



pc p-a

Sub
29/1

10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister⁽²⁾

You asked to see a
copy of Robin Squire's
Bill - immediately below

Clause 4 deals with
access to documents.

Exemptions are in the
Schedule.

Bill Returned to Quetang
Sub
28/1



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister⁽²⁾

May I look at the
Bill. It is not
attached

A bit surprising, perhaps,

that He were not more

worried about parallels

being drawn with central

Government, especially

on the disclosure of

documents.

DMB
25/1

Robin Minster
29/1

PRIME MINISTER

25 January 1985

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/OPEN GOVERNMENT
LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

This private member's Bill of Robin Squires (Hornchurch) has now been seen by both H and L Committees. With some reservations, these Committees have found the Bill desirable.

You will be interested in the progress of this Bill because it extends your legislation - The Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960. Certain Local Authorities have indulged in undemocratic abuses of the system and sensitive political issues have been dealt with increasingly in private sub-committees of the council, to which the public and press are excluded. The Bill has the admirable aim of extending this Act to allow access to such sub-committees.

This law may not be entirely effective, as attempts may be made to convene private caucus meetings, but, nonetheless, this part of the Bill should be supported. It is consistent with the Government's stated policy of open government. The same is true of agendas, explanatory material and, arguably, minutes of such meetings.

The New Departure

The Squire's Bill proceeds onto new territory. It demands the disclosure (Clause 4(i)) of "any internal

document, including memoranda, letters and interim reports about any matters to be discussed in public at that meeting".

H Committee did not generally feel that this would be a hostage to fortune. Although, on the face of it, this Bill makes the non-disclosure of these documents at a national level less defensible, it was felt that sufficient safeguards were read into the schedule to the Bill. I attach the Bill. The Secretary of State for the Environment wished to have the power to add other categories to these exclusions by order in council. This appears to be a satisfactory solution.

Not attached

Conclusion

This Bill deals with one of the two areas where there appears to be public concern about the issue of freedom of information. The other area is access to personal files. The Cabinet Office have still not responded to your request concerning the second of these two issues. We do not suggest any action in relation to the Squire's Bill, but if you are still concerned in the second issue could you repeat your request for action.

BF

*I will chase them
DMS
25/1*

H. Booth

HARTLEY BOOTH