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Des Browne

FUNDING FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE OXFORDSHIRE CORONER

Thank you for your letter of 10 September about the inquests into deaths in Iraq which the Oxfordshire coroner is handling.

I note that you consider it is for my department to ask for a call on the reserve. There seems, however, to be some misunderstanding about the funding of the coroners service. Whilst my Department has policy responsibility for coroners, the operational responsibility rests with the relevant local authority. In this case, therefore, it would normally be for Oxfordshire County Council to meet the costs of the inquests.

The Cabinet Office Ministerial Code of Conduct (paragraph 6.10) clearly sets out the principle that Departments responsible for initiating policy are required to take into account the effect their proposals have on other departments. It is MoD policy to repatriate bodies to RAF Brize Norton rather than Lyneham, Fairford or elsewhere and it is a direct result of this decision that the backlog of cases has occurred. If fatalities were shared amongst a number of coroners this problem would have been avoided.

It is for this reason that I consider that it your department's responsibility to shoulder the costs arising from the Iraq inquest backlog. It might be helpful to know that the Department for Transport has accepted this in the case of the Potters Bar inquest because the inquest there is taking the place of the public inquiry. If you are unable to fund the additional resources from your existing budget then it is for your department, not mine, to approach the Treasury for a Reserve claim.

I have suggested to my officials that they meet with yours to discuss the mechanics of this further to arrive at sensible and consistent future arrangements. However, it might be worth us meeting to agree the arrangements.

Yours, Lord Falconer

LORD FALCONER OF THOROTON



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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