



NISA
BT 21/5

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My ref:

Your ref:

20 May 1985

Dear Nick,

NEW BURDENS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Thank you for your letter of 24 April about the recently circulated list of new burdens on local authorities.

Let me say immediately that the list is not intended as an authoritative and precise statement on burdens. It is very largely my Department's own record of items that have been brought to our attention and the details and accuracy are thus governed by the amount and frequency of information supplied to us. Moreover, the very format of the list, which requires entries to be brief but at the same time representative of the practical implications of new proposals, makes it impossible for all the ramifications of particular packages to be presented.

I think therefore that we should seek to use the list more as a means of providing Ministers, both individually and collectively, with a reasonably realistic overview of the burdens situation than as a detailed assessment of each item. The latter should more properly be carried out elsewhere. It serves as a reminder of the need to control the number of new burdens imposed on local authorities as well as an indication of what has evolved in the preceding six months. It was on this basis that I invited colleagues' comments which, as in the case of your letter and others which I have received, rightly provide a broader perspective on some of the detailed items covered. In the particular case of the Transport Bill it would be helpful if your officials could let mine know of the compensating savings which lead to the 'overall neutrality' position which you describe.

I am doubtful about your suggestion that new entries should be discussed, and by implication agreed, between officials before the list is produced. This would involve much extra work and change the whole purpose of the exercise. Once the new prior consultation arrangements which we have recently agreed are properly underway we shall automatically get better quantification of new burdens and this will be reflected in future lists. But if we seek specific agreement for every entry the system will get bogged down in detailed and largely unproductive discussion, and the six monthly updating exercise would become little more than a routine cosmetic exercise with each Minister acknowledging his own items. The present format provides sufficient information, subject of course to the need to correct mistakes, for Ministers individually to be aware of their Department's own contribution and for Ministers collectively to get a general overview.

As I said, the list is not perfect and there are certainly some items on which I suspect that we are not as up to date as we would like. You tell me that the entry for item 20 is factually incorrect and we have now amended it. That is indeed one of

the reasons for distributing the list. We can only record information as it is passed to us and I certainly do not have the Departmental resources to chase up each individual entry. The better the information flows to us the better the list will be.

I mentioned in my earlier letter that we are preparing new guidelines on the new prior consultation arrangements for use within DOE. These are about to issue and will be sent to other departments; I hope they may prove a useful model.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, members of E(LA) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*You are
Pat*

PATRICK JENKIN

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