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PRIME MINISTER

EDUCATION IN LONDON

At their meeting on 12 July the Cabinet invited me, with the other Ministers mainly concerned and the Chairman of the Party, to reach decisions on the timing of the first elections for the directly-elected Inner London Education Authority (CC(84)26th Conclusions, Minute 1). We have not been able to reach final decisions; but I hope that we have usefully clarified the issues.

Background

2. As you know, the present ILEA is the Greater London Council acting through a special committee. The ILEA has no separate corporate status. It does not employ staff or own property in its own right. It follows that when the GLC is abolished a new body must be set up to run the education service. If abolition day were on any date other than 1 April, the problems of adapting the financial system would be insuperable. It follows that the new body must assume responsibility on 1 April 1986; and that if elections were not held until May 1986 special arrangements would have to be made to provide the new body with its members.

Administrative arguments

3. The administrative arguments and, in the view of the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the educational arguments all point strongly to holding the first elections in the Autumn of 1985. The successful candidates would then be able to prepare themselves for decisions on the 1986-87 budget and precept and



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to advise the Secretary of State on transfers of staff and property. If we do not give the members of the new body time for adequate preparation, the relevant decisions will have to be left in the hands of the members of the present ILEA. No doubt many of them will also be members of the new directly-elected Authority. But that is not an argument which will be generally accepted as justifying departure from what, in administrative terms, is the obvious timetable. It is relevant that because of the need for adequate preparation for handover it is planned that the joint boards to run the police and fire services should come into existence in shadow form as early as 1 September 1985. That example is bound to be quoted in public discussion.

4. A further advantage is that if elections were held in the Autumn of 1985 it would be possible for the successful candidates to replace the members of the present ILEA. That would reduce the risks of friction and disruption during the period leading up to the formal transfer of responsibilities on 1 April 1986 to the new body.

5. Finally, there are strong arguments against the other possibilities. In particular, to hold elections in May 1986 would, for the reasons outlined above, require us to appoint members of the new body to cover the period between 1 April 1986 and the elections. The only practical possibility would be to nominate the members of the present ILEA. There are obvious political objections to this, not least the difficulty of defending to Parliament what would be misrepresented, like our original proposals in the Paving Bill, as a 'nominated quango'.

Political considerations

6. Against this must be set the very strong views of the Chairman of the Party and the Chief Whip that to hold the first ILEA elections in the Autumn of 1985 would be vehemently opposed by the Party, particularly in London. Such elections would be used as a referendum on abolition. If we did badly, it would both depress morale among our back-benchers and Party workers immediately after the Party Conference; and it would worsen

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our prospects in the subsequent borough elections. The Party in London is not in good heart over the abolition campaign; to reject its advice on the timing of the first ILEA elections would have the most serious effects on morale. Moreover, fighting two local election campaigns in London in a short space of time would be very expensive for Party funds.

A possible compromise

7. A possible compromise between these conflicting requirements would be to hold the ILEA elections in February or March 1986. The meeting took the view that the date should be after 16 February 1986, when the new electoral register comes into effect. There is an argument for 20 March, since that would permit candidates to be nominated on the basis of the new register. However, it would leave very little time for the newly elected members to get through all that needs to be done before 1 April. The meeting therefore considered that if this broad approach was adopted, the date of the elections should be as soon as possible after 16 February 1986.

8. The Chairman of the Party said that although from his standpoint a date of February 1986 would be less satisfactory than May 1986 it was preferable to Autumn 1985. In particular, he thought that it would be possible, in effect, to treat the London elections in 1986 as a single campaign stretching over three months or so.

9. The meeting felt that it must warn you that it would not be easy to defend a decision on these lines in public. Holding elections in mid-February would allow the members of the new ILEA little time in which to prepare a precept and budget for 1986-87 and to advise on transfers of staff and property. All this would be quite obvious to our opponents, who would argue that we had chosen the date for narrow political reasons and not in the interests of good administration.





Conclusion

10. For these reasons, the meeting felt unable to offer a firm recommendation. Decisions are not urgent, though it would be helpful to have them before the Summer Recess. I should be grateful if I might discuss the issues with you, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Chief Whip and the Chairman of the Party.

11. I am sending copies of this minute to the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Chief Secretary, Treasury, the Chief Whip, the Attorney General, Lord Bellwin, the Chairman of the Party and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Wor W*

Privy Council Office  
24 July 1984



Hold papers ready  
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AT 2617

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PRIME MINISTEREDUCATION IN LONDON

Lord Whitelaw has failed to secure agreement on the date for the first ILEA election and he requests you hold a meeting. I suspect the disagreement is not between him and the Secretary of States for Education and Science and Environment but between the three of them and the Party. It seems to be agreed by everyone that the election must take place before 1 April but the Chairman of the Party and the Chief Whip prefer February 1986 to Autumn 1985. It seems to me difficult to argue that delaying the election avoids an abolition referendum as the Abolition Bill should have received Royal Assent by July 1985 or even earlier. The other argument is that the Party might be at a low ebb electorally in the Autumn 1985 but it is surely difficult to count on February 1986 being significantly better. In my view, and that of the Policy Unit, the arguments point to Autumn 1985 so long as Royal Assent has already been achieved.

Agree to hold a meeting?

AT

25 July 1985



PRIME MINISTER

EDUCATION IN LONDON

with M2.

1. I have seen the Lord President's minute of 24 July to you reporting our discussion on the timing of direct elections for ILEA. It sets out very clearly the dilemma that we face.

2. I do not believe that going for the compromise of a separate direct election for ILEA in February/March 1986 could be presented as a convincing solution:

i. It does not meet the administrative and educational case for ensuring an adequate period of preparation for hand-over to the new ILEA. Even given goodwill, there would be quite inadequate time for the newly elected ILEA to prepare a budget and fix the precept for 1986-87. But we cannot assume goodwill and have not assumed goodwill in our plans for the abolition authorities generally. Any idea that the present ILEA will have laid well-prepared plans for the new ILEA to adopt before 1 April 1986 seems to me fanciful.

ii. We propose to establish the joint boards in shadow form from 1 September 1985 just in order to ensure adequate preparation for abolition. Not to do so for ILEA at about the same time, will seem perverse and evasive. With elections in March 1986, we would have also to set up the new ILEA in shadow form in the autumn of 1985 and put the existing membership of ILEA on it. That would be an open invitation to obstruction, since the existing ILEA will be caught up in the death throes of the GLC.

iii. Separate elections for ILEA whenever they are held will become elections about the education budget and the consequences of abolition. If, as I agree, we cannot sensibly advance the borough elections to coincide with those for ILEA, there is advantage in choosing a date which is coherent with our overall abolition strategy and can be



defended as such. To choose a date, which for well-understood practical reasons is likely to precipitate an administrative shambles and the worst possible start for the new ILEA, can only hinder our chances in separate elections.

3. Copies of this minute go to Willie Whitelaw, Leon Brittan, Patrick Jenkin, Peter Rees, John Wakeham, Michael Havers, Irwin Bellwin and John Selwyn Gummer, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

KJ

25 July 1984



EDUC: ILERA: R4



25 JUL 1984