



PRIME MINISTER

CYNON VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

I have seen your Private Secretary's letter of 4 March about a case referred to you by the Cynon Valley Borough Council. I fully understand your well justified concern. I first saw a copy of the Council's letter of complaint to you a day or two before I left for Japan and I immediately asked for an explanation and report, and instructed Michael Roberts to look into the case in my absence. Michael received the papers while I was away and took a decision on them on 3 March. In the meantime my Permanent Secretary had begun his own enquiries and I don't think I can do better than enclose a copy of his report to me. I would add that as he himself has only just taken up his duties no blame can attach to him. I have myself now looked at the files which reveal that at a number of points in this sad saga officials realised that things were amiss and appeared to initiate action but as yet I have no explanation as to why on each occasion nothing effective was done.

The difficulty in such cases is that Ministers and senior officials do not become aware of them until the damage has been done, but I am consulting urgently with the Permanent Secretary about measures to be taken to avoid such events in the future. It will be made clear to all concerned that maladministration of this kind is simply not acceptable and I can only convey my regrets that such a case has occurred in my Department and that the systems in operation have proved inadequate to prevent it.

R.

RNE
9 March 1981



MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

SECRETARY OF STATE

CYNON VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

... The Prime Minister has expressed deep concern about the handling of this case. I am very sorry to say that it appears to be fully justified. The substance is dealt with in CT 1021/81 and a brief diary of events ^{is} attached. The Borough Council have now been told that you would ^{not} uphold their appeal, and so it is urgent that the Prime Minister should reply as soon as possible.

I would need more time to consider the merits of the answer we have given the Borough Council, (though I am not aware of anything amiss), and certainly to consider the implications for management. Prima facie, however, I must conclude that we stand convicted of gross delay, amounting to maladministration, in handling the case and that the only course is indeed for an unreserved apology to go from No 10.

The story is contained in File R28/39/5. No action was taken between June 1978 and January 1979. No excuse for this can be offered. It would appear that the Mid Glamorgan County Council made little serious effort to play their part. Eventually my senior officers became anxious (rightly) that despite frequent reminders from Transport and Highways Group (the one bright spot in this story), the County Council's dilatoriness would lead to criticism of the Welsh Office. But when the County replied, two months were wasted before the Borough Council were asked to comment, and eight more months went by before serious consideration was at last given to the merits of the case.

... Delay of this kind simply cannot be condoned. Indeed, it is quite inexplicable. Nevertheless, a full explanation must be obtained before I can report to you about management or disciplinary action as appropriate. Meanwhile, it would be unfair to deduce, merely from the sketchy evidence of the papers, exactly where the blame lies as between the levels of management in T & H Group and what should be done to put things right. I know that you will wish to discuss, but my present thinking is that you should write as soon as possible to the Prime Minister on the lines of the attached draft and remit the papers to me so that I can immediately set in hand an inquiry, the purpose of which would be to establish how so severe a lapse from acceptable standards of public administration came about; where the responsibility lies; and whether disciplinary action is appropriate.

Trevor Hughes

TREVOR HUGHES
6 March 1981



DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER
TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CYNON VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

You wrote to me on 9 February about the way in which your Council's request for a determination into highway legislation, which has now been given to your Council by the Welsh Office, has been handled.

I have discussed your letter with the Secretary of State for Wales. Some delay was caused, as you know, by the need for consultations with the County Council. But I have found that the greater part of the delay was indeed attributable to failure by the Welsh Office to give sufficient and proper priority to your representations.

In short, the matter has not been handled in the Welsh Office in accordance with the standards of public administration which the Secretary of State and I require, and which your Council are fully entitled to expect. Appropriate action is being taken within the Welsh Office. I would like to tender an unreserved apology to the Council for the delay, and the Secretary of State for Wales wishes to be fully associated with it.