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Prime Minister

To note



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

26. February 1982

My dear Prime Minister.

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You will recall that in May 1980 you established a Home Defence Sub-Committee of OD under my chairmanship to consider urgently our policy on civil home defence. Following my report to OD we announced in August 1980 a programme of measures, significantly increasing the allocation of resources to civil home defence, which was welcomed by our supporters in Parliament and elsewhere. We have recently reviewed the progress made by officials in developing this civil preparedness programme: I can report that in a number of areas matters have been carried well forward and that in general we have raised the level of war emergency planning effort throughout the country.

I must, however, sound a less optimistic note about our relations with Labour-controlled local authorities. There are, as you know, serious difficulties in the presentation of civil home defence policies; particularly because we have to refute the argument that the Government's nuclear deterrent policy makes planning for nuclear war a necessity. Several local authorities have come out strongly against any more than the minimum planning for the aftermath of a nuclear attack on the United Kingdom. The thrust of much of our current planning is, however, in connection with the threat of conventional war and this work is closely related to contingency planning for large scale civil emergencies generally - the need for which is accepted by all. The Secretary of State for Defence has taken the lead in co-ordinating the presentation of our military and civil defence policies to the public.

My Sub-Committee has now established five key areas of work to which officials are to give priority: war emergency legislation, home defence planning assumptions, the structure of regional government, key point protection and shelter and evacuation policy. I expect to report on this work in the autumn and to include in this a number of issues mentioned in the paper I put before OD in July 1980. There are four further important areas of work on which officials are to report by the end of 1982: revised guidance to local authorities, defence planning in the non-oil energy industries, the requirement for key industrial materials and the related work on strategic stockpiles.

You will recall that work on a policy for strategic stockpiles was commissioned at an ad hoc meeting under your chairmanship in January last year, at which proposals to sell off the Government oil stockpile and parts of the food stockpile were considered. The meeting agreed that the oil stockpile should be

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disposed of and that disposals of food for 1981-82 should proceed, but that any further sales from the food stockpile should be considered as part of a review of our stockpile policy. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has advised me that he needs a decision on the food stockpile in the Spring. My Sub-Committee has therefore agreed that, rather than upset the programme of work now established, we should look at the food stockpile in isolation next month. We have also still to make recommendations on the possibility, which your meeting left open, of some limited reallocation to civil home defence of savings realised by stockpile disposals. I plan to cover this point in my further report to OD.

I am copying this letter to my OD(HD) colleagues, to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to the Ministers of State, Northern Ireland Office and Departments of Industry and Energy, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*John*  
*Waller*

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The Prime Minister was grateful for the Home Secretary's letter of 26 February about the work of the Home Defence Sub-Committee of OD. She has taken note of its contents.

JC

J.F. Halliday, Esq.,  
Home Office.