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My ref: J/PSO/13483/83

Your ref:

*A 227*  
 21 July 1983

Dear Keith,

FAMILY POLICY GROUP: JOINT DOE/DES CIRCULAR ON DUAL USE AND  
 COMMUNITY USE

I have seen the paper prepared by our officials setting out proposals for the Joint Circular requested at the last meeting of the Family Policy Group. I agree with the overall approach on content and timing. The proposals look sound and I believe we have the makings of a very useful Circular.

I was about to write to you, when your letter of 7 July arrived. I am disappointed to learn that you do not share my view on the outstanding issue of rights of access which we must resolve quickly if we are to meet our timetable. My sympathies and Neil Macfarlane's are with the arguments attributed to DOE in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the paper. Advice of the kind proposed by your officials has been issued in the past, without achieving that further and substantial breakthrough in dual use of schools we now need. More facilities are urgently needed in many areas: public expenditure restrictions must prevent our meeting all these needs through new provision. The voluntary sector is ready and able to play a responsible role in helping to manage community facilities. I suggest therefore that we must look for the kind of positive guidance in this Circular that will direct LEAs and LAs more strongly than hitherto and provide a lever for voluntary groups anxious to gain access to particular facilities.

This initiative on dual use is an essential element in our wider efforts to bring more existing facilities into community use. The CBI are supporting Neil Macfarlane's initiative to open up private facilities to the community and I feel sure that this important campaign will be assisted if we are seen to be taking a robust line with the public sector.

I also consider that the DOE statement more accurately reflects the intentions of the FPG. I understand that the Prime Minister and other members were sympathetic to the idea of a statutory right of access in the longer term. I can appreciate your concern about the initial reaction of LEAs, but I feel sure that we can salve their feelings in the drafting, eg by reference to good practice now.

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I agree that some LEAs might take paragraph 2 as implying a call for further expenditure. Some further expenditure may of course be inevitable, but we must remember that opening up a school or other existing facility can save substantial expenses in providing and operating new facilities. I would expect this section of the Circular to make that point, and to advise on ways of meeting additional costs eg from the Leisure and Recreation budget, through pricing and by specific grants under the Urban Programme and other schemes.

I note you copied your letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Other members of the FPG should be aware of the progress we have made, so I am copying to them this letter, yours, and our officials' paper.

As we appear to be in agreement on the main points in the circular and the timescale is tight, I have asked my officials to press ahead with yours in preparing a text. If you still wish to support the DES line in the paper on rights of access, I suggest we meet for an urgent discussion. In that case perhaps your Office could contact mine to arrange a date.

*You are*  
*Pat*

PATRICK JENKIN