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THE PRIME MINISTER

25 February 1988

Dear Lucy.

It was good of you to send me, as you had offered to do last year, the paper enclosed with your letter of 22 October. I read it with interest and have looked into our arrangements for co-ordination, both within Government, and in the delivery of services.

The enclosed factual note describes co-ordination in practice in several of the areas covered by your paper. I hope you will agree that it does show we take co-ordination seriously, and that it is working to good effect in a great many areas.

I believe we have made excellent progress. Our approach to child abuse, for example, has been (and is being) developed inter-departmentally so that policy and practice in the respective areas of responsibility are developed consistently, and with due regard to each other. The completion of the guidance to be issued once the outcome of the Cleveland inquiry is known, will be done so as to achieve consistency of approach between departments and the professions involved, and secure improved inter-agency co-operation.

You will have seen from announcements made early in this Session [Mr. Patten, 19 January, OR col 646] that inter-departmental work on alcohol misuse is producing valuable measures to tackle under-age drinking; and our inter-departmental work on drugs has produced valuable outcomes for the protection of the young.

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The White Paper on 'The Law on Child Care and Family Services' was itself a product of joint working. In the care field, we have secured through joint work the development of access to police records to ensure that unsuitable people do not find employment in work with children.

In the juvenile justice area, the successful development of alternatives to custody, for those who do not need it, and in particular of the Intermediate Treatment initiative, is evidence of long-standing arrangements for joint working between departments; and inter-service co-operation is generally well established at local level for dealing with young people in trouble.

In these priority areas as well as in others I am satisfied that Government departments are working together to good effect. All the departments concerned are aware of the need to secure consistency of policy and practice. As always, there will be further developments to be made, and the paper you sent will valuably inform future work.

You will gather that I do not believe we face fundamental obstacles to progress of the sort you desire, nor therefore that we need to search for new mechanisms in order to achieve it, although of course I should be glad to consider any specific proposals you had in mind. Once you have had a chance to consider the attached paper in detail perhaps you could let me have a list of topics you would like to discuss: we can then see when we might arrange a meeting.

*Y
Lowson
Rayner*

The Baroness Faithfull, O.B.E.