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TO: BILL SMITH
WESLEY SHANNON

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UPDATE ON NORTH BELFAST

1. Derek Wheeler and I met with the North Belfast MLAs yesterday afternoon. Nigel Dodds MP MLA was not available and asked that we speak to his political adviser, Ian Crozier, which we did.
2. Following discussions with CRUA last week and with Ardoyne/Holy Cross School interests at the weekend, Derek and I thought that it would be important to meet the MLAs to update them on the implementation of the various measures in the package and in particular to explore with them how the road re-alignment measure and a Community Forum might be progressed. The Glenbryn Community are very keen to see rapid progress on the road development. The Ardoyne Community on the other hand have indicated that while they were prepared to enter into consultation on the road re-alignment plan, they believe that the appropriate mechanism would be the establishment of a Community Forum through which all matters could be raised.
3. Prior to the meetings with the MLAs, we became aware of a press statement issued by CRUA which was critical of "support staff in the First Minister's Office" and suggested that we were not pursuing this matter as vigorously as CRUA would have hoped.
4. In our discussions with the MLAs we emphasised that we were proceeding as we had indicated in the letter from the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (issued to interested parties on 23 November). In that we committed to the preparation of a design by mid-January. This had been done, and we explained that we are now in the second stage of implementing this measure which is detailed consultation with both communities. We said that we would like to have been further on than we are now but indicated that the violent environment over the past month had not been conducive to open consultation. We indicated that DRD would do the work on the road and provide technical support once a design has been finalised and that we are urgently pursuing this.
5. We advised MLAs that we were aware that while some steps had been taken to develop dialogue, we understood that there had been no contact between both communities for the past fortnight. We said that we were

disappointed at this and reiterated our offer of providing support to both communities to assist in the development of community dialogue.

6. The message from the Unionist side was that there was a very real expectation that the road re-alignment would go ahead. MLAs expressed concerns about this with varying degree of emotion. Billy Hutchinson MLA in particular was very angry and threatened that if the work was not commence within 10 days then "he would do it himself". There was a perception, from the Unionist side, that the Ardoyne community was now trying to veto this proposal.
7. Some concerns were raised about the involvement of Ardoyne Focus group who were not one of the groups listed in the letter that was issued to interested parties by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. We explained that at the meetings with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, the Right to Education group had indicated that once the protest was out of the way, any consultation with the community should be through Ardoyne Focus group and that we have been communicating with that group since then. We also indicated that in any event there are similar people involved in both the Right to Education group and in the Ardoyne Focus group.
8. We emphasised that while the issue of community dialogue was important, we wanted to see this pursued in parallel to the proposal on road re-alignment and, again, offered third party assistance to facilitate this. None of the Unionist MLAs thought that this would be helpful at this stage. They all emphasised that without progression on the road re-alignment there was little potential for progress on community dialogue.
9. From the Nationalist side there was much less enthusiasm for the proposed road re-alignment. Gerry Kelly MLA indicated that he hadn't discussed the matter in detail with local people since he had been away at the weekend. While he didn't indicate opposition to the proposal, he emphasised that this was without prejudice to consultation with the Ardoyne community interests. He agreed to speak to the local people and come back to us.
10. Alban Maginness indicated that there would be no enthusiasm for the proposal in the nationalist community. He considered that there was real concern about any further isolation of the school. However, he recognised that the proposed re-alignment might help reduce conflict at the interface.

Next steps

1. The proposed road re-alignment is becoming a "crunch" issue. Early implementation of this measure is crucial to CRUA staying on board. We now need to plan ahead to see how we might manage the implementation of this in the event that nationalists indicate either that they do not support the measure. We should have a clearer picture on this within the next 48 hours.
2. Derek has now received the design with which CRUA is content. We will make contact today with Gerry Kelly MLA with a view to arranging for Mary McKee of Ground Works (the landscape architect who is working with Derek on the proposal) to meet with the representatives of the Ardoyne community and Holy Cross School interests. This may lead to further discussion with CRUA.
3. We will also urgently explore with DHSSPS and DRD officials how the process might be moved on once a design has been finalised. The issue of the transfer of land from the Everton complex to DRD will need to be formally clarified.
4. We will discuss with Stephen Grimason how this might best be presented in the media.
5. We will provide Ministers with another update as soon as we have a clearer view of how this might be taken forward.

(sgd) *Mary Bunting*

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