



CCNO
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28 September 1984

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 13 September about drug abuse. I greatly welcome your interest and support.

Soon after my appointment I decided that the political and social consequences of the increasing level of drug abuse - particularly heroin - were such that a coherent strategy, publicly explained, was required to tackle it. Since then, with assistance from Keith Joseph and Norman Fowler, we have been working to develop a Government-wide approach. Because I was not satisfied with the pace at which progress was being made, I asked David Mellor to chair an inter-departmental Ministerial Working Group to come up with firm proposals in each relevant area of Government responsibility.

..... This Group has already done much valuable work. I am enclosing a note which summarises our strategy and the main measures which we have already taken or which are in hand. Geoffrey Howe's minute of 21 September has, of course, highlighted the action we are taking in the international field. It is now more important than ever that the Group should keep up the momentum.

Ken Clarke's speech at the Party Conference provides an opportunity and a challenge. We have responded by accelerating our consideration of the key issues. It is essential that Ken should have solid announcements to make. I welcome the urgency with which colleagues have treated this, and am prepared to chair any meeting required in order to reach agreement on matters which remain outstanding. I should, of course, make it quite clear that extra resources will be required if these announcements are to be made and the momentum of our efforts sustained.

I propose that Ken Clarke should be able to make the following announcements.

1. SENTENCING

I have already announced parole changes which will enhance the effect of sentences imposed on the worst drug traffickers. I have also announced our intention to legislate on the forfeiture of the proceeds of crime, something very relevant to drug trafficking.

But I think that we should now go further. I have considered the fact that the Lord Chief Justice has called for long prison sentences for drug traffickers. I have also re-examined the sentencing practice of the courts in such cases. I now propose that Ken Clarke should announce our intention to legislate as soon as possible (the Criminal Justice Bill I propose to introduce next year will provide a vehicle) to increase the maximum penalty from 14 years to life imprisonment for offences of drug trafficking in Class A drugs. This should signal to all concerned the seriousness with which we view this crime.

2. POLICE

ACPO have not moved as far and as fast as we would wish to step up their efforts to deal with drug trafficking. My officials are pressing them urgently on their plans, although you and colleagues will well understand the importance of avoiding strains on our relationship with Chief Constables at this time. I hope that Ken may be able to announce some welcome changes. In any case, we will provide examples of police activity and successes which can be used in the speech.

3. CUSTOMS

Customs and Excise play a vital role in intercepting supplies at the ports. But we are certainly vulnerable here. The amount of drugs targeted on this country has increased considerably. But the number of customs officers has fallen by over ten per cent. The number of specialist customs investigators has increased since we took office but we remain open to the criticism that it should be made much harder to smuggle drugs into the country. I am certainly not convinced that we need hundreds more uniformed officers deployed at major ports. But it seems clear to me that without some additions to Customs manpower our efforts to tackle other aspects of the drug problem will be severely weakened. I therefore propose that Ken Clarke should announce

at Brighton that, in addition to the 60 extra staff who are being temporarily deployed this year, we intend to make more Customs staff available to reinforce their controls to prevent drug smuggling. It would clearly be for Treasury Ministers and the Board of Customs to determine the exact numbers needed and their deployment. But I would like Ken to be able to be as forthcoming as possible about what is planned.

4. TREATMENT AND DRUGS SECURITY

I would like to see Ken Clarke announce extra resources for the Health Departments for treatment and rehabilitation and for the security of controlled drugs. The £7 million DHSS central funding initiative for treatment and rehabilitation has provided an invaluable stimulus for many worthwhile projects. But it has been heavily over-subscribed; and treatment facilities throughout the country cannot cope with the pressures of a growing addict population. Moreover, implementation of last year's report by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on security is being held up because of the costs of improving security at retail pharmacies and at hospitals. Early progress is required on both. I believe that we will be strongly criticised if no announcement of new money is made for treatment and security.

5. PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS

We must do all that we can to prevent young people from experimenting with dangerous drugs. David Mellor's Group has been giving the highest priority to working out proposals for getting that message over to both parents and young people. There are dangers in a generalised, undirected campaign. We have to devise the right messages for the right target audiences. There is still more work to do. But I believe that Ken Clarke should announce at the Conference that we are committed in principle to a major new initiative in this area and are commissioning market research to advise on messages, context and targets. This could be linked with other initiatives which are already being worked up on the health education front. I am told that the cost of undertaking a properly targeted campaign might be of the order of £2 million.

I realise that any proposals requiring extra resources come at a particularly difficult time. Some of these proposals affect other Departments. I must look to them to say to what extent increased expenditure to combat drug misuse can be offset by reductions elsewhere. Between now and the Conference colleagues and I will firm up these proposals and discuss their financial implications. I am sure, however, that the time has passed when we were able to push forward a defensible but limited policy without the need to incur much by way of significant expenditure. The scale of the problem has escalated beyond this. So has public concern about it. There is no reason to believe that the worst is behind us. The Party and the general public expect action; Ken Clarke's speech is an opportunity to make clear that action is in hand.

As regards Ken Clarke's speech itself, I have asked my special adviser and officials here to provide the fullest possible assistance.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours and to Ken Clarke.

Yours,
C. Clarke

DRUG MISUSE

AN OUTLINE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY

POLICY

To curb drug misuse by simultaneous action on five main fronts:

- * reducing supplies from abroad;
- * tighter controls on drugs produced and prescribed here;
- * policing;
- * deterrence;
- * treatment and prevention.

Co-ordination of policy through David Mellor's Ministerial Group on the Misuse of Drugs.

SPECIFIC MEASURES ALREADY TAKEN

reducing supplies from abroad

- (i) additional £1m to aid eradication of poppy cultivation in Pakistan.
- (ii) senior Customs officer posted to Karachi to improve operational intelligence.
- (iii) senior police officer posted to the Hague.
- (iv) number of Customs specialist heroin investigators doubled since 1979.
- (v) 60 more uniformed Customs officers being appointed, partly to combat drug trafficking.

- (vi) announcement of intention to ratify UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1971.

tighter controls on drugs produced and prescribed here

- (i) introduction of licensing restrictions on the prescribing of dipipanone (diconal).
- (ii) control of barbiturates under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (from 1 January 1985).
- (iii) action against doctors last year for irresponsible prescribing.
- (iv) consultations completed on report by Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on the security of controlled drugs. It is hoped to make an announcement shortly.

policing

- (i) ACPO working party established with Home Office encouragement and support to examine the case for setting up regional drug squads.

deterrence

- (i) introduction of restrictions on parole for drug traffickers sentenced to five years or more imprisonment.
- (ii) legislation promised in this Parliament to deprive drug traffickers, amongst others, of the proceeds of their crime.

treatment and prevention

- (i) publication of reports by Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on treatment and rehabilitation and on prevention. (Comments are being provided by a wide range of interested and responsible bodies as part of an extensive consultation exercise on this report).

- (ii) £7m allocated over 3 years for pump-priming of local treatment and rehabilitation services.
- (iii) Regional Health Authorities have been asked to give the highest priority to services for drug misusers and to report back by the end of the year on the action they are taking.
- (iv) guidelines being prepared for the medical profession on good clinical practice.

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