



*John*

PRIME MINISTER

*with PM?*

Nicholas Ridley copied to me his minute of 28 February about plans for continuing action to tackle the litter problem. Paul Channon will be interested in the road safety and maintenance issues which arise from litter on major roads. I have to examine the effect which greater enforcement of the litter law might have on the resources of the police and the time of the courts. But I agree that this is a national nuisance which has been getting rapidly worse to the point of disgrace.

About 1,900 people are proceeded against in the magistrates' courts each year for litter offences. This is fairly small - about 0.1% of total magistrates' courts prosecutions. We have been encouraging the police to make sensible choices about manpower, giving priority to terrorism, violence, serious property offences, drug trafficking and so on. There is now increasing insistence from our more knowledgeable supporters that we should intensify our pressure on the police to concentrate their effort against crime and I must not relax that pressure. Litter is not of the same order, even though the public are rightly concerned for this aspect of their local environment. We should look, therefore, for other means to gain effective enforcement at no extra burden to the criminal justice system. The Westminster scheme provides us with some clues.

The one-year experimental fixed penalty scheme for litter offences in Westminster is about to finish, and the results so far indicate that it has been a success: only four fixed penalty tickets were issued during the first nine months of the experiment, from 590 people being asked to pick up their litter. The scheme has involved a publicity campaign and the provision of a great number of litter bins, with 81 council officers authorised to enforce the scheme in the course of their normal duties. The effect on the police and the courts' workload has been nil. My fears in that respect have not been substantiated. Therefore, and subject to

analysis of the full year's results, we would expect not to be supporting the adoption by other local authorities of a fixed penalty scheme (which appears unnecessary), but suggesting that they adopt a strategic enforcement role like Westminster's (which seems to be successful). I think, therefore, that it would be wise, as Nicholas suggests, to put legislative decisions on hold until the autumn.

This ties in well with Nicholas' suggestion of more local activity under the guidance of the Tidy Britain group, harnessing the enforcement capabilities of local authorities, the financial and staff resources of business, and the concern and enthusiasm of local communities. That is a powerful partnership which has proved its effectiveness in crime prevention. The CBI should be encouraged to recognise its role here, too, in encouraging businesses to put something back into their communities, and to gain valuable national and local credit as a result. While accepting that operational priorities are for Chief Constables to decide in the light of other demands, we know that the police are responsive to local concerns and can be relied upon to co-operate in those local schemes which seem to need their help. Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the crime prevention panel network may be resources upon which the police could draw. The DTI's Task Forces and City Action Teams, although environmental improvements are not at present one of their direct priorities, could be a further source of help.

We will be able to give strong support to Virginia Bottomley's campaign to encourage a litter consciousness in Departments and their sponsored bodies and industries. I am sure the brewers and licencees will wish to set an example, and we need to put more pressure on fast food outlets. We can ourselves set an example through tidy police and fire stations and the like.

I am copying this minute to Nicholas Ridley and Paul Channon.

*Douglas Hurd*

8 March 1989