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Mr Gowdy, DHSS
Mr Hunter, DHSS
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr McConnell - B
Mr Wylie, SSA
Mr Robinson, Compensation Agency

UNDER SECRETARY
(Criminal Justice)
26 NOV 1992
935
N.I.O.

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L) - B

BELVOIR ESTATE - REQUEST FOR A MEETING BY DR PAISLEY AND MR PETER ROBINSON MP

1. This further report (following my last report of 14 October) covers those issues which Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson may raise with the Secretary of State at their meeting on 26 November.

HOUSING

Background

2. The bomb which exploded at the Forensic Laboratory on Wednesday 23 September damaged a total of 1,002 homes, 574 of these were Housing Executive tenant dwellings and the remainder were privately built or Executive dwellings now owned by the

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occupiers. Approximately 50% of the dwellings suffered minor damage, 40% moderate damage and 10% were badly damaged.

All wind and weatherproofing repairs to Executive and owner-occupied dwellings were substantially completed by Sunday, 27 September 1992. As I indicated in my earlier minute of 14 October it is the Executive's intention to complete bomb damage repairs to all those dwellings before Christmas.

Current Position

3. At 16 November a total of 860 Executive dwellings located within the full range of the explosion had either had repairs completed or had been surveyed to determine any work required. Of the 29 Executive dwellings rendered temporarily uninhabitable, repairs have been carried out to 23 and the remaining 6 should have repairs completed this week. In the case of these 29 dwellings the Executive will consider sympathetically requests for a rent free period to enable the tenants to redecorate. The Executive's normal redecoration and disturbance allowances will apply as appropriate in all cases.

The Secretary of State announced shortly after the explosion that the Executive would be available to complete repairs for owner-occupiers following assignment of compensation rights by the occupier to the Executive. However, to date none of the owner-occupiers has requested the Executive to carry out permanent repairs though a second letter offering this facility has now been sent to all owner occupiers.

I understand that, at the public meeting on 23 November attended by Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson together with the Mayor, Mrs Robinson and Alderman Ernie Harpur, the following main housing issues were raised:-

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Standard of repairs - only one official complaint has been received by the Executive and this is being followed up.

Betterment of Dwelling - tenants' dwellings will be brought back to their original condition. Replacement of kitchens and/or bathrooms is not taking place but is included in future schemes, the first phase of which is programmed for the third quarter of 1994/95 (resources permitting).

Conditions around mobile homes - there are 20 mobile homes located in two areas. The Executive is currently arranging for additional hard standing of paths to be laid. Complaints about mice will be followed up.

Condensation in mobile homes - the Executive will consider requests for additional heating.

Laundry facilities in mobile homes - additional facilities are being provided and should be in place by next week.

Contractors - the contractor (H & P Campbell of Newry) in question is working on an improvement scheme in the Estate and was appointed in accordance with normal tendering procedures.

Rain penetration at Castlehume Gardens - this part of the Estate is the subject of an improvement scheme which had already been programmed and was not precipitated by the explosion. The flats and maisonettes in question had been vacated and the tenants' belongings removed into storage in anticipation of some damage occurring during the work. In order to construct a new roof in a three-storey block the contractor needed to break through the existing roof. Minimal rain penetration to vacated flats did in fact take place but not flooding as implied by Dr Paisley. Polythene sheets are in place to reduce damage. Damage will of

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course be attended to before the flats are handed back to their tenants.

4. The Housing Executive are keen to meet the concerns of the tenants and suggest that Dr Paisley meets with Mr Billy Cameron, the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Operations, to talk over the situation. The Department of the Environment strongly support this suggestion and the Secretary of State may care to put it to Dr Paisley during the course of their meeting.

Compensation

5. Background statistics in respect of the Belvoir Bombing are attached at Annex A.

Dr Paisley has expressed concern about an arbitrary ceiling of £22k for compensation awards. The position is that each claim is dealt with on its own merits and settlement reached depending on the level of damage incurred and there is therefore no arbitrary ceiling of £22k on compensation awards.

He has also expressed concern about the recurring problem of the £200 threshold. The Criminal Damage Compensation Scheme does require the deduction of £200 from each claim. This is contained within the legislation and cannot be waived. However, it is important to note that where a householder is insured the applicant may be able to recoup some of this deduction if the excess on their household insurance policy is less than the £200 threshold.

7. All Social Fund applications were processed immediately. To
SOCIAL SECURITY ETC

Action by Social Security Agency

6. As a result of the Newtownbreda explosion on the evening of 23 September 1992, staff on the Knockbreda Social Security Office responded as follows:

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9.30 am 24 September - Two members of the District Management Team and 2 Social Fund Officers went to the Activity Centre in the Belvoir Estate to assist those who had suffered damage to their homes. A Social Fund Officer remained at the Activity Centre until Friday, 2 October.

25 & 26 September - Information about the Social Fund was provided by the District to Castlereagh Borough Council for inclusion in their leaflet which they delivered to residents.

General

10. 1 & 2 October - Visits to approximately 700 homes were made by 27 volunteers from the Agency, delivering especially prepared one-page Social Fund leaflet.

11. 2 & 3 October - The District provided further information to Castlereagh Borough Council on the Social Fund for inclusion in their second leaflet. Information was also provided for an input to the Herald and Post Newspaper.

7. All Social Fund applications were processed immediately. To date the following payments have been made:

DAVID HART	Community Care Grants	69	£26,730
CPNTAL	Budgeting Loans	28	£5,795
	Crisis Loans	5	£1,116

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One further Social Fund application was received on 24 November and it will be cleared by Friday 27 November.

8. There has been no criticism to date about our handling of the emergency situation. The only enquiry received came from Dr Paisley and concerned the amount paid to 2 residents. Both applications were reviewed and a full explanation was issued to Dr Paisley on 12 October 1992.
 9. Annex B contains background information on help available from Social Security through the Social Fund and Annex C is a table of Social Fund applications and awards following recent bomb explosions - it will be seen from this table that the majority of money paid out is in the form of non-repayable grants.
- General
10. On 2 October the Secretary of State announced a payment of £10,000 to Castlereagh Borough Council's Emergency Fund. This was paid through the Social Security Agency and was extremely well received by the Mayor (Mrs Robinson) and residents.
 11. The Secretary of State should be aware that I am convening on 9 December the first meeting of a Working Group on "Points To Learn" following terrorist incidents. I will of course keep him informed of progress.

(Signed: D WATKINS)

DAVID WATKINS
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT

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ANNEX A

COMPENSATION AGENCY

SOCIAL FUND

Statistics set out below reflect the position on 23 November:-

Number of Notices of Intention to claim compensation received	971
Number of Application Forms received	678
Number of claims cleared	13 (£12.534)
Number of claims on offer	83
Number of Interim Payments made	152
Amount of Interim Payments	£187,600
Estimated total cost of damage	£6m

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ANNEX B

SOCIAL FUND

1. Help may be available from social security through the social fund to assist with expenses arising from bomb damage. The Social Fund is intended for people on low incomes who cannot meet unexpected or important expenses from their existing resources.

i. Crisis Loans are available to people, whether or not they are on Income Support, who have immediate short-term needs and who would otherwise suffer serious damage or risk to their health or safety.

ii. People on Income Support may also be able to get a Budgeting Loan or, in certain circumstances, a Community Care Grant for the replacement of items such as clothing or essential furniture.

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