

NOTE OF A MEETING TO DISCUSS GUIDELINES FOR SPECIAL BRANCHES AT 2.00PM  
ON 30 OCTOBER 1983 IN THE HOME OFFICE

Present:	Mr Pilling	Home Office
	Mr Oxford	ACPO
	Mr Kelland	Metropolitan Police
	Mr Hewett	Metropolitan Police
		ACPO(S)
		Box 500
		Box 500
		SHHD
		Home Office

Before the Chairman (Mr Pilling) formally opened the discussion, it was agreed that a further meeting should be held at 11am on 3 November at Queen Anne's Gate. (since changed because of Parliamentary business)

2. The Chairman opened the meeting and commented that any review of the existing terms of reference for Special Branches must take account of continuing campaigns against the police, and in particular, against Special Branches. There were recent signs that some police authorities were seeking to obtain more details of Special Branch activities using the argument that they could not fulfill their statutory obligations without these details. Mr Oxford was invited to outline his own recent difficulties in this area.

3. Mr Oxford explained the background to recent events in Merseyside. He considered that chief officers had not helped matters by a lack of consistency in their annual reports. He outlined the specific questions put to him by his police authority recently and how he had dealt with each of these. He felt that guidelines carrying the Secretary of State's authority and approval would be an asset to chief officers.

4. The Chairman briefly explained the similar problems faced by Sir Phillip Knights in the West Midlands. There were now indications that police authorities were beginning to look to the costing of Special Branch as a way of delving into its specific functions and operations.

5. SHHD said that there had been few problems with police authorities in Scotland for some years, and that there was no current political pressure to investigate or curtail Special Branch activity. ACPO(S) felt that it was only a matter of time before such pressure came into being, and that there was already concern being voiced about computer records held by Special Branches.

6. SyS Officer felt the problem was essentially one for the provincial forces. The Metropolitan Police could rely on the Home Secretary to combat the slings and arrows which came their way. The key to the criticism of Special Branches lay in the definition of subversion and the attempts to equate it with non-criminal activity. Robin Cook MP had raised the issue in several debates in the House of Commons. SyS Officer considered that new guidelines would be worthwhile if only to ensure consistency in what chief officers said to their police authorities and possibly to provide them with something to which they could refer.

7. The Chairman moved to the question of publicity for any guidelines produced. He explained that the Home Office view was that there should be no rush to publicise such a document, but that the guidelines should be publishable should public controversy reach a level where it helped to calm rather than stimulate further debate to make them public. Mr Oxford was opposed to publication unless it was absolutely unavoidable.

8. SHHD felt that publicity was not necessary but that even as an unpublished document they could assist chief officers in dealing with police authorities. The Chairman agreed, saying that while chief officers might avoid directly quoting from the guidelines they could reveal their existence. The Home Office would always be willing to discuss with a chief officer how best to deal with specific questions from his authority.

9. The Chairman then introduced the proposed guidelines as a first draft and invited comment. Sys Officer and Mr Hewett both stressed the need for a document which was as short as possible and said that the temptation to add further qualification should be avoided. All members of the meeting then proposed changes to the draft guidelines and letter to chief officers, and each change was considered, discussed and either rejected or accepted. The two documents attached to this note contain the amendments approved by the meeting. Annex A is a revised draft of the proposed covering letter to chief officers, and Annex B is a revised draft of the proposed guidelines.

10. The Chairman thanked all present for their attendance and contributions.

25 October 1983

F4 Division  
Home Office

