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PRIME MINISTER

Following your approval in principle to the appointment of Mr David Widdicombe as Chairman of the committee of inquiry into local government practices and procedures, I would now like to move as quickly as possible to approach other possible members of the committee.

In my minute to you of 7 December I outlined the advantages of appointing a small but high-powered committee. In the light of your further comments and those of colleagues I would propose to sound out the following as possible members of the committee of inquiry:-

Sir John Boynton. A highly respected former Chief Executive of Cheshire County Council who reputedly carried out a thorough-going modernisation of his authority and brought it to a high peak of efficiency. The first President of SOLACE (Society of Local Authority of Chief Executives), Sir John has a solid reputation in local government. He has also given valuable service on a number of Government Committees, including the Rampton Hospital Inquiry and the North West Economic Planning Council where he was known as an energetic and able member. As you know he served as Election Commissioner in the Southern Rhodesia elections of 1979-80. I have no doubt that he has both the background experience and personal character to make an invaluable contribution to the inquiry.

Sir Alan Smith. Highly recommended by the Scottish Office and the Department of Trade and Industry. As John Graham's letter of 24 December explained, he was the driving force behind the rapid growth of the Dawson Knitwear group and although he has recently retired from active business life he remains a dynamic personality. Both Nigel Lawson and Norman Tebbit have commented that they would look for a member with a business background and experience in dealing with local authorities. Sir Alan fulfills those requirements admirably: in addition to

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL



his contribution in the private sector, he has been a Conservative member and latterly Treasurer of Tayside Regional Council.

Mrs Heather Brigstocke. High Mistress of St Pauls Girls School. Mrs Brigstocke has a wide and impressive range of interests in the educational and other fields. For the last two years she has been an Executive Director of London Weekend Television. She is also a Trustee of the National Gallery; a member of the Councils of Royal Holloway College, the Middlesex Hospital Medical School and the City University; a Governor of Wellington College and Atlantic College; and President of the Bishop Creighton House Settlement, Fulham. She has a high reputation as a strong and incisive personality who would be well able to deal with the complex and sensitive issues facing the inquiry. She would also of course have a keen interest in those aspects of the inquiry of relevance to the educational service with which Keith Joseph is concerned.

I should mention that our reserve English candidates, should any of these possible members prove acceptable to you, or be unable to serve, would be Sir Peter Newsam and Mr George Russell, Chairman of Alcan UK. Professor Alan Bradley of Edinburgh University, whom George Younger suggested in his letter of 24 December, would seem to me to be an admirable Scottish substitute. If, therefore, any of our first-choice candidates fall for whatever reason, I should also be grateful for your approval in principle to approach these alternative candidates.

I am copying this letter to Cabinet colleagues and Sir Robert Armstrong.

PJ

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16 January 1985

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