

An amazing response from the Home Secretary to The Madeleine Foundation (about the proposed Home Office Review of the investigation into the disappearance of Madeleine McCann)

Article filed Sunday 28 March 2009 by The Madeleine Foundation

On our website is the long letter we wrote to the Home Secretary, Rt. Hon. Alan Johnson M.P., about the news that the Home Secretary was considering a 'review' by a British police force of the investigations about the disappearance of Madeleine McCann (see 'Articles' section).

The Home Office has a tracking system for incoming letters. We wrote our letter to him on Friday 12 March. The letter should have been received by the Home Office on 15 or 16 March.

On Friday 19 March, we enquired about the progress of our letter. A member of the staff of the Home Office's Direct Communications Unit confirmed two details for us. First, the matter was being dealt with by the Home Office's 'PPPU' - which we were told stands for the Police Powers and Procedures Unit. Second, we were told that 'a reply to you is now being prepared'.

All well and good. We also asked for advice on where to send a further letter asking 12 questions of the Home Secretary under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) about the Madeleine McCann case. We were given that advice and promptly sent off an e-mail and hard copy letter to the 'Direct Communications Unit' as suggested (since then, we understand that a few dozen others have also asked the same 12 questions of the Home office).

Now, both our first letter on 12 March (and our subsequent FOIA request) dealt with matters clearly within the responsibility of the Home Office. These included:

- 1) Reports that the Home Office was about to, or had already, begun a 'scoping exercise' to assess the nature of any review that might be carried out by a police force in the U.K.
- 2) Further reports that the Home Office was considering (or had already embarked upon) such a review
- 3) Several reports that Home Secretary Alan Johnson had had a private meeting with the McCanns on these matters
- 4) Several reports that staff of the Home Office had also had meetings (in the plural) with the McCanns about the possibility of a review

- 5) Reports that the McCanns had originally approached the Home Office for their help on the above issues
- 6) Reports that the Home Office had already appointed West Yorkshire Police to carry out a review
- 7) Reports that the Chief Executive of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, Mr Jim Gamble, had recommended West Yorkshire Police as the best force to carry out any review into the disappearance of Madeleine McCann.

Well, a reply has been received, quite quick by government standards. Dated 22 March and received late last week, its reference number, for the record, is T4753/10. Perhaps more typically, the name and rank of the sender was not given, no specific e-mail address nor telephone extension number was given, and the signature of the person who signed the letter was illegible. It could be: 'Pat Cramp'. Or it might be: 'P.T. Crane'. Or it might be 'Pot Craig'.

No matter, the contents were what really mattered. A holding letter saying that our letter and questions would be answered in due course was what we expected. But, instead, we got this:

Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
Switchboard 020 7035 4848
Fax: 020 7035 4745
Telephone: 020 7035 4742
E-mail: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk
Our Ref: T4753/10
Date: 22 March 2010

Mr Tony Bennett
The Madeleine Foundation
66 Chippingfield
Harlow
CM17 0DJ

Dear Mr Bennett

Thank you for your letter dated 12 March 2010.

I would like to advise you that the matters raised are the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I have therefore transferred your letter and its enclosures to that department at King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH, telephone 020 7008 1500. They will arrange for a suitable reply to be sent to you.

Yours sincerely,

That now gives us the task of both tracking down where our letter and its enclosures have gone to in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and making sure that it gets back to the Home Office to make sure it is answered.

Can a private meeting between the Home Secretary and the McCanns really be 'the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office'?

We don't think so.

We'll keep you all posted. In the meantime, many thanks to all of you who sent off your FOIA questions to the Home Office. They're very important questions and we await the replies with a great deal of interest.

Tony Bennett 28.3.2010 for The Madeleine Foundation
e-mail: ajsbenett@btinternet.com
Tel: 01279 635789