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Mr Peach

WRVS

Thank you for your minute of 12 January. You correctly interpreted my remarks to imply that I contemplated a large scale review in some form or other of the WRVS. I appreciate the force of the arguments for letting well alone, but you may care at least to glance at the preliminary papers which have already been written.

My concern was aroused by the paper by Alan Davis of 2 years ago (flagged on the file). I need not trouble you with the yet earlier papers to which reference is made in paragraph 10 of Mr Davis's note. They show clearly that Lady Pike convinced Miss Clayton (as she has subsequently convinced me) in conversation that her organisation was very economically and efficiently run. I am not sure however how far a conversation between the chairman of WRVS and the head of VSU would be accepted as evidence if any criticism were to be mounted from outside.

In the last 2 years our knowledge of WRVS has increased slightly, and Mr Bowles has established working relationship with his opposite number, but still says he knows very little of the details of their working. [But they do not, I would not, understand]

It is this overall ignorance about expenditure of £2.5m which most concerns me. Mr Hulbert ~~has~~ also voiced the opinion from time to time, as a professional observer that we may not be getting a value for money.

It accordingly seem to me that the retirement of Lady Pike might be an appropriate time to open this question. A subsidiary (and connected) reason is that we may be asked to find a full salary for her successor, who may in turn seek higher rates of pay for her ^{staff} path. All this would have to be justified. It would be beyond the scope or competence of VSU as an administrative division of the Home Office itself to conduct a review of so established an institution as WRVS. It occurs to me however that there might be scope for the appointment of a commission of distinguished people in public life (for example, such as Lord Allan of Abbeydale) who might be invited to consider with WRVS the role which they ought to play in the last two decades of the century. In the course of such consideration no doubt some review and estimate could be made of the work they currently undertake.

With this in mind I asked Mr Hulbert to prepare a note on the grounds for setting up a review. His contribution is attached.

As expected, it does not reveal any serious grounds for criticism, but stresses of our ignorance of how WRVS operates and produces some evidence that in a number of fields their work may have been overtaken, and to a certain extent rendered superfluous by the development of local authority and professional services which did not exist when WRVS was founded. The overall impression is of some decline in activity accompanying the rise in costs in real terms which is noted in paragraph 8 of Mr Davis's minute.

None of this makes a review imperative. Still less is there any suggestion of impropriety or wastefulness. There is however a great ignorance of how the money is spent, and the feeling in some professional circles (of which Mr Hulbert's note is

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(an example) that the WRVS has failed to move with the times and may not give as good value for money as might be expected.

Mr Griffiths' note was received after the foregoing was in type. As you see, I had already anticipated his main point, - & at no stage contemplated a "review" in the sense that Mr Griffiths has used the term.

DPA

J C HINDLEY
15 January 1981

(I apologise for the classification, but I think it would be disastrous if there were any "leak" that we are even thinking on these lines)

DPA

Voluntary Services Unit