PLAN TO SCRAP HEALTH BOARDS

ULSTER SEES RED FOR OLD TRAFFORD SHOWDOWN

80 members from the Carrickfergus Manchester United Supporters Club had an early start for tonight's big match.

The Government wants all of Ulster's health boards scrapped as part of the biggest NHS shake-up for more than 40 years, the Belfast Telegraph can reveal today.

The radical reform also includes plans to merge most of Northern Ireland's 23 health trusts.

The Telegraph can reveal the Government is preparing proposals to abolish the 15 health boards in England which provide the NHS with a local face, and is considering merging all the 23 boards in Northern Ireland, which have been in place since 1971.

The proposals are due to be published in the White Paper on health policy which is expected in the new year.

A GUARDIAN REPORTer, who was present at the meeting, said the proposals were described as "a radical shake-up of the NHS that would mean the end of the local boards that people know and trust.

The report said the Government wanted to create a new network of "health alliances", which would be responsible for providing health services in local areas.

The report also said the Government was considering creating a single health and social care board for the whole of Northern Ireland, which would replace the current 23 health boards.

The proposals were described as "a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the NHS".

The Government said the proposals were part of a wider review of the NHS, and would be discussed with local people and organisations before being finalised.

The Telegraph can reveal that the Government is also considering merging the 23 health boards in Northern Ireland to create a single health and social care board for the whole of the province.

A source close to the plans said: "The Government wants to create a new network of 'health alliances' that would be responsible for providing health services in local areas."