

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

*Subject copy on:
Cabinet: May 79,
Drafting and Circulation
of Cabinet Papers*

THE PRIME MINISTER

Personal Minute

No. M13/79T

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

CONDUCT OF CABINET AND CABINET COMMITTEE BUSINESS

I am writing to you about the way in which Cabinet and Cabinet Committee papers are drafted.

Between the Election and the start of the recess we accomplished a great deal. We had a Budget which set an entirely new strategy. We took important but difficult decisions on public expenditure in 1980/1. A number of Ministers were able to announce major new policy decisions. At the same time we made progress in some major international negotiations.

We did all this at considerable speed and we had to cut some corners. Papers were frequently circulated with insufficient time for adequate study; and sometimes not all the relevant facts were before us. This was to some extent inevitable in these early months. But now this initial period is behind us, we need to deal with Cabinet and Cabinet Committee business in a more deliberate way, while losing none of our impetus.

There are one or two steps we can take which will help us conduct our business more effectively. First, we must do all we can to improve the drafting of Cabinet and Cabinet Committee papers.

/Guidance on this

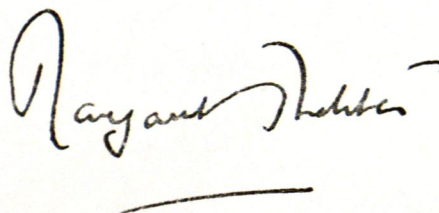
CONFIDENTIAL

Guidance on this is contained in paragraphs 3,7,9,11,13 and 17 of Questions of Procedure for Ministers (C(P)(79)1). I think they repay re-reading, particularly paragraph 13 with its key sentence "The model memorandum explains at the outset what the problem is, indicates briefly the relevant considerations, and concludes with a precise statement of the decisions sought." No matter who has prepared the draft, the responsibility for the paper lies with the Minister circulating it.

Second, we must ensure that Cabinet and Cabinet Committee papers are circulated in good time. As a minimum papers should be sent round to colleagues two clear working days before a meeting.

Finally, we have done our best to cut out unnecessary Committee work and unnecessary co-ordination since Ministers are better employed getting on with the job rather than sitting round a table. I do, however, stress the word "unnecessary". It is no help to the Cabinet if proposals are put to it before all the departments with a legitimate interest have been properly consulted. Ministers should therefore normally discuss their proposals with the other departments concerned, either in the appropriate Cabinet Committee or more informally, before bringing them to the Cabinet for decision. We can more effectively arrive at our conclusions if there is prior agreement on the facts and the options.

I am sending copies of this minute to all members of the Cabinet including the Minister of Transport, to the Chief Whip, the Law Officers and Sir John Hunt.



19 September 1979