

cc: Mr Hulbert  
Br Bowles

Mr Hindley

May I comment on TH's paper justifying a review of the activities of WRVS.

First, I should like to say that I agree entirely with the reasons given for conducting a review and for our need for more information. However, I am not convinced that it is a review as such which we need or that we should be working towards. I want to argue that we should focus upon what we think we need and then, in the light of the circumstances prevailing, determine which would be the best method of satisfying them.

It has to be accepted as a starting point that WRVS is an archetypal holy-cow. Free thinking journalists or way-out politicians may be in a position to criticise it to the extent that they can, but for the majority of middle England, and in particular the present Government, the WRVS is placed on the same platform as motherhood and vicarage teas: ie. it is and can only be a "good thing".

It may therefore be quite inappropriate to begin talking about the issue in terms of a 'review'. This implies that a superior authority is going to conduct an examination of a subordinate organisation. Although we are the paymasters I would doubt if, politically, we can realistically regard ourselves in that light. Therefore the negative implications of conducting a review would be recognised immediately and reacted to as if they were hostile threats. In other words the suggestion of a review would be counter-productive and would not yield the information which we need nor the improvement in the performance of WRVS which we might hope for.

We begin then with the assumption that the WRVS exists and will continue to exist. We have some reason to believe that the momentum which has carried it thus far may not be sufficient for its continued development through the next decade. We should go along with the idea that it should be helped to take stock of itself and to revitalise itself in order that it may adapt to changing circumstances in ways which will nevertheless enable it to preserve the essential idea of public service upon which it is based. To put it crudely it needs to be helped to make itself attractive as a medium for social service to those young matrons who grew up in the sixties and early seventies for a start.

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Note should also be taken of the fact (I believe) that Lady Pike is due to retire in the near future. The question is, is she the sort of person who would welcome a reassessment of the aims and strategies of her organisation as a parting gift, as it were, to the organisation and her successor? Or is she the sort of person who would regard the present model as inviolable? The answers to these questions will have a great bearing upon the timing of any proposals we may care to promote.

This brings me to my last point. It is that the VSU is not without influence and may promote some sort of enquiry, but I hardly think it probable that the Unit is in a position to insist upon some sort of review unless it were presented with some special occasion (eg. a scandal). In the circumstances, therefore, the best strategy would appear to be that the Unit should endeavour to persuade WRVS (at whatever particular point in time seems appropriate) to commission an organisational development study to be undertaken by a prestigious professional firm or specially commissioned group.

Provided it were agreed that the report of the study would be published, or at least made available to us for consideration, and provided also that those commissioned to undertake the task were competent professionals working from an objective standpoint, we should not fear that the results would be in any way inferior to a review directly undertaken.

Having said all of that I do believe for the reasons advanced in Mr Hulbert's memo that we should immediately begin to investigate the ground and lay whatever trail is needed to bring about some form of assessment as soon as can conveniently be arranged.

DPA

HYWEL GRIFFITHS  
14 January 1981

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