PREM 19/3384

Confidential Filing

Weather Situation in 1981/2 in the UK.

Severe Weather Conditions in UK

HOME AFFAIRS

January 1982.

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
~~11.1.82~~							
~~14.1.82~~							
~~20.1.82~~							
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~~5.2.82~~							
~~29.4.82~~							
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~~22.5.82~~							
~~1.12.82~~							
~~11.2.91~~							
13.2.91							

PREM 19/3384

TO BE RETAINED AS TOP ENCLOSURE

Cabinet / Cabinet Committee Documents

Reference	Date
CC(82) 1st meeting, item 5	14/01/1982
CCU(82) 12	01/03/1982
CCU(82) 21	29/04/1982
CCU(82) 26	21/05/1982
CCU(82) 29	27/05/1982
CCU(82) 52	01/12/1982

The documents listed above, which were enclosed on this file, have been removed and destroyed. Such documents are the responsibility of the Cabinet Office. When released they are available in the appropriate **CAB** (CABINET OFFICE) CLASSES

Signed_____ Date_____

PREM Records Team

MR OWEN

c. Mr D Morris, No 10
PS/Sir Robin Butler
Mr Fisher
Mr Quilty
Mr Ball

SNOW

1. The Department of Transport do not intend to issue a situation report today as there is little of significance to say. Snow yesterday and overnight appears not to have worsened the overall transport picture. Icy roads and freezing fog in the South East were the subject of a Met Office Flash (Tier 1B) warning at 0440 hrs today and were well highlighted on early morning radio and TV programmes. British Rail continue working an emergency timetable on most routes in England and Wales.

2. The Department of Transport are trying to find out what British Rail's plans for restoring normal services are, particularly on Network South East. The department hopes to have this information for their Secretary of State to report at Cabinet tomorrow and for Prime Minister's Questions tomorrow afternoon.

3. Information has just become available about the armed forces involvement under the Military Assistance to the Civil Community (MACC) scheme. Between 6-10 February some 80 assorted 4 wheel drive and oversnow vehicles and some 100 men carried out tasks (including meals on wheels deliveries) in support of the police, fire and ambulance services and local authorities in South East, North East, Eastern, Western and Wales military districts. In addition Search and Rescue helicopters and Mountain Rescue Teams and the RAF have carried out 17 casualty evacuation sorties in the mountains (mainly in Scotland) in the last two weeks.

BRIGADIER J A J BUDD
13 February 1991

MR OWEN

c. Mr D Morris - No 10
Sir Robin Butler
Mr Fisher
Mr Quilty
Mr Ball

SNOW

1. Since my last report on 8 February snow falls have continued in some parts of the country but they have been lighter than before and there has been a gradual improvement in the level of most transport services.

2. All main road routes are reported passable except in the North where both snow and ice are causing continuing problems. The M62 is the only transpennine route reported open at 1100 hrs today. There are lane closures in places on motorways and trunk roads and many minor roads are blocked in Yorkshire and Humberside.

3. Most regions of British Rail are operating reduced services. There are problems with electric traction units and rolling stock with sliding doors. Dry powdery snow has apparently got into the working parts requiring a major repair effort. A shortage of rolling stock in Network South East is causing serious delays for commuters and leading to much overcrowding. BR have asked their customers to stagger their morning and evening journeys to minimise overcrowding as much as possible. Airports and ports are working normally.

4. The Meteorological Office have not updated their Tier 1A (Advance Warnings) since 9 February and say that apart from fresh snow in some places, which will be notified under their Tier 1B (Flash Warnings), they do not anticipate needing further Tier 1A warnings in the next five days.

5. D.Environment report that despite an additional 700 spaces being made available for the homeless in London not all have been taken up. (Of the 500 made available on 7 February only 429 were taken up.)

6. No other significant problems have been reported by departments. I will circulate a further situation report when circumstances warrant one.

BRIGADIER J A J BUDD
11 February 1991

File. R8/2
All circulated separately on 8/2
CAS

MR OWEN

c. Mr D Morris, No 10
PS/Sir Robin Butler
Mr Fisher
Mr Quilty
Mr Ball

SNOW

1. Up to midday today the continuing snowy weather is affecting transport operations in most parts of the country except Scotland. Problems are being widely reported by radio and TV. Motorways and most trunk roads are being kept open but in many areas there are lane closures. A class roads are worst affected in the North West and across the Pennines.

2. All regions of British Rail are operating reduced services and there are significant delays and many cancellations on all London commuter lines. There are reduced services on all London Underground and many bus routes.

3. Airports are all open but subject to temporary closures from time to time to clear runways. Seaports are operating but Sealink services from Folkestone to Boulogne have been reduced and Hoverspeed services cancelled.

4. No significant problems are reported by MAFF. All milk was collected yesterday. Collection today is slower due to heavy overnight snow in many areas.

5. No significant problems have been reported concerning electricity and water supplies or telecommunications.

6. D.Transport are ready to discharge the lead department role if required. Unless events make a weekend situation report necessary I shall issue the next summary on Monday 11 February.

Sue Chapman

pp BRIGADIER J A J BUDD
Cabinet Office
8 February 1991

PRIME MINISTER

SEVERE WEATHER

I thought you might like some briefing on today's conditions, especially as you may be asked about the position by the press tomorrow. I am attaching some material from DTp which includes a statement issued tonight by Mr Chope and some Q and A briefing about arrangements for dealing with severe weather conditions.

As far as Yorkshire and Humberside is concerned, the briefing makes it clear that numerous A roads were closed in Humberside and North Yorkshire today, the M62 was reduced to a single lane in Humberside and the A1 and M1 to a single lane operation. Many minor roads were impassable. Although most main airports in the UK were open today, I have checked with DTp who confirm that the Leeds/Bradford airport was closed untill 18.00 tonight.

CAS

Caroline Slocock
8 February 1991

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WEATHER : STATEMENT FROM CHRISTOPHER CHOPE

Christopher Chope, the Roads and Traffic Minister, issued the following statement on the weather today:

"This is the second day of exceptionally heavy snow falls and those responsible for clearing the roads and operating the railways have worked extremely hard, day and night, to try to keep transport moving. It is a continual battle as more snow falls but they have managed to keep most major roads open and rail and underground services are running although they are subject to delays and restrictions.

"Most main trunk roads and almost all the motorways are passable, although great care is needed and some motorway stretches may have single lanes only.

"On the railways most regions are operating, although services are reduced and passengers are experiencing delays in getting to their destinations.

"London Underground is running a reduced service to most destinations. Some bus routes are not operating because of snow blocked local roads.

"Almost all airports are open but many domestic and European flights have been cancelled.

"The weather forecasts now suggest that temperatures will drop even lower and this could lead to increased icing on roads. This will put a further burden on those who are working to keep the roads open. In the meantime everyone should continue to pay heed to the police warnings and should not travel unless their journey is really necessary."

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ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEALING WITH SEVERE WEATHER ; TRANSPORT

Roads

Q1. Who is responsible for ensuring trunk roads and motorways are kept open ?

A1. Department of Transport responsible for trunk roads and motorways in England, but the actual work is carried out on their behalf by agent authorities (county councils, metropolitan district councils, London boroughs and, in the case of motorways, some private consultant engineering firms).
Other roads are the responsibility of the local highway authorities.

Q2. How does the Department of Transport control the activities of its agent authorities ?

A2. A Statement of Service and Code of Practice for winter maintenance is issued each year. This sets out detailed specifications of what is required of the agents.

Q3. Warning of adverse waether conditions ?

A3. The authorities responsible subscribe to road weather warning services.

Q4. Normal preparation on receipt of warnings ?

A4. Check salt suppliers are adequate; alert drivers of salt-spreaders and snow-ploughs; introduce 24-hour monitoring of conditions as necessary.

Q5. Adequacy of resources ?

A5. Resource provision has to be geared to the sort of conditions that might normally be expected. Not cost-effective to provide on basis of worst possible case.

Q6. What dedicated resources are available for trunk roads and motorways ?

A6. £24 million allocated to winter maintenance of motorways and trunk roads in England for 1990/91.

Department of Transport has a fleet of 282 snowploughs and

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miles of motorway in England. £4.2 million provided in 1990/91 for ongoing programme of renewal of winter maintenace vehicle fleet.

A6(continued) Motorway winter maintenance operations based on 106 compounds around the network. These have stocks of rock salt, fuel and garage facilities.

Q7. What dedicated resources are available for local roads ?

A8. Matter for local highway authorities to decide on budgets. No central figure available for 1990/91.

Local highway authorities spent £52 million on local roads maintenance in 1988/89.

Q8. Enhance resources?

A8. Rt Hon Friend Secretary of State for Transport told the House on 10 December that he would review arrangements. I understand he is likely to make an interim report shortly.

Q9. Better traffic control arrangements needed ?

A9. Traffic control a matter for the police. Department of Transport discussing these arrangements with the police as part of the review being carried out.

Q10. Better information to the public ?

A10. Satisfied that adequate warnings have been given by the Meteorological Office.Emphasise need for individual drivers to take adequate precautions before setting out, and perhaps decide not to travel.

Rail

Q11. Who is responsible for deciding on what measures and investment in equipment is required ?

A11. It is for British Rail to decide what represents the best commercial return on investment. Cost of equipment that is used only a few days a year must be set against the costs of equipment in every-day use.

Q12. What dedicated resources are available to British Rail ?

A12. BR has 70 snow-ploughs, a small number of snow-blowers and mini snow-ploughs that can be fitted to the fron of trains. But locating these equipments at the right places on the network always poses difficult decisions. In addition some 25,000 heated points have been installed.

Q13. Does electrification of lines mean greater problems in the future ?

A13. Diesel engines are better able to cope and do not rely on a separate power source; but that is only one aspect of the diesel versus electric debate.

Q14. Are doors on new electric trains particularly vulnerable to icing up ?

A14. Past experience has revealed some problems, but this morning's weather has led to significantly greater problems. There does not seem to be an instant answer, but I have no doubt that BR will conduct some research into this.

Q15. What other improvements can be carried out ?

A15. Following the storm of October 1987, BR has been carrying out a programme of tree and branch felling work alongside railway lines to minimise disruption from fallen trees.

General

Q16. Overseas arrangements better ?

A16. Not always so, and climatic differences hinder valid comparisons. Review by my rt hon Friend looking into comparative arrangements where they can be considered valid.

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From: Mr P Kitchen
DPE
8 February 1991

PS/Secretary of State

cc: PS/Mr Freeman
PS/Lord Brabazon
PS/Mr Chope
PS/Mr McLoughlin
PS/Sir Alan Bailey
PS/Mr Portillo
Mr Dempster
Mr Holmes
Mr Osmotherly
Mr Sunderland
Mr Coates
Mr Billington
Mr Rowlands
Miss Samuel
Mr Reeves
Mr Whybrow

EFFECTS OF SEVERE WEATHER : 8 FEBRUARY 1991 (SECOND REPORT)

1. I attach a note setting out the situation, as at 3.30pm today, on the various transport modes during the present severe weather. This is not very different from the first report today.

2. The weather forecast indicates a lessening of the snow but a further drop in temperatures, which would lead to increased ice on the roads. This could cause problems when eg. drivers of road clearing vehicles are already working long hours.

3. As the lead Department (designate) for this emergency we have contacted other Government Departments. None of them have reported any serious problems. Home Office have reported preparations being made by the emergency services. MAFF have confirmed that, despite obvious difficulties, there have been no significant problems in either the agriculture or food industries. DOE are taking over responsibility for shelters for the homeless from the Department of Health and Mr Yeo MP has announced that 600 extra beds have been set up in London shelters. DOE will probably consider on Monday whether the Bellwin rules for reimbursing Local Authorities will apply. The individual Departmental reports are attached.

P KITCHEN

P2/070
276 5770

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EFECTS OF SEVERE WEATHER : SITUATION AS AT 3.30pm 8 FEBRUARY

ROADS

Midlands/E Anglia
Single lane operation on all motorways. Minor roads passable with extreme caution.

South East
Most main routes are passable with great care, but motorways are subject to lane closures. Single-lane operation on the M 25 in Essex and Surrey; and on the M2 and M 20 in Kent. There are two blockages on the northern section of the M 25. A 34 impassable to HGVs at Gore Hill.

South West
All roads across Exmoor are hazardous and the M 5 is down to a single lane in Somerset. M4 reduced to single-lane operation between J22 and J49. Minor roads extremely hazardous.

East
Except for the M 11 between junction 6 - 7, motorways open but with single lanes only. Many A roads blocked.

East Midlands
Nothing special to report.

Yorkshire and Humberside
Numerous A roads closed in Humberside and North Yorkshire. M 62 reduced to single-lane in Humberside. A1 and M1 reduced to single-lane operation. Many minor roads impassable.

North East
A 66 closed across the Pennines and at the junction with the A 1 (Scotch Corner). M62 is the only trans-Pennine route still open.

North West
Numerous A roads closed throughout the region.

RAILWAYS

Anglia Region - reduced services on all lines. Peak services will not operate.

London Midland Region - all services south of Rugby suspended at 8.45am. 25% reduction in Inter-City services otherwise. All sliding-door stock taken out of service (with significant effect on Bedford - St Pancras service).

Eastern Region - reduced services on all lines. 12 down trains on the East Coast main line cancelled. Additional stops to other services to cover.

Western Region - London - Cardiff services reduced to hourly intervals.

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Southern Region/Network South East - most lines open but subject to very significant delays. No services on three suburban lines in South London. Barking - Gosple Oak radial service cancelled. Reduced services from London to Portsmouth and Exeter. Thameslink services cancelled.

LONDON UNDERGROUND AND BUSES

Underground
Reduced services on all lines. Closed sections - north of Queen's Park (Bakerloo Line) and Newbury Park to Hainault (Central Line).

Buses
Services on 35 routes cancelled; reduced services on many other route.

PORTS

Reduced Sealink services from Folkestone to Boulogne. Hoverspeed services cancelled.

AIRPORTS

Almost All major airports open, but many domestic and European flights have been cancelled.

NB Leeds/Bradford airport closed until 6.00 tonight.

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SEVERE WEATHER 7/8 FEBRUARY 1991
SITUATION REPORT AS AT 11AM FRIDAY 8 FEBRUARY 1991

GENERAL SITUATION

1. With further heavy falls of snow overnight in the Midlands, Eastern and Northern England, only the south west has escaped the worst of the current severe weather. The Met Office is forecasting further heavy snow falls today and over the weekend. with strong winds today particularly in the east and north, and sub-zero temperatures.

2. The Department of Transport which is acting as lead Department for the time being reports that motorways and most major roads are open and passable with great care but many minor roads are blocked.

3. There have been no reports of power disconnections.

MAFF INTERESTS

4. Although rural communities are operating only under great difficulty no Region has received requests from the agriculture or food industries for assistance. Indeed there are reports of farmers coming to the assistance of their local communities helping to clear blocked roads, etc.

5. We have made contact with the Milk Marketing Board at Thames Ditton which confirms reports from regions that generally there have been no significant difficulties on milk collection up to yesterday evening and collection was continuing today. Some problems have been experienced with freezing valves on bulk milk tankers and farm tanks and in cleansing tankers.

6. The MMB does not anticipate any shortage of milk for liquid sale.

7. Food Industry, Marketing and Competition Policy Division has not received any report from the food trade concerning major problems on food distribution.

G F Meekings
Emergencies and Food
Protection Division
8 February 1991

CODE 18-77

By fax to:

Mr Edwards
Department of Transport

HOME OFFICE PARAGRAPH FOR SITUATION REPORT ON SNOW - 8 FEBRUARY 1991

The emergency services have taken a number of steps in preparing to deal with the effects of the weather. These actions include liaison arrangements with County Emergency Planning Officers, motoring organisations, voluntary organisations and the local media. Access to and strategic placement of 4 wheel drive vehicles has taken place and some police officers have been redeployed to stations closer to their homes.

C Benn

pp N M CLOWES
8 February 1991

Civil Emergencies Secretariat
Emergency Planning Division
Home Office

Mr McQuail
cc PS/Sir Terry Heiser
Mr Peel
Mr McBrayne
Mr Kitchen DTp/DPE

OSD 24/18/002

SEVERE WEATHER 7-8 FEBRUARY 1991

1. You may wish to note the following DOE situation report on the effects of the current severe weather.

2. **Water** - WRE1 have reported the following:

Despite below freezing temperatures and snow being experienced in almost all regions, particularly in Central and Eastern areas of the country, water companies have reported few incidents beyond some small service mains failures and the expected domestic pipe bursts. Disruptions to public supplies are not being experienced and no electricity power failures to water undertakings have been reported to date.

3. **Bellwin** - FLG have advised Mr Portillo, through Mr Summerton, that it is too early to judge whether or not the Bellwin rules will apply and that it is unlikely to be clear until Monday. FLG are standing by this weekend ready to advise Ministers if necessary (Mr Smith 04022 23412).

4. **Homelessness** - Mr Yeo MP has announced that 600 extra beds in shelters have been set up for the homeless in London. Sir George Young has recently agreed with Department of Health Ministers that DOE will take over the responsibility for shelters with the aim of ensuring that resources are made available for keeping them open.

5. It should be noted that DTp were asked by the Cabinet Office to assume the lead department role as from 1700 hrs yesterday.

J R Perrett
OSD6
Rm C12/16
2 MS
276 4284

8 February 1991

Dominic Morris Esq
No 10.

File

CAB

CABINET OFFICE

With the compliments of

Brigadier J. A. G. Burdet

We have changed the lead department for the current severe weather. The attached letter explains the new position. I shall be delighted to answer any queries you may have

Tony Burdett

70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS
Telephone 01 270

7/2/91

CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS Telephone

071 270 0199

Mr P Kitchen
Department of Transport EPD
2 Marsham Street
London

7 February 1991

Dear Pat

Current Severe Weather - Lead Department

1. 24 Hour evidence of the current severe weather has indicated that the principle effects are on the transport system. Today's Met Office Tier 1A severe weather warning indicates that continuing snow and fresh to strong winds are likely to continue to make travelling hazardous and disrupt transport operations.

2. These circumstances indicate that the lead department role should change from the Home Office to your Department. On the other hand there seems little need at the moment to co-ordinate departmental responses to this severe weather. The authorities on the spot and the relevant utilities appear to be coping well. Therefore, you are invited to take up the role of lead department designate from say 1700 hrs today.

3. I presume that for departmental purposes you will be gathering information on the transport system on a regular basis. You should agree with the Home Office how any other information you may need could most efficiently be obtained ie from the Police and Local Authorities. You may also wish to "take over" any arrangements already made by the Home Office with D.Energy (electricity and gas supplies), D.Environment (water supplies) and DTI (telecommunications).

4. We should keep in close touch in case the lead department role needs to be pursued more actively as the days pass.

5. This letter is copied to Neil Clowes (Home Office), John Perrett (D.Environment), Graham Hobrough (MAFF), Peter Driscoll (D.En), Mike Thompson (DTI), Adrian Mummery (DH), Mike Wittekind (DSS), Jim Jones (Welsh Office, Cardiff), Eric Ferguson (Scottish Office, Dover House).

Yours sincerely

Tony Rowell

BRIGADIER J A J BUDD

Home Affairs

MCS to see
MAP 5/2

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Rt Hon Michael Heseltine PC MP
Secretary of State
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
London SW1

5 February 1982

Dear Secretary of State,

SNOW AND FLOODING EMERGENCIES

TPM

Thank you for your letter of 2 February. I am grateful for your suggestion that before any emergency spending could be exempted from RSG penalties, local authorities should be asked to prepare statements of the amounts which are exceptional on the strict criteria agreed for specific grant, and that these statements should then be audited. On the basis of this safeguard, I can agree to exempt all certified emergency spending from penalties, as you propose, subject to two further conditions.

First, in the case of such spending below the product of a penny rate, I suggest we should exempt only that part which falls in 1981-82. With the best will in the world, expenditure which does not qualify for specific grant is bound to be more difficult to police than expenditure which does. In the case of expenditure incurred in 1981-82, the problem may be manageable because one can ask (crudely) whether spending is additional to existing plans. But in 1982-83, even a scrupulous auditor might find it difficult to tell what is additional and what is not. The recent bad weather is something local authorities will be taking into account in framing their budgets, so it will enter into the baseline. It is one thing to disentangle this for a relatively few claims for specific grant, each checked by your department. It would be quite another to attempt it for a much larger number of claims for exemption, which cannot be so fully scrutinised.

Second, I think it important that the circular to local authorities about grants for emergency spending should remind them of the guidance given by your Department in January 1981 about emergencies and government assistance. Of course no one expects local authorities to budget for specific conditions they cannot foresee. But it is only prudent for them to maintain a reserve against contingencies, and it would be quite wrong for them to expect all risks to be met by the general taxpayer.

I am sending copies of this letter to recipients of yours.

Yours sincerely
T. Mattaw
for LEON BRITTAN

[Approved by the Chief Secretary and signed in his absence

SCOTTISH OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP
The Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Treasury
Parliament Street
LONDON
SW1P 3AG

3 February 1982

SNOW AND FLOODING EMERGENCIES

I have seen a copy of the letter which Michael Heseltine sent to you on 2 February.

I support him entirely in what he says. In Scotland the position would be even less defensible if we did not leave out of account expenditure required by the recent weather emergencies when deciding whether or not to take action against a local authority for overspending. As you know the system in Scotland is different and a decision on whether or not to take action on overspending is based on a judgement by the Secretary of State and not on the application of a formula. It is hard to see how I could defend taking action against a local authority which had been forced to overspend by the bad weather while at the same time accepting that this expenditure was acceptable for purposes of the special grant which we are paying.

This issue is very likely to come up on an adjournment debate on Thursday 4 February and I would be grateful for your confirmation that we take the line that any expenditure reasonably incurred to cope with weather problems will not be taken into account when deciding whether or not to take action against an authority on grounds of overspending.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, Nicholas Edwards and colleagues who attended the Prime Minister's meeting on 11 January.

GEORGE YOUNGER

Prime Minister.

Mr Heseltine, with support from Mr Younger (see letter attached), is continuing to do battle with the Treasury on the snow-clearance formula.

MCP
4/2

2 MARSHAM STREET
LONDON SW1P 3EB

My ref: H/PSO/10731/82

Your ref:

2 February 1982

Dear Leon

SNOW AND FLOODING EMERGENCIES

Thank youfor your letter of 27 January.

I am sorry that you do not agree that we should exempt from RSG penalties all abnormal expenditure by local authorities required to deal with these emergencies. For my part I believe this is essential. Unless we do we shall risk appearing extraordinarily unsympathetic. We would be penalising some authorities by cutting their rate support grant merely because they were unlucky enough to have to incur extra and unbudgeted expenditure to deal with emergency situations following severe weather. This would be a quite untenable position. It would largely negate our earlier offer of specific grant help and would certainly make it seem that we have no conception of the real problems which local authorities have faced in coping with the emergencies.

Nor is there anything odd in having 2 different approaches to the calculation of additional expenditure for the specific grant and for exemption from block grant penalties, since the two cases are entirely different. In the first we are merely giving ex gratia assistance above an arbitrary level which we are free to set because the expenditure is entirely the responsibility of local authorities. But thatdoes not mean that we need also punish them by cutting rate support grant in respect of their expenditure below that arbitrary level.

I understand your point about erosion of grant penalties. However this risk is small and could be eliminated by asking local authorities to prepare a special statement of their additional expenditure which would then be subject to audit. The Audit Inspectorate do no anticipate any difficulties in dealing with it in this way.

I hope you will now be able to accept my proposals. We have still to write to local authoritiesexplaining how the specific grant will operate but cannot do so without also explaining the rate support grant implications. Any further delay can give rise to further criticism of Government inaction, in Parliament and in the country.

I am copying this letter as before to the Prime Minister, George Younger, Nicholas Edwards and colleagues who attended the Prime Minister's meeting on 11 January.

Yours ever

Michael

MICHAEL HESELTINE

Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP

Prime Minister (2)

To see that the Treasury are still disputing the snow-clearance formula.

MCS 28/1

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Rt Hon Michael Heseltine PC MP
Secretary of State
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 3EB

27 January 1982

Dear Michael,

COMPENSATION FOR SNOW CLEARANCE COSTS

Thank you for your letter of 20 January.

I am sorry that we cannot agree on this detail of the emergency costs compensation scheme. I am afraid that I find it very hard to go along with your proposal that we should exempt from RSG penalties more expenditure than we accept for specific grant. Apart from the oddity of introducing this discrepancy, I think we would risk further erosion of grant penalties since it would not be possible to check authorities' numerous claims for exemption as rigorously as the relatively few for grant.

At this stage, we really cannot estimate what effect any form of exemption arrangement would have on the total grant hold-back; and while I accept that the extreme possibility you describe could occur, I think it much more likely that any increase in grant penalty will be very small.

I am copying this letter to recipients of yours.

Yours,

Leon

LEON BRITTAN

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND

SCOTTISH OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

✓ MAP

The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury
HM Treasury
Treasury Chambers
Parliament Street
LONDON
SW1P 3AG

26 January 1982

Dear Leon,

SNOW AND FLOODING EMERGENCY

I have seen Michael Heseltine's letter of 18 January about the treatment of emergency expenditure by local authorities and your own reply of the following day. I intend to proceed in Scotland on broadly the same lines as he is proposing. There is no block grant arrangement in Scotland under which additional expenditure may result in loss of grant at the time, but I ought to reassure Scottish local authorities that additional expenditure incurred properly by them in dealing with the consequences of severe weather will be discounted in any exercise of my power to make selective grant reductions.

I am also concerned, as he is, about the closing date for claims. Where Michael suggests that only expenditure in respect of work carried out by 31 May 1982 will qualify for support I propose for Scotland a reference to work carried out by 30 June 1982. This is necessary because in many areas (particularly in Highland, Grampian and Tayside Regions) there are roads where it is not unusual for there still to be frost on the ground in April and even May. The extent of frost damage in these areas does not become fully apparent until the frost has completely gone, so that only then can emergency repairs be planned and carried out. It is quite unrealistic to expect damage in these areas to be assessed and rectified before a date earlier than the end of June. We shall of course be scrutinising all claims to ensure that only appropriate expenditure is included.

If we had an earlier date than the end of June I would find it very hard to rebut Opposition criticism that, when they dealt with the consequences of severe weather in 1978-79, the cut-off date for Scotland by which local authorities had to complete work which was to be the subject of claims was 30 June. I therefore wish simply to repeat the arrangements made in that year and I look for your early agreement to proceeding on this basis so that we may notify local authorities.

I am copying this letter to Michael Heseltine and the recipients of his letter.

Yours ever,

George

Home Aff, Jan '82

Wales (Weather Conditions)

3.30 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the latest situation in Wales arising from the extreme weather conditions, in particular with regard to future water supplies.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): The recent weather conditions created severe problems in many parts of Wales, but life in the Principality is now returning to normal. I have already paid tribute in the House to all of those who have had to cope with the emergency and I have made clear the basis of the Government's financial support for local authorities.

As the thaw developed, the problems that had been created by the snow were replaced by the problems of burst pipes and interruptions to water supply. But the water supply position generally is improving and the vast majority of consumers are being supplied with properly treated water at normal pressures. The water resources are entirely adequate, but there are local problems due to leaks in distribution systems. All those problems are being attended to as quickly as possible by the Welsh water authority. In some parts of Wales properties are still without water and every effort is being made by the Welsh water authority to reconnect the areas affected.

There will obviously be appreciable financial consequences of the emergency, in particular for the local authorities which had the primary responsibility for dealing with it, and for the farmers. It is far too early to make a realistic assessment of those consequences. We shall continue to assess the position as information about the costs incured by all concerned becomes firmer. Early on, however, the Government announced that the standing arrangements for financial aid to local authorities in an emergency would apply on this occasion, and I have already described those to the House.

Mr. Powell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing the private notice question to be asked. The statement of the Secretary of State does not cover all the issues that should be discussed in the House, and time should have been made available for a full debate.

Does the right hon. Gentleman share the widespread concern about the statement on Monday by the Welsh water authority that unless severe restraints are imposed, Wales could lose its entire water supply within a matter of days? Is he not aware that water is gashing out from burst pipes faster than it can be replaced in the reservoirs? Is he aware that areas in West Wales, Anglesey, the Heads of the Valleys and elsewhere are in a desperate position? Will he assure the House that there is no danger from the pollution of water supplies? Will he promise the Welsh water authority Government financial aid to meet the additional costs of repairs and replacement of water treatment and pumping operations?

Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that industry and workers receive financial help to sustain the financial losses due to the weather conditions and the snow storms? Is he aware that in my constituency of Ogmore people made special efforts to accommodate and feed more than 1,000 stranded people for the best part of a week? Will he express justifiable thanks to them for their commendable efforts?

Mr. Edwards: I have already expressed appreciation in the House to all those, including private citizens, who helped to keep industry and life running in the Principality. I repeat my thanks and include the private individuals in the Bridgend area who were so generous.

On the hon. Gentleman's main point about water, the Welsh water authority was wise to warn of possible difficulties because of the loss of water from burst pipes. The normal consumption of water in the hon. Gentleman's area is 400,000 gallons a day. However, during the past few days consumption has risen to 1 million gallons a day because of numerous burst pipes. The hon. Gentleman greatly exaggerated the general position. The water supply is now under control and the water is fit to drink. Although I have details of certain areas where the water supply has not yet been connected, they are relatively few and reconnection is taking place quickly.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Cardigan): Will the Secretary of State confirm reports in today's newspapers that financial aid will be forthcoming from the EEC emergency fund?

Mr. Edwards: The Government submitted a prompt claim to the EEC Commission, which is being urgently assessed. Although the statement in the *Western Mail* this morning is inaccurate both on the amount of aid and the timing, it is hoped that the Commission will make an early announcement. I hope that aid will be forthcoming from that source.

Mr. Delwyn Williams (Montgomery): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Powys, which has the greatest mileage per head of population in Britain, has received nothing but co-operation from the Welsh Office during the emergency? Is he further aware that none of its emergency services has been curtailed? Will he note the concern—*[Interruption.]* We would prefer the exclusive rate formula—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I was simply trying to restore order so that the hon. Member for Montgomery (Mr. Williams) could finish his question.

Mr. Williams: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the weather guru, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), is still remembered with some bitterness for the way in which he refused retrospective aid in emergency conditions?

Mr. Edwards: I pay tribute to the Powys authority which, throughout the winter, has been remarkably skilful in keeping the roads open. I speak from personal experience of the way in which it operated snow ploughs in appalling conditions, even in rural areas. I have praised it elsewhere, and I have pleasure in doing so again in the House today.

On the question of Government financial support, I confess that I do not recall the details of the timing of the previous announcement, but the special Government financial provision this time is intended to apply to the whole of the emergency period.

Mr. Alec Jones (Rhondda): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to all those organisations and individuals in Wales who helped recently. It is not much use the Secretary of State simply saying that he is proposing the

represents several hundreds of millions of pounds extra nationally which local authorities can add to their housing programmes as from 1 April this year.

Mr. Heddle: Will my hon. Friend not agree that there are ways of meeting housing needs other than by building new homes, including the promotion by local authorities of shared ownership, low-cost ownership and building for sale?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend is right. I am encouraged that there has been a significant response in the past six to nine months to the very important range of low-cost home ownership initiatives introduced by the Government.

Mr. Hardy: I am sorry that I was a little premature in rising on my point of order just now, Mr. Speaker. I was extremely shocked by the Minister's display of his complete ignorance of the problems of local government. I beg to give notice that I shall seek an early opportunity to raise this grossly unsatisfactory matter on the Adjournment.

Housing Starts and Completions

18. **Mr. Thomas Cox** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* council and *(b)* private houses are now under construction in the Greater London Council area.

Sir George Young: About 13,000 local authority and 14,300 private dwellings were under construction in London at the end of September 1981.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware that those figures are an appalling indictment of two-and-a-half years of Tory Government? In view of the enormous housing problems in London, why cannot the Government start to put into employment the thousands of building workers whom they forced to go on to the dole and get the local authorities to start to tackle these problems? The hon. Gentleman knows that they have to be tackled. Surely now is the time to start doing it.

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will get some comfort from the fact that private sector housing starts in London in the third quarter of 1981 were nearly double the number in the comparable period of 1980. The 1982-83 HIP allocation for London is £558 million, compared with £549 million this year. London will receive a HIP allocation equivalent to more than £200 per household compared with less than £100 per household for the rest of the country. We are trying to tackle London's housing problems.

Mr. Major: To put the matter in context, how many council houses in Greater London are empty and have been empty for many months?

Sir George Young: Our latest figures show that there are 32,814 local authority dwellings empty in London.

Owner Occupation

19. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he proposes to increase owner occupation in partnership areas and other inner city stress areas.

Mr. Heseltine: All the measures we have taken to promote low-cost home ownership are relevant in inner city stress areas. Additionally, as announced on 9 December—[Vol. 14, c. 865]—a special allocation of £5 million will be made available for low-cost home ownership schemes in 1982-83. We have invited authorities to submit schemes which involve a high ratio of private to public sector finance.

Mr. Atkins: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that very detailed answer. What is happening to the pepper potting scheme for building homes on small sites in urban areas?

Mr. Graham: It is being assaulted.

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. A number of volume builders in local authorities have been working together to explore how these small, vacant urban sites can be developed economically to provide low-cost housing. The first project in Bolton has been completed successfully, and several others are planned or are under way across the country.

Mr. Stan Thorne: What will the Secretary of State do about the problem in Preston and many other areas, of small children still living on the fourteenth floor of multi-storey housing blocks that cannot be demolished because of lack of finance for housing?

Mr. Heseltine: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not listen to what was said by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction. Local authorities have some £400 million of underspent housing capital allocations available to them this current year, which they could have spent in the manner suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

same levels of aid as those given by the Labour Government in 1978. Conditions now are far different from what they were then. In 1979 we did not face such severe weather conditions, and local authorities and others were not expected to meet the same problems.

Throughout Wales there is a feeling that the right hon. Gentleman has been less than generous. Those words were used to describe the Government's proposals by the Tory deputy leader of the Mid-Glamorgan county council. Will he confirm that that council will have to spend the equivalent of a 2½p rate before it receives any Government assistance? Should not that matter be reconsidered when up-to-date figures are available?

Wales has been concerned about the water supply, and I am glad to receive the semi-assurances of the Secretary of State. They are only semi-assurances because he cannot possibly know every individual aspect of the water position, and nor can the Under-Secretary. Is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that the water authority has sufficient staff and resources to restore a full supply as soon as possible?

Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us how he proposes to spend money from the EEC fund? Will it be given to individuals and local authorities? Finally, will he tell the House of the effect of the bad weather conditions on industry in Wales?

Mr. Edwards: The level of aid depends on the extent of the damage and the total costs. The Government have made it clear that they will pay 75 per cent. of the cost of the emergency over and above a 1p rate inclusive of grant. If the costs are large, the Government's contribution will be that much larger. We will pay an appropriate share, and that seems right. It also seems right that local authorities should make some contingency provision every year for emergencies that always arise. That is the basis of the provision in regard to aid in excess of 1p rate inclusive of grant. That is exactly the system employed by the Labour Government in 1978-79 and local authorities needed to have no doubts about it, because it was clarified in a circular in December 1980. The product of a 1p rate inclusive of grant in Mid-Glamorgan is about £950,000.

The water authority is quickly restoring supplies. I am satisfied that its resources are adequate and I see no problems arising from that.

As for EEC aid, it would be right to have a detailed assessment of where costs have fallen and who has suffered most before we make final decisions on the distribution of EEC assistance. It would be useful to know the level of the assistance before making those decisions. We shall certainly look at the precedents and see what is the best way of distributing help if we obtain it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private notice question and not a statement. It is an extension of Question Time. Exceptionally, I will call two more hon. Members before we move on.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarvon): Is the Secretary of State aware that many of those who have suffered additional costs need money urgently? Can he give an assurance that money for farmers will be forthcoming quickly and that local authorities will know exactly where they stand—with no chance of a cash cut-off—before they set the rates for next year, bearing in mind the legislation affecting rates that is going through Parliament?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, as well as farmers and local authorities, many individuals and families have suffered, particularly pensioners who have had to incur additional heating costs? Will he look at ways of helping them as well? As all eight counties in Wales had extremely severe incidents in a difficult period, we could have had a national state of emergency in Wales. Did he consider declaring such a state of emergency, as a Welsh Parliament would certainly have done, and did he approach any international agencies, apart from the EEC, for aid?

Mr. Edwards: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's view of what a Welsh Parliament would have done. Local authorities know their responsibilities perfectly well. For a considerable period, they have laid snow emergency plans with the Government. Those plans are ready for implementation at any time and the responsibility for implementing them lies with local authorities. The one lesson that clearly emerges from the emergency is that it is right that the responsibility should be at a local level and the Welsh Office should primarily carry out the role of a centre of communication and information, directing resources when specifically asked for. One of those in charge of a county emergency department made it clear to me that even the emergency headquarters had to act in that way and that decisions had to be taken close to the ground.

Farmers understand that they have to accept the general burdens falling on them from adverse weather conditions, but I have agreed to see the NFU later this week to discuss the issues. Sir Richard Butler has confirmed to me that it is much too early to make any assessment of the costs falling on farmers. I confirm that the additional financial assistance from the Government arising from the emergency is not cash limited.

Dr. Ifor Davies (Gower): The Secretary of State is aware from his flying visit, for which I thank him, that no area suffered greater damage than the Gower peninsula, which was cut off for nearly 10 days, but is he aware that the provision of foodstuffs was ensured only by sea landings through the valiant efforts and initiatives of local people? Is he aware of the general feeling that much damage would have been avoided if the help of the forces had been ensured earlier? I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will learn the lesson that in any future crisis direction and leadership from the centre are necessary. The right hon. Gentleman has acknowledged the help given by local authorities, but that is not enough. Help and direction are needed from the centre, and that involves the Welsh Office.

Mr. Edwards: While expressing sympathy for the hon. Gentleman's constituents who suffered severely, I should say that the first task of the Welsh Office was to establish at the start of the emergency that troops would be available whenever required. I was in touch with the GOC Wales on the Saturday morning and we were in continual touch throughout. Whenever a local authority asked for them, troops were made available, as were Service men generally. However, the responsibility for asking for troops lies with local authorities, which know whether help is needed. Officials in Cardiff cannot know whether troops are needed in a village in Gower. When a local authority asked for troops the Welsh Office ensured

[Mr. Edwards]

that they were available, and I congratulate the GOC Wales on the arrangements that he made to ensure that troops were provided.

Pressurised Water Reactor (Sizewell)

3.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Nigel Lawson): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the public inquiry into the application by the Central Electricity Generating Board to build a pressurised water reactor at Sizewell in Suffolk. As the House will know, the Government are committed to holding a full and wide-ranging inquiry into the Sizewell application. In a written answer on 22 July last year, my predecessor set out the issues which the Government regard as relevant to consideration of this application. My right hon. Friend also announced the appointment of Sir Frank Layfield, QC, as inspector to the inquiry.

I wish to give interested parties the earliest notice of the date of the inquiry. I also wish members of the public and their representatives to have adequate opportunity to study the extensive information and documentation which will be provided. I therefore propose that the main hearing of the public inquiry should begin early in January 1983.

I have reached this view following recent consultations with those on whom the burden of preparing the principal documentation rests. The chairman of the CEGB has told me that the board expects to publish its pre-construction safety report at the end of April. Dr. Walter Marshall, as chairman of the PWR task force, will continue to co-ordinate the efforts of all the parties involved in the preparation of the report and will keep me informed of progress. The CEGB also intends to issue at the end of April a full statement in support of its application.

The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive has told me that it expects to publish a report on safety issues by the end of June. There will, therefore, be an extended period for the study of both CEGB documentation and the NII report.

Earlier preliminary hearings will be held by the inspector at which those parties that wish to put their views before him on the general arrangements for the conduct of the inquiry and the scope of the evidence can do so at a time well before the main inquiry begins. The main hearing, and at least one of the preliminary hearings, will take place in Suffolk. I hope that arrangements can be made for the main hearing to be held within easy reach of the Sizewell area. An announcement on this will be made soon.

The Government are convinced that nuclear power has an increasingly important role to play in electricity generation in Britain. Nevertheless, any specific proposal has to be judged on its own merits. The arrangements for the Sizewell inquiry which I have just described will ensure that the CEGB's application is thoroughly and properly examined.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Leeds, South): The House is aware that the Select Committee on Energy published a report nearly a year ago on the Government's statement on the new nuclear programme and that the Government's response was published six months ago. Given today's statement, is it not a pity that there has not been a debate on those documents, which are relevant, both in general and in particular to the inquiry into the proposed PWR at Sizewell? Whenever a debate takes place—and it should be soon—it will be in the context of today's statement, but

Home Affairs

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FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY
TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR WALES

20. January 1982

Dear Mike

PNQ: WEATHER CONDITIONS IN WALES

As you know Raymond Powell's PNQ has been allowed. I attach three copies of a draft of the response my Secretary of State intends to make (subject only to any last minute drafting changes).

I am sending three copies to David Heyhoe, four copies to Murdo Maclean and copies to Terry Matthews, David Edmonds, Robert Lowson, David Wright and the Chief Press Secretary at No 10.

Yours ever

J F Craig

J F CRAIG
Private Secretary

Mike Pattison Esq
Private Secretary
No 10 Downing Street
LONDON

20 January 1982

P N Q BY MR RAYMOND POWELL MP

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the latest situation in Wales arising from the extreme weather conditions, in particular with regard to future water supplies.

P N Q STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES

The recent weather conditions created severe problems in many parts of Wales but life in the Principality is now returning to normal. I have already paid tribute in the House to all of those who have had to cope with the emergency and I have made clear the basis of the Government's financial support for local authorities.

As the thaw developed the problems that had been created by the snow were replaced by the problems of burst pipes and interruptions to water supply, but the water supply situation generally is improving and the vast majority of consumers are being supplied with properly treated water at normal pressures. The water resources are entirely adequate but there are local problems due to leaks in distribution systems. All these problems are being attended to as quickly as possible by the Welsh Water Authority. In some parts of Wales properties are still without water and every effort is being made by the Welsh Water Authority to reconnect the areas affected.

/There will obviously ...

There will obviously be appreciable financial consequences of the emergency, in particular for the local authorities who had the primary responsibility for dealing with it, and for the farmers. It is far too early to make a realistic assessment of these consequences. We shall continue to assess the situation as information about the costs incurred by all concerned becomes firmer. Early on, however, the Government announced that the standing arrangements for financial aid to local authorities in an emergency would apply on this occasion and I have already described these to the House.

20 January 1982

P N Q BY MR RAYMOND POWELL MP

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P N Q STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES

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There will obviously be appreciable financial consequences of the emergency, in particular for the local authorities who had the primary responsibility for dealing with it, and for the farmers. It is far too early to make a realistic assessment of these consequences. We shall continue to assess the situation as information about the costs incurred by all concerned becomes firmer. Early on, however, the Government announced that the standing arrangements for financial aid to local authorities in an emergency would apply on this occasion and I have already described these to the House.

H. Affairs

2 MARSHAM STREET
LONDON SW1P 3EB

My ref: H/PSO/10394/82

Your ref:

20 January 1982

✓ MAP

Dear Chief Secretary

COMPENSATION FOR SNOW CLEARANCE COSTS

Thank you for your letter of 19 January in reply to mine of 18th.

I am sorry that you see some difficulty with my proposal. I am not sure however that you have correctly understood me. There is no question of using a more generous definition for one purpose than for the other. On the one hand it seems entirely reasonable that local authorities should bear the first tranche of the additional cost of emergency work, up to the level of a 1p rate product, without any assistance by way of specific grant. It also seems reasonable that that tranche of expenditure should be treated in the normal way for the purpose of the normal operation of the block grant system; in technical terms, it should remain within "total expenditure". On the other hand, I am sure it would be wrong to allow this tranche of expenditure to attract block grant penalties. It is, by definition, abnormal and unforeseen expenditure; moreover the need for it has arisen at a very late stage in the financial year. We could not reasonably claim that local authorities should have allowed in their contingencies for weather conditions of this quite unprecendented kind.

If we were to follow the course which you advocate, and not exclude this first tranche of expenditure in assessing block grant penalties, it could result, paradoxically, in our exacting more from local government by way of additional block grant penalties than we were paying out in specific grant.

I hope therefore that you will feel able to agree, on further reflection, that we should proceed as proposed in my earlier letter. We need to reach a decision urgently, since there is a Question due for answer on Thursday which will oblige us to make our position clear.

I am grateful for your agreement to a cut off date of 31 May.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours.

Yours sincerely

DMT

for MICHAEL HESELTINE

(letter approved by the Secretary of State and signed in his absence)

Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP

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FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY
TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR WALES

January 1982

Dear Mike

This is in response to your request for background briefing for tomorrow's Prime Minister's Questions on the snow emergency in Wales.

You will by then have copies in Hansard of what my Secretary of State said during 1st Order Questions this afternoon. It had been intended originally that my Secretary of State's main response would have been to a Question from Sir Raymond Gower (tabled on Thursday 14 January). Unfortunately Sir Raymond was prevented by illness from being present during Questions and reports on the snow emergency had to be made on the basis of a Question (on the effect of the weather on agriculture) from Mr Delwyn Williams and one (from Sir Anthony Meyer) on local authority financing in Wales generally.

The Opposition had been looking for a formal statement. Mr Ioan Evans had sought a Private Notice Question but was turned down on the grounds (then) that a suitable Question - that from Sir Raymond Gower - was already available as a basis for a report from my Secretary of State.

The Opposition may choose tomorrow to concentrate on the lack of a statement or press for one to be made later. My Secretary of State has made it clear that it is too early to have any full assessment of the impact of the severe weather, though he will look particularly for follow-up reports on agriculture. Meanwhile there has been a very early response on local authority finance and all the signs are that the emergencies procedures have worked well.

... I attach some more detailed supplementaries.

Yours sincerely

Carys Evans

for J F CRAIG
Private Secretary

M Pattison Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON

SNOW EMERGENCY: FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Q1. What financial aid is being given to Health Authorities?

A. Health Authorities have budgets within which they are expected to manage their expenditure. It is too early to say whether the recent severe weather conditions will lead to difficulties for individual authorities in this respect.

Q2. What financial aid is being given to local authorities?

A. My Rt Honourable Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 11 January 1982 that the Government is prepared to give special financial assistance to local authorities who would otherwise suffer an undue financial burden. This aid will be 75% of net additional expenditure above the grant-inclusive product of a 1p rate. Details were given to Welsh local authorities in a circular letter issued by the Welsh Office on 15 January.

Q3. Doesn't the use of the grant-inclusive definition of a penny rate product mean that some authorities will have to bear a burden much greater than 1p, as the Welsh Counties Committee claim?

A. No. It means that the local ratepayer's contribution will be limited to the product of a 1p rate. To that is added the amount of Rate Support Grant that sum can be expected to attract, to reach a threshold above which the special aid will be available. If the RSG was not added, it would mean the special aid would be paid on Rate Support Grant, which would clearly not be right.

Q4. Will the amount of special aid available be affected by the cash limit on grant?

A. The special aid will be treated as outside the cash limit on Rate Support Grant.

Q5. Will this additional expenditure count against the expenditure target set for local authorities in Wales?

A. In judging the performance of local authorities in Wales against our current expenditure target, expenditure accepted for grant on weather emergencies will be left out of account.

Q6. But have not the local authorities been hindered from the start by lack of funds?

A. There is just no case for saying that any local authority delayed or limited its response to the weather problems because of doubts about where the money would come from. The Government's response was prompt and in line with what has been done on previous occasions. Let it be clear there was no cause for doubts among local authority about the level of Government support. I understand the temptation to argue that more should be provided on the grounds that the emergency was more severe than on previous occasions but let that argument be conducted on the basis of fact. It is much too early to assess the real and final costs.

Snow Emergency General

1. The response by local authorities was prompt. They set up their emergency arrangements according to their best assessment of the local situation.

2. When the need for special emergency arrangements in any situation was clear the Armed Forces were quick to respond (provision of helicopter services: road clearance: salt convoys).

3. I do not accept that there was any lack of coordination.

4. The supply industries maintained a remarkably high standard of service despite appalling conditions. Wales Gas supplied the highest daily uptake of gas ever recorded. Electricity supplies were cut off in a number of areas particularly in Pembrokeshire but the authorities made persistent efforts to restore supplies, including the use of helicopters, and were commended on their work by the NFU.

5. The new problem is flooding: burst pipes. The Welsh Water Authority say that there are many thousands of burst pipes and substantial loss of water. This will take time to repair, inevitably. On flooding the Authority are watching the effects of the thaw very closely, in the light of their experience both before Xmas and in recent years.

6. Of course industry has been effected and the disruption and the damage to property has come at a difficult time for many firms. But it is not true that industry were neglected (eg in providing access road clearance to factories. Local authority had to make priority decisions (eg clearance of roads to hospitals).

7. My rt hon friend has kept in closest touch with BSC and the NCB work in Wales. The steel plants have had to face many problems because of the weather but thanks to the work of those who looked after the machinery during the worst of the weather I hope the damage will have been kept to a minimum. It is too early to assess the full extent. The collieries had difficulties in moving coal in the early days of the bad weather but attendances and output was good despite the snow.

8. Others have already paid tribute to work of the local authorities, the Armed Forces, the Health and Social Services Agencies, the radio stations particularly the local stations who provided a minute by minute news and report service and the individual men and women who kept services running. I repeat that tribute. The main comment should not be carping criticism of 'too little too late' but the strength and success of what everyone was able to achieve in the face of really exceptional weather.

9. A provisional request for EC assistance has already been made.

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Mike Pattison Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

19 January 1982

Dear Mike,

WEATHER EMERGENCY EXPENDITURE

I undertook to let you have a note to explain the difference between the normal arrangements for Government grants to local authorities faced with weather emergencies, and the special, and unprecedented, arrangements agreed last summer to deal with the consequences of the urban riots. I hope that the attached note by Treasury officials will give you the information you need.

Yours ever

Terry Mathews

T F MATHEWS
Private Secretary

Weather

Government grants to support exceptional and local authority expenditure

Central government grants to local authorities faced with weather emergencies - usually floods or snow - are normally paid at 75% of that part of the additional neccessary expenditure which exceeds the product of a penny rate. The grants are clearly demand determined and are always paid outside the RSG structure. They are not subject to cash limits.

2. The grants paid to local authorities which incurred costs in dealing with or clearing up after the riots of summer 1981 are structured rather differently. Because a relatively small amount of the expenditure exceeded the penny rate product for the authorities concerned, it was decided that, while the penny rate product would still be used as a threshold to determine which authorities should qualify for grant, the actual grants paid should be 60% of all expenditure caused by the riots.

3. For the riot costs compensation scheme in 1981-82, the question of whether the expenditure involved should count against local authorities' expenditure targets arose for the first time. It was decided that expenditure qualifying for grant should not count against targets. This means that authorities which get riot related grant (i.e those whose expenditure exceeded the product of a penny rate in their area) will not count any of their riot related expenditure against their expenditure targets; but those authorities which do not get the special grant will.

4. In the case of the 1981-82 weather emergencies scheme, DOE and WO are proposing that all expenditure on weather emergencies should be left out of account in computing performance against the targets. The Treasury prefers to adopt the same formulation as was used for the riots - ie. that only expenditure qualifying for grant should be left out of account. This would mean that expenditure on the weather emergency below the product of a penny rate would be counted as ordinary current expenditure for the purposes of the target, but expenditure above that threshold would not.

Miss Kelley
Mr Monger
Mr Culpin
Mrs Diggle
Mr Ridley
Miss Noble
Mr Harris

cc Chancellor
Financial Secretary
Economic Secretary
MST(C)
MST(L)
Sir A Rawlinson
Mr Barratt
Mr Wilding
Mr Mountfield
Mr Kitcatt

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Rt Hon Michael Heseltine PC MP
Secretary of State
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
London SW1

19 January 1982

Dear Michael,

COMPENSATION FOR SNOW CLEARANCE COSTS

Thank you for your letter of 18 January suggesting how we might set up the scheme to relieve local authorities faced with heavy costs in clearing up after weather emergencies.

I am afraid that I see some difficulty with your proposal that we should use a more generous definition of expenditure on clearing up for the purposes of local authorities' performance against targets than for the purposes of grant. As I said in reply to Nick Edwards' similar suggestion in his letter of 15 January, it would seem very curious to use two different definitions and would call in question our reasons for adopting the penny rate product threshold in the first place. Nor do I see why different criteria should apply in the two instances: in both cases we are, in effect, requiring local authorities to deal with relatively routine contingencies themselves but giving them help in shouldering quite extraordinary costs.

The exception given last year for expenditure on the riots was without precedent and was structured in a very different way. I do not agree that it is comparable with the normal arrangements for weather emergencies which we are dealing with now.

I hope therefore that you will be prepared to amend the circular to local authorities to align the definition of expenditure exempted from block grant penalties with that used for determining the specific grant.

The other change you mention, to the cut-off date for the scheme, causes me less difficulty. I should have preferred one a little earlier, perhaps 30 April, but if you think there is a good case for a later date I would not press this.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours.

Yours ever,

LEON BRITTAN

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

2 MARSHAM STREET
LONDON SW1P 3EB

My ref:

Your ref:

18 January 1982

Dear Chief Secretary

SNOW AND FLOODING EMERGENCY

The meeting chaired by the Prime Minister on Monday concluded that "the financial arrangements used in past emergencies would now be applied to reasonable claims arising from the period of severe weather" (letter of 11 January from the Prime Minister's Private Secretary).

It was also agreed - though it has not been formally recorded - that expenditure required to deal with the present abnormal weather conditions should not attract block grant penalties. An exemption of this kind was given last year in respect of expenditure on riots (which was also given specific grant aid), and local authorities will now be expecting a similar exemption for this emergency expenditure.

It is in my view essential that the exemption should relate to all the abnormal expenditure falling on local authorities as a result of the present emergency, and not just to the excess over the product of a 1p rate. It is, I believe, politically unthinkable to allow any expenditure made necessary by these quite unprecedented conditions to lead to holdback of block grant. I therefore propose to include in the letter which my Department is to send to local authorities a paragraph on the lines of the enclosure to this letter. I should be glad to know very quickly that you are content.

There is one further change which I propose to the draft letter which your officials have already seen: instead of referring to expenditure committed by 1 March it should say that "only expenditure in respect of work carried out by 31 May 1982 will qualify".

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, George Younger, Nicholas Edwards, and colleagues who attended the Prime Minister's meeting on 11 January.

Yours sincerely

D Jones

pp

MICHAEL HESELTINE

Approved by the Secretary of State and signed on his behalf

Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP

DRAFT PARAGRAPH

Ministers intend that local authorities should not suffer block grant penalties in 1981-82 as a result of extra expenditure arising from the recent severe weather conditions. Local authorities will therefore be allowed to deduct such expenditure from the total of current expenditure for 1981-82 against which their performance in relation to the volume targets set last year will be measured. They will similarly be allowed to deduct it from their total expenditure for calculating whether or not their total expenditure is below their GRE for the purpose of securing exemption from grant holdback. Detailed arrangements will be discussed with the local authority associations.

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards PC MP
Secretary of State
Welsh Office
Gwydyr House
Whitehall
London SW1A 2ER

18 January 1982

Dear Nick

SNOW EMERGENCY EXPENDITURE

Thank you for your letter of 15 January suggesting how you might respond to questions about our response to weather emergencies in Wales. Naturally I understand that such questions are inevitable and we must be clear about the line to be taken in reply.

To take your second point first, I am pleased to be able to say that there is no question of the special grants to local authorities faced with weather emergencies counting against the RSG cash limit. Central government grants to local authorities for weather emergencies have always fallen outside the aggregate exchequer grant net and therefore are not subject to a cash limit. This makes sense because our reason for giving the grant is simply that we recognise that the expenditure involved is unforeseeable and beyond the contingency level for which local authorities might reasonably provide.

On the same basis, I am reluctant to use quite so generous a formula as you suggest for assessing local authorities' performance against our current expenditure target. In setting the penny rate product threshold, we are expecting local authorities to meet costs up to that threshold from their own resources. In effect, the penny rate product is being used as our estimate of a suitable contingency margin for emergency expenditure. It would seem curious to use a different definition for the two purposes and I would therefore expect the expenditure left out of reckoning in assessing performance against the target should be that accepted for grant.

In reply to questions on this point, I suggest that you might say that in judging the performance of local authorities in Wales against our current expenditure target, expenditure accepted for grant on weather emergencies will be left out of account.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine and George Younger.

Yours ever
Leon

LEON BRITTAN

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From The Secretary of State for Wales

15 January 1982

Dear Chief Secretary

SNOW EMERGENCY

As you will know, I am First Order for Questions on Monday 18 January. I expect to be closely questioned on the snow emergency in Wales and the steps the Government has taken in response to it. The Prime Minister may also be pressed on the matter in her Questions on Tuesday.

In the last few days it has become increasingly clear that the additional expenditure likely to be required of some Welsh local authorities as a result of the emergency is very substantial. They will have real financial problems, and they are becoming alive to that. In consequence, I am being assailed on the financial aspects of the emergency, with allegations that ratepayers are going to be subjected to a far greater burden than had been expected following our announcement of Government aid. There is no truth in that claim, which is aimed at turning us back from the grant-inclusive definition of a penny rate poundage. The intention to use that definition in situations such as this one was stated explicitly in a Circular to local authorities on 5 December 1980 and there should have been no doubt about it. I intend to defend our decision firmly.

However, there are two other points which have been raised and on which I wanted to advise you on the line I intend to take.

The first is whether additional expenditure incurred in connection with the emergency can be set aside when assessing the expenditure performance of Welsh local authorities against the all-Wales target I set them in the 1981-82 Rate Support Grant Settlement. It seems to me that it would be quite unconscionable to require any such expenditure to count against the target. I therefore intend to say that in judging the performance of Welsh local authorities in aggregate I will take into account exceptional expenditure incurred in dealing with emergencies.

The second point (which has been raised with us already by the BBC) is whether the 75 per cent specific grant will have to

/be accommodated

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From The Secretary of State for Wales

be accommodated within the cash limit already set for Welsh Aggregate Exchequer Grant for 1981-82. If we say yes, then of course the response will be that the Government's special aid is completely worthless: central Government will be giving no more cash to local authorities than it would have done anyway. Of course we cannot say a straightforward no either, since for all we know there may turn out to be room within the existing cash limit to accommodate this grant. I therefore propose to say that we shall have to wait and see how the sums turn out; the cash limited sum will not necessarily all be used up for other grant since it depends on the level of expenditure, but that if in the event there is insufficient room within the present cash limit the Government will increase it to the extent necessary.

I hope that you will see no objection to me taking these lines on the 18th and the Prime Minister taking them the following day if need be.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister and to Michael Heseltine.

Yours sincerely

Cairns Evan

Approved by the Secretary of State
and signed in his absence

The Rt. Hon. Leon Brittan, QC, MP,
Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE PROGRAMME: EXPENDITURE IN 1981-82

1. In the Ministerial discussion on financing snow-clearing on 11 January, the question arose whether there was spare money in the Community Enterprise Programme. There is not. This note describes the position.

2. There is PES cover for £99m in 1981/82 for CEP. MSC had planned to expand CEP to 25,000 places by the end of 1981/82. They now expect to achieve nearly 30,000 places but because take up was lower than expected in the early months of the financial year the requirement will be reduced by £10m. This sum is being transferred with Treasury agreement to MSC to help cover the operating costs of the Industrial Training Boards up to 31 March 1982.

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Prime Minister

MPP 14/1

MT

Caxton House Tothill Street London SW1H 9NF
Telephone Direct Line 01-213 7789 GTN 213
Switchboard 01-213 3000

M Pattison Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

14 January 1982

Dear Mike

I understand that following the Ministerial discussion on financing snow clearing on 11 January you thought it might be useful if we explained precisely where things stood on the finances of the Community Enterprise Programme. The position is set out in the attached note.

Yours
Marie Fahey

MISS M C FAHEY
Private Secretary

FILE

VLG

Home Affairs

SUBJECT.

cc DOE (PUSS) D/N (PUSS)
HO D/M (PUSS)
MAFF SO
CST WO
MOD (PUSS) NIO
D/Tpt (PUSS)

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 January 1982

cc. Master set.

Dear David

As you know, the Prime Minister held an ad hoc meeting this afternoon to ensure that central government was helping local authorities to the maximum extent possible in the response to the present problems posed by severe weather. In addition to your Secretary of State and Mr. Shaw, the meeting was attended by the Home Secretary, the Minister of Agriculture, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Wiggin), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department of Transport (Mr. Clarke), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Mellor) and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Morrison).

Shortly before the meeting, the Prime Minister had spoken on the telephone to the Secretary of State for Wales, who had just returned from his helicopter tour of the area. He had reported to her that the priority was to clear the motorways and trunk roads, so as to enable people and supplies to begin to move a little more freely. Some local authorities had done excellent work in road clearing, while others had been less successful. The Services were making an important contribution. The Army had reported to him that local authorities had hoped to be able to take on additional labour from the ranks of the long-term unemployed, and had asked whether unspent funds from the Community Enterprise Programme might be used to finance this. Mr. Clarke said that the Department of Transport had already moved some additional snow-clearing equipment from depots in Eastern England to the West. There were over 20 snow ploughs and snow blowers available, which could be used on Welsh roads, but no request had yet been received from the local authorities who were acting as agents in the road clearing. He would now contact the Welsh Office.

Your Secretary of State emphasised that, as he had made clear in weekend news broadcasts, the local authority chief executives were well aware of the established rules under which central government could meet up to 75% of reasonable expenditure, over and above the product of a penny rate, incurred in responding to weather emergencies. In discussion, it was agreed that this provided the best route for any central

/ government

VLG

Government assistance, including the possible use of labour from the unemployment register. The Community Enterprise Programme did not appear to be drafted to cover the kind of work now required.

Mr. Mellor reported that 25,000 consumers had lost power supplies by the weekend. The number was down to 11,500 this morning. This should be reduced to somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 tonight, with reconnection for these expected tomorrow. Following the inquest on such problems in December, it was clear that the limiting factor at present was not skilled manpower but access.

Summing up, the Prime Minister noted that the European Commission had been advised that the United Kingdom might wish to make a claim under the European Disaster Fund, but that it would be unhelpful to publicise this at present. In any public statements it should be made clear that central government stood firmly behind the major efforts already being made by local authorities, through their own labour forces and with police and military assistance. The Government would provide all the help that it could within existing arrangements, and would now confirm that the financial arrangements used in past emergencies would now be applied to reasonable claims arising from the period of severe weather. The Secretary of State for the Environment would make such a statement this evening, confirming the guidance he had given over the weekend. The Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, who were unable to be present at the meeting, would be advised of these conclusions.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries of those present at the meeting, and to Muir Russell (Scottish Office), John Craig (Welsh Office) and Stephen Boys-Smith (Northern Ireland Office).

Yours ever

Mike Pattison

D. A. Edmonds, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

PRESS OFFICE BULLETIN

date: 11 January 1982

No. 15

WEATHER

The Prime Minister has called a meeting for this afternoon (4.15 pm) of the Ministers most closely concerned with the effects of the weather on the country.

Its purpose is to receive reports from Ministers on their assessment of the situation and to ensure effective co-ordination.

If decisions are needed in the response to circumstances they will be taken this afternoon but we should not lead journalists to suppose that any financial conclusions will be reached.

So far as Government aid is concerned we must rely on Mr Heseltine's remarks on BBC World this Weekend yesterday. He then said the Govt would look sympathetically at requests for aid.

Those expected to attend this afternoon's meeting are:

Prime Minister

Ministers from the following Departments:

Environment	Defence
Wales	MAFF
Scotland	Energy
Northern Ireland	Transport
Home Office	Treasury

Mr Nicholas Edwards, Secretary of State for Wales, is today flying over Wales in a helicopter. He is unlikely to be at this afternoon's meeting but will report separately to the PM this evening on his return to London.

BACKGROUND NOTES

We should present this as a sensible stocktaking and co-ordination meeting and play down any suggestion of crisis. The meeting is an ad hoc affair; we should reject any idea that it is a revival of the winter emergency committee of Wilsonian fame.

B. INGHAM
11 January 1982

Briefing for World this Weekend. 10/1/82

WEATHER REPORT FOR 9 JANUARY 1982

General Picture

Conditions appear to be worst in the South West and West Midlands.. Snow fall has either moderated or stopped everywhere. Generally, local authorities appear to be coping. Some are concerned about supplies of salt for gritting and frost damage to roads. In some areas the wind is causing drifting snow to hamper clearance attempts.

West Midlands

Some areas had experienced 36 hours continuous snow by this afternoon but snow has now generally stopped. Herefordshire and south of the river Avon in Warwickshire are worst hit. Herefordshire is cut off but attempts are being made to re-open roads into it. South of the Avon many roads are impassable and some small communities are cut off. There is still some flooding from the previous bad weather but mostly on meadowland. Most main roads are passable but the Ross Spur is closed because of abandoned vehicles.

South West

15 inches of snow has fallen in the Cotswolds and there have been drifts of up to 15 feet in north Gloucestershire. Freezing rain has been falling in Devon, Dorset, Cornwall and south Somerset. Many minor roads are blocked and some major roads are closed including the M4 in Wiltshire and Avon. The Severn bridge is still open. Power failures have been experienced chiefly in Devon; many houses had power restored on Friday but some are still without power. The electricity board is working to re-connect. Clearance of roads has been impeded by abandoned vehicles

Yorkshire and Humberside

Only light snow has fallen. The floods are slightly receding although there is considerable inundation in Cawood, Wistow, Ulleskelf. The severe temperatures are hindering mopping up operations by householders. Food is being ferried by the Army

/to houses and

to houses and farms still isolated. Almost all roads are passable.

Northern Region

Snow fall has moderated considerably. Most major roads are open, but some minor roads are blocked. Snow clearing is going ahead satisfactorily with adequate supplies of salt. Local authorities fear considerable frost damage to roads.

North West Region

The region has experienced snow and ice but no communities are cut off and there has been no flooding.

Eastern Region

Very little snow has fallen in some areas but South Hertfordshire and South Bedfordshire have experienced 8 feet drifts in some places. There have been some problems with burst pipes but the water authority is repairing these, although engineers have been impeded by ice in getting to some houses. Some minor roads are blocked but no villages appear to be completely stranded.

East Midlands

The weather generally has not been exceptionally severe. No major problems in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire or Northamptonshire. Conditions in Derbyshire, and Lancashire, are rather more difficult. Some local authorities are worried about supplies of salt and some have overspent their snow clearance budgets already. Considerable frost damage is feared to roads.

The South East

The Cotswolds are worst hit and there have been 8 foot drifts in Hampshire. Some minor roads are impassable but only some farms and hamlets are cut off. Some problems experienced with drifting.

BRIEF ON THE ELECTRICITY CUTS FOR USE BY THE PRIME MINISTER IN "WORLD THIS WEEKEND" INTERVIEW

Line to take

Loss of electricity supplies obviously causes consumers considerable inconvenience and discomfort. The Boards concerned are doing everything they possibly can to restore supplies. But the weather conditions are very severe and this is hampering progress.

[If necessary] The Secretary of State for Energy has already asked the Chairman of the Electricity Council to report urgently on the adequacy of the industry's procedures and methods for restoring supplies in severe weather conditions. In the light of this report, he will consider what further action, if any, may need to be taken to minimise disruption in the future.

Background Note

All consumers in the South West should be reconnected by the end of today. Up to 4,000 consumers in Wales will remain unconnected overnight, but the electricity industry hopes to be able to do something for them tomorrow. The problem is access to where the faults are. There are very high winds and this is causing drifting of snow.

Department of Energy
8 January 1982

DENIS HOWELL'S STATEMENT AND MICHAEL HESELTINE's APPEARANCE ON "WORLD THIS WEEKEND"

Michael Heseltine will be appearing on World This Weekend tomorrow where he will rebut criticisms made by Denis Howell this morning on the Government's attitude to the weather crisis. Denis Howell criticised the Government for indifference as applied to citizens suffering from the weather, and made four main points:

1. That the Government should appoint a Minister responsible for such crises.

2. That those authorities who overspent on emergency work would suffer under the new Rate Support Grant rules.

3. That the Government should establish emergency centres to aid those affected.

4. That it should make immediate financial assistance available to local authorities.

The Secretary of State is likely to take the following attitude to the points as follows:

1. The Government made a conscious decision not to appoint a weather minister but the Department of the Environment Regional Offices have been closely monitoring the situation including over the weekend and have been in touch with local authorities and water authorities.

2. In deciding the Rate Support Grant the Government does have the capacity to take into account these sort of circumstances and indeed has already done so, vis a vis those authorities affected by the rioting last year. The Government will obviously look very closely at taking these exceptional circumstances into account.

3. The local authorities are already co-ordinating relief and help at the local level and have already opened emergency centres where necessary. There have been no reports of lack of co-ordination.

4. There are long-standing conventions about the way in which central Government gives help to local government in such circumstances. If the emergency expenditure exceeds the product of a penny rate the Government will consider any claims made by the local authorities. These rules are well understood by the local authorities.

Finally, the Secretary of State will criticise Mr. Howell for seeking to make political capital out of a serious situation.

Grey Scale #13

C Y M

A 1 2 3 4 5 6 M 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 B 17 18 19