

**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL  
WORKING GROUP ON VICTIMS HELD IN ROOM E4.18, CASTLE  
BUILDINGS AT 3.00pm ON THURSDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2000**

**In Attendance:**

Margaret Boyle	Social Security Agency	
Mary Butcher	Victims Liaison Unit, NIO	
Nigel Carson	Culture, Arts & Leisure	
Noel Cornick	Agriculture & Rural Development	
Fergus Devitt	Victims Unit, OFMDFM	
Anne Flanagan	Higher & Further Education, Training & Employment	
Leslie Frew	Health, Social Services & Public Safety	
Don Harley	Social Development	
Denis Haughey MLA	Junior Minister, OFMDFM	(Joint Chair)
Christine Jendoubi	Education	
Michael Maxwell	Enterprise, Trade & Investment	
Alan McArthur	Regional Development	
Michael McAvera	Victims Unit, OFMDFM	(Secretary)
John McConnell	Environment	
Dermot Nesbitt MLA	Junior Minister, OFMDFM	(Joint Chair)
David Sterling	Finance & Personnel	
Chris Stewart	Community Relations, Human Rights & Victims Division, OFMDFM	

**1. Introduction**

Mr Haughey welcomed everyone to the meeting and began by emphasising that all parties in the Executive and Assembly are committed to improving services offered to the victims of the conflict of the last 30 years. The fact that they, the Junior Ministers, were jointly chairing this forum was a demonstration of their personal commitment and that of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Mr Haughey welcomed the commitment of each of the Departments to this area and indicated his approval that such senior staff were involved. He went on to say that the clear message from the victims' organisations was that the provision of practical help and support must be a high priority for all those involved in this area. It was therefore very important for all Departments within the devolved administration to be proactive in meeting the needs of victims in a responsive, timely and co-ordinated manner.

Mr Haughey then explained that, because of other pressing business, he and Mr Nesbitt would have to close the meeting at 4.00pm at the latest.

All those attending then briefly introduced themselves to the Group.

## 2. **Terms of Reference**

Mr Nesbitt stressed the seriousness with which he and Mr Haughey viewed victim's issues. They did not underestimate the difficulties facing the Working Group in addressing these sensitive matters and for this reason it was important that the Group had clear terms of reference. Mr Stewart emphasised the high priority to be given to providing quality practical help and support to victims and highlighted the importance of the Working Group having a clear sense of purpose and a joined up approach to the work to be undertaken.

Some members of the group felt that it was important first of all to agree on a clear definition of what is a 'victim' and who are the 'victims'. There followed a lengthy discussion with some of the Group voicing their concerns on this point. They felt that they could not go on to agree the terms of reference until they first had a clear definition of 'victims'. It was agreed that the Victims Unit (VU) would develop a draft working definition of 'victims' to be circulated to the members of the group and agreed by them within the next 2 weeks. Mr Haughey commented that a generally accepted definition would be very difficult to draft and great care should be taken in dealing with this. If the definition could not be agreed, a meeting of the Group would be held.

### **Action:1. Fergus Devitt**

#### **2. Group members**

## 3. **Report on the meeting of the Junior Ministers with Adam Ingram MP**

Mr Haughey reported that at the recent meeting with Adam Ingram it was agreed that the VU and the Victims Liaison Unit (VLU) will co-exist within OFMDFM and the NIO respectively to cover transferred and reserved/excepted matters relating to victims. The Units will complement each other, not compete and, where appropriate, joint working (and funding) will occur. As victims need to know who to go to for help, it is important to determine at an early stage the agreed roles and responsibilities of each Unit and publicise that to the relevant audiences. Work on this is ongoing. Ministers have agreed to meet again on 13 November.

## 4. **Departmental contacts**

It was agreed that each Department/Agency would appoint a named individual to act as a contact point for the Victims Unit in order to assist in dealing with "welfare" cases brought to the attention of the Unit by victims groups. The individual appointed should have the necessary knowledge of their Department/Agency and the appropriate authority to resolve issues promptly. Names should be submitted to the Victims Unit by **Friday 6 October** (some

Departments/Agencies have already nominated contacts). The Victims Unit intends to call an early meeting of those nominated to clarify roles and responsibilities.

**Action: Group members**

**5. Report on the Social Security Agency project**

It had been intended that Margaret Boyle would give a short presentation on the Social Security Agency's 'People Affected by the Troubles' project; however, due to time constraints, it was decided to defer this to the next meeting. All those on the Working Group had received a background paper on this project and Margaret would be happy to answer any queries before the next meeting.

**6. European Funding**

Don Harley said that European funding available under PEACE II had been identified for victims and that detailed negotiations with the EU were due to begin shortly. Fergus Devitt added that work had commenced on a Measure for this funding and this would be developed with DFP over the coming weeks.

**7. Capacity building for victims groups**

Mary Butcher explained that many voluntary groups, particularly the newer ones, do not have the capacity to deliver the necessary support to their target groups. Equally, many of the policy makers are also new to these issues. For this reason the VLU with the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT) are currently developing a capacity building training programme for all those involved in this work. This training will consist of 5 x 1 day seminars. In order to determine the content of these seminars for the policy makers Mary felt that it was essential for the Departments/Agencies to have an input. She suggested that each Department/Agency nominate a person to work with members of the VLU and NIVT to develop the training programme. With regard to the actual training programme to be delivered, members of the Group may wish to attend themselves. The Victims Unit will be in touch with the members of the Group on this issue (Secretary's note: see letter issued by Fergus Devitt on 29 September).

**Action: Fergus Devitt**

**8. Departmental updates**

It was agreed that each member of the Group would provide a short written update on initiatives/progress on victims' issues within each of their Departments/Agencies before the next meeting. These updates should be sent to

Fergus Devitt by **27 October** in order that they can be collated and distributed prior to the meeting.

**9. Any other business**

John McConnell asked if OFMDFM policy on victims would be subject to an equality impact assessment. Fergus Devitt said that the current draft of the OFMDFM Equality Scheme referred to two equality impact assessments in relation to victims, one of which was the strategic plan. The development of any new policy would need to be examined in light of this.

**10. Date and format of the next meeting**

Mr Nesbitt said that he and Mr Haughey intend to continue in the role of joint chairmen for the foreseeable future. It was agreed that the group should meet approximately every six weeks and that a schedule would be drawn up for the next meeting in week commencing 13 November with proposed dates for the following six months. (Secretary's note: next meeting now arranged for Tuesday 14 November at 10 am).

The Ministers closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their time and inputs.

Michael McAvera  
Secretary