

Mt. Whitmore
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Clive Whitmore

Ref. A05065

MR IBBS
MR FRANKLIN
MR LE CHEMINANT
MR WADE-GERY
SIR A DUFF
MR LANE
MR HYDE

--- I attach a copy of a draft minute from Sir Robert
Armstrong to Committee Secretaries. Sir Robert
wishes to discuss this at the next meeting of Deputy
Secretaries on Thursday, 18 June. A copy also goes
to Clive Whitmore.

D. J. WRIGHT

D J WRIGHT

15 June 1981

COMMITTEE SECRETARIES

Cabinet and Committee minutes are once again in danger of becoming too long, and I should like all of us to have the danger much in our minds as we prepare them.

2. Remember that the purpose of our minutes is not to provide a complete account of the meeting in every detail. Their primary purpose is to record what was proposed, what was decided, broadly why it was decided, what action has to be taken in consequence of the decisions, and by whom.

3. I have myself found that, rather than simply take my notes of the meeting and dictate, it often helps first to write, or at least sketch out, the conclusions - recording who is to do what - and the summing up. Once those are clear in the mind, the opening statement and the discussion section often fall more easily - and more briefly - into place.

4. The discussion section need not record every point made in discussion: only those points that significantly affected the course of the discussion, helped to determine the conclusions and decisions, and may need to be in the minds of those who were not at the meeting but will have to act on the decisions.

5. Going through the draft minutes which reach me, I have the impression that they have been read through for typographical and grammatical errors, but not for style and directness. They could as a general rule be sparer and tauter. There are too many wordy periphrases and pleonasm, too many of those formulae that too easily become a substitute for clear thought and straightforward utterance. We also tend to be too free with the conjunctions and disjunctions, particularly "therefore" and "however" which often seem to be used not just unnecessarily but also misleadingly. All these are the characteristic faults of work that is dictated and not thoroughly read over.

6. In short, I think that for the expenditure of a little more time and care the product could be made significantly better, clearer and shorter.