

CONFIDENTIAL



Await DHSS

Prime Minister

Robert Armstrong has sent me a copy of his minute to you of 29 November enclosing a paper inviting you to consider transferring Ministerial responsibility for marriage guidance work from the Home Secretary to the Secretary of State for Social Services. He suggests that Norman Fowler and I will wish to give you our views direct, and I welcome the opportunity to do so.

The paper was prepared at the request of my Department and the Department of Health and Social Security. It sets out the background and the arguments. Both Departments agree that it now would be more logical for the DHSS rather than the Home Office to have responsibility.

I am very conscious of my Accounting Officer's concern at the unsatisfactory basis of our present funding of this work. He has pointed out that we have no clear policy objective nor any way of judging the relative preferences to be given to the different organisations, nor any way of seeing whether we get value for money. I believe that to have to direct him nonetheless to continue to make payments of grant-aid to these various bodies would reflect on the credibility of our efforts to improve our management of resources generally. On the other hand, to transfer responsibility to the DHSS, albeit on the basis of our present policy of low-key support, would allow the Government to assess the effectiveness of its expenditure in the field of marriage guidance and the areas closely linked to the family. I think it would be a pity to allow such an opportunity to slip, even if it did mean some embarrassment should we not wholly succeed by a clear statement of our policy in heading off the increased expectations arising from the transfer.

I hope that you will feel able to agree to the proposed transfer. I should be glad to discuss it with you and Norman if that would help.

L.B.

19 December 1984

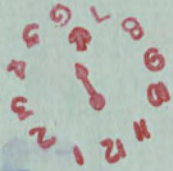
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Marriage Guidance



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