



Prime Minister:

H Committee agreed
with your view on
dog licences.

PRIME MINISTER

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DOG LICENCES

The Home and Social Affairs Committee (H) discussed the question of dog licences yesterday. There was general agreement that the present absurd situation, in which the cost of collection exceeds the revenue, must be changed, particularly in view of last December's critical report by the Public Accounts Committee.

H Committee agreed that there are two feasible options: to abolish the licence altogether, and to raise the fee to a realistic level, say £5.

The Secretary of State for the Environment favoured raising the fee to £5. He thought that if the licence were abolished, the Government would be widely seen as washing its hands of the very real problem of the nuisance caused by uncontrolled and stray dogs; and that the extra revenue generated by a £5 fee could be used by local authorities to tackle that problem.

But a clear majority of the Committee was in favour of abolishing the licence altogether. About 50 per cent of dogs are at present unlicensed. The majority of the Committee thought that that percentage would increase if the cost of the licence were raised, and that the law would be unenforceable. They thought that an increase in the fee would not necessarily lead to more effective measures against dog nuisance: the two issues were separate ones.

The Secretary of State for the Environment will reconsider the matter in the light of the discussion. We will try in the autumn to reach a decision in H which will avoid his having to take the question to Cabinet.

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Abolition of the licence would require primary legislation, and it is not clear when Parliamentary time could be found for it. Raising the licence fee would require secondary legislation only. But I should make it clear that, in my judgement, there will continue to be a majority in H Committee for abolition as soon as legislative time can be found for an inevitably controversial Bill.

I am sending a copy of this minute to Sir Robert Armstrong.

WSD

20 July 1983

PRIME MINISTER

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H COMMITTEE

Dog Licences

H Committee (minutes attached) discussed the proposal by the Secretary of State for the Environment to increase the dog licence fee to £5. In the event, however, a majority of the Committee favoured abolition. Particular factors which weighed with the Committee were the impossibility of enforcement and the absence of obligation on authorities to spend licence fee income on dog control measures. The Lord President invited Mr. Jenkin either to take the matter to Cabinet or to bring back proposals reflecting the majority view of the Committee in the autumn. *(See his minute elsewhere in the box)*

Civil Legal Aid

There was something of a row in H Committee about the Lord Chancellor's proposals for curbing civil legal aid expenditure and for extending the system of payment on account from last year to this year. The Chief Secretary argued that the low take-up rate of the 1982/83 scheme (only £13m of the £30m allocated) demonstrated that there was no great demand for it. The Scottish Office said that they did not have the money for a similar scheme in Scotland. In the event, however, it was agreed that since the Lord Chancellor would need the goodwill of the legal profession in order to secure greater control over civil legal aid expenditure, some money should be made available for payments on account. This should not, however, be as much as proposed by the Lord Chancellor and the precise amount would need to be determined in discussion with the Chief Secretary.

D.

20 July, 1983

File

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25 July 1983

This is just to record that the Prime Minister has seen the Lord President's minute to her of 20 July about dog licences.

Timothy Flesher

Bob Whalley, Esq.,
Lord President's Office.

