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PRIME MINISTER

SIR ROY GRIFFITHS' REVIEW OF COMMUNITY CARE

You will recall that in December 1986 Norman Fowler, after consulting you and colleagues, asked Sir Roy Griffiths to review the use of public funds to improve the effectiveness of their application to community care.

Sir Roy has just completed his report and submitted it to me at the weekend. I am sure you will wish to see the report straightaway. A copy is attached. Chapter 1, pages 20-23, summarises the proposals.

We gave Sir Roy a formidable task. The Audit Commission and the Social Services Committee had been critical of the effectiveness of community care, and especially of the application of public money to it from a variety of sources. Our invitation to Sir Roy to look at the problem was our response to this. The criticisms have since been echoed by the NAO, who expected that he would have to consider "fairly radical solutions" in his review.

He has brought to the work the logic and penetration that one would expect. But he has inevitably been confined by the fact that local authorities have a major place in the provision of community care. He has sought a solution that would spell out responsibilities and insist on performance and accountability. This has led him to the conclusion that local social service authorities should assess the community care needs of people in their locality, and should take a comprehensive view, in an enabling rather than a providing role, of these needs and the services that should respond to them.



This is an understandable response to the task he was set. But I think that, from a broader point of view, he has reached some wrong conclusions. There has been a welcome growth of private sector provision of community care. I do not believe that local authority "enablers" who are themselves providers of competing services would deal even-handedly with the private sector. More generally, I doubt whether our supporters would understand a policy which would steer vulnerable members of the community more firmly towards the local authorities, of whose record we are highly critical.

So we have a dilemma. Sir Roy's report recommends a logical way of tackling the diffusion of responsibility for community care which nevertheless takes us in the wrong direction politically. There may be ways round this, for example by emphasising the purely enabling role of local authorities, cutting back their responsibilities as providers and tightening up the framework within which they would operate while at the same time encouraging the private sector alternatives. But all this will need time and thought. Meanwhile, we have the Griffiths report, which is widely anticipated, and must decide what to do with it.

The report is one of two we have been expecting which will touch on community care. The other will be from Lady Wagner's working party on the role of residential care. Her work was commissioned in March 1986 by the National Institute of Social Work, with Norman Fowler's support, and the report is being published next month. The handling of that report is for the Institute, but they are certain to publish and I believe we have no choice but to do the same with the Griffiths report. My preference would be to publish it soon, saying only that this is an important contribution to the debate on community care which we shall consider alongside Wagner. We could add that we would be bringing forward our own proposals on community care in due course, in the light of these reports. We should emphasise that Sir Roy's proposals are primarily concerned with non-health services. Although they do not have a direct bearing on the review of the NHS the two are certainly relevant to one another.

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A number of colleagues will be interested in the Griffiths report and I had been planning to write to colleagues in E(A) about publication and handling. But given the political sensitivities, I suggest you might want to hold a smaller meeting of Ministers to discuss the immediate problems. I am therefore at this stage copying this minute and the report only to Nigel Lawson, Nick Ridley and John Major.

JM

17th February, 1988