

PRIME MINISTER

cc:- Mr. Ingham

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CO-ORDINATING THE  
PRESENTATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

You are meeting Lord Whitelaw at 1100 hrs today to discuss this. I have prepared these notes after discussion with Bernard Ingham.

Just before you went to Delhi, the Chairman of the Party urged on you the need for a more active Ministerial role in co-ordinating information. Mr. John Biffen has never taken much interest in this side of his responsibilities.

The Role

Lord Whitelaw would take over co-ordination at Ministerial level. Bernard Ingham would be his main support at official level, although Lord Whitelaw might want to appoint an information officer in his office to give him direct support.

Bernard Ingham chairs a weekly meeting of Chief Information Officers on Mondays at 1700 hrs, and from time to time smaller meetings of Chief Information Officers in the economic departments on Tuesdays at noon. One possibility would be for Lord Whitelaw to take over these meetings. But it would probably be better for Bernard Ingham to continue to chair these regular meetings, reporting to Lord Whitelaw; and Lord Whitelaw to hold meetings of information officers on a more ad hoc basis to tackle particular issues.

A particular role would be to commission weekend speaking notes for Ministers. These notes fell into disuse for a time under Mr. Biffen, but Bernard Ingham now commissions them at his Monday meetings and departments circulate them. It would be useful

/if

if Lord Whitelaw were to recover central co-ordination of these.

A particular question arises over the Thursday afternoon lobby taken by Mr. Biffen. In the past Mr. Angus Maude and Mr. St. John Stevas took this lobby <sup>jointly</sup>. One possibility would be for Lord Whitelaw to share the lobby with Mr. Biffen, with Mr. Biffen answering questions on House of Commons business and Lord Whitelaw taking questions on Government policy generally. Alternatively, Mr. Biffen could continue to take the Thursday afternoon by himself and Lord Whitelaw would meet the lobby from time to time on an ad hoc basis.

#### Presentation

Transferring this responsibility to Lord Whitelaw will attract comment. It would be best to present it positively, on the lines that, now Lord Whitelaw does not have departmental responsibility, he can take on this role which Mr. Biffen now has to combine with his heavy duties as Leader of the House of Commons.

Before this is taken any further, you will need to have a word with Mr. Biffen. We do not expect that he will be reluctant to give up these duties.

F.E.R.B.

30 November, 1983