

MINUTES OF PUBLIC MEETING HELD IN BELVOIR ACTIVITY CENTRE ON
MONDAY 23RD NOVEMBER 1992 AT 4.00 P.M.

1. OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS

Due to the large number of individuals who turned up at the centre for advice, it was agreed to hold an open meeting in the main hall of the Activity Centre. The main purpose of the meeting was to enable elected representatives to obtain feedback on problems currently experienced by residents following the recent bomb damage within the area.

2. OPENING REMARKS

Councillor Harper opened the meeting by thanking everyone for their attendance, and introducing the invited representatives:-

- Rev. I. Paisley (M.E.P.)
- Councillor Mrs. Iris Robinson (Mayor)
- Alderman P.D. Robinson (M.P.)
- Mr. George Wilks (Northern Ireland Housing Executive)

Councillor Harper stated that it would be his intention to open the meeting for discussion, thereby enabling residents to raise particular grievances. Before doing so however, he invited Rev. Paisley to say a few words.

Rev. Paisley confirmed that both he and Alderman Robinson had met with the Secretary of State shortly after the bomb blast, and had discussed a number of aspects regarding compensation claims and repair work. He stated that the purpose of today's meeting would be to provide both representatives with further information, in order that they can meet once again with the Secretary of State to highlight the current problems being experienced by the residents. Rev. Paisley concluded by saying that he was concerned that individuals were unable to make contact with key persons within the relevant statutory agencies, and to this end, he had arranged for the personal work telephone numbers of the Chief Executive of the Compensation Agency, Mr. J. Robinson, and the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Mr. Bill Cameron to be made available to the people of Belvoir. He then read aloud the respective telephone numbers:-

Mr. John Robinson
Chief Executive
Compensation Agency
Telephone - Belfast 246956

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Mr. Bill Cameron
Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Telephone - Belfast 240588.

3. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Councillor Harper declared the meeting open to the public, and invited those present to raise any matters requiring clarification, or issues needing further attention. Members of the panel responded to individual queries as they arose, and it was agreed that following the meeting, Rev. Paisley and Alderman Robinson would make arrangements to meet with the Secretary of State to discuss the problems raised. A further public meeting will be convened after this has taken place to report on any development. (The main points raised are summarised in the attached report for information).

4. CONCLUSION

The meeting closed at approximately 5.30 p.m. with an agreement that the two parliamentary representatives would report back to a Public Meeting once they had discussed the issues with the Secretary of State. It was agreed that the Community Services Department of Council would arrange publicity in advance of the scheduled date.

(iii) £200 limit

One member advised the meeting that his solicitor had informed him that Mr. Hales, Security Minister, gave an assurance on a recent visit to the centre, that the £200 threshold or excess clause would be looked at sympathetically, particularly for those in greatest need. This was confirmed by others present.

Alderman Robinson stated that such a measure was absurd in legal terms as the clause was written in law. He agreed to take the matter up with the Secretary of State, and to enquire into the possibility of Government making a special hardship payment to those who affected.

(iii) Settlement of Claims

One resident was concerned that settlement figures supplied in writing by the Compensation Agency bore

BELVOIR BOMB DAMAGE

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS RAISED AT PUBLIC MEETING ON MONDAY 23RD NOVEMBER 1997

1. COMPENSATION AGENCY

(i) Estimated Damage

Several members expressed concern that builders' estimates for approved repair work were not being accepted by the representatives of the Compensation Agency, resulting in the offer of settlement being considerably lower than required. In some instances, this resulted in a shortfall of approximately £3,000 to £4,000 in the overall claim, which if not resolved, will result in the occupier being 'out of pocket'.

It appeared to residents that an unofficial upper ceiling of £20,000 - £22,000 was being imposed, and that the Compensation Agency was generalising on the nature and extent of damage. It was stated that, according to the legislation, every property must be assessed according to the damage incurred, and that if, as suspected, an upper ceiling is being imposed then this is incorrect. The matter is to be looked into further.

(ii) £200 Limit

One member advised the meeting that his solicitor had informed him that Mr. Mates, Security Minister, gave an assurance on a recent visit to the centre, that the £200 threshold or excess clause would be looked at sympathetically, particularly for those in greatest need. This was confirmed by others present.

Alderman Robinson stated that such a measure was absurd in legal terms as the clause was written in law. He agreed to take the matter up with the Secretary of State, and to enquire into the possibility of Government making a special hardship payment to those most affected.

(iii) Assessment of Claims

One resident was concerned that settlement figures supplied in writing by the Compensation Agency bore

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no resemblance to the actual payment made. He also was concerned that representatives from the mainland had been brought in to assess damage to properties, and questioned why this was the case.

(iv) Telephones in Mobile Homes

It was reported that the cost of transferring a line to the mobile home was £140, with a further payment necessary when the tenant eventually moves back into their permanent dwelling. Clarification is being sought as to whether this cost will be met by the Compensation Agency.

2. NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING EXECUTIVE

(i) Mobile Homes

State of Vehicles

Several residents complained about the state which the caravans had been handed over to residents, and the fact that they were extremely dirty, damp and uninhabitable. Most families had to spend hours cleaning the vehicles before moving in.

General Conditions

A number of residents reported that they were living in extremely cramped and cold conditions, and that they suspected several vans had been infested by mice.

It was felt that additional heaters may be required during extremely cold spells.

Washing Facilities

Residents said that one washroom and dryer was not enough for twelve families with children, and that this should be rectified immediately.

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Site

People commented that the ground being used to accommodate the caravans was a quagmire, and that additional flagstones were required immediately, with resurfacing being considered at a later date.

Rent and Services

There was some uncertainty regarding the charges being made to owner-occupiers for the use of caravans and services. The N.I.H.E. representative confirmed that they would be making a claim directly to the Compensation Agency in this respect.

(ii) Poor Workmanship of N.I.H.E. Contractors

Several Executive Tenants expressed their concern over the poor workmanship of Executive Contractors, and questioned why local builders could not have been used. It was also stressed that every dwelling should be thoroughly inspected by Executive Officials when work is completed by the contractor.

One Executive Tenant commented that she felt that they were being treated as second class citizens, and stated that her vacant property had not been treated with respect by the workmen, who used it as a public toilet. Doors had also been left open on several occasions.

A number of owner-occupiers commented that it was because of this type of problem that they would not assign over their compensation rights to N.I.H.E. Contractors, whose standards fell short of their expectations.

(iii) Re-occupancy of Vacated Properties

Some discussion took place regarding the pressure being put upon N.I.H.E. Tenants to return to their properties before they had been adequately restored to their proper and former condition. Several residents felt that they had not been given adequate time to prepare the house before moving back into it. It was also pointed out that the N.I.H.E.

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expected rental immediately upon the handing over of the keys, and Alderman Robinson agreed to seek a 'rent-free' period of time enabling tenants to prepare their homes for re-occupancy. He felt that it was proper and morally correct for the N.I.H.E. not to ask for rent immediately upon return of keys to the tenant.

(iv) Garages

It was also reported that garage owners, waiting for repairs to doors were still expected to pay rent, despite the fact that the garages were unusable.

(v) Maisonettes (Castlehume Gardens)

Residents living in the maisonettes at Castlehume Gardens reported to the meeting the details of their plight at the weekend, when contractors left the site without weather-proofing the roof of the maisonettes. This resulted in properties being soaked during the inclement weekend weather, despite tenants seeking advance assurances from the N.I.H.E. that the maisonettes would not be left in this manner. Councillor Harper commented that over the weekend he had contacted the N.I.H.E. Emergency Repair Service, and had been informed that the contractor would return to the site immediately. It now appeared however, that this had not happened as promised.

Other residents living in maisonettes asked the N.I.H.E. representative for a written guarantee that such an occurrence would not happen when their properties are due for repair. Mr. Wilks assured residents that this would be given.

(vi) Roofspaces (Castledillon Road)

One owner-occupier made reference to large holes in the adjoining roofspaces, and the fact that Housing Executive properties had not been properly repaired, resulting in open gaps between adjoining walls of roofspaces.

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(vii) Emergency Repair Service

Discussion ensued on the emergency repair operation which was set up on the night of the incident. Several people commented that the amount of internal damage could have been restricted if N.I.H.E. workmen had been provided with emergency lighting generators and elevation equipment, enabling roofs to be repaired during the hours of darkness. This would have cut down considerably on the damage caused to carpets, curtains and furniture as a result of the heavy rainfall which occurred all through the night.

3. SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY

Benefits/Income Support

One lady living in a mobile home commented that her Income Support had been cut due to the fact that she had been moved out of her original property. Rev. Paisley promised to look into the matter if she supplied her name & address and further details at the end of the meeting.

4. NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

Forensic Laboratory

A number of residents sought clarification on whether the Government intended to reinstate the Forensic Laboratory on the existing site. The Mayor and Councillor Harper confirmed that they had both written to Mr. Mates and had been informed that the matter was still under consideration.

CONFIDENTIAL

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