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PLANNING FOR THE SUMMER

Meeting held on Friday 9 May 1997

Present:

Mr D Watkins, Cent Sec

Mr D Gibson, DED

Mrs D Brown, Cent Sec

Mrs L Brown, DOE

Mr S Marsh, NIO

Mr J McGrath, DHSS

Mr N Perry, NIO

Mr T Clarke, NIO

1. The purpose of the inter-Departmental group was twofold: to facilitate better liaison with the RUC in the preparation for possible civil unrest in the Summer; and to establish machinery for efficient information gathering during any periods of unrest.
2. The group would plan on the assumption that events in the Summer of 1997 would be broadly similar in scale and seriousness to those of the Summer of 1996. It would not plan on the basis of a significantly more serious scenario, such as had occurred in 1974.
3. The RUC had listed a number of requests involving help from Departments. These included access to plant and equipment (such as earth moving vehicles and chain saws), and Departmental staff to operate the vehicles and equipment.
4. The group agreed that work should be carried out to list the Departmental assets of which the RUC could have use, and the contacts through which the RUC would work to access those assets when needed.
5. The use of Departmental staff to operate the equipment was more problematic. Staff were unlikely to be willing to be involved, for example, in clearing barricades from roads, even with RUC protection, and were likely to argue that their contracts did not

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- require them to do so. One option, however, would be to use any staff who volunteered.
6. There was a lack of clarity as to where responsibility lay for keeping arterial routes open, ie, whether with DOE or the Army. DOE would explore this.
 7. DANI would be invited to join the group, as the RUC might need access to some of its equipment.
 8. A list of contact numbers would be compiled for police in each sub-Division. DOE and DHSS would explore the existing arrangements for contact at local level.
 9. DHSS would look at the style of the response from the Social Security Agency in times of crisis, and would explore the scope for securing ways of funding emergencies (such as that which had occurred in North Belfast in 1996) anywhere in the Province.
 10. During times of civil unrest, it was important to provide information to the community and to other services; eg, the ambulance service and bus operators needed to know which roads were blocked. This information should be logged with the RUC. However, there was a need to consider a wider public information initiative.
 11. There was a need also to provide full and accurate information to Ministers. Meetings of SPM and SCM would be used in the run-up to the Summer. During any period of trouble, SPOB would open its Ops Room on a 24 hour a day basis to receive and collate information, eg, on road blockings.
 12. Central Secretariat, which would be collating information from NI Departments, would want to avoid duplicating the information collected by SPOB. Each Department could be asked to identify a contact point who would establish a means of drawing in information from relevant parts of their Departments and would pass it to Cent Sec in the SPOB Ops Room.

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The group would meet again on Tuesday 3 June at 10.00 am. That meeting would

- assess progress on clarifying responsibilities in respect of keeping roads open;
- consider any progress by DHSS in devising a means of giving flexible financial help in emergencies;
- consider how information could be provided to the public in times of crisis. (The Information Service would be invited to join the group for that purpose.)

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