



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

29 February 1980

The Rt Hon Norman St John-Stevas MP  
 Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
 Privy Council Office  
 Whitehall  
 LONDON  
 SW1

Dear Mr St John-Stevas,

RELATIONSHIPS WITH SELECT COMMITTEES: DISCLOSURE OF DOCUMENTS

I was interested to see Paul Channon's letter of 20<sup>TPM</sup> February to you on the disclosure of documents to the Select Committees, and would like to add my contribution to the collective view which I agree we must reach.

I entirely support the line Paul recommends. We should not provide the Committee with documents of the sort he mentions; even if the report in question is innocuous, we can expect the Committees to use the fact that it was provided as a precedent in seeking other such internal documents. We must preserve the rule that Officials' advice to Ministers is not to be disclosed, and this is, of course, enshrined in the Memorandum of Guidance for Officials. The Procedure Committee did not query that part of the memorandum, and the Chairman of the Liaison Committee will be aware of the provision in the memorandum.

Ultimately we must rest our refusal to disclose documents on a readiness to defend our refusal in the House. I think Paul's letter provides adequate grounds of defence. But it would of course be better not to let matters go so far, and the provision of specially prepared memoranda should normally satisfy the Committee. You may also want to talk to the Chairman of the Liaison Committee at some stage about it: but you are the best judge of whether and when to make an approach. It may in the event be easier to deal with such requests with each Committee as they come up, at least for the moment: seeking to make a general issue of it could at this early stage be counter-productive.

I am copying this letter to recipients of Paul Channon's.

Yours sincerely,  
Stephen Locke  
(private secretary)

pp NIGEL LAWSON  
(approved by the Financial Secretary,  
and signed in his absence)

P.S. Since writing the above I have seen your reply of 27 February to Paul Channon. I must say that I would regard it as premature, to say the least, to be thinking of providing documents that contain officials' advice to Ministers even if sidelined. This could start us on a very slippery slope indeed.

29 FEB 1980

