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cc: Mr Bowles
Mr Griffiths

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Mr Hindley

WRVS

Further to your note of 26 November, I have given thought to the question of why a Review of WRVS would be appropriate.

The principal reasons for conducting a review must surely be:

- (1) WRVS has now been in existence for 40 years during which period both needs and provision have changed dramatically.
- (2) VSU has a direct and inescapable responsibility for grant-aid to WRVS now well in excess of £3M per annum - probably the largest Home Office grant in the voluntary sector.
- (3) WRVS is not a registered charity, nor does it have a constitution, nor does it exist as a result of the exercise of statutory powers by the Home Secretary. Thus the only form of public accountability must be to the funders of its activities.
- (4) The present basis of VSU/Home Office information would be insufficient to satisfy any detailed inquiry, e.g. a series of PQ's or the Home Affairs Select Committee, of the need for the present level of grant-in-aid.
- (5) Attitudes in WRVS do not encourage regular liaison of the kind normally associated with this level of grant-aid.
- (6) Levels of service and variety of work indicated by the Annual Report (the only information we have on service activities) provide impressive statistics, but do not relate these to need on any objective basis, nor is any information offered or sought on how other services and agencies relate to WRVS.

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Against this background, VSU has a need to promote a Review of WRVS, to satisfy itself that the levels of grant are justified, that public and parliamentary expectations of accountability are effectively fulfilled and to assist WRVS in its own assessment of its role in a developing voluntary sector.

There are a number of secondary reasons for conducting a review.

1. Demonstration of Effective Management of the Relationship between Funder and Voluntary Organisation.

VSU, with its interdepartmental brief, should surely attempt to provide an example to other Departments in its management of the grant-aid relationship. In the case of WRVS, whose interests relate to a number of Government Departments, our ability to know what is happening, let alone influence it, is extremely limited.

2. Relationships with Local Authorities

At this time VSU is seeking to improve the contribution of local authority support of the voluntary sector through the Initiatives Programme. WRVS is the one organisation which we fund which is involved in some way with almost every local authority in the country, yet we know nothing about those relationships, nor even the extent to which WRVS draws financial support for its local activities from those authorities. Recent informal information from DHSS via the Association of Directors of Social Services suggests that WRVS in some areas is having great difficulty in maintaining the Meals-on-Wheels service even on a 2-day per week basis. With the current emphasis on increased domiciliary care of the elderly to reduce costs of residential care, this represents a very serious situation. In the present economic climate local authorities in many areas do not have the resources to take over the direct provision of meals services and the consequence of WRVS failure to provide them could well increase demand for residential care.

3. Hospital Services

WRVS has provided certain facilities in hospitals by tradition, e.g. trolley shops, canteens. Such services were often instituted before the creation of hospital Voluntary Help Organiser posts and those which continue tend to remain outside general developments in the use of volunteers in hospitals.

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9. Relationship between WRVS HQ, Regional and Local Units

Some of the questions raised above have implications for the relationship between WRVS HQ, the Regional structure and their local organisers. With increased responsibility on local authorities in the last decade for welfare services, it is reasonable to assume that much WRVS activity is organised locally. The precise function of regional WRVS officers is therefore unclear and might benefit from being reviewed.

To make a specific case for a Review is difficult in particular because we lack contact and information with WRVS both centrally and locally, but I hope that a process of re-examination of some issues can be instituted to the mutual benefit of WRVS, VSU and the community it seeks to serve.

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PPT J HULBERT
19 December 1980

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