



DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT (N.I.)
STORMONT, BELFAST BT4 3TX

David Alton MP Esq
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

(Handwritten initials) December 1987

(Handwritten signature)

I am writing in response to your letter of 25 November about flood damage in the Strabane area since, as you are aware, I have responsibility for co-ordinating the activities of the voluntary and statutory agencies involved.

Since assuming this responsibility, I have arranged for a detailed survey of both the Omagh and Strabane areas to identify the precise nature of the problems and also to identify those who were not insured and who are in genuine need. You will appreciate that it is not the responsibility of the Government to compensate for what are essentially insurable risks or for losses due to bad weather. Nevertheless my Ministerial colleagues and I want to provide as much practical help as possible and I have initiated a number of measures which are designed to help those in genuine need. I enclose in the attached Appendix a summary of the action taken or to be taken by the agencies involved.

As I have indicated in the House, I would want to pay tribute to the work of the local agencies and I can assure you that in this exercise I would want to continue to work closely with Strabane District Council in the provision of practical help.

I am very grateful for your interest in this matter and the other issues which you included in your letter and can assure you of the Government's desire to be as helpful as possible in these circumstances.

(Handwritten signature)

RICHARD NEEDHAM

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

- (a) Urgent payments under the Social Security system amounting to £273,000 paid to approximately 600 claimants (part of which is recoverable under Social Security Regulations). Local DHSS Managers will pursue recovery where appropriate in a humane and considerate manner taking into account the personal circumstances of each individual.
- (b) Further consideration being given to Supplementary Benefit claimants in respect of further heating allowances and redecoration grants.
- (c) Local voluntary agencies will be reimbursed by DHSS for expenditure incurred by them in the aftermath of the flood (estimated up to £15,000) and will also be given further additional finance approximately £5000 to help those in need.
- (d) Residential and other help has been given and will continue to be given by the Western Health and Social Services Board.
- (e) Re-housing of families by the Housing Executive and drying out of properties in public and private sectors by the Executive.
- (f) The carrying out of repairs to Housing Executive property estimated to cost up to £250,000.
- (g) Payment by the Housing Executive of redecoration grants to its tenants to help with redecoration of property.
- (h) Local advisory services provided by the Housing Executive to its tenants and also to private owners and tenants.
- (i) Distribution of 70 tons of coal provided free by British Coal to families whose homes are heated by coal fires.

- (j) Grant-aid of £57,000 from the European Commission distributed to the households involved so that each receive £126.
- (k) Provision of 45 ACE workers to local Councils and voluntary bodies to help with redecoration of domestic property and with work on farms. Further posts could be made available to other local bodies if required.
- (l) Involvement of local workshops, training schemes and training centres in the redecoration of property, the provision of meals, the provision of utensils and the making of furniture for those in hardship.
- (m) Survey and, where necessary the replacement of electricity meters free of charge by NI Electricity Service.
- (n) Supply of 100 day units and 600 night units of electricity free by NIES to those houses heated exclusively by electricity and the provision of interest-free loans for up to 12 months for those who have to replace essential heating and cooking equipment damaged by the flood.
- (o) Support from IDB and LEDU to their client companies.
- (p) Provision by private sector companies of clothing and textiles, either free or at low cost to help those worst affected, in consultation with Social Service Board.
- (q) Possible entitlements for farmers under the Agricultural Improvements Scheme and availability of professional advice from Department of Agriculture professional staff.
- (r) Assurance from Banks that they are willing to be flexible and sympathetic in dealing with local clients. Willingness by Insurance Companies to expedite insurance claims quickly and to take up complaints for early resolution.

/JH