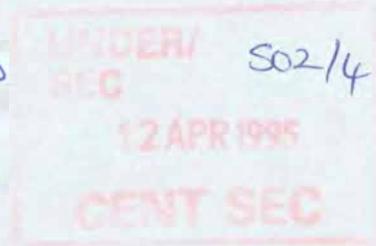




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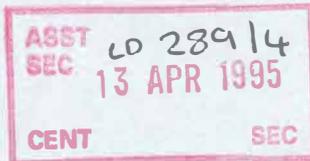
RESTRICTED - MANAGEMENT

Mrs Kenny
Mrs Devlin
LD13/4



11 April 1995

TO: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L) cc PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER (DFP, B&L)
FROM: R B SPENCE PS/MICHAEL ANCRAM (DENI, B&L)
PS/BARONESS DENTON (DED, DANI & L)
PS/MR MOSS (DOE, DHSS & L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/MR FELL
MR LEGGE
NI PERMANENT SECRETARIES
MR MACKENZIE
MR WATKINS
MR WOOD
MR PARKER
MR S BREARLEY



RESPONSE TO DOYLE REPORT

1. Following yesterday's meeting, the proposed response has been recast as a shorter, oral statement for delivery on Wednesday 19 April. Points discussed at the meeting have been incorporated.

2. Attached at Annex A is a draft statement.

3. I would highlight the following changes:-

para 4 reference to the RUC has been omitted as the police view is not mentioned in the Report; the draft seeks to repeat what Sir Reginald says;

para 6 removes the implied criticism of the watchkeepers and outlines what changes might be made in their instructions, including the timing of patrols;

para 7 makes DOE responsible for Parliament Buildings;

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para 8 states that 3 DOE staff have been reprimanded. 5 were interviewed, but disciplinary action under the Civil Service Code was not deemed appropriate by their senior management in two cases because they did not have a direct professional responsibility for the matter involved;

para 9 incorporates a new commitment to revise the Fire Precautions Guide.

para 11 includes the commitment to restore the Chamber and refurbish Parliament Buildings; the Secretary of State will wish to consider carefully the final sentence which would commit him to taking account of the wishes of the Northern Ireland political parties (including by implication Sinn Fein) in reaching final decisions about the restoration of the Commons Chamber;

4. Mr Mackenzie will be submitting separately a folder containing background notes on points raised at Monday's meeting and Q&A briefing. He will attend the Secretary of State in the House of Commons.
5. Attached at Annex B is a draft press release.
6. I am contactable by fax through my office and will be back in Northern Ireland on Sunday. I can also attend the Secretary of State in the House if he so desires.

R B S

R B SPENCE

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ORAL STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON THE DOYLE REPORT

Introduction

1. With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Report by Sir Reginald Doyle on the fire which took place on 2 January 1995 at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, and the implications of that incident for fire safety precautions at other Crown buildings in Northern Ireland.
2. I have today placed a copy of Sir Reginald's Report in the Library of the House.
3. While I am glad to note that Sir Reginald has concluded that the overall standard of staff safety in Crown buildings is generally satisfactory, his Report points up serious shortcomings, both in relation to the Parliament Buildings fire itself and to wider procedures dealing with fire safety matters. Several of his findings are deeply disturbing, and I am determined to address the shortcomings in the most serious manner.

The Parliament Buildings Fire

4. Sir Reginald's view is that the most likely cause of the fire at Parliament Buildings was an electrical fault in the wiring below the Speaker's Chair in the Commons Chamber. He considers that it was improbable that the fire was started deliberately. His conclusion on the cause of the fire is in accord with the findings of the forensic scientists assisted by an independent electrical consultant.
5. A number of matters relating to the fire give me very serious concern:

first, the watchkeepers in Parliament Buildings did not detect the fire and incorrectly attributed an unusual smell to new lagging on heating pipes;

second, part of the first floor of the building was not patrolled because one section was subject to restricted access from 1992 as it had been set aside for political talks;

third, there was no water supply to the fire hydrant system at Parliament Buildings when the fire broke out due to a valve at the reservoir having been closed, despite the fact that the non-availability of water had been reported 18 days before the fire to Department of the Environment staff;

fourth, over a period of nearly 5 years, there was no fire drill in Parliament Buildings even though there was official guidance that a fire drill should be carried out at least once every 12 months;

fifth, the Fire Brigade did not approach the building by the agreed access (ie Massey Avenue) but by the Upper Newtownards Road entrance (which was locked since 2 January 1995 was a public holiday).

6. The watchkeeping staff have been interviewed by the RUC, Sir Reginald Doyle and their Personnel Officer in the Department of Finance and Personnel. They reported that on their regular patrols of the building they found no evidence of fire. Their written instructions are being revised with respect to the timing of patrols, the reporting of unusual circumstances and access to all parts of the building.
7. It is clearly unacceptable that any portion of the building should have been inaccessible to the watchkeepers, when procedures require them to patrol the whole building; this has been rectified. Any misunderstanding about access arises

in part from the building being used by more than one Department. I have now made the Department of the Environment responsible for the management of the whole building.

8. As regards the absence of water in the fire hydrant system, it is clear that no action was taken to seek out the cause and to restore the supply in response to reports on 15 December 1994 that the system was dry. Three officials have been reprimanded. In addition, the Department of the Environment has reminded the contractor and the consultant responsible for the current contract at Parliament Buildings of their continuing obligations in respect of maintenance of existing services and installations during the period of the contract.
9. On the question of fire drill, there can of course be difficulty in setting a convenient date for a trial evacuation in a building which is often used for meetings with the public, but a gap of five years is inexcusable. It indicates that fire precautions were not accorded proper priority by management in Parliament Buildings. I have taken steps to ensure that those responsible for these matters in all Crown buildings in Northern Ireland are in no doubt about their responsibilities, and of my continuing concern that these responsibilities are properly exercised. An accelerated training programme for Premises Officers is being implemented by the Works Service of the Department of the Environment. Departments have been reminded of their obligation to comply with the Fire Precautions Guide which provides advice on fire safety matters. Some aspects of the Guide require revision or clarification and this work has been initiated.
10. Sir Reginald has indicated that the approach by the Fire Brigade to the gate at the Upper Newtownards Road entrance resulted in a delay of less than one minute and was not,

therefore, a material factor in terms of the speed with which the fire was addressed. Nevertheless, the Brigade has been reminded of the agreed access route in the case of fire.

11. I have authorised the Department of the Environment to proceed with work to restore the Commons Chamber as part of a general refurbishment of Parliament Buildings which will include replacement of the heating and electrical systems and extensive repairs to the roof; the upgrading of electrical circuits in the building to modern standards is one of Sir Reginald's recommendations. The estimated cost of restoring the Chamber as it was is about £1.5m. The whole project will cost in the region of £20m and will take about two years to complete. Final decisions about the layout of the Commons Chamber and the supporting services will be taken in the light of progress towards creating a local Assembly and the wishes of the Northern Ireland political parties.

Fire Precautions Generally

12. Turning to the issue of fire precautions generally, it is clear from the Report that fire safety precautions have simply not been given a sufficiently high priority and this I greatly regret.
13. The Report draws attention to the fact that, although the need for major refurbishment, including fire precautions work, in Parliament Buildings was identified in the mid-1980's, work was delayed because of other financial priorities, the need to find alternative accommodation for staff while work was in progress, and the requirement to have the building available for political discussions. There are obvious difficulties in arranging refurbishment of ageing but heavily used public buildings. But I accept there is equally a responsibility on Government for doing so in order to

ensure proper health and safety standards. Sir Reginald makes the comment that fire safety work -once identified as being necessary - should be carried out as a matter of urgency and should not be allowed to wait until it can be incorporated in a wider refurbishment scheme. I accept this and have made clear to all Departments that health and safety is of such fundamental importance that it must merit high priority in expenditure plans.

14. Sir Reginald has made many other important recommendations on the procedures and measures relevant to fire precautions. I have accepted all his recommendations and have asked a senior official in the Department of the Environment to ensure their urgent implementation and to report progress to me on a regular basis. A task force under his chairmanship has been established and has already met on three occasions.
15. In his Report, Sir Reginald indicates that the overall standard of staff safety in Crown buildings provided by fire alarms, escape routes, protection of escape routes, fire extinguishers, hose reels, etc is generally satisfactory. However, he considers that the legislation for Crown buildings is not satisfactory and recommends alternative informal safeguards to ensure that Crown buildings comply with the standards set out in the Fire Services Order. This recommendation is accepted, and applications for all certifiable buildings are being submitted on an accelerated, though prioritised, basis. The objective is to have complete certification coverage within two years. I note that the Home Office has examined the question of legislation on this issue and I am sending a copy of Sir Reginald's Report to my Rt Hon Friend the Home Secretary.
16. The recommendation that a comprehensive and definitive list of all Crown buildings requiring certification should be compiled is accepted and a database has already been prepared.

17. A distinction can be made between procedures to protect the safety of staff in the event of a fire and installations to protect the fabric of buildings. In the latter context, however, modern fire detection systems will be installed on a phased and prioritised basis in those buildings where it is considered necessary. In addition, an urgent review has been initiated to assess which buildings might justify installation of sprinklers or gas flood systems.

Conclusion

18. Hon Members will understand my considerable concern about Sir Reginald's Report in view of the serious shortcomings which it exposed. I can assure the House that I am determined that these shortcomings are addressed.
19. I am most grateful to Sir Reginald Doyle for his Report which, I believe, will lead, through the implementation of his recommendations, to a general improvement of the fire safety arrangements in all Crown buildings in Northern Ireland.

PRESS RELEASE

DOYLE REPORT

In an oral statement today in the House of Commons, Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, accepted the conclusions and recommendations in a report by Sir Reginald Doyle on the fire at Parliament Buildings, Stormont on 2 January 1995. He said that several of the findings were deeply disturbing and he expressed his determination to address the serious shortcomings which had been revealed.

Sir Reginald, who was formerly Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services at the Home Office, concluded that the most likely cause of the fire was an electrical fault in the wiring below the Speaker's Chair in the Commons Chamber. He considered that it was improbable the fire was started deliberately. His conclusion on the cause of the fire is in accord with the findings of the forensic scientists assisted by an independent electrical consultant.

Sir Reginald also concluded that the overall standard of staff safety in Crown buildings in Northern Ireland is generally satisfactory, but he has made a number of recommendations to further improve fire safety.

In relation to the fire at Parliament Buildings, Sir Patrick Mayhew expressed very serious concern over the fact that the watchkeepers had not detected the fire; part of the building had not been accessible to the watchkeepers; water supply for fire fighting purposes was not immediately available even though the absence of water in the fire hydrant system had been reported 18 days earlier; no fire drill had taken place for 5 years; and the fire brigade had sought access to the Stormont Estate at the wrong entrance.

The Secretary of State said that instructions to the watchkeepers are being revised; access arrangements for the watchkeepers to all parts of the building had been clarified; three officials had been reprimanded for the failure to take action over the absence of water in the fire hydrant system; and action had been taken to ensure that fire precautions were being given proper priority in all Crown buildings.

Sir Patrick announced that the Commons Chamber would be restored at a cost of around £1.5m as part of a 2 year refurbishment of Parliament Buildings, which would cost in the region of £20m.

The Secretary of State said he greatly regretted that "fire safety precautions have simply not been given a sufficiently high priority". He accepted Sir Reginald's advice that fire safety work should not be allowed to wait until it could be incorporated in wider refurbishment schemes. Sir Patrick has set up a task force under a senior DOE official to ensure implementation of the Doyle Report's detailed recommendations, including fire certification for all relevant Crown buildings within 2 years, improvements in arrangements for handling fire safety matters in Departments, and installation - where appropriate - of modern fire detection systems.

The Secretary of State assured the House of Commons that he was determined to address the shortcomings identified by the Report and said that he believed that the implementation of the Doyle recommendations would lead to a general improvement of the fire safety arrangements in all Crown buildings in Northern Ireland.