



PRIME MINISTER

BF 13/6/86 to DW. of BG
 Any P/Comments
 by the weekend please.

THE WIDDICOMBE REPORT ON THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS

The Widdicombe Committee have, as you know, now submitted their Report. We are due to publish the 500 page main document and four research volumes this month. Publication and the associated press conference will be mainly the Committee's occasion, but we shall of course be expected to respond to the event. This minute therefore seeks your agreement, and that of colleagues, to my proposals on handling on publication day and thereafter.

The Report is substantial - there are 88 recommendations - and formidably comprehensive in approach. It has addressed all the issues cited in the formal terms of reference (annex 1). These included inter alia the practices which particularly concerned colleagues before the inquiry was set up. Among these were, as you will recall:

- the manipulation of standing orders to prevent proper consideration of Committee papers, and to deprive minority party members of access to information;
- the use of ratepayers' money to finance politically motivated voluntary groups;
- 'political' appointments and promotions of officers, and their involvement in clandestine decision taking systems;
- problems arising from conflicts of interest, including councillors' employment by other local authorities and the role of the trade unions;

and so on.



We might have expected the Committee to see these issues as individual problems or abuses in a few authorities, requiring tough but individual solutions. Instead, the Report takes a systematic view of practice and procedure across the whole of local government, and provides for a comprehensive package of interlocking safeguards and solutions applicable to the whole. Annex 2 gives a selective list of the recommendations as they affect structure, procedure and relationships within local government at all levels.

The package is all embracing and bound to be controversial, particularly in local government circles. From our point of view, I should say first that some of the recommendations look pretty sensible and sound. Others, however, are far from straightforward: councillors' remuneration, the proposals greatly to strengthen the Local Ombudsman service, the powers to be given to the Audit Commission, and the new role of the Chief Executive are all examples where acceptance of the Widdicombe proposals as they stand would pose considerable difficulties.

However I see the main problems as more general, and two-fold. First, it will be argued by some (including our own supporters) that the Widdicombe Report represents 'overkill'. The procedural abuses that prompted it were evident, outrageous, but sporadic in terms of local government as a whole. The solution offered, on the other hand, is an entire system to treat the whole patient, instead of imposing quick and effective local cures. The question we shall have to weigh is whether the continued spread of the disease does require pre-emptive treatment on the scale proposed by Widdicombe. We also need to consider the Widdicombe system alongside our proposals for local government finance.



Second - having said that - this is the Report we have: a major effort, which (if implemented) would mean a very long and complicated Bill. It is obviously not possible to produce such major legislation in time for the coming Session, nor could it be introduced in the one following (1987-88) since that will not be a full Session. On the other hand, we might seek to build an some aspects of the Report for our Manifesto.

These two factors point to a strategy of offering a long consultation period in which to allow the public response to the Report to form, coupled with the avoidance meanwhile of precipitate Government reaction. This means, in my view, no picking out of selected 'plums' for early legislation action next Session, for three reasons. First, any early dismantling of the package will make it difficult to hold pressures on the Government to take a premature line on the whole. Second, people will (naturally) not agree on what the 'plums' actually are. Third, the Bill which would be the vehicle for the plums, which would deal mainly with competition and the provision of local authority services, publicity and (possibly) capital controls is already likely to have a tough passage against a tight timetable, there is no need to add to its controversiality.

I therefore propose that the Report be published next Thursday, 19 June with a statement saying simply that the Government welcomes the Report, proposes to express no views at this stage, but invites comments by the end of the year. A draft text of the statement, which will be in response to a written PQ, is attached at Annex 3.

After publication, I would propose that officials should undertake a detailed analysis of the Report. This work should be handled through my Department, in full collaboration with other interested Departments, especially, of course, with my Scottish and Welsh



colleagues. Although there is insufficient time to legislate before the Election, we will need to reach conclusions before then on the Widdicombe proposals.

On my proposal that we should avoid piecemeal early legislation, colleagues may not agree. I would naturally be happy to discuss if colleagues wish - but this should not delay the publication of the Report meanwhile. It is now essential to publish as soon as practicable, to enable the Committee to hold their press conference and then to stand down. They need adequate notice to make the arrangements for this.

I should therefore be grateful to know if you and colleagues agree

- to publication on 19 June, and
- to my issuing the statement attached.

If 19 June is agreed, I shall need to be able to tell David Widdicombe by Monday next at the latest. A further discussion of the Report and its implications can of course be arranged thereafter, if colleagues wish.

Copies go to members of "H", to Paul Channon, Michael Havers, Richard Luce, Kenny Cameron and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

BH Leonard

First Secretary

per ps.

N R

11 June 1986

(Approved by the Secretary of State and signed in his absence)

INQUIRY INTO THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS ANNOUNCEMENT
BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, 6 FEBRUARY 1985

1. "In the debate on the Address on 7 November I said I intended to set up an inquiry into various practices and procedures in local government. Following discussions with the Opposition parties and the local authority associations, I am now in a position to give further information to the House.

2. The terms of reference for the Inquiry will be as follows:

To inquire into practices and procedures governing the conduct of local authority business in Great Britain, with particular reference to:

- a. the rights and responsibilities of elected members;
- b. the respective roles of elected members and officers; and
- c. the need to clarify the limits and conditions governing discretionary spending by local authorities

and to make any necessary recommendations for strengthening the democratic process."

3. Within those terms of reference I am inviting the Committee to pay particular attention to the following issues:

- ensuring proper accountability for decision-taking to elected members and to the electorate generally; and examining possible ways of strengthening local democracy within the existing structure of local government;
- clarifying the status and role of party groups in decision-taking;
- ensuring the proper participation and accountability of individual elected members in the decision-taking process;

- examining any problems of propriety which may arise from members' conflicts of interest, particularly where officers of one Council serve as councillors of another;
- considering the merits of the development of full-time Councillors; and the related issues of the use of members' allowances and the remuneration of Councillors generally;
- reviewing the system of co-option of non-elected members;
- studying officers' relationships, particularly in view of their legal and professional obligations, with elected members and political groups;
- clarifying the limits and conditions governing discretionary spending, including the use of sections 137 and 142 of the Local Government Act 1972 (and sections 83 and 88 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973), for political purposes in local government; or in relation to bodies set up, and largely funded by, local authorities.

4. In view of the growing public concern about the use made by some local authorities of their discretionary powers to engage in overt political campaigning at public expense, I am asking the Committee to submit an early interim report on this question. As far as the report as a whole is concerned, I am asking the committee to aim to report within a year.

5. It is essential that the Inquiry should be both impartial and effective in dealing with these difficult issues. The best way to achieve this is to establish a small Committee of people of judgement and ability, headed by a chairman of known integrity. The Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales and I therefore propose to appoint a Committee of four or five members chosen for the personal contribution which each can make to the wide-ranging subject-matter of the Inquiry.

6. I am glad to inform the House that Mr David Widdicombe, QC, has indicated to me that he would be prepared to accept appointment as Chairman of the Committee of Inquiry. Further appointments to the Committee, of which I shall advise the House, will be made shortly.

WIDDICOMBE: MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS as they affect structure and procedures, from **Councils**, down through **Committees, Members, Party Groups, The Chief Executive and Officials**, to **electors** and their **rights of challenge**. The last section covers **discretionary spending**.

COUNCILS

- are to be considered corporate bodies, with decisions to be taken openly by the whole council, and officers to serve the council as a whole (R1).

COMMITTEES

- membership of decision taking committees and subcommittees must reflect composition of the whole council (R2)
- councillors' rights to attend such meetings and see papers should be statutory (R4)
- delegation to Committee Chairmen between meetings to be regularised (R5)
- No cooption on decision-taking committees. Instead, non voting advisers (only) can attend, their names and terms of attendance to be publicised (R6)
- Standing orders to be required by statute to cover 7 key provisions including question time, time for minority party business, clearance of public gallery during disturbances, and safeguards against summary suspension of Standing Orders (R8).

MEMBERS

- obligations and duties in law to be enshrined in the National Code of Local Government Conduct, to be made statutory and a feature of solemn declaration on taking office; breaches of the Code to constitute prima facie maladministration (R10-14)
- may continue to be employees of another local authority - but only at grades below Principal Officer (PO) level.

- (Teachers are not covered by this safeguard) (R16)
- must contribute to a statutory register of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests (defined very widely); failure to do so will be an offence. In meetings, on declaring a pecuniary interest, members will have to leave the room. Further provisions to be included in the statutory Code (R18-21)
 - basis of remuneration should be reformed, and levels increased, to discourage potential abuses which now feature (R25-30)
 - the courts will have a wider (discretionary) power to disqualify councillors in certain cases (R86).

PARTY GROUPS/POLITICAL ACTIVITY/ADVISERS, ETC

- non decision taking committees (which would include some one party sub-committees and other political groups) are to be exempt from the rules on membership structure and access to papers etc which apply to decision taking committees and sub-committees (R3-4)
- but the national political parties should press for rules to secure openness about attendance at party group meetings, observance of model standing orders on proper conduct, etc (R24)
- authorities should be able if they wish to attach or appoint officers to the party groups or their leaders - subject to extensive defined safeguards (R41-43)
- the attendance of officers at party groups should also be subject to safeguards, notably that the Chief Executive should decide who attends (R44)
- all officers of PO level and above should be debarred, if necessary by legislation, from local political activities (R51)
- local authorities to publicise in "Conventions" the working relationships between the political parties and between

councillors and officers (R9).

OFFICIALS

- appointments and dismissals to be by new statutory Code of Practice to secure basis of merit and fair and open competition (R46)
- officials can be councillors only if employed below PO level (R16)
- officials to be prohibited from all local political activity at PO level and above (R51)
- officials allowed to be attached to party groups/leaders only on clear, safeguarded basis (R41-43)
- allowed to attend party groups only if Chief Executive permits (R44)
- discipline or dismissal of staff at or above PO level can only be triggered by the Chief Executive (so no 'political sackings') - and he is wholly in charge of all aspects of staffing below this level (R38-40).

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive becomes a powerful, key figure, the guardian of many of the reforms proposed.

- his appointment will be a statutory requirement and all statutory functions relating to propriety will vest in him alone (R35-36)
- in relation to council business, he will decide party balance on committees; councillors' rights of access to documents/meetings; delegation arrangements; and he will keep the statutory register of councillors' interests. He will also be the legal advisor to the council (R37)

- he will be statutorily responsible for all staffing matters below PO level, and for initiating discipline and dismissal action at levels above that (R38-39)
- he will decide officer attendance at party groups (R43)
- the procedures for appointing him will include an independent assessor (R47)
- he will only be dismissable on the vote of two thirds of the council (R49)
- the courts will have discretion to disqualify him in certain cases if he acts unlawfully (R85).

RIGHTS OF CHALLENGE

- Auditors' reports are to be made immediately available; section 19 and 20 powers under the 1982 Act are to be transferred to the Audit Commission, who would also have new powers to seek an immediate injunction or expedited hearing for an order or mandamus (R71-73)
- existing statutory rights of objection to the accounts should be extended to all electors and ratepayers (R75)
- the local Ombudsmen should be able to receive complaints direct; remedies should be enforceable in the courts; Government should review and modify exclusions to the Ombudsmens' jurisdiction; the Ombudsmen should have powers to investigate cases on their own initiative; Government should reconsider charging the costs of the service to central funds, and review the need for the Representative Bodies. There should also be a new power of financial assistance to complainants, vested in the three CLAs (R77-81, 83-84)
- any elector ratepayers should be able to seek judicial review (R82).

DISCRETIONARY SPENDING

The Committee favour retention of limited discretionary spending

powers, but advocate some Guidance for the operation of section 137 (R56-57). They propose that S137 should in any case be amended to prevent its use for another LA's functions without that LA's consent - as in Scotland (R64), and that a declaratory provision should rule out its use for electoral advantage (R65). They propose also that

- the role of authorities in economic development should be reviewed, to see if new powers are needed (R58)
- the basis of raising expenditure under section 137 be changed from rate product to population, and the level thereafter regularly reviewed (R59-62)
- meanwhile, the level should in any event be doubled in the Met districts and London Boroughs only (R63)
- on voluntary bodies' funding, the proposal is for openness on the facts and monitoring, rather than change (R66)
- on Enterprise Boards, the proposal is to consider them in the review at recommendation 58 (R69)
- on local authority companies, the law should be changed to tighten safeguards (R70).

DRAFT STATEMENT

1. I should like to thank Mr David Widdicombe, and his fellow members on the Committee of Inquiry into the Conduct of Local Authority Business, most sincerely for their Report which is published today. The Committee's study has been a thorough one, and their Report is impressive in the extent of its coverage and the scope of its findings.

2. It is also radical in content. Major changes are proposed to deal with the impact of greater politicisation on the conduct of local government business.

3. The Government believes that the Report will stimulate wide-ranging debate. We wish to encourage that debate, and to weigh its outcome before reaching a view on the Committee's proposals.

4. I am therefore issuing an invitation today to all interested parties to let me have their views. I am determined that the timescale for this will be adequate. We shall be looking for substantive responses by the end of this year. It will not be practicable, given the scope and range of the proposals, to contemplate early implementation.

5. I commend the Committee for their major study, and I look forward to the considered response of the public.

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CCBG

PRIME MINISTER

NRPM

I have seen Nicholas Ridley's minute of 11 June to you on the publication and handling of the Widdicombe Report on the conduct of local authority business.

The Report is comprehensive in its coverage and raises many important issues which deserve to be debated in full. I agree with Nicholas's view that a reasonable consultation period is desirable and support his other proposals on the handling of the Report after its publication.

I am copying this to members of H Committee, to Paul Channon, Michael Havers, Richard Luce, Kenny Cameron and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

K.D.

Department of Education and Science

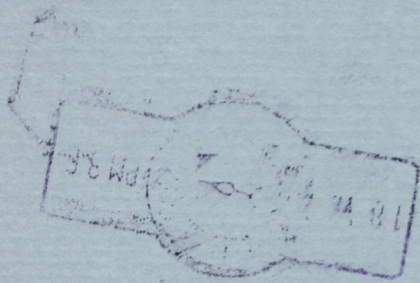
18 June 1986

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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PT 30





CCBQ

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Prime Minister

NBP

THE WIDDICOMBE REPORT ON THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS

I have seen a copy of Nick Ridley's minute of 11 June to you, proposing that the Widdicombe Report should be published on 19 June, accompanied by a Government statement giving no views on it but inviting views from others. I am content with what he proposes, as I am with his suggestions for our consideration of the Report after its publication.

I am copying this minute to members of H, Paul Channon, Michael Havers, Richard Luce, Kenny Cameron and Sir Robert Armstrong.

MR

16 June 1986

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bc BG

CA JAFU cc: PS's to:
Lord President
Chairman
Lord Chancellor
Chief Sec to Treasury
Home Secretary

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

16 June 1986

Education
Scotland
Transport
Chief Whip
Captain of Gentlemen at Arms

Welsh office
DHSS
Northern Ireland
C.D.L.
LPS
Paymaster General

**THE WIDDICOMBE REPORT ON
THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS**

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's minute of 11 June about publication of the Widdicombe Report.

The Prime Minister is content that the Report should be published on Thursday this week. She recognises the need for consultation on the wide ranging changes proposed, and agrees that this rules out fundamental legislation in the 1986-87 session. However, the Prime Minister feels that at this stage there is no need to say anything about the timing of implementation, and suggests that the draft statement should be amended so as not to tie the Government's hands.

One possibility for achieving this would be to omit the final sentence of paragraph 4 of the draft answer.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the members of "H" Committee, John Mogg (Department of Trade and Industry), Michael Saunders (Law Officers' Department), Paul Thomas (Office of Arts and Libraries), Iain Jack (Lord Advocate's Department) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

DAVID NORGROVE

Robin Young, Esq.,
Department of the Environment

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NC

CIO

CCBG
JLVBG



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

16 June 1986

NBRN

Dear Brian

WITH DN

The Lord President has seen Mr Ridley's minute of 11 June to the Prime Minister about the Widdicombe Report on the Conduct of Local Authority Business. He entirely agrees with the way Mr Ridley proposes to handle the Report, including the issue of the statement attached to the letter.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Norgrove at No 10, to the Private Secretaries to the members of H Committee, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Attorney General, the Minister for the Arts, the Lord Advocate, and Sir Robert Armstrong, and to Anthony Langdon in the Cabinet Office.

Yours sincerely,

Joan.

JOAN MACNAUGHTON
Private Secretary

Brian Leonard Esq
Private Secretary to the
Secretary of State
Department of the Environment

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CCB/f

MINISTER OF STATE, PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

PRIME MINISTER

NBPN.

16 June 1986

THE WIDDICOMBE REPORT ON THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS

Nicholas Ridley copied to me his minute to you of 11 June in which he set out his proposals for handling the Widdicombe Committee's report. WITH ON

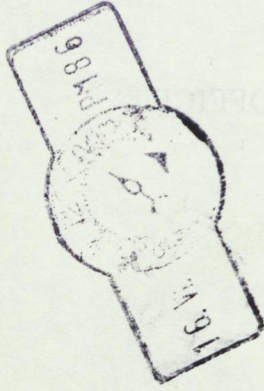
2. One aspect of the Committee's proposals that is of particular interest to me concerns the powers and jurisdiction of the local Ombudsmen. QL Committee has agreed a place in the 1986/7 legislative programme for a non-controversial Bill to extend the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to cover certain non-departmental public bodies and to make a few minor changes to the provision for his appointment and dismissal. William Waldegrave and I have already recognised the risk of pressure to expand the Bill to include provisions relating to local Ombudsmen, which would certainly make it controversial. This risk should be minimised if the government's response to Widdicombe as a whole is to provide a lengthy period of consultation before decisions on implementation are announced. I therefore support Nicholas Ridley's proposed strategy for handling the report.

3. Copies go to recipients of Nicholas's minute and to William Waldegrave.

Richard Luce

RICHARD LUCE

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MINISTER OF STATE IN CHARGE OF

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Ref. A086/1723

PRIME MINISTER

The Widdicombe Report on the Conduct of Local Authority Business

NBPN.
In Am's Box/DRN?

The minute which the Secretary of State for the Environment sent you on 11 June sets out his proposals for handling the Widdicombe Report. He notes that some of the recommendations will be controversial and therefore proposes a lengthy period of consultation, with no early implementation even of the "plums".

2. Some of the recommendations will be seen as designed to remedy abuses by local authorities which led the Government to set up the inquiry. There may therefore be an expectation on the part of the Government's supporters that there will be early action in these respects, and there could be considerable pressure to amend the Local Government Bill in the 1986-87 Session to cover some of the recommendations. The risks associated with this are not easy to assess and the judgment of how to handle them is essentially a political one: but the Department of the Environment will need to consider very carefully in preparing the Bill for next Session what scope it would offer for amendments to be put down covering Widdicombe recommendations and the plan for handling such a contingency. Subject to comments from Ministers on the Secretary of State's minute and if you are otherwise content with his proposals, a --- draft minute you might send making this point is attached.

3. One aspect of the Committee's recommendation that might attract direct comparisons between local and central government concern the duties and obligations of members and proposals for insulating staffing matters against political influence. As the Treasury and Civil Service Committee has just published its Report on Duties and Responsibilities of Civil Servants, this is

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a topical area. But I do not think there should be any great difficulty in defending the Government's position on this, since many of the safeguards needed in local government already exist in central government, backed up by Ministerial accountability to Parliament.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

16 June 1986

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DRAFT MINUTE FROM PS/PRIME MINISTER TO PS/SECRETARY
OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The Widdicombe Report on the Conduct of Local
Authority Business

Your Secretary of State's minute of 11 June to the Prime Minister set out proposals for handling the Widdicombe Committee's Report.

2. As the Secretary of State says, the report is comprehensive in the way it addresses the issues in the terms of reference and controversial in some of its recommendations. The Prime Minister thinks that the strategy of offering a long period of consultation with a view to conclusions but not implementation before the Election is a sensible one, and she is content that the Secretary of State should publish the Report with a statement on 19 June, as he proposes.

3. The Prime Minister thinks, however, that some of the Government's supporters may see certain of the recommendations as well designed to counter the abuses by local authorities that were very much in the Government's minds when the inquiry was set up.

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RTAABK

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They may therefore find it difficult to understand why the Government is not pressing ahead more quickly with implementing some of the recommendations, and the Local Government Bill in 1986-87 Session could be vulnerable to amendments that would force the Government's hand. This will need to be borne carefully in mind when that Bill is being prepared, and the Prime Minister thinks that the Secretary of State will want to consider contingency plans for handling such pressure.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to those to whom your Secretary of State's minute was copied.

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LOCAL GOVT
RELATIONS
PT 30



Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

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CABINET OFFICE,
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AS

Tel No: 233 3299
7471

13th June 1986

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley AMICS MP
Secretary of State for the Environment
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 3EB

D. Nicholas

THE WIDDICOMBE REPORT ON THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS

Thank you for the copy of your minute of 11 June to the Prime Minister.

I agree that the nature and extent of the recommendations raise issues which will not be straightforward; would entail long and complex legislation, much of it controversial; and would have far-reaching implications for the conduct of local authority politics and business.

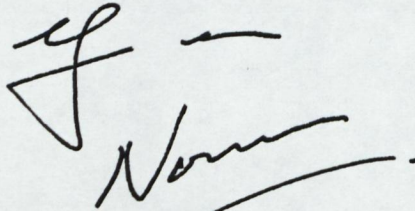
I therefore concur with your view that there should be an early publication and that your statement should invite views, but not go any further as regards our substantive view on the recommendations. I wonder whether you might go a little further than you do at the end of paragraph 4 of your statement, however. The Report makes very clear that they regard the recommendations as closely inter-related and a whole package. It is partly because of the strength of this view that it would be very difficult for us to deal with specific points in early legislation, although we did do so in the earlier context of local authority publicity. I should be inclined therefore to draw upon this strong view of the Committee, when making it clear that no early implementation is practicable.

We should also take the opportunity which the publication of the Report and the subsequent debate offers to draw further attention to abuses of public position, funds and patronage by left-wing authorities.

I note that you propose a group of officials. While I cannot be represented, I should be glad to be given the opportunity to see

the conclusions of that group at appropriate points, and to have an opportunity to provide my comments to it.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister, members of H, Paul Channon, Michael Havers, Richard Luce, Kenny Cameron, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Norman Tebbit', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

NORMAN TEBBIT

LOCAL GOVT
RELATIONS
PT 30



PRIME MINISTER

13 June 1986

WIDDICOMBE REPORT ON CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS

Nicholas Ridley provides a fair summary of the main conclusions of this important Report. I suggest you stick to his summary, as the Report itself makes pretty stodgy reading.

Together with rates reform, these proposals would establish local government democracy and administration on a much sounder footing than ever before. Elected councils would have to conduct their business according to statutory rules of procedure. Political interference in the executive arm of the council could be eliminated by bringing to local government the sort of rules that civil servants adhere to. The local authority Chief Executive, the local Ombudsman, and the Audit Commission all have their powers increased so as to act as a check on abuses by local authorities.

The proposals will be controversial. The increased authority of the Chief Executive might stop Lambeth misbehaving, but also risks upsetting the cosy arrangements in Cirencester which few people may want to change. The proposals are also complicated and detailed. Nicholas Ridley is therefore right to invite comments on the Report and to accept that it will not be possible to legislate all of it in 1986-87.

But I believe he (and Norman Tebbit) go too far in ruling out the option of picking out a few plums and adding them to the

Local Government Bill proposed for the 1986-87 Session:

- a. Conservative supporters who have been protesting at abuses for years will be disappointed if there is no prospect of remedying them until after the next Election.
- b. The Labour Party is divided on local authority abuses. (Jack Cunningham is more sympathetic to reform than, say, David Blunkett.) This is good ground for the Government to fight on.

Possible candidates for earlier implementation are:

- Ending the abuse of co-option (Peter Davis was elected to Lambeth Council and found himself sitting on a committee with a Labour candidate he had defeated).
- Disqualifying senior council employees from also being councillors.
- Registering the pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests of councillors.
- Properly accounting for grants to voluntary bodies.
- Strengthening district audit and the local Ombudsman.

There is no need to decide on any plums at this stage. But

paragraph 4 of Nicholas Ridley's draft Parliamentary Answer limits our options more than is necessary. It reads: "We shall be looking for substantive responses by the end of this year. It will not be practicable, given the scope and range of the proposals, to contemplate early implementation". At the very least, the last sentence should go. Could the consultation period also be shortened to end October?

I therefore recommend that David Norgrove write to DoE saying:

i. You agree to the publication of the Widdicombe Report next week.

Yes

ii. You recognise the need for consultation on the wide-ranging changes proposed, and this rules out fundamental legislation in the 1986-87 Session.

Yes

iii. But you hope that it will be possible to consider whether some measures might be implemented in 1986-87, and therefore paragraph 4 of the draft Parliamentary Answer should be revised so as to keep this option open.

no need to say anything

Point do not tie our hands

David Willetts

DAVID WILLETTS

PRIME MINISTER

WIDDICOMBE

Mr. Ridley proposes to publish the Widdicombe Report next Thursday, 19 June. His statement will be entirely neutral, simply welcoming the Report and inviting discussion. He would ask for comments by the end of the year. He rules out early legislation on all of it or selected "plums" either in 1986/87 or in 1987/88.

Mr. Tebbit is also against early legislation and I understand that Lord Whitelaw shares that view, in part because he wants to avoid a spill-over session in the autumn of 1987.

David Willetts questions these views in his minute below. He suggests that the Parliamentary statement limits the options unnecessarily and that nothing should be said about the timing of implementation.

If you wanted to pursue David's proposal I think you would need to hold a short meeting.

Do you want to consider with the colleagues concerned the possibility of implementation of some of the proposals during the course of this Parliament?

DNS
(DAVID NORGROVE)

13 June 1986

*Do not need to
say anything about legislation.*