

2.



Prime Minister.

Not a happy story. But
the Welsh office seem to have
drawn the necessary lessons.

for
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MANAGEMENT AND SENIOR STAFF IN CONFIDENCE

PRIME MINISTER

CYNON VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

— Roy A.

I sent you a minute on 9 March about this case and your Private Secretary's letter of 12 March indicated that you wanted a report from me when my enquiries into the way in which the matter was handled by my Department was complete.

... I attach a copy of a minute I have received from my Permanent Secretary. I agree with the action he has taken or proposes to take and I have instructed him to proceed accordingly.

R.

I fear that the same things
will inevitably happen again

RNE

unless we take firmer
action than this

4 June 1981

not

MANAGEMENT AND SENIOR STAFF
IN CONFIDENCE

SECRETARY OF STATE

Cc Mr R A Lloyd Jones
Mr J E King

CYNON VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL: HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE CASE

... I enclose the report of the formal inquiry into the handling of this case. You will see that fault is considered to lie at four levels; the Higher Executive Officer who personally dealt with the case, the Principal to whom he worked, the Assistant Secretary in charge of the Division and the Under-Secretary in charge of the Transport and Highways Group. I have discussed the report with my Principal Establishment Officer and agree with this assessment. The case officer is clearly seriously at fault since he was directly responsible for not carrying out the work but there are indications that he was both overloaded and badly managed in that he was diverted to other tasks requiring immediate attention without thought of the consequences for his normal work. The Principal and Assistant Secretary are also seriously at fault since they knew that the case was being delayed but did not take steps to ensure that it was progressed. They are also at fault in allowing the officer to be given other tasks without drawing the Under-Secretary's attention to the consequences. The Under-Secretary must take general responsibility for the state of affairs within his Group; specifically he contributed to the circumstances which led up to the failure by allocating additional tasks directly to the case officer, apparently without consultation with the latter's superiors to ensure that the officer was not being overloaded. All four officers showed serious lack of judgment regarding the relative importance and sensitivity of the case. But I am satisfied that there is no evidence of wilful misbehaviour or pursuit of self-interest. What is needed therefore is a punishment which will serve notice that neither you nor I are prepared to tolerate such slapdash handling of public business.

I have examined the files of the officers concerned. The Higher Executive Officer and the Principal have had consistently very good reports and the former has indeed been recommended for promotion. The Assistant Secretary's reports are average. You know the Under-Secretary; my assessment of him is that he is a good professional engineer and a hard worker but that he occupies a post which also requires administrative skills which he does not possess to the same degree. He is due to retire next February.

I propose to take, and in some instances have already taken, the following action:-

- (a) All four officers will be severely reprimanded. This will have obvious implications for the prospects of advancement for the three younger officers. As to the Under-Secretary, a severe reprimand at this late stage in his long career will be felt deeply and I do not consider that any more severe penalty is justified by this one case. His Deputy Secretary and I will

keep a close eye on his management during his remaining few months of service;

- (b) The Assistant Secretary and the Principal have already moved to different posts. They will be warned that their work in their new posts will be closely monitored and that any future similar occurrence will not be tolerated. The Higher Executive Officer will similarly be warned;
- (c) I have issued instructions to Under-Secretaries throughout the Department requiring them to ensure that all Heads of Divisions have and maintain systems which enable them to follow the progress of work through their Divisions. I have required them to confirm personally to me that adequate systems are now in operation. I have also issued instructions that any cases which are the subject of delay, for whatever reason, are brought to their attention so that they can alert you and me where necessary.

The Prime Minister has asked you for a report on the results of this inquiry and you may care to send her a copy of this minute. In doing so I should be grateful if you would convey the sincere apologies of the Department. I am of course available to discuss if you wish.

Trevor Hughes

TREVOR HUGHES
3 June 1981