



PRESS RELEASE

STATEMENT BY MR BRIAN FAULKNER MP, MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT, IN
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON THURSDAY DECEMBER 11, 1969, ON THE SUBJECT
OF THE REVIEW BODY ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Since the issue of the Communique on October 10 1969 at the close of the visit of the Home Secretary, the Government have been giving much thought to the next stages in our programme for re-shaping local government.

Hon Members will recall that the Government had issued two White Papers as part of the process of discussion and negotiation on this important subject: The Statement of Aims in December 1967 and the Further Proposals in July 1969.

The decision which we took on 10 October to bring about a radical re-organisation of housing administration, on a centralized rather than a local authority basis, created a new situation and called for a re-appraisal of the ideas on local government which had been taking shape up till then. The decision to transfer functions relating to housing, slum clearance and redevelopment represented a change in the range of the responsibilities which had been discussed up till then in our negotiations with local authorities, and it was also clear that any centralized programme of house-building would require the guarantee of closely co-ordinated water, sewerage and roads and of the prompt release of land. Moreover we knew from our discussions with local authorities that, as they saw the position, the combined effect of transferring certain functions and staff from local Councils re-opened afresh the whole question of the precise role of local government and consequently of the number, size and character of local Councils in future. We were also mindful of the fact, as a matter of good staff relations, that the interests of the local staffs pointed to the urgent need for a comprehensive and above all a simultaneous re-organisation of services so that a smooth, fair and orderly transfer of officials, as well as reasonable career prospects, could be assured. The subject was fully ventilated in the course of a two-day Debate in the House of Commons during October and November.

A review of the whole situation was clearly called for and accordingly we initiated some studies within the Department as well as a number of other consultations. From these it became clear that the implications of the new situation were much more far-reaching than the implications of the earlier work

/on re-shaping

on re-shaping and could have an effect on all of our local administration. As a result I have decided, with the full backing of my Colleagues in the Government, that the Review Body which we contemplated must be a body of the highest standing, of complete impartiality and independence and capable of making an authoritative re-assessment of the whole position.

I am glad to be able to announce that I have in fact been able to assemble such a group.

For the position of Chairman I have secured the services of Mr Patrick Macrory, an executive Director of Unilever, a distinguished industrialist of international standing and an Ulsterman who maintains active and regular contact with his native Co Londonderry. I am greatly indebted to Lord Cole and the Board of Unilever for their kindness and generosity in releasing Mr Macrory for this work.

I am having discussions with five other people, all leading people in the business, professional and trade union life of Ulster. As soon as all the arrangements are completed I shall announce the names.

This makes a body of six people.

I am arranging for the Review Body to have the services of a Consultant and for this key position I have had the good fortune to obtain the services of Mr D N Chester CBE MA Warden of Nuffield College, Oxford, an eminent authority on both Government and Local Government, author of many publications in the field of public administration and himself a Member of Oxford City Council for many years.

As the outcome of recent consultation with the three principal local authority associations I propose to go further and to place at the disposal of the Review Body three assessors, to be nominated by these Associations, so as to have available to the Review Body at any time the services of persons with direct experience in local government in Northern Ireland.

I am hopeful that the Review Body will start work soon, will arrange a concentrated programme and will not take long over its task. It will work in close contact with local authorities and with the Ministries.

/The Terms

The Terms of Reference will be as follows:

"In view of the decision to set up a central housing authority, announced in the Communique of 10 October, 1969 (Cmd 4178), the Review Body are asked:

1. To review existing published Government proposals for re-shaping local government in Northern Ireland.
2. To examine any further proposals which may be made to the Review Body.
3. To examine the consequences of the decision on housing.
4. To consider any implications of that decision for the Health, Welfare Child Care, Education and Public Library services at present discharged by local government.
5. To advise on the most efficient distribution under the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland - whether under local government or otherwise - of the functions dealt with in proposals under 1 or 2 above.
6. To bear in mind the implications for elected local government of any courses of action which the Review Body may deem advisable.
7. To recommend how local opinion can best be brought to bear on administration.
8. To advise on the number of local government areas."

It will not be any part of the Review Body's duty to attempt to define the new local authority areas nor to draw their boundaries. We wish them to be free to concentrate on principles and to base their advice on administrative considerations and the practical merits of the situation.

If, when the Report of the Review Body is received and considered, it is apparent that the pattern of local Councils is such as to justify the drawing of new boundary lines by an impartial body of high standing, then in that event it is the intention of the Government to refer the matter to the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for the Stormont Constituencies and to request them to carry through the operation along the same procedures and methods as they employ in defining Constituencies. That Commission is of course presided over by a Judge of the Supreme Court of Northern Ireland. I believe that this decision should meet with widespread satisfaction on all sides of the House and throughout the country as well.

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As will be seen from the Terms of Reference we have very much in mind the need to bring local opinion to bear on administration; and the attention of the Review Body is being specially directed to this point.

I ask the House to join with me in voicing the confident belief that the creation of a Review Body of such distinction will mark an important step forward in the modernization of our local administration and in wishing the Review Body all success in its work.