

MR. CATFORD

CHEQUERS AND THE COMMUNITY CHARGE

Thank you for showing me the letter of 13 June from Mr. Stacey and the way in which he proposes to complete the registration form for the main house at Chequers.

I am concerned about the lack of information in the proposed completion of the form. It may be right for section 5 to be completed with an entry "none". But if so then as a minimum I think that the form should be supplemented by a letter to the Council - N.B: the declaration that 'the information given is complete'. The letters needs to cover the following points:

- explain that the house is available for the use of the Prime Minister of the day;
- indicate the Prime Minister's (and Mr. Thatcher's) present practice, i.e. they go to Chequers on average 'X' weekends a year, usually for two nights and sometimes for one night, plus some holiday periods;
- explain the position in relation to staff, i.e. how many and how often they stay in the house.

If this information is not provided, either on the form itself or in a covering letter, I do not see how the District Council will have sufficient information to assess whether or not the Trustees are liable to pay a standard charge. And an obscurely completed return could lead to unfavourable publicity for the Prime Minister. Moreover, <sup>at</sup> the end of the day it is for the Registration Officer (not the Trustees) to decide what the liability is; frankly, providing him with less than complete information is unlikely to serve the interests of the Trustees.

I have discussed all this with DOE, who agree with this approach. Indeed, John Gummer's Office is on the point of circulating guidance on the registration process to Ministers who have the benefit of official residences. This is unlikely to arrive before tomorrow, but DOE tell me my proposed approach is fully in line with the guidance.

One other thought. Might it not be sensible for the Secretary to the Trustees to make contact with his counterparts at Dorneywood and Chevening? It may be that circumstances between the houses vary and that different answers are therefore appropriate. But to the extent that consistency is appropriate, it would be sensible to make sure that this is being achieved.

PLG

PAUL GRAY

15 June 1989

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P.S. You may also care to see the attached correspondence, just received, concerning Rose being a bed accommodation at Upton.

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