

Susan Robinson

08/09/2001 12:47 PM



cc.

Ps Ministers/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP
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May/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Tony McCusker/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Gerry
Loughran/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Anne Rainey/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Angela
Dullaghan/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Pamela Stewart/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Will
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Parkinson/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Hugh Logue/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Denis
Ritchie/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP

Subject: North Belfast Initiative

See attached from Chris Stewart



Min fm G McDonald - NBI.dc Letter from WGlendinning to DR - NBI. Letter fm D Ritchie - W Glendinning NBI.



CS-9-8 North Belfast Initiative.c

Ms Giffey
poss. Pft reference.

1 Mr Mulholland to note
2 file P1.

FROM: Glenn McDonald
APS /Mr McCann

DATE: 8 August 2001 Copy Distribution List Below

PS/MR MALLON PS/MR EMPEY

FOLLOW UP TO 26 JULY EXECUTIVE: NORTH BELFAST

1. Your note of 6 August asked for a report setting out the steps being taken to ensure safe access to schools in North Belfast when the new term begins.

2. The Department has been concerned throughout this difficult situation to show support for the school and to safeguard the safety and well-being of the children as far as possible. The then Permanent Secretary, Nigel Hamilton, visited the school in June and the Department has been in contact with CCMS, which has management responsibility for the Holy Cross School, and the Belfast Board.

3. The Deputy Chief Executive of CCMS, Mr Eddie McArdle, has been closely involved in working with the school, parents, community groups and police to help resolve this issue and has advised as follows:

.the school access issue has arisen from, and become embroiled with, wider interface issues and community tensions in the area-

.CCMS and the Board of Governors (BOG) of the school have sought to keep the two issues separate to avoid education becoming a political football. There is an ongoing risk that other schools could be blocked in retaliation (eg Cliftonville Primary) but CCMS and the BOG have worked to prevent such an escalation.

.CCMS and the BOG have sought to reach into the local communities through church contacts on both sides, building on relationships developed during a similar situation 3 years ago, to ensure that Holy Cross School can stay open.

.The Mediation Network has been drawn in by groups on both sides to help resolve the issue and has arranged meetings with both communities.

.A Parents Group, acting under the auspices of local community groups, has been established to meet with the Mediation Network and Glenbryn residents over the next few days. CCMS and the BOG, concerned that this group would be discussing

negotiating on issues relating to the school, have arranged to have the School Principal and Vice-Chair of the Board of Governors co-opted onto the membership-

CCMS and the BOG plan to hold a subsequent meeting of Holy Cross parents to explain the outcome of the meetings and discuss how best to take matters forward.

.The local catholic church is launching a pastoral initiative in the parish which will comprise masses and meetings to provide an alternative forum for discussion of these issues-

.If the situation is not resolved by September, access through the back gate of the school can be maintained through St Gabriel's secondary school on the Crumlin Road, as happened at the end of the summer term. While some parents will be content with this in the short-term, there are others who are demanding access via the front gate from the Ardoyne Road and others who fear for the safety of their children under either arrangement.

.It hardly needs to be said that, even if access is maintained, it is not acceptable to have young children placed under such daily stress and parents and teachers kept in an ongoing state of anxiety.

4. This issue is one which has arisen, and will ultimately have to be resolved, at local level. The ongoing efforts by CCMS and the BOG to keep the school open and to draw a clear distinction between the question of school access and wider community issues, are to be commended. The situation is extremely difficult and volatile and higher level political interest and activity to help reach a resolution, provided it is pitched at the right level and delivered with sensitivity, would be welcomed by CCMS and the Board of Governors. In considering how the Community Relations Unit might assist, it would be best to contact Eddie McArdle directly (Telephone 028 9039 3880). The contact point in the Department is Dr Mark Browne (028 9127 9338). Belfast Board officers have visited the school and assisted in strengthening security around the premises but have had more limited involvement with the local communities. The relevant Board contact is the Senior Education Officer, Mr Michael Rea (Telephone 02890564027).

5. I would be grateful if you would keep us informed of any proposed action by OFMIDFM.

[Glenn McDonold]

GLENN McDONALD con~ Distribution List

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Community Relations Council

06 August 2001

Mr Denis Ritchie
Community Relations Unit
Block A, level 4 Open Plan
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3SG

Dear Denis

Re: North Belfast Initiative

Following the meeting which was convened by CRU last Thursday to discuss the situation in North Belfast, the Community Relations Council wishes to proceed to engage with community activists from the respective communities in the area through a series of '*proximity talks*'. This would involve the following:

- ◆ Contact with the relevant parties through Springfield Inter-community Development Project, Community Development Centre North Belfast and Lower North Belfast Community Centre.
- ◆ Mediation network providing the facilitators for the process and advice on the location and exact format of the process.
- ◆ CRU providing access to relevant statutory agencies as may be necessary to assist the process.
- ◆ Concentration on the short-term reduction and hopefully ending of, inter-communal violence in the area. Resolution of conflict around the schools and related issues.
- ◆ In order for us to proceed with this CRU will need additional resources to fund the hiring of meeting places and related incidental costs. We will forward details of these for you as we progress the format of the discussions. There are likely to be other costs related to taking families out of the area for respite.

I hope that this is satisfactory and I look forward to your reply.

Your sincerely

Will Glendinning
Chief Executive Officer

/ The Office of the First Minister

and Deputy First Minister --

COMMUNITY RELATIONS UNIT BLOCK A, LEVEL 4
CASTLE BUILDINGS, STORMONT, BELFAST BT4 3SG
z- Tel: 02890-523463 Fax: 02890-522229

Mr W E Glendinning Chief Executive
Community Relations Council
6 Murray Street
BELFAST
BT1 6DN

7 August 2001

NORTH BELFAST INITIATIVE

Thank you for your letter of 6 August.

As discussed I have spoken to Brendan McAllister of the Mediation Network with regard to their co-operation on this matter and he has assured me that the issue was at the top of their agenda. Indeed I understand that the Mediation Network has already been active on the ground and it would, I suggest, be useful for you to meet Brendan as soon as possible to get an update from him on current developments.

I can confirm that the Department is content that you now proceed as proposed and will be prepared to facilitate liaison with relevant Government Departments and Agencies as required. At present we are seeking information from the Department of Education about any plans they have with regard to the return to school at the start of September and I will keep you informed about this. You have of course already well established lines of communication with the Housing Executive. Please let me know if you need any other channels to be opened, eg with BRO, Social Services etc.

On the subject of resources, I can also confirm that additional funding over and above expenditure which cannot be contained within CRC's existing budget will be available, subject to consultation with us in advance with regard to any major items of expenditure or any that might be novel or contentious.

It would be helpful if you could keep me closely in touch with what is going on. In the main I think oral reports will suffice but in the case of any significant developments it would be preferable to have a written report. Many thanks for your assistance and co-operation.

Yours sincerely

D J RITCHIE

FROM: CHRIS STEWART
9 AUGUST 2001

PS/SIR REG EMPEY
PS/MR SEAMUS MALLON

NORTH BELFAST INITIATIVE

1. Following our meeting on 6 August, the purpose of this note is to update Sir Reg Empey and Mr Mallon on the latest developments in relation to the North Belfast Initiative. The position on the action points from the previous meeting is as follows.

Liaison with other initiatives

2. The Lord Mayor's initiative is ongoing, but there is nothing further to report at this stage. The initiative by local community groups to establish dialogue within the two communities is also ongoing.

Scope for Community Relations Council (CRC) and Mediation Network involvement

3. Following a request from the Community Relations Unit (CRU), the CRC produced a proposal to be taken forward in conjunction with the Mediation Network (copies of the relevant correspondence are attached). I am satisfied that the proposal is sound, and that the CRC has the capability and resources to implement it. CRC input will involve the Chief Executive, Will Glendinning; the Deputy Chief Executive, Paul Lynch, and the Director of for inter community initiatives, Michaela Mackin. CRC will operate through key local organisations – the Springfield Inter-community Development Project; the Community Development Centre North Belfast; and the Lower North Belfast Community Centre.
4. The core of the proposal is the establishment of dialogue, initially on a single identity basis, with the intention of introducing cross-community dialogue when feasible. The proposal will allow CRU to focus on a co-ordination and liaison role, at the apex of lines of communication with both communities via the CRC and local groups, assisted by Mediation Network. CRU will arrange to meet any additional costs accruing to the CRC and Mediation Network. Preparatory work is underway, with CRU arranging meetings with key players for early next week. CRU will also continue to liaise with the 'high level' group which was brought together last week.

Access to schools

5. A report has been received from the Department for Education (attached). It indicates that the authorities are aware of the issues,

and are supporting local efforts at achieving a resolution, focussing in the main on Holy Cross Primary School. Mediation Network are already involved, having been brought in at the direct request of the local communities. Mediation Network is hopeful of a resolution by September.

6. The clear advice from the education authorities and, indeed, from local community groups is that this initiative should be allowed to proceed, but that it would be wrong to focus efforts solely on the access to schools issue, as it is a symptom of underlying tension.

Ministerial participation

7. My assessment of the current situation is that the personal interest taken by Ministers is warmly welcomed, but that the time is not right for high profile participation, as the arrangements for dialogue are have yet to fully crystallise. However, this should be kept under review in relation to the scope for Ministers to add impetus to the process at a future point. Meanwhile, Ministers may wish to consider a meeting with Will Glendinning of the CRC.

C F STEWART

Community Relations, Human Rights & Victims Unit
☎ 28351

Enc

cc: PS/Mr Loughran
Mr McCusker
Mr Haire
Mrs Sheila Bradfield
Mr McCartney
Mr May
Mr Barrington
Mr Campbell
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Mr Ritchie
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Mr Ritchie