



NEA
to see

Not Q
Civil Service
info re
Westlands

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

N L Wicks Esq CBE
Principal Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1A 2AA

8 January 1988

Dear Nigel

TREASURY FIRST ORDER QUESTIONS: THURSDAY, 14 JANUARY: PQ FROM
TAM DALYELL MP

We had a word about this earlier today, and you favoured a short reply.

Since then the Paymaster has discussed this with his colleagues, and they have agreed to answer simply "No Sir". I attach the Supplementary briefing that has been prepared: the Chancellor particularly enjoyed the reference to being economical with information in A5!

I am copying this letter to Bernard Ingham (No 10), with thanks for his suggestions on this.

Yours ever

Simon.

S P JUDGE
Private Secretary

FROM: E BROWN

DATE: 5 January 1988

MR SAVAGE

cc Mr Luce

Mr R I G Allen

Mr Pickford

Mr Stern

Mr Taylor (COI)

TREASURY FIRST ORDER QUESTIONS: THURSDAY 14 JANUARY 1988

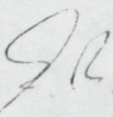
1. Here is a draft reply, supplementaries and background briefing for Tam Dalyell's PQ for oral answer on 14 January.

2. I have taken the advice offered by Mr Ingham that in his experience there is likely to be little or no return in telling Mr Dalyell anything. If however the Paymaster General is inclined to prefer the approach he asked me to consider, the answer could be on the lines -

"The MPO has recently issued guidance on records management; the MPO and Treasury have been working with departments on information management since 1985. A note by the Cabinet Office describing Central Government Conventions on publicity and advertising was deposited in the House of Commons Library in 1985 [and the Director General of the Central Office of Information and the Press Secretary to the Prime Minister are in regular contact with their colleagues in departments]. None of these papers or activities are in any way related to the so called Westland affair."

3. The shorter reply would allow Mr Dalyell to express indignation that nothing had been done but would give no "hooks" for supplementaries. The second reduces the scope for indignation but provides opportunities for questions particularly in relation to Mr Ingham's contacts with departments. If the phrase in square brackets was omitted a substantial area of scope for comment would be removed.

4. I have consulted Mr Ingham in No 10, Mr Taylor, COI and relevant divisions in the Treasury.



E BROWN

ORAL

THURSDAY 14 JANUARY 1988

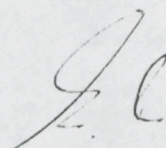
TREASURY

Lab - Linlithgow

MR TAM DALYELL: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he has issued any guidance on information management in the Civil Service, as a result of lessons learned during and since the Westland Affair.

DRAFT REPLY BY MR PETER BROOKE

NO SIR.



E BROWN

RC2 Division

Ext 6060

MRS D SANGWAY

RC2 Division

Ext 6112

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Note To any supplementary questions which is related to the "Westland affair", the answer is

"I have nothing to add ^{on} to this matter to what has already been said by the PM, and other Ministers, in statements and in reply to questions."

OTHER SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Guidance to Press Officers

Q1. What guidance is issued to Information Officers and Press Officers about releasing sensitive information to the media?

A1. None is directed specifically at Press Officers or Information Officers. They are Civil Servants and are given the same guidance as anyone else.

Q2. What principles are Press Officers expected to apply in considering the release of sensitive information to the media?

A2. As I have already made clear, the same principles apply to Press Officers as to all Civil Servants generally. They are expected to behave in exactly the same way and I would refer the Hon. Member to my RHF's answer on 2nd December, Column 572.

Q3. But surely Press Officers are given guidance on what to do and what to say - they are not free agents?

A3. Press Officers or Information Officers in general are answerable to the ministers in charge of their Departments in exactly the same way as any other Civil Servant.



Information Management

Q4. What is information management?

A4. In the context in which it is used in the civil service Information Management is concerned with Information as a resource and the application of the normal disciplines of management to that resource to ensure that only information which is really necessary is collected and that it is used economically and efficiently.

Q5. Why are the government only now addressing the Information Management?

A5. The civil service has always practised Information Management in the sense of making sure that information is available, economically at the right place and at the right time. Research by MPO and now the Treasury into best practices and the testing and development of improved methodologies has been in hand since 1985. The Treasury is now summarising that experience and may subsequently issue guidance to the civil service.

BACKGROUND

Westland plc was in serious financial difficulties in 1985. Two firms, Fiat and United Technologies put forward partnership proposals to relieve the difficulties. The Secretary of State for Defence explored an alternative possibility of association with Aerospatiale, MBB and Augusta. Before Westland plc made their decision about the offers, a letter of 3 January from the then Secretary of State for Defence to the company was published. The Solicitor-General wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence on the morning of 6 January pointing out that the letter, in his opinion, contained material inaccuracies. When the Solicitor-General's letter was brought to the attention of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (at about 1.30 pm on 6 January), he took the view that the existence of the letter and the opinion it expressed should be made public. He asked his officials to discuss with No 10 whether the disclosure should be made and if so whether it should be made from No 10. The discussion between officials led to DTI officials informing the Press Association, by telephone, of the letter and of part of its content. The information was on the Press Association tapes at 3.30 pm. The need for urgent action was dictated by a press conference which the Chairman of Westland plc was holding at 4.00 pm to announce a revised proposal from the United Technologies Corporation - Fiat consortium. The officials had not sought the Prime Minister's agreement to the action.

The Prime Minister instituted an enquiry into the events. It started on 14 January; it reported to the Prime Minister on 22 January. The Prime Minister reported to the House of Commons on 23 January. During the report to the House and since the Prime Minister has been pressed to reveal detailed facts about her involvement in the event including, for example, when her office told her that it had agreed to the publication of the extract from the Solicitor-General's letter of 6 January. Mr Dalyell has approached the issue directly and indirectly. The indirect questions have included

- a. the factors Her Majesty's government take into account in deciding the timing of release of information of commercial sensitivity (17.2.86 Col 9);
- b. guidance on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers and ministerial responsibility for the release of information to the media (14.12.87 Col 378).

The Prime Minister has declined to be drawn.

Definition

Information Management (or as it is frequently known, Management of Information as a Resource) is defined as,

"the means through which an organisation maximises the efficiency and effectiveness with which it plans, collects, organises, uses, controls, disseminates and disposes of information, and through which it ensures that the value and potential value of that information is identified and exploited to the fullest extent."

The need for Information Management

The ever increasing volume of information - in the civil service 2 million files are opened each year. 1,500 miles of files stored in registries.

The costs of collecting, storing and retrieving information.

The costs to business in supplying information.

The opportunity presented by Information Technology to improve the availability of information (but with a risk of increasing the volume).

Methods and Benefits

Methods - to enable information needs to be examined across the whole, or part of, a department have been tested or developed.

- the methods relate information needs to objectives and activities.

Benefits - interconnections between objectives and activities and information needs are tested.

- Duplication, overlaps and gaps are identified.

- Opportunities for making better use of information are revealed.

- Information that is not needed is cut out.

Guidance

Draft guidance is being considered in the Treasury for issue early in the new year.

Guidance

No guidance is issued to Information Officers on the subject of "information management". But there are two main document sources which dictate the custom and practice:

- i) The note by the Cabinet Office on Central Government Conventions on Publicity and advertising are in the Library of the House;
- ii) The guidance which is updated and issued at the time of General Elections (which is and remains Confidential). This is distributed by the PM's Prin. Private Secretary to Ministers, by the Prime Minister's Press Secretary to Heads of Information, and by the Director General of the Central Office of Information to his own staff in HQ and Regions.

Both of these documents are concerned with expenditure, on Publicity and Advertising, which a government may properly incur and the activities which it may undertake. Neither have any connection with the "Westland Affair".

Conduct

The conduct expected of Information Officers is, of course, no different from the rest of the Civil Service of which it forms an integral part. Members of the 1,100 strong Government Information Service are recipients of the same guidance which go to all members of the Civil Service and are controlled in their conduct in precisely the same way as all other Civil Servants.

Information Objectives of Departments

The information objectives of each department are set by the Ministers in those departments. Activities are co-ordinated by the Prime Minister's Press Secretary (in respect of news presentation) and by the Director General of the Central Office of Information (in respect of publicity conventions, and central advice on propriety).

Role of Director General of COI

The Director General of the Central Office of Information additionally acts as Head of Profession for the Information Officer Group but in practice this means general oversight and organisation of recruitment, training and career development and not information management (because, as already stated, information policy is a matter for each Minister).