

Prime Minister. ①
Agree that DoE should be asked to
consider ways of closing this apparent
loophole? MEA 27/8

PRIME MINISTER

27 August 1985

PARISH COUNCILS

Yes
no

We have unearthed a rather curious gap in local government legislation.

It seems that parish councils have very wide powers. They can:

- i. appoint staff;
- ii. acquire land inside or outside their area;
- iii. provide recreational facilities;
- iv. publish 'information' on matters relating to local government;
- v. do anything calculated to facilitate the discharge of any of their functions;
- vi. use the product of a 2p rate for discretionary spending.

To fund these activities, parish councils ^{may} can levy a precept on their district council. The district council is obliged to pay this precept and to add a corresponding sum to the parishioners' rates. There is ^{no} ~~is~~ no limit either ^{to} on the level of spending or ^{on} on the precept, and it is not clear what would happen if someone tried to employ a parish council as a weapon for defeating rate-capping.

If the far-Left discovered the extent of these powers, they might well start to make use of parish councils in quite a big way. The present amateur councillors would prove no match for professionals, and a nasty little cancer might

start to spread.

As usual, self-parody precedes serious moves. The Suffolk parish of Cornard recently declared itself a 'nuclear free zone'. /

We recommend that you should ask the DoE to find some means of closing this loophole without making it a major issue. Perhaps an innocuous clause or two could be slipped into a relevant Bill either next session or in 1986/7?

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