

FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

20 March, 1980

Dear Mike,

In your letter of the 25th February you asked for further particulars of the numbers involved in the manpower cuts affecting the Public Record Office.

The 1980/81 establishment for the PRO is 430. The reduction sought before the recent request for a further 2½% cut was 39½ posts by April 1982. The consequences of a further 2½% reduction have not yet been fully worked out.

The Keeper of Public Records proposes to achieve a reduction of 22 posts by closing the Chancery Lane reading rooms and making the relevant records available at Kew. The remaining reductions would be achieved as follows:-

- (a) Central Services, planning and public relations:
4½ posts (out of 41);
- (b) improvement of means of reference to records:
3 posts (out of 15);
- (c) repair of records: 10 posts (out of 42).

There are certain areas in which the reduction of services would have unacceptable consequences. No reduction in security arrangements or in the arrangements for selecting new records from departments and preparing them for the public's use could be made without serious risk of valuable material being lost. Common services cannot be reduced further unless there are changes

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in the regulations which have to be complied with by the Civil Service generally. Further reductions in the staff required for improving means of reference (para.(b) above) would not yield more than five posts, for these staff already provide reliefs in the Chancery Lane reading rooms. Further reductions in the record repair staff (para.(c) above) would endanger the records themselves and create redundancy problems which do not arise in other sections.

Other reductions would cause a deterioration of the service to the public exceeding that resulting from the closure of Chancery Lane. The photocopying services provide copies (on a fee-paid basis) in response to orders from the public. They also make copies for use in the reading rooms when the original records have become too fragile for readers to use. Reductions in the staff employed on the processing of incoming records would lead to the rationing of records to readers. In all these cases the reduction of staff would adversely affect readers of the modern records at Kew as much as, and probably more than, the smaller number of readers at Chancery Lane.

You also asked about the possibility of saving similar numbers in other functions of the Lord Chancellor. This would not be easy, since most of the Lord Chancellor's staff work in the courts, where the needs are demand-led; the difficulty is, inevitably, increased by the requirement of an additional 2½% cut. It might be possible to save these additional posts by further cuts in the civil courts and the Land Registry, but the staff costs here are paid for by fees and a reduction in staff numbers would involve a corresponding reduction in fees and consequently no overall financial saving. Moreover, the Land Registry are already under great pressure as a result of previous cuts and any further reduction would seriously prejudice their ability to provide an adequate service to the public.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Green in Mr. Channon's office.

Yours sincerely
Ian Maxwell

I.H.Maxwell



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