

Handwritten: *Secret P. in. Main file*
10/10/89

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PA CCRU

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Handwritten: *Mr. Grady*

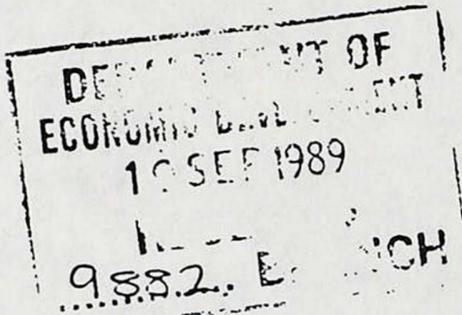
Handwritten: *807300 19/9/89*

Handwritten: *Mr. Minnie*

Handwritten: *Mr. Wolstencroft*

FROM: BRIAN MAWHINNEY
18 September 1989

- cc Minister of State (B&L) - B
- Ministers (B&L) - B
- PUS (B&L) - B
- Sir Kenneth Bloomfield - B
- NI Perm Secs *19/9*
- Mr Burns - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Spence - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Miles - B
- Mr Carvill
- Mr Holmes
- Mr J McConnell - B
- Dr Harbison
- Mr Kirk - B



Handwritten: *cc Miss Brown*
Ms McAister

Handwritten: *Miss Allen*
Miss Thompson

SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L) - B

Handwritten: *a Under Secs.*

NORTHERN IRELAND COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

Introduction

1. This minute is intended to bring you up to date with the plans to create the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

Background

2. On 19 June, I announced, with Tom King's agreement, that Government was backing the creation of a new body to promote the improvement of community relations in Northern Ireland. In that announcement, I explained that Government was responding to initiatives taken by a group which had been developing ideas for a community relations resource centre and by the Cultural Traditions Group which had been seeking to promote a more constructive debate about how to handle cultural diversity. I stressed that I envisaged the new body adopting a "bottom up" approach, concentrating on supporting all those working at local level to promote greater tolerance, practical co-operation and mutual understanding across the community.

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3. I invited a small committee, chaired by Dr James Hawthorne and drawn mainly from existing groups, to work closely with our Central Community Relations Unit in finalising the detailed arrangements for establishing the new body as soon as possible. I provided this committee with a framework and guidelines for their work.

Aims and Objectives

4. The main aims and objectives of the new body will be:-
 - 4.1 to provide support, facilities and recognition for organisations operating at local level which are concerned with the development of community relations, awareness of cultural diversity and conflict resolution;
 - 4.2 to promote constructive debate throughout NI about community relations and cultural diversity;
 - 4.3 to develop opportunities at local level for people from the different traditions to meet and work together and to increase mutual understanding and respect; and
 - 4.4 to increase public awareness of, and support for, activities which improve community relations and promote awareness of cultural diversity.
5. The new Council will seek to meet these aims and objectives by:-
 - 5.1 assisting and facilitating local groups and individuals to build confidence, lessen tensions and improve relationships with different communities;

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- 5.2 providing a resource centre for statutory and voluntary agencies and individuals throughout Northern Ireland working in the area of community relations and cultural diversity;
- 5.3 working with the wide range of existing voluntary, community, business, trade union, church and other relevant organisations to develop community relations policies and practices as part of their activities;
- 5.4 working with all parts of the public sector to facilitate a greater understanding of, and support for, activities which promote community relations and awareness of cultural diversity;
- 5.5 organising the provision of appropriate training and support for people active in the field of community relations and cultural diversity; and
- 5.6 identifying, evaluating and disseminating ideas and examples of good practice.

Constitution

6. The body will be established as a company limited by guarantee. The details of the articles of association will be agreed with us. At an earlier stage, I had contemplated the body being established on a statutory basis, partly in order to demonstrate Government's full commitment to the concept. However, I am satisfied that the present proposal is a sensible (and quick) way forward and will still allow us to assess at a later stage whether there is a case for legislation.



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7. A governing body of 18 to 24 members is envisaged; the final number is still a matter for discussion. Government would directly appoint up to one third and the remainder would be appointed under arrangements which would ensure that the body as a whole was broadly representative of the NI community and reflected key sectors like business, industry, education, trade unions, churches and the voluntary sector. Many of the initial members would be drawn from those involved to date in the Cultural Traditions Group and the ideas for a resource centre and, together with my appointees, would ensure that the Council had a reasonable balance between "the great and the good" and those with real knowledge and credibility at street level. Appointments would be for up to 3 years with a proportion retiring each year; reappointments would be subject to a maximum service of 6 years. To an extent, the Council would, therefore, become self-perpetuating, but in identifying the foundation members and filling subsequent vacancies, there would be consultation between CCRU and the Council.

8. There are, of course, some dangers in this flexible approach. But I think that the approach, whilst underlining the independence of the body and establishing its roots in the community, enables Government to have a strong influence on its overall composition. The alternatives would be for Government to appoint all - or at least a majority of - the members or to give nominating rights to a number of specified organisations. I do not believe that the first would enhance the credibility of the body at grass roots level or that the second would necessarily produce a better slate of members.

9. The Council will invite CCRU to send an observer to its meetings and, as appropriate, those of its sub-committees. While there are some potential difficulties (for example,

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being drawn into debates on issues where Government may take a different view than the Council), I am sure that this arrangement will help to develop a good, close working relationship between CCRU and the Council.

Development Plan

10. The Council will be required to prepare a 3 to 5 year development plan which will form the basis for seeking support from Government and other funding agencies.

11. The main ingredients of that plan are likely to include -

establishing links with existing organisations working at local level to improve community relations;

determining the support required for such organisations and developing a resource centre for this purpose;

establishing the training needs of people working on community relations and arranging the provision of appropriate training;

carrying forward the work of the Cultural Traditions Group, including administering parts of the cultural traditions programme; and

taking over responsibility, in a phased manner, for funding local community relations activity, including the cross-community contact scheme presently carried out by NIVT.

12. A politically sensitive problem is how best to handle the Irish language issue within the wider context of respecting cultural diversity. Eventually the Council should be

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involved, but drawing it directly into a highly developmental role on this one aspect of cultural diversity could risk giving the body a "green tinge" from the start and seriously threaten its credibility with the majority community. I propose, therefore, initially to handle the funding of Irish language activities directly, with CCRU acting on the advice of an advisory committee which I would set up for the purpose.

Financial Implications

13. It is envisaged that the Council would be a lean organisation with not more than half a dozen key officers plus support staff. Its Director would be paid on a salary based on the Civil Service Grade 6 and the post will shortly be advertised. The Council would initially rent accommodation in a part of Belfast accessible to both sides of the community.
14. The Council would be required to submit its financial proposals to Government on an annual basis. I propose to meet the core administration costs of the Council - estimated at £60,000 in the current financial year, rising to around £165,000. These figures include the payment of an honorarium of £5000 per year to its Chairman.
15. The Council will also need resources to implement different projects and programmes, including existing programmes which it will take over from other agencies (eg NIVT's cross-community contact scheme and aspects of the cultural traditions programme). I envisage the Council seeking financial support from the International Fund for Ireland and the major charitable trusts as well as Government. At this stage, I estimate our support for programme expenditure being in the region of £250,000 per year. All this is manageable within the existing PE provision for community relations.

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16. I will be making clear from the onset that Government will want to review the effectiveness of the new body before the end of the initial 5 years and that, to this end, an independent evaluation will be commissioned during the 4th year of the Council's existence.

Conclusion

17. I believe that these proposals will lead to the establishment of an effective body which will be able to play an increasingly important role in helping to ease the divisions in the Northern Ireland community.

Signed

BRIAN MAWHINNEY
Approved by the Minister
and signed in his absence

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7

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