



*File*

*Home Affairs*

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

20 June 1979

*Dear John,*

Following discussion on Open Government in the Home and Social Affairs Committee, the Prime Minister has now agreed that the Government's view should be announced today when the Minister of State in the Civil Service Department will be answering oral questions.

Mr. Channon will reaffirm that the Government is committed to legislation to reform section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911, and he will add that it will be the practice of this Government to make as much information as possible available including background papers and analytical studies relevant to major policy decisions. He will also draw attention to the forthcoming discussion in the House of the recommendations of the Procedure Committee, which should enable the House to maintain and improve the scrutiny of the work of Government Departments. He will add that, against this background, the Government shares the view of its predecessor that legislation to provide a public right of access would not be appropriate, and that the Government feels that a Code of Practice would be open to many of the same objections.

The Prime Minister firmly believes that this approach offers the right balance. She wishes to ensure that these arrangements are effective, and she has therefore asked me to stress that Ministers should take the initiative in publishing information, especially on major issues of Parliamentary interest, to the greatest possible extent. It will be for Ministers individually to decide what particular material can be released in each specific case. The Prime Minister would like her colleagues to give close personal attention to this question. The release of appropriate material will not only provide evidence of the intention to make Government more open but will also help in explaining and justifying policies.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the members of the Cabinet, including the Minister of Transport, to the Private Secretaries to the Chief Whip and the Attorney General and to Sir John Hunt.

*Yours truly,*

*Mavis Whitman.*

J.A. Chilcot, Esq.,  
Home Office.

CONFIDENTIAL

*JB*