

## NOTE FOR THE RECORD

### MEETING WITH SINN FEIN TO DISCUSS WEST BELFAST TASK FORCE – THURSDAY 29 MAY AT 9.40 AM.

#### PRESENT:

Minister

Gerry Adams

Michael Ferguson

Chrissie McAuley

Ciaran Quinn

Siobhan O'Hanlon

Mike Warnock, DETI

Barry Clarke, DETI

Adrian Arbuthnot, DEL

Mike Thompson, DSD

Tim Losty, Invest NI

Sinn Fein

1. Gerry Adams welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Minister. He acknowledged the work to date on the WBTF, which was to the benefit of everyone in West Belfast and the Great Shankill, but much more was needed. Sinn Fein was keen to see the Joint Working Group established soon and wanted to be represented on it.

#### Feile an Phobail

2. Gerry Adams provided a background to Feile an Phobail and its importance to the development of the social economy in West Belfast and the need for it to be addressed as part of the WBTF. He explained the benefits of Feile an Phobail in terms of developing cultural and creative arts. Mr Adams outlined the festival's positive impact on the local community and the key role it plays in redirecting local youths away from drug abuse, joy riding, alcohol etc. Added to these issues, he said that the uncertainty of future funding could result in the loss of five of eleven full time jobs.

#### Lá/Conway Mill

3. Gerry Adams went on to raise the issue of Lá, the Irish language daily newspaper, which was in the process of going through a second appraisal process for financial assistance. Whilst he appreciated the need for the appraisal process, Mr Adams



added that it was issues such as this, together with Feile an Phobail and Conway Mill, which could undermine the positive steps taken in relation to the WBTF if they were not seen to be supported. He said that Conway Mill played a significant role in supporting alternative education projects and young artists, but the lack of mainstream funding was of great concern. Mr Adams then paid tribute to the work of those civil servants on the ground, who had brought expertise to the area.

4. In response to the above issues, the Minister indicated that progress had been made and that Mr Adams was right to highlight the social economy issues – an area government was keen to address. Referring to funding for Feile an Phobail the Minister agreed that it needed to be sorted and said there was a political will to find a resolution, but the main question was which of the Departments should accept responsibility for managing its funding. He thought that the funding sat better with DCAL than BRO, however a more strategic approach to festivals needed to be adopted by Government and he was keen to see this addressed as part of an overall tourism product development strategy.
5. In response to criticism from Michael Ferguson on the apparent lack of movement from DSD re Gateway routes, Mike Thompson explained that the DSD was going through a transition period and referred to the positive work underway on the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. The Minister added that DSD did not ignore TSN; it was top of their agenda.

#### **Joint Working Group (JWG)**

6. The Minister advised that the first meeting of the JWG would take place on 11 June. The establishment of a liaison group (chaired by Brian Hanna and with representatives from each Task Force) was currently being progressed by the WBTF Chairman. In response to a question from Mr Adams on the establishment of an Oversight Committee, the Minister and Mike Warnock explained that this was no longer viewed as an appropriate model; the JWG which would comprise the local liaison group and senior government officials from key departments, was the preferred model.



7. When queried about political representation, Mike Warnock explained that it was a matter for the TF Chairmen and the local communities to agree membership of the liaison group – this could not be for Departments although we would be pleased to provide advice and support.

### **Integrated Development Fund (IDF)**

8. Michael Ferguson asked about the bidding process for the IDF. The Minister explained that West Belfast would qualify for IDF funding and the JWG would help develop a strategy from which bids could be made. The Minister added that IDF money had been allocated for this and the next financial year, however bidding criteria had still to be determined. The Minister suggested that Sinn Fein submit ideas and bids through the JWG – which were likely to be addressed in the Autumn.

### **Partnership Board funding**

9. Chrissie McAuley referred to the current situation regarding a lack of capacity in the West Belfast Partnership Board (WBPB) and the need for government to address the WBPB's funding bid for its Economic Development Unit. The pressures on the staff and funding resources of the WBPB were already stretched and would further increase with expected representation on the JWG.
10. The Minister indicated that Geraldine McAteer had raised this issue with him the previous day at the former Mackies site. He was aware of the WBPB's bid for over £750k over five years and reminded the Sinn Fein delegation of the requirement of an economic appraisal. However, he advised that Invest NI would help plug a funding gap by purchasing services from both Partnership Boards. The Minister went on to express his concerns about the lack of participation on the Greater Shankill side and the need for this to be addressed.



## Invest NI Headquarters Building

11. Michael Ferguson suggested that locating the new Invest NI HQ at Springvale would be a major boost for both communities and urged the Minister to do what he could to ensure this. In response, the Minister explained that the Invest NI HQ project was the subject of an open tender.

## Springvale Educational Village (SEV)

12. The Minister referred to the SEV and the possible involvement of BIFHE. Gerry Adams said that he was one of many in the area who was cynical of SEV – Sinn Féin had fronted a sustained campaign to improve educational problems in West Belfast and ideas put forward by the local communities were not been taken on board. The Minister accepted that government would have little credibility re SEV until something happened on the ground. Adrian Arbuthnot confirmed that a Report on the current review was due in 3 months time.

## Conclusion

13. Gerry Adams said that it was important there was a regular flow of information as progress was made. He acknowledged progress, the potential for leveraging funding via the JWG from the IDF and reminded the Minister that as yet none of the Gaeltacht issues had been properly addressed. The Minister suggested a follow-up meeting in three months time, however he expected the JWG would keep everyone informed on a regular basis.
14. Referring to a request from Gerry Adams for mainstream funding for Feile an Phobail, the Minister said that he would feed the discussion on funding back to Angela Smith as he was keen to have the funding sorted out. **Action: PS/DCAL to note.**
15. In relation to Lá, the Minister advised that the project must display viability and their business plan was currently being appraised.

16. Gerry Adams suggested that areas such as Feile an Phobail and Lá needed taken on as mainstream issues by the WBTF.
17. The meeting concluded at 10.30 am.

**BARRY CLARKE**

**Ext: 29793**

5 June 2003

cc. Bruce Robinson  
Wilfie Hamilton  
Leslie Morrison  
Alan Clarke  
Officials in attendance  
PS/DSD  
PS/DCAL  
Jill Heron  
Alma McManus  
WBTF – IDG members