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CABINET

EDUCATION IN LONDON

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Education and Science  
and the Secretary of State for the Environment

PURPOSE

This paper invites colleagues to consider the principle of a directly-elected education authority for inner London.

2. At present, the statutory position is that the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) is the Greater London Council (GLC) acting through a special committee which has 35 directly-elected members, (the GLC councillors for the inner London boroughs and the City) and 13 appointed members from the 12 inner London boroughs and the Common Council of the City of London. The White Paper proposed a joint body with all its members appointed by the inner London boroughs and the City after abolition of the GLC. We now propose, instead, a directly-elected ILEA. The introduction of direct elections would not affect the status or nature of the new style ILEA, only the system for appointing its members. It would be directly elected by the electorate of inner London, issue its own rate, and (probably) hold its elections in the years between borough elections.

ADVANTAGES

3. The main reasons for preferring a directly-elected authority to a joint board are -

- a. It is favoured by the great majority of responses to the White Paper (246 to 3 out of specific comments received up to 10 February), including those from Conservatives. A clear majority of the 12 inner London Conservative Members of Parliament and 10 of the 12 boroughs (including Westminster) are in favour.
- b. Accountability to the electorate would be beyond question.
- c. Members would actually be able to do the job, whereas members appointed by the boroughs might well find themselves in real difficulty controlling an authority vastly bigger than any borough, and providing a service which the boroughs have never provided.

d. The simplicity and wide acceptability of direct elections should ease the passage of the abolition Bill.

e. There is a considerable advantage in maintaining continuity in the Conservative group on ILEA whose alternative budget will help us to set a realistic spending level for the Authority when the rate is capped.

DISADVANTAGES

4. There are two main arguments against direct elections. First, direct elections to ILEA will lead to requests for direct elections to the other single service joint boards (police, fire and public transport in the Metropolitan County Councils (MCCs); and fire in London). But ILEA as an indirectly-elected Authority would be the only non-elected education authority in England; consultations on the White Paper have not elicited anything like the same pressure for directly-elected authorities for the other services.

5. Second, directly-elected members, unlike borough appointees, would not have to balance competing claims of services on what ratepayers might reasonably pay. However, a single service joint board controlled by delegates from some of the highest spending local authorities in England would hardly be a force for economy, either. And an elected Authority would at least have to answer direct to the electorate for its spending. Above all, the elected body will be within the scope of rate limitation; and in the first three years (along with the joint boards) it would be subject to the special financial and manpower controls proposed in the White Paper.

OTHER ISSUES

6. There are subordinate issues which will need to be settled, such as the size and composition of the Authority. There is also the question of the timing of legislation. We cannot set up the new corporate body until April 1986. However, officials believe that it would be possible to provide in the paving Bill for direct elections to the special committee of the GLC in May 1985. This would, however, be at the expense of delaying introduction until immediately after Easter, and lengthening (possibly substantially) the paving Bill. The delay would make it even more essential to take the Committee Stage on the floor of the House.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

7. If colleagues agree to direct elections, we suggest an announcement, by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, today. A draft is at Annex A. This deals only with the principle of direct elections; a more detailed statement would be needed as soon as we have been able to consider a report from officials on implementation (including the timing of legislation).

CONCLUSIONS

On balance, the advantages of direct elections outweigh any problems that are likely to arise. We therefore invite colleagues to -

a. endorse the principle of direct elections to the education authority for inner London;

b. agree that an immediate announcement should be made on the lines of the attached draft; and

c. agree that a further, more detailed, announcement should be made as soon as possible.

K J  
P J

Department of Education and Science

7 March 1984

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Annex A

STATEMENT

My colleagues and I are considering the responses to the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities", and the associated consultation documents. Conclusions will be announced on a number of points in due course. However, the Government have now reached a decision on the future arrangements for education in inner London, and we thought it right to inform the House of this now.

The White Paper proposed that there should continue to be a unitary education service in inner London, administered by a single education authority. It also proposed that the authority should be a joint board of councillors appointed by the inner London borough councils and the Common Council of the City.

Having considered the arguments put forward in consultation, we accept that a directly-elected authority would be more appropriate than a joint board for this service, and we intend to legislate accordingly.

A further statement on the proposed arrangements for the new directly-elected authority, including the timing of elections, will be made as soon as possible.

7 March 1984

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