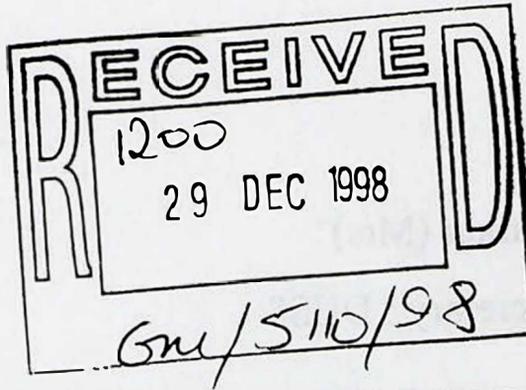


Nicola - pl-see para 10.

From: DPS/Mr Ingram
22 December 1998



Mary Butcher - O.
Victims Liaison Unit

MR INGRAM'S MEETING WITH SECURITY FORCE/PRISON OFFICER VICTIMS GROUPS

The Minister was grateful for the comprehensive briefing you provided for the meeting the Minister had with representatives of the DPOA and Prison officers association on 16 December 1998.

In attendance:

Miss Hazel McCready (DPOA)	Minister
Mr Sam Malcomson (DPOA)	Ms M Butcher
Mr Finlay Spratt (POA)	Mr N Marsden
Mrs Moira Kerr (Widow of a prisoner officer)	

Detail

2. Miss Hazel McCready started off by mentioning that the DPOA were concerned that currently work has been undertaken by the North West Trust cutting across work already undertaken by the DPOA to establish a pain clinic in the North West. Mr Malcomson added that there was too much money going into research which could be better used in providing beds. The Minister replied that he has no detailed knowledge of the Health service but it is for individual Health Boards to decide where clinical needs lie. The Minister added that the Health service in Northern Ireland is inefficient in that there are too many health boards and it does need rationalised. He also reminded those present that the local health service will be transferred to the Assembly in a matter of months and then it will be down to local politicians to run the services. He advised the group that they should be making contact with these people as they will be responsible in delivering in the long term. He mentioned that he written to all the parties in the Assembly asking them to nominate someone who would deal with victims issues. Once all the replies have been collated, the Minister undertook to pass them on to the various victims groups and then it would be up to them to start lobbying the parties for meetings.

3. Mrs McCready asked the Minister could the Trauma Centre be asked to contact the groups to detail exactly what services are available? She added that Musgrave park hospital has the biggest trauma centre in Europe; could the Government not give them £20,000 for equipment that would assist everyone in the community? The Minister replied

that he thought it would be a good idea for someone from the Trauma Centre to contact the groups to outline what was on offer. With regard to her request for 20k for Musgrave Park hospital he emphasised that the allocation of funding was no substitute for proper decision making: if an area of critical need was identified it should be funded from the relevant Department's budget. Mrs McCready then asked the Minister if the group could help Musgrave Park Hospital by writing to the Eastern Health Board. The Minister confirmed that this would be the best way forward.

4. Mrs McCready then mentioned that another big concern for her group was the disability living allowance validation programme (DLVP). She explained that the relevant legislation covered accidents happening today but not the injuries received by police and prisoner officers 20 years ago even though their injuries still affect them today. The Minister reminded Mrs McCready that at the last meeting with the DPOA he recommended that they should feed in their experiences of the welfare benefit system to Alastair Darling for consideration.

5. The Minister then moved on to the definition of victims. He pointed that the concept of victims has to be agreed by society as a whole and we are currently at the beginning of a very complex system. Mrs Kerr opined that there has to be a difference between a victim of the troubles and others in the community. Mrs McCready added that the bulk of the officers she deals with receive a monthly pension of £50; all of them were medically discharged as a result of mental or physical injuries received over the last 30 years. Mr Malcomson emphasised that they did not want to be treated as special cases he pointed out that there is a Police Dependent Trust on the mainland so perhaps money could be provided to get an equivalent body up and running in Northern Ireland. The Minister pointed out that the Police and Rehabilitation Trust has recently been established although admittedly not up and running yet. Mrs McCready pointed out that this was for serving police officers. She opined (and Mrs Kerr agreed) that police officers would have been better off joining terrorist organisations.

6. Mr Spratt mentioned to the Minister that obviously his biggest concern is prison officers. The POA have for years been concerned about protecting themselves but now that we have a semblance of peace in Northern Ireland they wish to address the problems of people like Mrs Kerr. He added that the POA do see a difference in victims; the people who have stood for 30 years against terrorists are the real victims. He said that nothing has been done for security force victims. He believed that the security forces need to set up their own group to deal with security force personnel. He emphasised that the group

present were happy to take on that mantle but they needed money to do this. He explained that Prison Officers cannot go to WAVE for assistance because of people there with other motives. Mr Spratt also pointed out that anything prison officers' widows receive comes from the POA's own funding. On the presumption that there would be a problem getting funding for such a group, Mr Malcolmson intervened to ask the Minister who will be paying the bills for the research into the Bloody Sunday Inquiry. The Minister pointed out that this was a judicial process which was outside the hands of the Northern Ireland Office even though we are picking up the bill for it. He added that this was a good example of examination and escalating costs. He stated that with that particular example people were trying to approve or disapprove what actually happened. There was no dispute about what happened to police officers and prisoner officers. The Minister agreed with Mr Spratt that security force personnel need a central voice. He added that the group needed to articulate themselves in a stronger more structured manner. Mrs McCready then asked the Minister if they could have the finance for a full-time worker for a year or two. The Minister stated that he would consider it and come back to her.

7. The Minister mentioned that £200,00 of the Victims budget had been put aside for the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust to decide what groups should benefit from it, but they had come back nominating individuals. Because of that there was currently a stand-off. Mrs McCready, who sits on the Committee, said that she was unaware that it had to be groups. That said, she pointed out that some people do not want to be involved in groups. When the Committee met they felt that £5,000 should be allocated to individual hardship cases. The Minister emphasised that this was not what he asked NIVT to do.

8. Mr Spratt then pointed out that to set up the group he had suggested they would need professional advice; would the Minister agree to giving them a grant? The Minister replied that he would consider their case if that is what the members they represented wanted. In reply Mr Spratt explained that he and the other representatives present would have to build confidence through their own group. He stated that those they represented had not lived in the community for 30 years but would like to. He also pointed out that when the Prison Service downsize there will be less members to fund the benevolent fund for widows etc. He asked the Minister how soon he could confirm if they would be able to have a consultant. The Minister explained that he would have to give this careful consideration, because if he did something for one group he had to be conscious of the reactions of other groups.

9. Mrs McCready then moved onto the Educational Bursary Scheme and asked was this just for children. The Minister confirmed that adults were also eligible. She then asked about the possibility of Government funding for their group to go on an educational trip to America to see how victims of the Vietnam war had been treated. The Minister agreed that these sort of trips are very helpful and he pointed out that the Cost of the Troubles Study group were going to South Africa early in the New Year. He did not however specifically offer to fund the trip.

10. Moving back to the Health Service issues the Minister suggested that it would be useful for the group to meet with Mr McFall. To that end he asked the group to write to Mr McFall's office [**PS/Mr McFall to note**]. Finally, Mrs McCready asked for information on the Civic Forum. The Minister promised he would get information on that from the political side of the office [**Action: PS/Mr Murphy**].

Conclusion

11. In a wash up after the meeting the Minister indicated to you that he would be sympathetic to giving the group the funding for a consultant. I should be grateful for further advice on this.

Noel Marsden

N MARSDEN
Private Secretary
Ext 28127

cc: PS/Mr Ingram (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Murphy (B&L) - O - [**See paragraph 10 for action**]
PS/Mr McFall (DENI,DHSS&L) - O - [**See paragraph 10 for action**]
Mr Jeffrey - O
Mr Maccabe - O
Mr Stevenson - O
Mr Cleland - O
Mr Pollock - O