

PRIME MINISTER

H COMMITTEE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

H Committee took a paper on Wednesday by the Environment Secretary containing proposals for legislation to take forward the recommendations of the interim Widdicombe Report.

The proposals included restricting the authority for expenditure on information and publicity to Section 142 of the Local Government Act, and preventing 137 being used for this. There would also be a specific prohibition of references in advertising and publicity to particular political parties and individuals associated with them, or which were designed to affect public support for political causes.

Hartley Booth's note (Flag A) and the H Committee minutes (Flag B) show that, while the Committee accepted many of the proposals in the paper, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster effectively registered his concern that the definitions of political advertising would be by no means water-tight. It was decided that the Lord Chancellor's idea - to enshrine developing caselaw into statute - might offer a better way forward, and further thought is being given to this.

The legislation would form part of the Local Government Bill, which already has a place in the 1985/86 programme. The Royal Assent would have to be secured by 31 March, 1986. Once Parliamentary Counsel have prepared the draft Bill, L Committee will take a decision on whether it should be introduced.

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