



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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BACKGROUND TO THE STATEMENT

Introduction

1. These papers provide background to the statement by the Rt Hon Tom King, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, about further action being taken to tackle the problems in Belfast's most deprived areas.
2. The statement follows work by officials which the Secretary of State commissioned in December 1987. This work covered the areas of greatest need in Belfast; these areas - shown in the attached papers - include parts of East, North and West Belfast and involve Catholic and Protestant communities.
3. The main characteristics of these areas are high levels of unemployment, relatively low levels of skill and educational achievements, and a poor physical environment. While housing conditions have improved considerably, large numbers of unfit, substandard or over-crowded homes remain to be tackled. The private sector tends to be weak and local economic leadership to be limited. In general terms, morale is low; a ghetto mentality exists in some locations; there is little confidence in the capacity of these areas to recover by themselves; and the individual can become alienated from the wider society in which he or she lives. On the positive side, there are able and energetic people and organisations in all parts of the city eager to help themselves and those around them.
4. Like other inner city areas, the deprived areas of Belfast suffer from comparatively higher levels of petty crime - assaults, robberies, joyriding, vandalism etc. In addition, paramilitary influences are strong in several parts of the city and, along with inter-community conflict, result in acts of violence, damage to property, punishment shootings, racketeering and a very bad image which adds significantly to the difficulties in improving social and economic conditions.
5. A number of these areas were identified in earlier work in the 1970s which resulted in the Belfast Areas of Need Programme. Material available in the 1981 Census enabled a reassessment of these Areas of Need to be undertaken and the summary of the main indicators from that exercise is included with these papers. It was clear from this update, however, that the areas of most acute disadvantage were Catholic and Protestant wards in West and North Belfast. A detailed analysis of socio-economic conditions in these Wards, using other available data, has been made and the results are also published in these papers. This analysis can also be used in developing proposals for other deprived areas of the city.

Analysis

6. The study by officials indicated that a specific, constructive and co-ordinated programme of practical action is now needed to target the central problem of lack of employment and economic activity.
7. Such a programme would have the following main objectives:
 - 7.1 to help to create the conditions in which economic activity can be stimulated and reinforced (as far as possible through private sector activity and growth);
 - 7.2 to enhance the quality of life (both through measures for the benefit of the whole community and, as necessary, support for individuals who need direct help);
 - 7.3 to improve the prospects of those living in these areas of securing employment and of benefiting from economic and industrial development in the whole Belfast Urban Area and outside that Area; and
 - 7.4 to enlist the positive involvement of local people.
8. The programme would highlight the main areas on which further significant and measurable progress must be made and would involve an intensification and acceleration of a number of existing activities plus a number of important new measures.
9. Areas for action under the programme would include:-

Employment ie attracting new investment; developing new business activity; promoting the enterprise culture; expanding the ACE programme as a means of providing quickly more jobs pending the creation of viable employment (with priority to self-help community initiatives which may lead to permanent jobs and which improve the local environment and enhance the quality of services to the local community); enlisting the support of the private sector.

Labour Market and Training ie increasing access to employment opportunities in Belfast and elsewhere; increasing appropriate training opportunities; including closer links with employers.

Education ie achieving a substantial improvement in performance of school-leavers (including rationalisation of secondary school provision and raising the morale of teachers and pupils); increasing access to further education; developing the links between schools and employers.

Health ie developing community health and social services; improving primary health care; enhancing the environment of existing health facilities.

Public Sector Services ie improving the delivery and co-ordination of major services; improving and maintaining the physical environment; expanding the Action Team approach.

Voluntary Sector ie developing and strengthening the contribution which community and voluntary bodies make.

10. The study concluded that new machinery is needed to drive forward these new measures in the areas of greatest need, including

- developing the details of the Action Programme, with sharp definition of action points with measurable targets;
- ensuring the implementation of such a Programme, involving the effective integration of action across departmental boundaries;
- taking decisions about the deployment of resources;
- monitoring effectiveness and reviewing overall progress.