



HOME OFFICE

H.M. INSPECTOR OF CONSTABULARY

Mill House,

Brayford Wharf North

Lincoln

LNI 1YW

Telephone: Lincoln (0522) 33407

JHB/GS

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L. Byford, Esq., CBE., QPM., LL.B  
HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary  
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary  
Home office  
Queen Anne's Gate  
LONDON  
SW1H 9AT

*Dear Larry*

Home Office Guidelines for running a Special Branch

I have read Joe Pilling's letter to Ken Oxford and the draft guidelines for running a Special Branch with considerable interest. Whilst I understand the Home Office desire to provide standard guidelines for all aspects of police activity I have reservations about this so far as Special Branches are concerned because of the sensitivity which surrounds their operation. Whilst I can see that a Home Secretary might consider it politically desirable to be able to make public the terms under which Special Branches are supposed to operate, I believe that however widely the terms of reference were drafted, they would provide a great deal of fuel for unwelcome public debate.

In practice it seems that the operation of Special Branches produce relatively few problems which excite public attention, the only ones which come to mind being associated with ham fisted attempts to recruit agents from amongst the University student population.

I am not opposed to the publication of confidential guidelines within the Service but do not believe that anything should be done to make the Special Branch a subject of public debate. If Home Office wish to keep a check on what Special Branches are doing it would be easy enough for us to make a special review of Branch operation during Force inspections, perhaps at two or four year intervals. You will I am sure remember that this was done some years ago when HMIs and their staff officers reviewed Branch operation in the light of a check list of questions issued from your office. This seems to me a perfectly acceptable way of monitoring standards of performance and promoting uniformity of operation in an area which by its very nature tends to be self-regulating. The only real question in my mind is whether Special

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Branch records are always as valid as we would wish in terms of the reliability of initial information and the updating of records to take account of age and status.

I have no other positive comments to offer to this debate but feel sure that the ACPO response will give Joe Pilling something to work on.

Louis R. Quance

Jim