

PRIME MINISTER

You ought to be aware of the attached note which records a meeting between the Lord Privy Seal, the Secretary of State for the Environment and Sir Philip Goodhart. The latter had apparently proposed that there should be a London Grand Committee comprising of London Members of Parliament. Mr Jenkins favoured this development and obtained Mr Biffen's agreement on the premise that this might help with the passage of the Paving Bill (although given the time^{scale} envisaged in the meeting it is difficult to see how this could be of much use). The Lord Privy Seal's office assure me that no final agreement has been given but clearly Sir Philip will have gained the impression that the Government is likely to facilitate his proposal.

You may like to discuss this with the Lord Privy Seal and the Secretary of State for the Environment. Although Sir Philip adduces in his letter, which is attached, a number of powerful arguments in favour of a London Grand Committee its establishment might well be seen as a recognition that "London needs a voice". There is no precedent for a committee of the kind proposed; the Scottish Grand Committee does, after all, have delegated powers. Moreover, if the need for a body with a strategic view of London's needs is conceded in one forum, it is much more difficult to argue that no such body is needed elsewhere.

In any event, both Andrew and I feel that this is a proposal which ought to be given much closer scrutiny than seems likely at present.

9 May 1984



Mr Turnbull to Mr

J

9/5

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2AT

9 May 1984

LONDON GRAND COMMITTEE

with request
if required

The Lord Privy Seal and the Secretary of State for Environment met on Tuesday evening May 8 to discuss Sir Philip Goodhart's letter to the Lord Privy Seal of 11 April proposing that a London Grand Committee should be established to which all London Members of Parliament would belong. Sir Philip Goodhart was present for the second half of the discussion.

Mr Biffen said that he wished to help Mr Jenkin in whatever way possible to ease the progress of the Paving Bill: he was therefore in favour of the establishment of such a Grand Committee. However this was essentially a matter for the House of Commons and he would wish to give some further thought as to the exact composition and terms of reference of such a Grand Committee. Mr Jenkin said that he was grateful for Mr Biffen's support. He thought this should be a longterm proposal and not linked directly with the cancellation of the GLC elections. It would also be important to head off any thought of establishing similar Grand Committees for say the Greater Manchester area. Mr Biffen said that he thought that the most sensible time to put forward the proposal would be early in the new Session in October/November perhaps in the context of the abolition of the GLC Bill. He would like to give some further thought to how the Grand Committee would operate and he would let Mr Jenkin have his proposals in the near future.

Sir Philip Goodhart then joined the discussion and Mr Biffen told him of what had been agreed above. Sir Philip asked whether it was intended to make an announcement of the establishment of the Grand Committee during the proceedings of the Paving Bill this week, but Mr Jenkin reiterated that it would not be appropriate to link this proposal directly with the cancellation of the GLC elections.

John Ballard Esq
PS/Secretary of State for Environment

Mr Biffen has now asked me to set some work in hand with Mr Townley of the Cabinet Office and he will be in touch with officials in your Department.

I am copying this letter to Tim Flesher, No 10 and Murdo Maclean, Chief Whip's Office.

Yours sincerely,
D R Morris

D R MORRIS
Private Secretary



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

How do you want to
carry the attached forward.

Two suggestions :-

- i. Discuss in a 1215 meeting
on Monday? and then ✓
- ii. Ask that a paper
should be prepared and
put through E(LA).

Agree?

Monday not

FR RB

10.5



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt. Hon. John Biffen M.P.,
House of Commons,
London SW1.

April 11th 1984



The letter in yesterday's Times, signed by eleven Conservative Members of the G.L.C., calling for the rejection of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill, is an uncomfortable reminder that a substantial majority of the Conservative Members of the G.L.C. are opposed to the policy outlined in our White Paper, "Streamlining the Cities". Obviously the arguments that they deploy are of variable quality, but the single argument that has the strongest impact on myself and on a considerable number of other London Members was put clearly by that Conservative Elder Statesman of Local Government, Sir Frank Marshall, when he wrote in his Report on the administration of Greater London: "I share the view of those who maintain that the sum of local needs and aspirations falls short of the wider interest of London as a whole."

On the other hand, having been the Minister responsible for Belfast, and having had to deal with a Belfast City Council that had been shorn of virtually all its executive powers, I am very well aware of the problems that would be created by the setting up of a Local Government 'talking-shop' without responsibility.

In order to try to resolve our difficulties, I have suggested the establishment of a London Grand Committee, to which all London Members of Parliament would belong, and I have circulated the enclosed Paper to all our backbench London colleagues.

There will be a number of issues affecting the whole of London which cannot be adequately discussed by the 32 London Boroughs, but which ought not to take up the time of the House of Commons as a whole. To give just one example, in the last few days we have spent many hours discussing the London Regional Transport Bill. One of the new Clauses in that Bill sets out in some detail the sort of Annual Report that will be required from the London Regional Transport Executive. When the G.L.C. has been abolished, Parliament will be the only place where this Report can be sensibly discussed by elected representatives of the people of London. As Leader of the House, you will not want to set aside one full Parliamentary day each year for a Debate on London Regional Transport. The London Grand Committee is the ideal forum in which to discuss this and other issues.

Since I sent the enclosed Paper to my backbench London colleagues, more than half of them have said that they support this proposal. The main opposition comes from the seven or eight colleagues who oppose, with varying degrees of vehemence, our proposals in the White Paper, but many of this group agree that the establishment of a London Grand Committee would meet some of their objections.



I have also discussed this proposal informally with Alan Greengross, Cyril Taylor, and a number of other Conservative G.L.C. Members who do not like "Streamlining the Cities". They hanker after "Son of G.L.C.", but many of them are attracted by the idea of the London Grand Committee if they cannot have their own body. I have also sent copies of my note to Jim Swaffield, a constituent and friend of mine who was Director General of the G.L.C. in happier times, and to Lord Marshall. Their replies have been friendly and positive.

I have also, of course, discussed this with Patrick Jenkin and William Waldegrave. They agree that nothing in my proposal conflicts with Government policy, and that the establishment of a London Grand Committee could be a substantial help in meeting the charge that we were being undemocratic and trying to silence the voice of London.

Of course the establishment of a London Grand Committee will produce a lot of problems, but it could also make a positive and necessary contribution to the administration of London. If you felt that a discussion would be helpful, I am of course at your disposal. I have copied this to the Prime Minister, to the Chief Whip, and to Patrick Jenkin.

Yours sincerely
Philip

Sir Philip Goodhart



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

29.2.84

THE LONDON GRAND COMMITTEE


In their response to the Government White Paper, "Streamlining the Cities", the Conservative Group on the G.L.C. argue that the present proposals "would make London the only capital city west of the Elbe without a directly-elected Council to speak on its behalf and give it a framework and direction".

I also note that in his Report on Greater London, that Conservative elder statesman of Local Government, Sir Frank Marshall, now Lord Marshall, wrote: "I share the view of those who maintain that the sum of local needs and aspirations falls short of the wider interest of London as a whole". I find that many senior Conservatives accept the strength of Lord Marshall's argument.

The G.L.C. Conservative Group also argues that after a distribution of many of the G.L.C.'s present functions to the Boroughs, there will "remain the need for a directly elected body to provide an effective and financially disciplined voice and direction for specific and defined tasks that must be done for London as a whole".

It is of course Government policy "that most of the functions at present exercised by the G.L.C. ... should become the direct responsibility of the Borough Councils. In some cases they will need to co-operate closely and have informal arrangements for sharing costs, staff and facilities. There are a few services for which statutory joint arrangements will be needed. ... Where Joint Boards are needed to run services, they will be made up of elected Councillors nominated by the Borough Councils, and will be accountable through them to their local electorates."

Plainly the Government believes that a directly (or indirectly) elected Joint Board administering a range of shared services would evolve into a mini-G.L.C. with a potential for erratic intervention into fields that should not concern it. On this fundamental point of the need for a central body that could "speak" for London, there would seem to be an irreconcilable difference of approach. Is there any way to avert a head-on collision between the Conservative Government and past and present Conservative leaders on the G.L.C?



In the past, London Members of Parliament have rarely been encouraged to play a regional role. Because of the Home Secretary's responsibilities for the Metropolitan Police, we now have an annual debate on the Report of the Commissioner, but by comparison with our colleagues from Scotland or Wales, we do not have the opportunity or the Parliamentary forum for systematic and comprehensive discussion of London's problems. I note that all Scottish Members of Parliament will normally be summoned to at least eleven meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in any one Session. There are rarely less than six Scottish Bills per Session, and when one takes into account other specifically Scottish debates, it is clear that the average Scottish Member of Parliament spends at least 100 hours per Session dealing with Scottish issues.

I believe that London's Members of Parliament are well qualified to speak for London, provided that they have a suitable forum. I believe there should be a London Grand Committee, to which all London's Members of Parliament would automatically belong. It would clearly not be appropriate to set up a London Grand Committee while the Bills abolishing the G.L.C. are going through Parliament, but once this legislation is on the Statute Book, the London Grand Committee should be established. It might meet twenty or twenty-five times in each Session.

Clearly, one of the principal tasks for Members of the London Grand Committee would be a discussion of the way in which Boroughs, or Joint Boards, or Central Government Departments, were dealing with those services which are now provided by the G.L.C. For example, the White Paper proposes that the London Fire Brigade should be run by a Joint Board. My own Borough of Bromley suggests that it should be run by the Home Office. Irrespective of whether it is run by the Home Office or a Joint Board, the state of the London Fire Brigade should be discussed by the London Grand Committee at least once a year. The debate on the Fire Service would normally be opened and closed by a Junior Minister from the Home Office.

Then there is the problem of Roads and Traffic Management. There seems to be wide agreement that some of the G.L.C.'s responsibilities in this field should be devolved to the Boroughs, but there is a general appreciation of the fact that one Borough's traffic scheme may affect traffic flows beyond that Borough's boundaries. There seems to be a general expectation that many of the five hundred 'Traffic Managers' now employed by the G.L.C. will move to the Department of Transport. The London Grand Committee might well spend at least two or three sittings every year debating the state of London Roads and London Traffic. These debates would be replied to by the



Parliamentary Secretary at the Department of Transport, who would also introduce and reply to the debates on the annual report to the London Transport Executive, which would clearly fill three or four sittings of the London Grand Committee each year.

It has been suggested that various specialist bodies now run by the G.L.C. should be taken over by the individual London Boroughs on an agency basis. It has been proposed, for example, that the G.L.C. Historic Buildings Division should be looked after by Westminster, but what will happen if Westminster does not provide adequate support for the Historic Buildings Division? The knowledge that the London Grand Committee would review the workings of these agency arrangements once a year, or once every other year, might produce an additional incentive to make these arrangements work effectively.

It may be argued that the establishment of a London Grand Committee could increase the power of Central Government over Local Government in London, but in practice that boundary line is inevitably blurred in every capital city, and the Government's proposals in the White Paper will inevitably lead to some strengthening of the powers of Government Departments. If Ministers are going to have some increased responsibilities for London services, it becomes even more important that there should be a suitable forum where Ministers can be held to account.

In the past, there has often been a debilitating and harmful conflict between Central Government and the majority Party in County Hall. For a variety of reasons, it is probable that there will be a natural Conservative majority in the London Grand Committee whenever there is a Conservative Government. This means that Ministers who come to the London Grand Committee will be assured of a critical and informed hearing - which should concentrate their minds on the problems of London - but there should be no institutionalised hostility of the sort that has done so much damage to London services and London ratepayers in recent years.

The establishment of a London Grand Committee will undoubtedly increase the work and responsibility of London's Members of Parliament, but this will be welcomed by some. It will also provide a directly elected, financially disciplined body, which can be seen to discuss "the wider interest of London as a whole." The establishment of the London Grand Committee does not conflict with any part of the Government's White Paper. It could meet some of the anxieties of those Conservatives who believe that London's interests are greater than the sum of local Borough needs and aspirations.