

MINISTER'S PRE-BRIEF AND MEETING NOTE



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Mánnystrie O tha Laa

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☐ PRE-BRIEF

☒ MEETING

TIME AND DATE OF MEETING:		Meeting – 7 August 2024 @6pm		
TITLE/ORGANISATION: (Include INV number where possible and ensure title on pre-brief and meeting notes are the same)		Minister's meeting with representatives from the Belfast Islamic Centre at the Belfast Islamic Centre, University Road, Belfast		
VENUE:	☐ e.g. Parliament Buildings	☐ e.g. Castle Buildings	☐ Other – please specify	Belfast Islamic Centre
LIST OF ATTENDEES:				
☒ Minister	☐ SpAd	☒ PS XX Redacted Section 40 (2)XX		
OFFICIALS:	Michael McAvoy			
OTHERS: [Include Pdf Copies of any Presentations Delivered]	XX Redacted Section 40 (2)XX XX Redacted Section 40 (2)XX XX Redacted Section 40 (2)XX XX Redacted Section 40 (2)XX XX Redacted Section 40 (2)XX Cllr Michael Long			

MEETING KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:

Minister

- Offered her solidarity to the Muslim community and apologised for what people have gone through since the weekend. Advised that she was not meeting them today in the circumstances that she would like.
- Stated that it is shameful how the city is behaving – not a city that she recognises and not one that she is currently proud of.
- Stated that there is lots of misinformation which has spread like wildfire.
- Re-assured them that the DoJ takes this seriously and that she has been in regular contact with the Chief Constable and the Secretary of State. Added that the Chief Constable has been reflecting on the police operation last week – some things went well but in other areas lessons will be learned.
- Appreciated that people are genuinely frightened.
- Stated that we cannot accept this level of intolerance.
- Said she would like to hear from them, as representatives of the Muslim community what could be done better and how to develop stronger links between the police and the community.

BIC reps

- Advised that they want to be treated as equal - many of us have been born and bred in NI or lived here for many years.
- We cannot be classed as immigrants when we have lived and worked here for 35 years, paid taxes etc.
- Aggrieved that some people are sowing this constant division.
- Elements within the Islamic community are getting restless and agitated – if the authorities won't do something then they are saying that we will.
- We need to discourage them from any action which will escalate the situation.

Minister

- Commented on the dispersal of the initial protest on Saturday and the pop up protests that then took place.
- Advised that we do not want an established pattern of protests - added that the Department will consider community safety interventions and stated that she has also spoken to the SofS to make the case for more resource for the PSNI.
- Stated that it is ok for people to be angry about housing and homelessness but they need to channel their frustration at the Government.
- Commented that as a leader in the community it is important that she takes a stand and uses her influence to manage the problem.

- Stated that the courts have been robust - those charged have been remanded in custody.

There was a wider discussion which covered;

- How we tackle online misinformation and radicalisation from far right organisations – driven by different dynamics; not social or economic deprivation.
- Algorithm driven radicalisation – vulnerable individuals click on items on their phone and are then bombarded with similar items via social media – they are often easily influenced and seduced into participating in acts of violence and disorder.
- The age profile of the protestors, the likelihood of paramilitary involvement, other planned parades and the possibility of tension and the competing pressures on police resource.
- The need for community and political leaders to step up and be united in their condemnation.
- The possibility of publishing stats that may help to shift the dial in terms of attitude.
- EPPOC advertising campaigns and the success that has been evident from these in terms of changing attitudes – loan sharks and child criminal exploitation.
- The opportunity that Good Relations week in September may provide to promote the message of inclusivity, tolerance etc.
- The opportunity to work on attitudinal change with young people who may be in the YJA.
- The synergy between the work that the Department is doing to tackle paramilitarism and drive out fear – need to make similar efforts to support the Muslim community.
- Sources of compensation for those whose businesses and homes have been affected – schemes through Belfast City Council e.g. vacant to vibrant and the criminal damage compensation scheme administered by the DoJ.
- Policing of illegal parades and weaknesses in the system in terms of not notifying the Parades Commission in the first place.
- The possibility of mutual aid – hugely expensive for NI compared to other parts of the UK.
- The different police approaches to violence and disorder and the strength that they possess in terms of public order training, equipment and tactics.
- Trust in policing – challenges faced with the reduction of neighbourhood officers and the inability to establish a close working relationship with individual police officers.
- Messaging that BIC can relay to their community in the coming days.

- Combination Orders, Enhanced Combination Orders and community service – discussed the benefit of an offender sitting down with the person they have harmed and understanding the hurt and damage they have caused.
- Particular businesses that are vulnerable as they are easily identified – halal shops. The Minister encouraged BIC members to pass details onto the PSNI.

In closing the Minister offered further re-assurance that the DoJ and the PSNI will do what they can – our aim is to keep people safe. Minister also advised of the Executive meeting and the recall of the Assembly on Thursday – both provided opportunities for a strong and united message against racism and Islamophobia.

ISSUES AGREED (must be completed):

- BIC representatives will keep in touch with DoJ officials – contact details exchanged.

ACTION POINTS / OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE:

- N/A

NOTE WRITTEN BY: XX Redacted Section 40 (2)XX

DATE: 9 August 2024

Signed and Dated by Private Secretary:

XX Redacted Section 40 (2)XX

9 August 2024