

PRIME MINISTER

10 how many was that minute circulated? Only half a dozen people had any need to know? mb

Local Government Policies: Information Unit

The Secretary of State for the Environment minuted you on 14 November proposing the establishment of an Information Unit to get across the Government's case on local authority issues. I minuted back on 21 November recording your view that this work should be carried out as part of the Department's normal activities, using civil servants reporting to Ministers rather than employing outsiders - see Flag A.

The text of this letter has been leaked to the Guardian - see Flag B.

The line our Press Office will take (though there have been no enquiries as yet) is that the Government has a duty to ensure that the facts of its case are correctly presented and reported. But the Government is also very aware of its duty to maintain the distinction between it and the Party, and between information and 'propaganda'. It is precisely to ensure that the Government's actions are above criticism that it examines proposals of this kind with great care to see that these distinctions are maintained.

An investigator is already at work within the Department of the Environment to try and establish the source of a number of leaks in the local authority area. Cabinet Office are asking that this latest example be added to the instances to be investigated.

I understand that the Department of the Environment may be returning with a revised proposal, seeking to clarify the use of outsiders. They accept that no outsiders should be recruited to the team but they will be seeking to

Now attached

/argue

argue that it makes sense to hire outside advice on the presentation of the Government's case. Even this revised proposal will need to be examined carefully.

AT

ANDREW TURNBULL

28 November 1983

P.S. The revised proposal has arrived. Mostly it is acceptable, though before agreeing you should have advice from Bernard on X.

AT



FILE

107
L/c: Mr Ingham
Mr Hunt

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

21 November, 1983

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES: INFORMATION UNIT

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 14 November proposing the establishment of a temporary unit of some 5 or 6 people comprising administrators, information officers and possibly people drawn from the journalism and public relations world outside.

She fully accepts the need to get across the facts of the Government's case on local government and agrees that more resources should be devoted to this. She feels however that this should be done by the department acting under its normal procedures and not through the establishment of a separately identifiable unit. This work should be carried out by civil servants, responsible to Ministers and not by hiring outsiders.

She feels it is important to avoid any suspicion of using Government money for Party political purposes. This means that your department should be putting information to the media and should not be providing a service directly to Conservative MPs, peers or local authority leaders. The latter is the responsibility of the Party machinery.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Private Secretaries of members of Cabinet and to Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

(Andrew Turnbull)

J. Ballard, Esq.,
Department of the Environment

CONFIDENTIAL

HL

B

Extract from "The Guardian"

28 November 1983

Premier rejects plan to counter council lobbying

By Richard Norton-Taylor

A plan by Mr Patrick Jenkin, the Environment Secretary, to set up a special information unit to counter the campaign mounted by local authorities against Government policies has been rejected by Mrs Thatcher.

The proposal is referred to in a confidential memo from Mr Andrew Turnbull, one of the Prime Minister's private secretaries, to Mr John Ballard, a civil servant in Mr Jenkin's private office.

The initiative reflected the concern among ministers in the environment department about the effect of the aggressive lobbying tactics adopted by the GLC and other councils.

Mrs Thatcher's determination to quash it equally reflects her concern that the plan might have provoked another row similar to the one which broke out over the decision by Mr Heseltine, the Defence Secretary, earlier this year to create a special propaganda unit to attack the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

In his note, dated November

21 and headed "Local governments policies: information unit," Mr Turnbull says Mrs Thatcher agrees that more resources should be devoted to getting across the Government's case on local government — by implication its plans to control local authority spending as well as to abolish the metropolitan councils.

But he adds: "She feels it is important to avoid any suspicion of using government money for party political purposes." This means, Mr Turnbull adds, that the Department of the Environment should not provide a service "directly to Conservative MPs, peers or local authority leaders." That task, he says, is the responsibility of the Conservative Party itself and not the Civil Service.

According to the memo, Mr Jenkin earlier this month wrote a minute to the Prime Minister proposing "the establishment of a temporary unit of some five or six people comprising administrators, information officers, and possibly people from the journalism and public relations world outside."

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES: INFORMATION UNIT

IF ASKED about Richard Norton Taylor's piece in the Guardian (copy attached), Press Officers should take the following line unattributably:

"Of course the Government is concerned to argue its case vigorously and positively. Of course it makes sense to deploy/concentrate its information resources to prosecute its arguments effectively. Equally, however, the Government recognises and takes seriously the need to distinguish between Government and Party and between information and "propaganda". Accordingly, ideas/proposals in this sensitive area call for careful judgement and are looked at bearing in mind the need to ensure that whatever Government does should be, and be seen to be, above criticism."

IF ASKED about a leak inquiry:

"A number of leaks have occurred in the DoE policy area. they are taken seriously and they are being investigated. You can assume that this latest unauthorised disclosure will figure in those investigations.

There is not, and has never been, any question of mounting a paid media campaign on the local government policies in advance of the legislation getting through Parliament."

RC

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cc: Mr Butler
2 Mr Jace 17/12
3 Mr Ingram
4 Mr. E. E. E. E.

Room 521

xxx 7133

File

RESTRICTED

Mr B Scott

5 December 1983

I am writing to confirm that the Department of the Environment are commissioning you to undertake an enquiry into the disclosure of classified information which appeared on page 3 of the Guardian on Monday 28 November in an article by Richard Norton-Taylor. Your terms of reference are to establish the circumstances in which the apparent leak took place, who passed on the information, and whether there is any connection between it and the recent series of unauthorised disclosures of information relating to the structure and finances of local government.

You may take this letter as authority to interview officials at DOE and the Prime Minister's office. Please report back to me if you should decide that it is necessary to interview Ministers.

The usual arrangements will apply with respect to remuneration etc. I am copying this letter to PS/Sir George Moseley, Mr Ennals, Mr Davie and Mr Andrew Turnbull.

G N BENDON
Departmental Security Officer



Department of the Environment

PSA

Property Services Agency
Lambeth Bridge House
Albert Embankment
London SE1 7SB

Direct Line 01-211
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With Compliments

*GW Bendon -
5-12-83*



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister ①

To see Bernard's advice
Agree I write saying
outside journalists should
not be used on a paid
basis? Yes

Agree I make points on
distribution?

On leak, my letter went to
secretaries of Cabinet colleagues
(incoming minute was so
copied and principles were of
general applicability). Within
DoE about 5 people received
copies from Secretary of State's
office. - 2 junior ministers,
permanent secretary, head of
local govt division, and
head of information. But
it might have been recopied.

It is too wide a
circulation

AT 30/11