

From: Mrs M E Madden  
CJSD  
14 December 1994

C

ASST 469112.  
SEC 15 DEC 1994  
CENT SEC

1. Mr Marshall  
2. Mr Walker

BSBHA is an  
entirely separate  
unit. This unit relates  
only to the drop-in centres.  
CJSD have confirmed this.

1. as has been

2. as has been

For this reason that, even if  
Minister decide not to apply  
fund to BSBHA, its proposals will  
be rejected on the grounds  
explained in this note? What a tough!

from Kavanagh  
for advice

- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Shannon - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Marsh - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr McCusker - B
- Mr White - B

Dwy  
16/12

has been  
taken  
C 202

PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B

14.12

UNDER/ SEC 677/12  
14 DEC 1994  
CENT SEC

### SELF-HELP CENTRES FOR RELEASED LONG TERM PRISONERS

The purpose of this submission is to seek Sir John Wheeler's agreement to the line officials propose to take in response to proposals submitted by the Chief Probation Officer to establish self-help centres aimed specifically at facilitating the reintegration into the community of ex-paramilitary prisoners.

#### Background

2. Sir John Wheeler may recall an earlier submission of 10 December 1993 which outlined a proposal put forward by the Chief Probation Officer, Mrs Breidge Gadd, that two self-help/drop-in centres should be established in appropriate areas of Belfast - one for loyalist and one for republican released paramilitary prisoners. That submission highlighted three main concerns about the proposals:

- i. The exclusivity of the centres in their intended use solely by paramilitary prisoners and the separation of the facilities for use by different factions. This conflicted with the policy of treating all prisoners as offenders without separate political or criminal status.

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- ii. Services of the type proposed were already available through other providers but were not used by the paramilitary ex-prisoners. Agreement to provide facilities for this group would imply tacit recognition by Government of their exclusive status.
  
- iii. The centres would be managed and run by the paramilitary ex-prisoners themselves, thereby requiring their control of some £160K of Government money each year.

Sir John Wheeler agreed with the conclusion that the Probation Board should be dissuaded from pursuing the proposal further and a meeting was arranged between officials and Mrs Gadd to convey this decision.

#### Developments Over the Past Year

3. At the meeting with Mrs Gadd on 14 December, officials expressed their concerns about the project but Mrs Gadd, remaining obdurate in her commitment to the proposal, undertook to revise it to take account of and assuage the concerns which had been expressed. A revised proposal, which was received at the end of March 1994, appeared to go some way toward meeting the objection put forward by officials by, among other things, expanding the target clientele for the proposed services from paramilitary ex-prisoners to 'long-term prisoners'. In subsequent discussions and exchanges of correspondence with Mrs Gadd it became apparent however that the centres were likely to be used exclusively by the paramilitaries. In essence, therefore, the doubts expressed last December remained valid.

4. In September, following a meeting with the Chairman of the Probation Board, Mr Sean Curran, Mr Legge wrote to him confirming the NIO's view that to reach a firm decision on the proposal now - in light of recent developments - would be precipitate. He added, however, that the proposal would remain under consideration and that

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we would return to it once we were clearer about the current political and security developments. In his reply of 3 November, Mr Curran expressed the Probation Board's disappointment at the terms of Mr Legge's letter and pressed for a 'definitive and conclusive response' on the issue.

### Current Developments

5. The NIO's research and statistics programme for 1994/95 includes a research project on "community reintegration of long-term prisoners". The findings from this project will give us a better basis for considering proposals of this nature both in the context of establishing ex-prisoners needs and identifying ways in which their needs might best be met.

6. In addition to the proposal submitted by the Probation Board, Stephen Pittam, the Assistant Secretary of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT), has written to the PUS to seek NIO involvement in co-sponsoring with the Trust a proposal put to them by an organisation known as PROPP - the Progressive Release of Political Prisoners. That proposal replicates the one submitted by Mrs Gadd under the aegis of the 'Lifers Self-Help Aftercare Group!'

7. It seems likely that given recent political developments and the prospect of a sustained ceasefire we will come under increasing pressure to respond positively and imaginatively to proposals of this nature. This pressure is likely to increase when, in the near future, the European Commission announces its economic assistance package which we understand is likely to include some mention of measures to help ex-offenders. At the moment, however, our reservations about the proposals put forward by the Probation Board and JRCT outweigh the case for a positive response. But the balance will invariably shift as the political and security situations develop over the coming months, and we would expect in due course to entertain some form of provision for the reintegration of released long term prisoners.

*Handwritten note:* / *see memo*  
*7 Dec.*

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8. In the margins of a recent presentation to the new Probation Board, Mr Legge had a brief and informal discussion with Mr Curran and suggested that it would serve no useful purpose to press the NIO for a definitive answer on the proposal at this time. Mr Curran, however, remained adamant that the Board would require a firm answer now. If that answer was 'no' or if the Department appeared to him to be procrastinating, he made it clear that he would not hesitate to take the matter up with the Minister.

#### Proposed Line

9. In spite of Mr Curran's determination, it is proposed to respond to the Probation Board and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust proposals along the following lines:

- we are very much alive to the suggestion that long term prisoners might have particular difficulties in reintegrating and have commissioned research to inform our future thinking on the matter;
- at present we still have reservations about the proposal, not least about how it might currently be construed within the community; but
- the situation is under constant review and decisions on such matters will be informed by the nature and pace of political and security developments.

10. I should be grateful for early confirmation that Sir John is content with the proposed line.

(Signed)

MARY E MADDEN

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