



SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

The Rt Hon The Lord Wakeham
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the
House of Lords
Privy Council Office
Whitehall
LONDON
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Dear John:

NORTHERN IRELAND: POLICING STRUCTURE REFORM

In my letters of 15 June and 14 October to EDH colleagues I said that I was developing separate and distinct proposals from those for the rest of the UK for the reform of the tripartite policing structure in Northern Ireland.

The structural arrangements for policing in Northern Ireland are set out in the Police Act (Northern Ireland) 1970. They are broadly based on the 1964 Police Act. The current tripartite structure was originally established to ensure that there was no direct political control of the RUC under a local administration. Under the different circumstances of direct rule, these arrangements have not worked well over the years. In my view the structural problems have seriously limited the efficient management of resources and the achievement of proper local accountability. In addition, for my own part I have found the present structure at times hampering the exercise of my responsibility for security policy.

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10 December 1993

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I have studied with interest Michael Howard's proposals for reshaping police authorities in England and Wales. There are elements (in management efficiency and setting policy objectives for example) that I hope to implement in Northern Ireland. However I do not consider that the Home Office model of a Police Authority is appropriate for Northern Ireland, where very different circumstances prevail. In particular, the police budget is entirely met from central funds and there is no history of local government involvement in policing.

I propose to redefine the roles and lines of accountability in the tripartite structure. A new police body will be established to ensure that the RUC is fully accountable to the local community. It will not have the resourcing and servicing roles which in Northern Ireland's unique circumstances at present prevent the current Police Authority from fully developing this role. The Secretary of State will set overall objectives and priorities for policing in Northern Ireland, and provide resources for the police, while the Chief Constable will retain operational independence and have responsibility for the efficient management of resources. Further details are given in the attached paper (Annex A).

I have taken initial soundings from the Chief Constable and the current Police Authority for Northern Ireland. The



Chief Constable has said that he agrees with the need for a tripartite system in Northern Ireland's present circumstances, and with the proposal to clarify and define roles, responsibility and accountability. He sees no difficulty or threat in the extra powers which the Secretary of State would have under the proposals. The Police Authority, on the other hand, have reacted strongly against the proposals, mainly because of the loss of their resourcing function. This they see as an unwelcome centralisation of a matter which should be locally based, and as a no less unwelcome erosion of their influence (and indeed power).

From a wider political perspective, there are potential attractions in my proposals to both sides of the community. The nationalist community will welcome greater police accountability, while the majority community could find attractions in the greater responsibility I propose to give the Chief Constable for police resources. A change of this magnitude in a subject as sensitive as policing in Northern Ireland is bound to be controversial - which is why I propose at the outset to make a commitment to legislating by Bill, permitting debate and amendment, rather than Order in Council.

I have arranged to see the entire Authority with Sir John Wheeler on 13 December, after which I will make my final

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decisions as to policy. But, in the face of misleading rumours and damaging press stories, I believe there is a need to place quickly on the record an overview of the Government's thinking on policing structures for Northern Ireland, and to announce our intention to bring forward proposals. I therefore attach the text of an answer to a Parliamentary Question which I propose to answer on Thursday 16 December (Annex B). I shall then publish my detailed proposals in due course, taking account of what the Police Authority will say to me on Monday.

I should be grateful therefore to know of any comments which colleagues have on the parliamentary question and answer (Annex B) by Tuesday 14 December. Comments on the draft of the detailed paper (Annex A) would be welcome by Thursday 23 December.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, EDH colleagues, the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence, the Attorney General, and to Sir Robin Butler.

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