CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister: agreed

I prefer Option (c)

Do you prefer option a) (no statutory requirement for joint committees) as DOE ~~and the Policy~~ prefers or option c)* as DTI (minute attached) and the Policy Unit suggest. Option b is favoured by no one. Surely no need for a meeting.

*MAFF also prefer option c)

Prime Minister

ABOLITION: TRADING STANDARDS AND RELATED FUNCTIONS IN METROPOLITAN COUNTIES

See Pt 21 2/4

It was agreed, at a meeting chaired by you on 12 July, that trading standards and related functions in the MCs should be devolved to districts on abolition. (Trading standards in London already lie with the boroughs). It was also agreed that I should discuss with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister for Agriculture whether the establishment of joint technical committees in each MC could provide a way of improving the consistency and quality of the trading standards service.

There have been a number of exchanges with those colleagues, culminating in a discussion at MSC 95 on 30 October. I have accepted that, if pressed by the industry and trading standards lobbies, I should be prepared to concede a requirement in the Bill for the districts in each MC to establish joint technical committees. We have been unable, however, to reach a compromise about how this issue should be handled in the Bill.

There are three options:

(a) to introduce the Bill without any statutory requirement for consultation between districts, whilst making it clear in Committee that we would encourage voluntary cooperation. This is my preferred option. It would leave us maximum flexibility to make concessions as the Bill goes through;

(b) to include in the Bill as introduced a simple requirement for the districts in each MC to consult each other with a view to securing common standards of trading standards enforcement. This would represent a gesture towards the industry and trading standards lobbies whilst still leaving scope for conceding joint technical committees as the Bill goes through. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister of Agriculture judge this simple consultation provision to be an insignificant gesture;

(c) to include in the Bill as introduced a requirement for joint technical committees. This is the only option acceptable to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister of Agriculture. It is unacceptable to me because it would leave us no scope for a concession in Parliament, other than to give in to the inevitable pressure for joint boards which we have decided are totally unacceptable.

Time is now very short for drafting option (c) although we do have a contingent draft for option ~~(b) which could~~ be easily inserted in the Bill.

CONFIDENTIAL

I am sorry to have to bring this problem back to you, but I would be grateful if you would convene a short meeting with colleagues most closely involved to resolve this issue. It would also be helpful if that meeting could discuss handling of an announcement of our decision.

I am sending copies of this minute to members of MISC 95, Michael Jopling, John Cope and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A.H. Davis
for PJ

(Approved by the Secretary of State and signed in his absence)

1 November 1984

LOCAL GOV: Relations Pt 23

with A1
13.11

CC NO

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD
WHITEHALL PLACE, LONDON S.W.1

From the Minister

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

ABOLITION: TRADING STANDARDS AND RELATED FUNCTIONS IN METROPOLITAN COUNTIES

with HTF?

I refer to Patrick Jenkin's minute to you of 1 November.

I agree that there are basically the three options available to us as set out in Patrick's minute. I fully support the view showed by Norman Tebbit and Alex Fletcher that option C (a statutory requirement on the districts to set up joint technical committees) is the only one tenable if we are to be seen by the CBI and others to be dealing seriously with the issue of the quality and consistency of trading standards enforcement. Anything less than this will only provide greater encouragement for the CBI to press for the establishment of joint board arrangements for the trading standards service. Of course nothing is going to stop our opponents and some enforcement interests from demanding joint boards but provisions for statutory joint technical committees in the Bill will help to defuse some of the pressure that will build up. At least this option is one that can be defended as a reasonable alternative to going the whole hog and agreeing to joint boards.

In short, therefore, I feel strongly that we should not take a line which will inevitably be seen by all interests involved to be only some sort of first offer which we would be prepared to concede under a little pressure.

I am sending copies of this minute to members of MISC 95, John Cope and Sir Robert Armstrong.

C Hendy

for MICHAEL JOPLING
2 November 1984

(Approved by the Minister and signed in his absence)

Relations: LOCAL GOVT. A23.

- 2 NOV 1984

A

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

ABOLITION: TRADING STANDARDS AND RELATED FUNCTIONS
IN METROPOLITAN COUNTIES

I have seen a copy of Patrick Jenkin's minute of 1 November.

At your meeting of 12 July Norman Tebbit agreed to consider with Patrick Jenkin and Michael Jopling whether the establishment of joint technical committees would provide a way of improving the consistency and quality of the trading standards services, although, as you know, he regarded this as an uncomfortable compromise.

Norman and I consider that a statutory provision for joint technical committees is the minimum required in the Bill from the outset. Either of the other options Patrick Jenkin outlines would be treated as derisory by industry, for whom trading standards is an essential service, and by the enforcement authorities, and would increase rather than ease the pressure for this service to have a joint board of the kind agreed for other services in the Metropolitan Counties.

This pressure can therefore only be resisted effectively by including in the Bill provisions for joint technical committees.

I am sending copies of this minute to members of MISC(95), Michael Jopling, John Cope and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

D.P. Gritchs
pp AF

(Approved by Mr Fletcher and signed in his absence.)

2 November 1984

CONFIDENTIAL

B

MR FLESHER

2 November 1984

ABOLITON: TRADING STANDARDS IN METROPOLITAN COUNTIES

We see little merit in refusing to establish joint technical committees if this is merely designed to permit a subsequent concession on the point. It is true, as Patrick Jenkin says, that if committees are established in the Bill, there will be pressure to go further and establish joint boards. But such pressure can surely be resisted: it seems unlikely that great numbers of backbenchers in either House will become incensed about the issue.

We recomend that the Prime Minister should write to Patrick Jenkin, making these points and choosing in favour of option (c). We cannot see the need for a meeting.

Oliver Letwin

OLIVER LETWIN