

WENO



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP
 Secretary of State for Social Services
 Department of Health & Social Security
 Alexander Fleming House
 Elephant & Castle
 LONDON
 SE1 6BY

26 April 1984

Norman

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SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE (SSI)

Thank you for your letter of 10 March. I am grateful to you for setting out your intentions for the SSI in greater detail.

I appreciate that your objective is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the personal social services and I welcome your explicit statement of the proposed Inspectorate's concern with achieving value for money within existing resources. However, I remain in some doubt as to whether your proposed extension of the SWS's functions is likely to be the most effective way of achieving your objective. Your rejection of definite targets for the Inspectorate, even as something to aim at when considering costs, standards and provision, increases my unease. I would welcome Robin Ibb's views on what is proposed for the Inspectorate and it may be that he can set my mind at rest.

In any case, I hope we can avoid making a public statement on the SSI for the present. I share Patrick Jenkin's anxiety that this is not a good time to be announcing anything which, in places where better services are thought to equal higher spending, will inevitably be publicised as an example of Government double dealing when we are calling for restraint. Like Patrick, I would also welcome a further sight of the joint statement when you know the Association's views, though I should add that the redraft attached to your letter seems to me a great improvement.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours.

Norman

Nat Health Efficiency
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18 May 1984

The Rt Hon Peter Rees QC MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

Dear Peter,

SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE (SSI)

Thank you for copying to me your letter of 26 April to Norman Fowler about the proposal to establish a Social Services Inspectorate to replace the existing Social Work Service. I have also seen the earlier correspondence, including Norman Fowler's letter of 10 March.

I do not have any specific experience in this field but I am suspicious of professional inspectorates. My experience is that they can be greatly concerned with standards and regulation which do not address key issues of value for money - cost and service to customers. There is a real risk that they can turn into pressure groups for the profession.

On the other hand I am impressed by what Norman Fowler is doing to improve efficiency in a range of areas. And I value a capacity to improve value for money by promoting best practice, by setting standards and by making comparisons. It may be that re-creating the Social Work Service (SWS) as an Inspectorate will aid these aspects because the inspectors will be more acceptable to local authorities than DHSS officials of the SWS. I cannot judge on the basis of the information available to me. But I note that the main additional activity is to be dependent on the "voluntary co-operation and goodwill of staff in the inspected authorities".

I wonder, therefore, whether a good way forward would be to test the proposed arrangements informally by piloting investigations of the type envisaged without adopting the rigidities of an inspectorate at this stage. An important aim might be to establish the notion of increasing value for money year by year before institutionalising the arrangements as an Inspectorate.

I am copying this to recipients of yours.

Yours truly,

Nat Health Efficiency Pt 3

21 MAY 1984

