



Home Affairs

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

12 May 1980

Dear Mr. Price

Thank you for your letter of 21 April about the National Front march in Lewisham on Sunday 20 April.

May I first say how much I welcome your sending a letter of appreciation to Sir David McNee in recognition of the excellent way his officers carried out their duty in policing the event and containing trouble where it arose. The Home Secretary also wrote to Sir David and I believe there is general praise of the job the police performed that day.

You raise the general question of the cost of policing demonstrations of this sort and call for a Government initiative on the issue. You will know from the Answer given by Willie Whitelaw to your Question on 24 April that the Commissioner has estimated the total cost of policing the march in Lewisham at some £300,000. The mounting cost of policing demonstrations is one of the reasons why the Government is currently undertaking a review of the Public Order Act 1936 and related legislation.

The Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland jointly published on 24 April a Green Paper which is intended to stimulate a full and informed debate on the difficult issues involved in the review. One of the issues discussed in the Green Paper is on what basis it should be possible to ban processions.

As you know, at present a march can only be banned if the Commissioner - or the chief officer of police outside London - is satisfied that he cannot otherwise prevent serious public

/ disorder.

27R

order. The Green Paper discusses possible alternative criteria, although it makes it clear that these are not without difficulty. I am sure that you will wish to examine the Green Paper and the possibilities and options it sets out carefully and I need hardly say that the Home Secretary will be glad to receive any comments you may have on it.

You also mention the threat by Lewisham Borough Council to withhold payment of the Metropolitan Police precept.

The Home Secretary is answerable in Parliament for the exercise of his responsibilities as police authority for the Metropolitan Police District. This channel of accountability reflects the special position of the Metropolis as the seat of Government and capital city. At local level there are well established arrangements for consultation between borough councils and district police commanders about local policing matters. As far as financial matters are concerned, each year the Receiver holds a consultative meeting at which he discusses his financial plans with the local authorities' representatives before the precept is set. Lewisham seem to be overlooking these important respects in which local opinion is taken into account in the affairs of the Metropolitan Police. And it is the more regrettable because, if the Council were to carry out its threat, it would go against a clear legal requirement to meet the precept. It was for all these reasons that I deplored the Council's action in the House on 17 April, and I stand by what I said then.

(sgd) M T

Christopher Price, Esq., M.P.