



Prime Minister  
Agree to  
his approach?

MR FLESHER

THE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME: FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICE

JA

This minute advises you of progress with the scrutiny on the Home Office Forensic Science Service and the Metropolitan Police Laboratory. The Prime Minister asked Sir Derek Rayner (as he then was) to take particular interest in the scrutiny on her behalf.

Findings and Recommendations

- 2. The scrutiny examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the forensic laboratories supporting the police forces of England and Wales.
- 3. The six operational laboratories of the Home Office Forensic Science Service handle about 115,000 cases a year from provincial forces. There is also a research establishment. At the time of the scrutiny the laboratories cost about £5.8 million a year and employed 550 civil servants; but the scrutiny found marked differences in unit costs between the laboratories.
- 4. In addition, the Metropolitan Police Laboratory handles about 49,000 cases a year, mainly for the Metropolitan Police. It also does research. The total cost is about £4.3 million and includes 280 civilian employees of the police.
- 5. The scrutiny found that the Forensic Science Service is well respected by its principal customer - the police - and it sets and achieves high standards. But the service is demand-led. The police decide what cases to put to it and this creates a constant upward pressure on resources.
- 6. The report's main recommendations are:

- 6.1 to link the staffing of the laboratories to the number of police they support (which in turn reflects population, crime and the Government's law and order priorities);
- 6.2 to encourage more restraint by the police in submitting particular types of cases, especially where forensic evidence is not essential to get a conviction;
- 6.3 to move towards delegating more authority and accountability to the Directors of individual laboratories.

#### Decisions

7. The Home Office have accepted the main recommendations of the scrutiny which concerns the Forensic Science Service. They expect savings worth £132,000 a year. The Home Office have already issued a formal 'job description' to laboratory directors making clear their personal responsibility for standards, productivity and the efficient use of resources; and one for the Controller is nearing completion.

8. Decisions on the recommendations concerning the Metropolitan Police Laboratory rest with the Commissioner and are still to be taken.

#### Comments

9. Lord Rayner has commented that a good start has been made on establishing a framework for efficiency and effectiveness in the Forensic Science Service. The job description for each laboratory Director goes further than the report itself and, together with the development of cost comparisons between laboratories, is an important step towards good management.

10. Lord Rayner added that the real test will be how this is used to get better value for the taxpayer's money. The new Controller of the Service will need to monitor costs and performance of the laboratories carefully, and exert pressure to cut costs and raise productivity. He noted that the report does not contain a detailed analysis of the supporting services at all the laboratories. He would expect the Controller now to be able to make further cost reductions by applying the lessons from the Review of R & D Supporting Services at both operational and research forensic science laboratories.

11. Lord Rayner was anxious not to second-guess the recommendation to link the size of the laboratories to the size of the police forces they support. But he commented that the Forensic Science Service appears "free" to the police. So the police have no yardstick to judge whether forensic examination adds value commensurate with its costs. Limits on particular types of cases, as proposed by the report, may be effective in restraining demand for a while: but they take away from the police judgements about priorities which are properly theirs.

12. Nor did Lord Rayner wish to second-guess Home Office Ministers about whether payment by the police for the Forensic Science Service would be possible, but he was keen to stress that management of the Service should be doing as much as possible to make the police aware of - and responsive to - the costs incurred. He felt it might help concentrate the minds of Chief Constables, for example, if the costs of forensic support were on the table when their own budgets are being discussed.

#### Proposed Action

13. The priority should be to achieve practical improvements in efficiency and effectiveness by:

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13.1 <sup>why?</sup> Release of the scrutiny report (with any necessary editing for security) together with a statement of the Government's intentions, once it has been shown to the local authority associations and the Association of Chief Police Officers.

13.2 Action to apply the lessons and recommendations of the Review of R & D Support Services (the Lord Privy Seal's report in June on the follow-up to this Review will include a statement of what is being done).

13.3 Investigation of the differences in costs between laboratories uncovered by the scrutiny.

13.4 Decisions on the Metropolitan Police Laboratory.

14. I should be grateful for the Prime Minister's approval to go ahead on this basis. A copy of this report goes to Halliday in the Home Secretary's office.

CP  
C PRIESTLEY  
Head of the Rayner Unit  
22 April 1983

This needs very  
careful handling. It  
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crime.



file

RW

## 10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

MR PRIESTLEY

### THE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME: FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICE

The Prime Minister has now seen your minute of 22 April about the scrutiny of the Home Office Forensic Science Service and the Metropolitan Police Laboratory. In general Mrs Thatcher endorses the comments of Lord Rayner and the proposed programme of action set out in paragraph 13 of your minute. She has commented, however, with particular reference to the publication of the scrutiny report that this issue needs very careful handling. It could, the Prime Minister considers, be presented as a constraint on the Police in their efforts to solve crime. In view of this the Prime Minister would be grateful if the Home Secretary could give particularly close attention to the form in which the scrutiny report is published (if it is necessary that it should be published) and the content of the accompanying statement of the Government's intentions.

I am sending a copy of this minute to Tony Rawsthorne (Home Office).

(Timothy Flesher)

3 May, 1983

RW

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



HOME OFFICE  
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE  
LONDON SW1H 9AT

24 May 1983

*Dear Tim*

*DJ 1/6*

THE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME: FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICE

Thank you for copying to us your minute of 3 May to Clive Priestley about this scrutiny.

I find that copies of the scrutiny report were placed in the libraries of both Houses last September and that the Rayner Unit were informed of this in reply to a questionnaire they sent us in August. Copies were also sent to the Trade Union Side in accordance with normal practice and it may be as a result of this that there was some limited press interest a few weeks ago.

The Home Secretary is naturally very conscious of the need to avoid adverse publicity on this matter and will consider whether anything more needs to be done when consultations with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Local Authority Associations have been completed.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Clive Priestley.

*C. J. Walters*

C. J. WALTERS

Tim Flesher, Esq.