



Annex D

LONDON BOROUGHS FORUM

1. This note considers the nature and modus operandi of a statutory London Boroughs Forum.

THE NATURE OF A FORUM

2. A Boroughs Forum should clearly be basically a local authority body, though there could be provision for the appointment of additional members (see para. 9 below). In addition, the following assumptions have been made:

- a. it should not be a directly-elected authority;
- b. it should not run a major service (defined as requiring large numbers of staff and/or major expenditure);
- c. it should not be a precepting body.

3. Given these constraints, it is clear that the main role of the body would be a consultative/advisory one. If a body of this kind existed, it could, however, be considered as a suitable home for other minor activities.

Essential Functions

4. The pressure for the body arises principally because of the perceived need to have a body "speaking for London" on major land use planning issues. This would inevitably encompass strategic transportation matters. In practice, also, the body could not be prevented from expressing views on social and economic issues.

5. The purpose of the London Planning Commission (LPC) is to provide advice for the Secretary of State on major planning issues. It has been criticised because it is appointed by the Secretary of State, and not based on local government; and because it has no powers over the boroughs.

6. There is no room in the proposed unitary development plan system for a London-wide body with planning powers. It would, however, be possible to meet the first criticism by reconstituting the LPC as a borough-based body. This would produce a body which could speak for, and coordinate the views of, the boroughs on land use planning and transport issues going wider than the individual borough. Such a body might be needed anyway within the present proposed framework; but it could not credibly play a part in the new planning structure unless it was given a statutory basis.

7. A Planning Forum, replacing the LPC provisions in Schedule 1 to the Bill, could provide a home for some existing GLC activities which the boroughs wish to preserve such as the research and information function (at present proposed to be dealt with on a "Lead borough" basis under clause 86.) However, a body set up by amendment to



Schedule 1 could not properly take on more general activities (eg supplies, scientific services) - which the boroughs might wish to continue in some form after abolition. Nor could it be a general "voice for London" representing London in, for example, relations with other cities. But a more broadly-based body which could look after these tasks might also be able to move into other more controversial fields.

Constitution

8. A Forum could be constituted as a statutory joint committee to which each borough would be required to appoint one member. On present political composition, this would give 19 Con 12 Labour and 1 Alliance, plus the City.

9. There is a case for widening the membership to include people outside local government with an interest in London affairs from, say, industry, the voluntary sector, unions, and planning. These would have to be appointed by the Secretary of State. There could be a statutory limit on the number of appointees - eg not exceeding a quarter of total membership which would give up to 11 appointees.

Financing

10. A Forum would need to be given access to sufficient finance to enable it to fulfil its role properly, but to prevent it spending recklessly eg in pursuit of doctrinaire economic and social policies. This might be achieved by setting a limit to the amount of the charge which it could levy on the boroughs. There might also be provision that the budget must be agreed by at least two-thirds of the boroughs (though if the necessary two thirds majority was not secured, the Forum would not be able to function).

LONDON BOROUGH VIEWS

11. Conservative Borough Leaders have made clear their strong opposition to any new directly-elected London-wide body. They are equally anxious to avoid the creation of any new body which could, in time acquire an independent role.

12. However, a number of Conservative boroughs have expressed concern about the absence of a body to look after some London-wide issues after abolition - examples are the supplies organisation, parts of the scientific services branch, and the research and information function. Some of the boroughs who want a body to carry on work of this kind see it as a "statutory LBA". Such a body would need to be created as a general-purpose one, and not by amendment of Schedule 1.

13. In so far as they are concerned about the future of London-wide activities, the creation of a new body would probably be welcome to most Labour Boroughs. But a borough-based body would not meet the main Opposition argument, which focusses on the need for a directly-elected London Authority; and, even if they accepted the principle of a borough-based body, the Labour boroughs would probably want it to take on far more functions than would be acceptable.



IMPACT ON THE MET COUNTIES

14. There would be pressure to extend to Met Counties any compromise proposal that was conceded for London. Indeed a "planning Forum" could be presented as giving statutory form to the "planning conferences" of district representatives which are to be convened when necessary to advise the Secretary of State on the issues to be dealt with in his strategic guidance. However, a case can be made for drawing a distinction between London and the Mets so far as planning issues are concerned - the proposed London Planning Commission is already an acceptance of this; and there is virtually no Local support (except perhaps in Merseyside) for a new country-wide body.

