



Copy of letter
from Home Secretary
to Professor Abel-Smith

WHITEHALL, LONDON S.W.1

9th May, 1967

[Brian]

Thank you for your letter of 13th April about the national survey on poverty which you are conducting.

Naturally, I am much interested in what you are doing, and I would like to help you as much as I can. At the same time, there might be some difficulty in suggesting to electoral registration officers that information relating to the preparation of the register should be open to access for the purposes of research. Recent events in connection with the P.E.P. survey on race relations may unfortunately have increased the reluctance of local officials to give facilities for those who are engaged in field work of this kind.

Apart from this, there are a few points about your request which we would like to discuss further. As you will know, the method of preparing the electoral register varies a good deal from one area to another. You point out that poor people tend to move house rather frequently, and an electoral registration officer for an area where there is great movement of population will probably find that it is necessary to wait almost until the qualifying date before he conducts his canvass; in other areas where there is little movement of population the canvass can be conducted some weeks before the qualifying date. It seems to my people here that what would be most helpful to you would be to have quick access to the end-product of the electoral registration officer's work, that is, to the results of his canvass. Although the register is published some four months after the qualifying date, the electors lists, which are in substance a draft version of the electoral register, are published at the end of November; and the material they are compiled from is available much earlier. Perhaps the best course might be for you to have a talk with the Assistant Secretary here in charge of the Division dealing with elections, so that we can see what we might do as a next step. His name is Mr. R. J. P. Hewison and I suggest that you get into touch with him (01-930 8100 extension 69) to fix a mutually convenient time.

My Electoral Advisory Conference, which includes representatives of electoral registration officers and of the principal political parties, would probably be interested to know if any moves were to be made along the lines you suggest. I mention that now because it has been the general practice in the past to consult them about any use of the electoral registration machinery for other purposes.

[Yours ever,

Professor Brian Abel-Smith

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