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My ref:

Your ref:

Prime Minister²
Bernard has already
described this to you. It
deserves a warm welcome. 10 July 1987

All round effort by
Ministers will be particularly
important.

John 10/7.

Dear David,

REFORM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

Thank you for your letter of 2 July about the need to put across the case for the reform of local government finance more effectively. Sir Terry Heiser and our Director of Information have since discussed this with Bernard Ingham, as suggested, and also Neville Taylor, the Director of COI.

My Secretary of State has concluded - and Bernard Ingham agrees - that it would be better not to establish a separate unit to carry this forward because the Local Government Bill now in the House contains provisions directed against the use of ratepayers' money for party political purpose. The establishment of a separate 'propaganda' unit - as it would inevitably be called - would afford too easy a target for the Opposition and is therefore undesirable.

My Secretary of State has decided instead that as effective a way of providing resources for supporting Ministers will be to re-order priorities within the framework of existing Departmental machinery. He proposes therefore that the Director of Information will directly supervise a strengthened local government team. This will be led by an Assistant Secretary, and consist of an administrative Principal, and a Principal information Officer backed by a team of Information Officers.

They will operate in co-operation with Chris Brearley, the local government finance divisions and the political advisers. As Local Government Minister, Mr Howard will provide the steer. Clearly they will also liaise with Bernard Ingham - who agrees with these proposals - and for whose offer of assistance the Department is very grateful.

That said, the Prime Minister will be aware that the Department faces an extraordinarily heavy and growing workload in presentation on housing, water privatisation and inner cities policies. We would like to strengthen the Information Directorate urgently to cope with this. Neville Taylor is looking at the staffing implications.

*Not attached
Plan this*

By using this concentration of resources, my Secretary of State believes that we can work up an effective campaign. Bernard Ingham has already seen and largely endorsed a draft outline of our proposals. A copy is attached. We will also be able to provide all the necessary material for use by Ministers and Government backbenchers.

Our recollections of the similar problems which the Government faced on rate-capping and abolition of the metropolitan counties in 1983/84 leads my Secretary of State to endorse strongly the Prime Minister's suggestion that Ministers and backbench colleagues must actively support us. Then, the briefing material was provided but, sadly, was rarely used. My Secretary of State and Mr Howard are already arranging to see selected groups of Government backbenchers to explain the proposals in detail.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours, to Bernard Ingham (No 10) and Neville Taylor (COI).

*Yours sincerely
R U Young*

R U YOUNG PP.
Private Secretary

RATE REFORM PROGRESS MEETING: PRESENTATION

I promised the Minister at last week's meeting a paper on presentation, looking at both the short-term, and the run up to publication of the Bill.

This now has to be set in the context of last week's E(LF) meeting. Until we are clearer on details we will have to continue to make as much of the broad thrust of policy, commitment, dire prospects of alternatives etc as Ministers have been doing since the Election.

Possible Pinch Points between now and Recess

- Second Reading of Local Government Bill
- DOE Top for Questions on 15 July
- RSG Settlement announcement
- PM's PQ's
- more backbench unrest
- shift away from backbenchers to other, potentially as embarrassing rows, with, for example, the Church on the position of monks and nuns. (The Universe has already carried a stinging article. Mr Howard has tackled the broad criticisms on BBC Radio 4 'Sunday' programme).

Action from now until Recess

We should:

- continue to accept all media invitations which provide the opportunity to press home the case (this may at some point have to include confrontations with opponents).
- ensure that Ministers/backbenchers have speaking notes/bull points for use on constituency platforms/local radio interviews etc.
- set up interviews with Mr Howard for Local Government Chronicle and Municipal Journal on the Monday or Tuesday of the week beginning 13 July (The Minister has agreed to this in principle). They will want to talk about his broad responsibilities as Local Government Minister, but of course rate reform will be a centre-piece. Their readerships are the informed professionals in the local authority world.
- continue to provide non-attributable briefings for journalists. Mr Ward and Mr Adams have been an enormous help, and it would be useful to continue this facility.

- continue to set up Ministerial briefings/lunches with both national and regional lobby correspondents.
- explore prospects of developing Ministerial visits to include meetings with local media eg over breakfast or lunchtime drinks (This should form part of longer term strategy).

The details of Mr Howard's appearance on Channel 4's 'A week in Politics' on Friday 10 July will be sewn up early this week. A three minute introduction will be followed by an eight minute interview with either Nick Ross or Sue Cameron.

The Minister agreed that it would be useful to update the 'idiot's guide' to the Green Paper. This is in hand.

August

August is a dead month in terms of both political interest and Ministerial engagements. We might best use this time to begin preparing and planning the material needed for an Autumn assault leading up to publication of the Bill.

September

Stories about non-earning housewives having to pay will excite the interest of women's magazines. Ministers should consider giving interviews to a series of them eg Woman, Company, Cosmopolitan, Woman's Own.

We might also usefully, through the Regional Information Officers (RIOs) stimulate telephone interviews with the more important local radio stations for their early morning news/mid morning news and views programmes. These would involve five to ten minutes of Ministers' time for each interview. Mr Chope has already dealt with a similar sort of thing for BBC Radio Northampton. They would provide the opportunity to hammer home the important messages. This could result in 30 plus interviews across the country. If Ministers agree, we could split them between Mr Howard and Mr Chope.

Timing of announcement for detailed arrangements/transition.

Plus party conferences.

Ministers are to discuss presentation of details. If done too soon before party conferences it will leave opponents with time to marshall their arguments. If done during Conservative Party Conference the details would no doubt please some and disappoint others. But there would be a captive audience of journalists at conference and Ministers would be able to take the opportunity to brief intensively.

We need also to consider the action necessary should criticisms arise from the other party conferences. We should be ready with instant responses, which should include Ministers giving interviews. (This may well lead to confrontation type interviews, but would need to be done so that the Government's case does not go by default).

October to Return to House

As soon as Party Conferences are over, in the very short time allowed before the House returns (21 October) I would recommend that Ministers 'go on the road' to the regions.

Once the detailed arrangements are in the public domain we need to influence opinion formers in the Regional media - they will be more important to us than any good piece written in one of the nationals.

Mr Howard and Mr Chope should host a series of drinks/buffet suppers in hotels in each of the main news centres (Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, London). The RIOs are best placed to invite on our behalf editors from leading newspapers, radio and television for welcome drinks, semi-formal address by Minister, Question and answer session, ending with informal buffet supper, giving Ministers the opportunity to circulate.

We will gain much from going to the regions to sell our case. We will be seen to be making the necessary effort to inform local people and show that we are prepared to tackle head on difficult issues. (A little massaging of local media egos does no harm).

If Ministers agree in principle, we will look into the prospect of providing a travelling display. We would also need to provide up to date press packs with detailed information and speech notes/quotes. Mr Bendon is prepared to cost this sort of exercise.

The obvious difficulty is the shortness of time available between conference ending and the House resuming. If Ministers agree, we may find ourselves having to do a one-week whistle stop tour of the regions. And those we can't fit in would have to be done before publication of the Bill.

Immediately before publication of the Bill, Ministers should brief provincial lobby journalists to remind them of the Government's policy.

On publication Ministers should hold a large scale press conference and be prepared to give interviews to both radio and television news and current affairs programmes.

Further consideration to presentation will no doubt be given following publication of the Bill.

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10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

13 July 1987

Dear Bob,

REFORM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to me of 10 July with its attachment and warmly welcomes this programme for putting across the Government's case on the reform of local government finance. She agrees that an all-round effort by Ministers will be particularly important and will be prepared to urge colleagues to speak out if this seems necessary to your Secretary of State.

I am copying this letter to Steven Wood (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office), Bernard Ingham (No.10) and Neville Taylor (COI).

Jm,

David

(DAVID NORGROVE)

Robin Young, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

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