

Qa 04146

To: MR LANKESTER

From: SIR KENNETH BERRILL

Waste

1. You may like to have some CPRS comments on the Department of the Environment's letter of 24 May - your minute to Mr Vile of 29 May refers.
2. We agree with the Department that much can be done to encourage the local authorities themselves to re-assess priorities and cut out waste through a combination of financial restraint (through the Rate Support Grant) and the withdrawal of unnecessary central Government controls.
3. In addition, however, we believe that there are a number of specific areas which ought to be examined. They include the following:
 - (i) The question of efficiency audits and value-for-money studies alluded to in the Department of the Environment's letter. The Layfield Committee attached a good deal of importance to this and we know that the Advisory Committee on Local Government Audit is considering the problems. We would hope that some progress could be made in this area and that comparisons between local authorities could be prepared in a way which exposed them to public scrutiny. This would give the electorate the opportunity of bringing some influence to bear.
 - (ii) Another area worth exploring and dealt with in some detail by Layfield is that of charging policies. If the public attitudes survey done for Layfield is anything to go by, a move towards greater charging for some services (e.g. swimming pools, adult education classes) would not be unpopular. The financial returns would not be great but it could be a better way of determining some priorities.

(iii) Major direct and indirect savings might be made if more attention were given to the question of the maintenance of public housing; and, in particular, to devising schemes for making the tenant more responsible for making good (or preventing) damage and wear and tear.

(iv) School meals. These are an area where reducing controls on local Government could go hand in hand with cost saving. The present regulations force local authorities to provide a type of service (a traditional hot two-course meal) which is expensive and not necessarily appropriate to modern conditions. The case for a full review (taking in the nutritional, family support, administrative and financial aspects of school meals) is set out in the Annex.

4. I am sending a copy of this minute to Martin Vile.

K.B.

8 June 1979

Att

SCHOOL MEALS

1. Local authorities are at present required to provide for their school children a mid-day meal, on demand, which is 'suitable in all respects as the main meal of the day'. In England and Wales this is interpreted as requiring the provision of a traditional two-course meal. Pricing and subsidy levels are decided by central Government and there is always great political difficulty in raising charges. The result has been a substantial rising burden on public expenditure. In the present year, 1979/80, the cost in England and Wales alone is expected to be £390m. net of school meal charges - some 6 per cent of the total educational budget. This £390m. was made up of £116m. in free meals for some children, £56m. in free meals for teachers and other staff, and £218m. in subsidy for the remainder.

2. The school meals service was created when incomes and family support programmes were very different from today. The need to continue to offer a traditional two-course meal every day and in all circumstances to all school children in England and Wales can be questioned. Local authorities in Scotland have more discretion in what they provide and a snack type meal (which need not be less nutritious than the traditional two courses of carbohydrates and fats) could mean less preparation and supervision. It also might be more what many children want (36 per cent do not take up the present traditional two-course meal).

3. Given the need to cut public expenditure and the many pressing social priorities, a review of the objectives and cost effectiveness of the school meal service, in the light of present day eating habits and family support programmes, seems called for. Such a review should cover, as one issue, giving more flexibility to local authorities in England and Wales on the type of meal they provide.



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