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FROM: T McCUSKER
AS MBW
DATE: 19 JANUARY 1994

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21 JAN 1994

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Anten

*Pl. copy for information to Mr McCormick
& pass original to Mr Sandhu to
note & PIA.*

*cd Dave
24/1/94*

cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP, B&L)
PS/Mr Smith (DOE, DED&L)
PS/Baroness Denton (DHSS, DANI&L)
PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Fell
Mr Legge
Mr Thomas
NI Permanent Secretaries
Working Group Members
Mr Bell
Mr Watkins
Mr Steele
Mr Lyon
Mr Wood (B&L)
Mr Leach

*Mr Catchley
For "Points to Learn..."
file please
24/1/94*

*Mr Hill
we have 26/1/94
To see file 24/1/94*

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L)

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON POINTS TO LEARN FOLLOWING TERRORIST INCIDENTS: AN UPDATE

1. On 28 July 1993, Mr Watkins submitted to the Secretary of State a copy of the report of the Working Group set up to review the Government's response to the civil dimension of security incidents, particularly those involving personal and social hardship, following bombings at Belvoir and Glengormley. The Secretary of State agreed the various recommendations and asked for a progress report by the end of the year.
2. The attached Annex details the progress made on the various recommendations. Departments and Agencies have reviewed all recommendations with a view to ensuring future incidents are avoided and the response of the Social Fund.

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the matters carefully and it is clear that the wider public sector responds to all terrorist incidents immediately and with maximum co-ordination of services. There is also the greatest sympathy possible for the victims of these incidents; the many tributes paid to all the public services following the Shankill bombing is evident that they are highly regarded and valued.

3. The most significant recommendations related to reviews of the special arrangements which allow the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to carry out repairs to owner-occupied properties on assignment of compensation rights, and consideration by DHSS of the scope for introducing a special hardship payment separate from the Social Fund.
4. Just before Christmas, Mr Atkins reviewed the special arrangements which the Housing Executive introduced at the time of the Belvoir bombing. The conclusion was that even though there was no real demand for such a facility, it would be better to retain the present arrangements whereby the Executive would not normally carry out permanent repairs to owner-occupied properties, but that the scheme could be amended to undertake such work, if warranted by the scale and type of incident, eg Belvoir or Glengormley.
5. Lord Arran has reviewed the scope for introducing a special hardship payment, but has concluded that a new special hardship scheme should not be set up. This is based on the view that the Social Fund in its current form deals adequately with urgent need in the immediate aftermath of an incident, either by way of non-repayable grants or interest free loans, and that help is available whether or not individuals are receiving social security benefits. The Secretary of State has agreed with this conclusion. Central Secretariat will wish to monitor future incidents to assess the response of the Social Fund.

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6. The Secretary of State is invited to:-

- a. note the progress made in relation to all the recommendations set out in Section 7 of the Report of the Working Group on Points to Learn Following Terrorist Incidents;
- b. note in particular the outcome of the reviews carried out by DOE and DHSS; and
- c. agree that Central Secretariat should continue to monitor the responses of Departments and Agencies to major incidents.

Signed: T McCUSKER]

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ANNEX

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON POINTS TO LEARN FOLLOWING TERRORIST INCIDENTS: UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The various recommendations are set out below together with details of action on implementation taken by Departments.

- (a) No single department or agency should be tasked to co-ordinate notification arrangements, but the RUC notification to chief executives of district councils should be reviewed by DOE to ensure that CEs receive prompt notification of any serious incident.

The system of notification has been reviewed in conjunction with the RUC and district councils, and DOE is satisfied that it works well and that a formal notification arrangement does not need to be established.

- (b) Where an incident affects a considerable number of households the district council should be encouraged to establish a co-ordination centre as soon as possible.

It is recognised that it is difficult, in advance of an incident, for councils to identify a co-ordination centre: the site of the incident will naturally be governed by the event and should be as close to the incident as possible. Councils are aware of their responsibility to identify suitable locations, as quickly as possible, where co-ordination centres could be established. Some concern has been expressed about Belfast City Council's capacity to respond to a major domestic incident: previous incidents have invariably been commercial. DOE will encourage the Council to play its full role where there is a major domestic incident in the BCC area.

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- (c) Additional telephone lines (some dedicated for incoming calls), & mobile phones and fax should be made available to co-ordination
- (d) centres. The costs of these services should, in the first instance, be borne by the district council, but should be recouped from DOE. The Group recommended that DOE pursue this matter, perhaps by exercising its powers under the Miscellaneous Provisions (NI) Order 1992, or by some other means, in order to recompense councils if they have to incur legitimate costs in dealing with the response to terrorist incidents.

This recommendation has been supported by district councils. DOE has indicated that its power under the Miscellaneous Provisions legislation could be used to meet such costs, and is prepared to consider any approach for reimbursement on a case by case basis.

- (e) Government's response (by way of contribution to Relief Funds) to future incidents should depend in each case on the scale and nature of the incident, though there should be no prejudice in favour of establishing a fund.

Agreed. DOE will, however, consider in the forthcoming Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order, allowing Councils to contribute to appeal funds in certain circumstances.

- (f) The DOE guidance to chief executives of district councils should be reviewed in consultation with district councils and new guidance, eg., on liaison with statutory agencies, provided in the light of recent events. The guidance should spell out the important role of the chief executive/clerk in the aftermath of such incidents.

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DOE has consulted with chief executives and is content that chief executives are fully up to date on their responsibilities.

- (g) DOE should consider whether, in the longer-term, district councils should be given a statutory remit to respond to incidents.

Having considered the matter very carefully, in consultation with chief executives, DOE is of the opinion that district councils should not be given a statutory remit to respond to incidents.

- (h) DOE should pursue the idea of setting on a seminar or seminars for senior council staff to consider the role and response of chief executives/clerks to major incidents. Such a seminar or seminars to offer guidance on best practice.

Chief Executives have indicated that they would welcome the seminars. DOE is arranging this in the very near future.

- (i) It was agreed that the Under Secretary in Central Secretariat should continue to provide a co-ordinating role and interface with Ministers in relation to any major incident. At an operational level it was concluded that no specific department or agency should assume a co-ordination role in response to an incident.

This situation remains and works well.

- (j) Agencies should, as a matter of urgency, put together user-friendly briefing packs, which could be issued immediately to any residents affected by a major incident.

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All relevant departments and agencies have completed this task. Details of the various contact points for the briefing packs will be circulated shortly to all departments and agencies.

- (k) All departments and agencies should ensure that the staff responding to the emergency are adequately debriefed and, where necessary, receive appropriate counselling. Also all departments and agencies should ensure that local liaison arrangements are in place.

Departments accepted this recommendation and will keep these matters under review.

- (l) Depending on the scale and type of the incident involved, consideration should be given to introducing the special arrangements made following the Belvoir and Glengormley incidents in relation to NIHE carrying out permanent repairs to owner-occupied properties, on assignment of compensation rights, but the arrangements should be reviewed by DOE and a report submitted to Ministers later in 1993.

DOE has carried out a full review of the arrangements and have reported to Mr Atkins. The Minister concluded that the arrangements should continue whereby the Executive does not normally carry out permanent repairs to owner-occupied property; however the Scheme for Emergency House Repairs should continue to be amended by DOE to enable the Executive to carry out permanent repairs to privately owned property in named areas on assignment of compensation rights if so warranted by the scale and type of the specific incident involved.

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- (m) Following representations by the Secretary of State in the aftermath of the Belvoir incident the scheme for emergency house repairs was amended to make it clear that where urgent repairs are carried out by the NIHE it should, where necessary, maintain them pending the commencement of permanent repairs.

This was covered in the DOE response to Mr Atkins.

- (n) The Compensation Agency should continue its current practice of introducing ways to speed up claim formulation and settlement.

The Compensation Agency continues to process claims as quickly as possible.

- (o) The Group did not make any particular recommendation in respect of the £200 threshold on compensation payments, but in recognising the major hurdles which a proposal for change would have to surmount, suggested that the question might usefully be re-examined.

The £200 threshold is a cause of continuing public concern. An amendment to it would have to be effected in the context of any future review of the criminal damage legislation. At present there are no plans to change the threshold.

- (p) The Compensation Agency should consider testing whether a single form procedure combining, in some way, the notice of intention and actual claim form might speed up the process. If after testing, such a change was considered appropriate, it would require a legislative change to achieve a single form.

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The Compensation Agency has considered this carefully and has discussed the matter with the Law Society. The consensus is that a single form would not necessarily speed up the process.

- (q) The Department of Health and Social Services' social security policy and legislation branch should consider the scope for introducing an emergency/hardship payments provision, separate from the Social Fund, which perhaps could assign compensation rights. The DHSS and the SSA should liaise with the Compensation Agency on the practicability of such an arrangement and report to Ministers later this year.

DHSS reported to Lord Arran on 22 December. Although acknowledging that the Social Fund was not sufficiently flexible to deal with the range of needs which arose in Belvoir, the report concluded that no new hardship payment scheme, separate from the Social Fund, should be set up to alleviate hardship in the immediate aftermath of a major incident. This conclusion is based on the view that the Social Fund, in its current form deals, adequately with urgent need in the immediate aftermath of a bomb, either by way of non-repayable grants or interest free loans. Help is available whether or not people are receiving social security benefits. DHSS, along with other departments and agencies, have updated their publicity material and reviewed distribution networks to improve the flow of information to people suffering hardship following an explosion. Lord Arran and the Secretary of State both agreed that it would not be appropriate to introduce a hardship/emergency payment arrangement, separate from the Social Fund.

- (r) The Group recommended that departments and agencies should not be

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asked to continue to meet significant additional costs incurred in responding to an incident, but that the additional costs should be a charge on the NI Block.

In making the recommendation the Group was conscious of the DFP view that such pressures form part of the swings and roundabouts of managing large functional areas and, therefore, are unlikely to be accommodated. That view has not changed.

- (s) Given the experience of the media coverage of Belvoir the statutory agencies, in liaison with the Information Services, should review their current PR policy.

There is close liaison between the different parts of the information service and responses have been effective.

- (t) In the light of incidents such as Belvoir, Glengormley and other more recent events it is important that Ministers, subject to advice from PAB, SPOB and Central Secretariat, visit the scene of major incidents as soon as possible after the event, in order to reassure the public in cases of widespread damage to social and economic amenities.

This is a matter of judgement in the circumstances of each event.

- (u) Statutory agencies must balance the need for an orderly and well structured disengagement while at the same time ensuring that the necessary support infrastructure is in place.

All Agencies accept this point and are sensitive to the complex issues involved.

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- (v) Statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and community groups should seek to build on the very positive gains which emerged from the pain and suffering of Belvoir. A lot of mutual respect and greater understanding was achieved and this should not be allowed to fall by the wayside.

All Departments and Agencies learned a lot from the Belvoir incident, particularly in relation to co-operation on communication with local groups.

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