

25/5

Confidential Filing

Brevity in the recording of cabinet conclusions, and memoranda for Cabinet and Cabinet Committees.

CABINET

5
808

May 1979.

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
21.5.79							
15.7.79							
15.6.79							
17.6.83							
PREM 19/961							



LINE

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

CABINET MINUTES

At your meeting on Business with the Prime Minister this morning, the Prime Minister asked if you would again review the instructions to Cabinet Secretaries, with the aim of making the records of Cabinet and Cabinet discussions more summary. She has in mind that the minutes should cover decisions and a summary list of points made in discussion, without long accounts of the discussion.

E. E. R. BUTLER

17 June, 1983

CONFIDENTIAL

Mt. Whitmore
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Clive Whitmore

Ref. A05065

MR IBBS
MR FRANKLIN
MR LE CHEMINANT
MR WADE-GERY
SIR A DUFF
MR LANE
MR HYDE

--- I attach a copy of a draft minute from Sir Robert
Armstrong to Committee Secretaries. Sir Robert
wishes to discuss this at the next meeting of Deputy
Secretaries on Thursday, 18 June. A copy also goes
to Clive Whitmore.

D. J. WRIGHT

D J WRIGHT

15 June 1981

COMMITTEE SECRETARIES

Cabinet and Committee minutes are once again in danger of becoming too long, and I should like all of us to have the danger much in our minds as we prepare them.

2. Remember that the purpose of our minutes is not to provide a complete account of the meeting in every detail. Their primary purpose is to record what was proposed, what was decided, broadly why it was decided, what action has to be taken in consequence of the decisions, and by whom.

3. I have myself found that, rather than simply take my notes of the meeting and dictate, it often helps first to write, or at least sketch out, the conclusions - recording who is to do what - and the summing up. Once those are clear in the mind, the opening statement and the discussion section often fall more easily - and more briefly - into place.

4. The discussion section need not record every point made in discussion: only those points that significantly affected the course of the discussion, helped to determine the conclusions and decisions, and may need to be in the minds of those who were not at the meeting but will have to act on the decisions.

5. Going through the draft minutes which reach me, I have the impression that they have been read through for typographical and grammatical errors, but not for style and directness. They could as a general rule be sparer and tauter. There are too many wordy periphrases and pleonasm, too many of those formulae that too easily become a substitute for clear thought and straightforward utterance. We also tend to be too free with the conjunctions and disjunctions, particularly "therefore" and "however" which often seem to be used not just unnecessarily but also misleadingly. All these are the characteristic faults of work that is dictated and not thoroughly read over.

6. In short, I think that for the expenditure of a little more time and care the product could be made significantly better, clearer and shorter.

Cabinet

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

Sir John Hunt

The Prime Minister has seen your minute A09898 of 4 July, 1979, about the preparation of Cabinet papers, and is glad to learn that you are reminding the Cabinet Secretariat of the guidance given in paragraph 13 of Questions of Procedure.

C. A. WHITMORE

5 July, 1979.



CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

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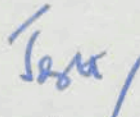
During the course of the flight home you criticised the draft Cabinet paper on Regional Policy and asked whether Ministers had guidance on the form which Cabinet papers should take. I said that they had.

This guidance is set out in paragraph 13 of Questions of Procedure for Ministers (C(P)(79) 1). This paragraph reads as follows and I have underlined the key sentence:-

"Memoranda for the Cabinet and Committees of the Cabinet should be as clear and as brief as possible, not exceeding two pages at maximum. Time spent in making a memorandum short and clear will be saved many times over in reading and in discussion; and it is the duty of Ministers to ensure by personal scrutiny that this is done and that, where necessary, memoranda submitted to them are revised accordingly. The model memorandum explains at the outset what the problem is, indicates briefly the relevant considerations, and concludes with a precise statement of the decisions sought. To facilitate reference in discussion, paragraphs should be numbered."

The paper on regional policy does not altogether conform to this criterion but in mitigation two points should be made. The first is the complexity of the problem. The second is that Sir Keith Joseph was reporting a discussion which he had chaired at E(EA) and at which a good deal of disagreement had been expressed with his own views: in an attempt to be fair to his dissenting colleagues he decided to present the issues as neutral as possible to Cabinet i. e. in the form of a series of questions.

I am however reminding the Cabinet secretariat of the guidance given in paragraph 13 of Questions of Procedure and we will do our best in future to see that it is observed.


John Hunt

4th July 1979

Cabinet

SIR JOHN HUNT

The Prime Minister read the Cabinet conclusions for last Thursday's Cabinet meeting and commented that she thought they were far too long. In particular she found the four pages on teachers' pay very long indeed (her underlining). The Prime Minister is, of course, aware of the great pressure under which these minutes were produced, particularly in view of your own departure to the pre-Tokyo meeting in Washington. She would, however, be grateful if the Cabinet Office Secretariat would reduce substantially the length of the record of Cabinet conclusions.

M. R. STONE

21 May 1970

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Prime Minister.

- 1. Do you wish to see these each week? No.
- 2. Do you have views on brevity - 4 pages on Teachers Pay?

K.R.S.
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CC(79) 2nd
Conclusions

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CABINET

I do hope the minutes can be cut down. I find them very long indeed. M.T.

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held at 10 Downing Street on
THURSDAY 17 MAY 1979
at 10.00 am

PRESENT

I have written to Sir J. Hunt.
K.R.S.

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Lord Hailsham
Lord Chancellor

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Sir Keith Joseph MP
Secretary of State for Industry

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Lord Soames
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon James Prior MP
Secretary of State for Employment
(Items 4-9)

The Rt Hon Sir Ian Gilmour MP
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
Secretary of State for the Environment

The Rt Hon George Younger MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin MP
Secretary of State for Social Services
(Items 4-9)

The Rt Hon Norman St John-Stevas MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

The Rt Hon John Nott MP
Secretary of State for Trade (Items 4-9)

The Rt Hon David Howell MP
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Mark Carlisle MP
Secretary of State for Education and Science

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