

CONFIDENTIAL

R.

cc PS/Ministers (L&B)-M
PS/PUS (L&B)-M
NI Perm Secs
Mr Burns - M
Mr Stephens
Mr Erskine
Mr Chesterton-M
Miss Pease
Mr Steele
Mr M Elliott
Mr Spence
Mr J McConnell
Mr G McConnell -M
Mr Kirk-M
Mr Hamilton

PS/Secretary of State (L&B)-M

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. Following your note of 28 July, I have been considering how to implement the SOS's decision that Central Secretariat should have "responsibility for central co-ordination of Government's community relations policy, to act as a stimulus for thinking by departments in this area and ensure that the community relations dimension of other policies is properly promoted". In particular, I have been examining how Dr Mawhinney's and DENI's responsibilities in the community relations field should relate to Central Secretariat. I have taken account of PS/Dr Mawhinney's note of 31 July and PS/Mr Stanley's minute of 4 August.

2. DENI has (by virtue of para (2) of Article 4 of the Community Relations (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1975) a statutory responsibility for

"formulating and sponsoring policies for the improvement of community relations in Northern Ireland."

This responsibility (initially conferred upon the Ministry of Community Relations (Northern Ireland) 1969) was transferred on 1 April 1975 for DENI as the Ministry of Community Relations was wound up.

3. As with its other responsibilities, this responsibility of DENI is discharged under the direction and control of the Secretary of State, and to assist him in that direction and control the Secretary of State has designated a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Dr Mawhinney) to assume day-to-day political responsibility.
4. It is clear that "policies for the improvement of community relations" cannot be dealt with exclusively within the ambit of DENI, but require the co-operation and involvement of virtually all NI Departments and NIO. This is the rationale for concluding that the Secretary of State and the Minister with responsibility (inter alia) for community relations working to him would benefit by the creation of effective inter-departmental machinery, organised and energised from the centre.
5. It should be understood that any policies formulated through this new machinery and approved by Ministers would be sponsored or carried out by the Department or Departments directly concerned. In particular, the powers to provide financial or other assistance conferred by the 1975 Order would remain with DENI and continue to rest within the ambit of that Department's Accounting Officer.

F.R.

6. At a later stage, it may prove desirable to consider divesting DENI of its "catch-all" statutory role for community relations to allow it to concentrate on its educational contribution via Education for Mutual Understanding, European Studies and other projects and their extension and development. But the policy, constitutional and legal implications of this need some further consideration.

CENTRAL COMMUNITY RELATIONS UNIT

7. Under the new arrangements, Central Secretariat would establish a Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU). This unit would be serviced mainly by existing staff though at least one new post may be required. The Unit would also have access to academic advice and be supported by an interdepartmental steering group. It would keep in close touch with PPRU (Policy Planning and Research Unit, DFP).
8. CCRU would, as I envisage it, have three broad roles:
 - 8.1 A challenge role (ie examining all major policy submissions to PCC and Ministers from the point of view of their impact on community relations);
 - 8.2 An audit role (ie periodic reviews of the impact on community relations of major departmental programmes); and
 - 8.3 An innovative role (ie offering advice on general Government policy on community relations and on specific issues which have a significant impact on community relations).
9. Where the Unit intends to express a view on a policy submission which has already been made, I would normally

expect to speak first to the Permanent Secretary of the originating Department. If a departmental Minister had expressed or signed such a submission, I would put any views to the Secretary of State through him (copying to Dr Mawhinney). Reports from periodic reviews would be made available to all Ministers and Permanent Secretaries and discussed with Dr Mawhinney. Advice on the development of general government policy in the community relations field would be cleared inter-departmentally in the Community Relations Steering Group (CRSG) (see below) and if necessary at PCC and submitted to the Secretary of State through Dr Mawhinney. Advice on specific issues would not be given without full prior consultation with the Department or Departments directly concerned. Where advice given or views expressed by the Unit could involve the commitment of additional resources, there would be prior consultation with DFP.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS STEERING GROUP (CRSG)

10. CCRU would be supported by a small inter-departmental steering group drawn from NIO and the Northern Ireland Departments, chaired by Dr Mawhinney, with Mr Spence of Cent Secretariat as alternate Chairman.
11. In the arrangements for inter-departmental steering, CCRU would need to maintain the closest working contacts with DENI and PAB in particular. Outside the Government machine, it would seek to establish close contacts with, and seek advice from, appropriate academics and those with practical experience in community relations matters. If this seemed a promising course, the Unit could consider supporting the creation of an informal outside "support group".

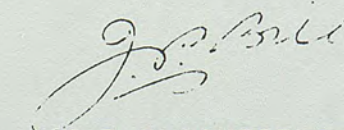
FORM OF ANNOUNCEMENT

12. The method of announcing these changes requires some care. On the one hand, they are essentially internal, machinery of government arrangements and it would be unwise to be too specific in any public statement or to imply that a major new step was being taken. On the other hand, the Secretary of State wants to place on the public record a clear statement of Government's approach to community relations issues. He has also to respond to SACHR's request (Mr O'Hara's letter of 10 June) for a response to the Frazer/Fitzduff paper and for "a full statement of the Government's policy on community relations and how it sees this developing".
13. As requested, officials have outlined the Secretary of State's proposals to the Chairman of SACHR and Mr O'Hara has now written (copy annexed) to the NIO to confirm his initial reactions and requesting further consultations with SACHR before final decisions are taken and announced.
14. In brief, Mr O'Hara welcomes the Secretary of State's personal commitment to community relations matters and his willingness to assume direct responsibility. In supporting the concept of a new central unit, he argues on the one hand that its brief should include discrimination and equality of opportunity and on the other that it must not duplicate the work of existing agencies, including SACHR. He urges that the unit should report directly to the Secretary of State and not through a Junior Minister. He also contends that the Unit must be under the direct control of the Northern Ireland Office, since it has the overall responsibility for preventing religious and political discrimination, and that the unit must have the authority to examine issues in the reserved and accepted fields as well as transferred matters under the control of Northern Ireland Departments.

CONFIDENTIAL

F R.

15. I am not clear whether Mr O'Hara's letter reflects the views of the whole Commission. There is, I think, a tendency on his part to view any new measures in relation to community relations as relevant only to the extent that they will help to remove disadvantages faced by the minority community. There is also a preference on his part for these matters to be handled by UK rather than Northern Ireland officials.
16. At an earlier stage it was envisaged that the Secretary of State's policy might be announced through a special meeting to be convened at Hillsborough at which SACHR and other interested bodies would be present. However, in view of Mr O'Hara's latest letter, the Secretary of State will wish to consider the alternative of making his announcement during an early visit to SACHR. Either option would allow Dr Mawhinney to follow up the Secretary of State's statement with his own statement about the community relations proposals in the education field.
17. On balance I favour making the announcement to SACHR and I attach a draft press which might be used. We have however to take account of Mr O'Hara's request for further consultations before final decisions are taken and announced. I do not favour further formal consultation with SACHR; the Secretary of State has decided what he wants and officials have explained the position to SACHR, but it might go some way to meet Mr O'Hara's point if the Secretary of State responded in writing along the lines of the draft letter which is attached.
18. The Secretary of State and Dr Mawhinney will no doubt wish to discuss.


K P BLOOMFIELD

21 August 1987