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PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO SUFFOLK HOUSE DRUG CENTRE AT IVER  
HEATH ON TUESDAY 28 MAY 1985

Main points made in discussion

One of the problems was the diversity of authoritative advice on the best methods of treatment. Many people swore by total abstinence, others believed in the "weaning" approach. **Brian Arbery** thought better and closer links were needed between DHSS, Home Office and Customs & Excise. He thought the recent drugs initiative was the best thing which had been done in the drugs field for many years.

**Brian Arbery** thought that while the voluntary sector played a major part in dealing with the practical problems, their views tended not to be heard at the policy-making level. He believed the NHS tended to accord drugs treatment a low priority.

**Dr. John Mack** (Consultant Psychiatrist to Suffolk House) believed we were still inclined to treat drug addiction as a medical problem. But it was clearly a social one.

There was anecdotal evidence of drugs abuse reaching down into primary schools. **Diana Donald** (Director of Suffolk House) was aware of 7 and 8 year old heroin addicts in the US.

All agreed with the residents' assessment that education in schools was crucial. The point that it should not be "establishment figures" putting the message across was well taken. Sports and pop personalities would be far more effective. The extent to which drug use was increasingly accepted and pervasive was noted. Some young people were now switching between alcohol and illicit drugs frequently. This kind of double use was a disturbing trend.



**Brian Arbery** stressed a number of points in particular:

1. The status of ex-drugs users needed to be enhanced - as the Prime Minister's visit to Suffolk House had done - if addicts were to be encouraged to come forward for treatment.
2. Education and proper law enforcement needed to go hand in hand.
3. Even a far from complete restriction of supply could help because it pushed up the price of drugs.
4. It might have to be accepted that the drug problem was here to stay, and that the important thing was to distinguish between drugs which could be coped with, and those which could not.

**Mr. Dewhurst** (Treasurer, Turning Point) stressed the importance of helping parents to recognise the symptoms of drug abuse in their children.

**Mr. Arbery** deplored the lack of response from the health authorities to the DHSS circular in 1984.

**Mr. Arbery** noted the particular difficulties that a Turning Point day centre in London was having with funding. Such centres did not have access to the supplementary benefit payments which centres like Suffolk House could draw upon. The Prime Minister agreed that more centres like Suffolk House were needed. She hoped that the major appeals (e.g. the Lord Mayor's appeal) would consider directing themselves to the area of drug abuse.

**Mrs. Glasson** (Chairman of Suffolk House Advisory Committee) was concerned that judges and magistrates did not have access to enough knowledge about local provision for drug offenders.



Dr. Mack and Mr. Arbery were agreed that heroin was the drug which should be causing most concern.

Mr. Arbery and Dr. Mack agreed to draw up a paper setting out their views on treatment and drugs policy, which they would send to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister agreed that she would be glad to be invited to open the Suffolk House extension when it was completed.

The housing problems of rehabilitated addicts were also discussed in general terms.

MLA  
29/5

cc Mr H Booth (Policy Unit) - for info