

The GLC Story Oral History Project

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Date of interview: 22nd April 2017

Location: London

VO: Neil, would you like to tell me a little bit about your background preceding your involvement with the Inner London Education Authority?

NF: (01:00) I won't go through my entire life story you'll be pleased to know but I came from the North of England. Born in Blackpool, lived in Bolton, lived in Leicester, and then came to start university course in London in the early 1960s. I moved out finished off the work and studies that I was doing in Leeds, but I came down to London where I've stayed ever since, without any movement at all, in 1970.

I'd done teaching in schools and in colleges, and I got a job working in colleges, in a college in London. I taught in the London boroughs of Harrow and Merton, North London as well as South London, but never part of the Inner London boroughs at all, I nearly did. Interesting to think what might have happened if I had gone and got a job working in one of the Inner London boroughs or one of the colleges in London. I would have been disqualified from being an elected member of the Inner London Education Authority but I didn't so I got on to Camden council in 1978. I was elected for the first time and within a year I was representing the borough council on ILEA, which was a surprise as it wasn't anything I'd planned. It was a vacancy I went for and got it. That's when it all started really, so 1979 until 1990, 11 years. I was a member initially just representing the borough of Camden, London, and seeing that their interests were represented.

In 1981 I was already good friends with colleague and political ally Ken Livingstone. And when Ken became leader of the GLC I was on the ILEA. But once Ken became leader we had a big shake-up, new members came on, it became much more left-wing and I was one of those supporters of Ken's. The first meeting in 1981 came as Ken's election as leader of the GLC. I got a job working for ILEA and I was chair of the Further and Higher Education Committee, which in size terms made it a rather smaller lesser significant committee, than the schools committee. But having said that I mean there were 1200 schools, so if you were chair of the schools committee, you looked after 1200 schools.

In some ways it was the best years of my life because it meant looking after funding, managing and overseeing an enormous area of London's interest in education, for example, there were 5 polytechnics that are now universities. So we were running, and I chaired the committee that ran 5 universities, I can't imagine today anybody running 5 universities. If you're chair of governors or chair of a committee of a university that's a big job, I had 5; I had 2 teacher training colleges as well and that's just for starters because we had I think 35 further education colleges spread across the 12 or 13 boroughs. When I say 12 or 13 boroughs there were 12 inner London boroughs plus the City Incorporation of London which is very small but significant, and perhaps I can come back to that, they were important in funding, but nevertheless across those 12 to 13 boroughs there were 35 colleges, there was also the adult education services that came on my watch as was the career service and various other things too, so I mean it was an enormous area of responsibility always regarded as less important than the schools. I taught in schools, schools are important, but to me the further and higher education remit was just superb. I couldn't really believe it. That gets me as far as talking about how I got involved, and that's my first job on the ILEA, I can talk a bit more about that or we can go on to later when I became the leader of it during the last few years before it was abolished. I've got us on to the question of why ILEA was so successful, my area was FMHE that's the shorthand for it. It was a great job (5.46).

VO: Could you speak a little bit about the political situation as well around that time?

NF: I can talk about the political situation in London, I can talk about it nationally as well. And in the end the national politics prevailed which is in a sense down the road a little bit from where we are at the moment but certainly we were abolished because of the political aspirations and ambitions of

Margaret Thatcher. But in terms of the politics of the GLC and the ILEA when I became involved, it had always been and I think was always likely to have been run by the Labour party simply the composition it still survives today in London and is very much a Labour focussed city, and in those days it was even more so I think, than perhaps today but nevertheless, all of the boroughs with one or two exceptions were run or dominated or controlled shall I say, by the Labour party, by the Labour councils. Westminster wasn't, Kensington and Chelsea wasn't and Wandsworth wasn't, those were the 3 but all the other ones, seven of them, the City Incorporation always made a big fuss about not being run by one party and then another, but as far as I was concerned, it was a very wealthy city, and by and large they tended to take the Tory line, but it wasn't a conservative council.

I enjoyed the politics of working with colleagues from all the other Inner London boroughs, it was good to know that we had lots of money. We were the most well-funded local education authority anywhere in the country, and I think, I've not the statistics in front of me to prove it, it was said to me one time that the ILEA was the best funded local authority in Europe. We got a very large amount of money which we thought was well justified because we thought sending it on the poorest community in the United Kingdom, London, still is a very poor city, it's also wealthy and affluent in some parts, but there are many parts of London you can get to and you can see real poverty and real desperation, and the education service is absolutely crucial, if we're going to help people to get out of their poverty, and become more prosperous, and get more jobs, and get more qualifications and so on. So that was the political scenario that I became involved with, but I'd been a teacher, I'd been a lecturer, I was aware of social class, I joined the Labour Party years beforehand. I'd got previous political interests in Trotskyist movements but that was behind me. I think I joined the Labour Party in 1985 and started to work to win Labour control, to implement Labour Party policy, which I still do [as] I'm a Labour Party member. (8:55)

VO: Would you be able to talk a little bit more about your personal politics and your relationship to politics?

NF: (9:10) Well I don't inherit anything from my family, my father worked in local government and he never said a political word in my hearing at all, so I didn't inherit a Labour Party culture or tradition but I had good friends when I was at school. We talked politics, we talked about the need for change, we believed in I suppose, revolutionary politics. We thought it was perhaps possible to transform British society by taking control of it, turning it over, and taking power away from the wealthy, the affluent, and handing it over to ordinary people. It wasn't quite to be but nevertheless, there was a campaign, a battle to be fought which is why politics was always attractive to me. I believed we were doing something that was going to serve the interest of the large number of people and large families living in cities like London struggling to make a living, needing help, needing support, and needing to get their exams passed, and needing to get their qualifications obtained that would get them good jobs that would allow them to earn a decent living. And hopefully get involved in their local parties and help campaign as well so that was in a sense my background. I'd got friends, I'd developed friends through the Labour Party in London. I'd had friends in political circles up in the North of England, in Leeds, where I'd been living just before I'd come to London. But yes to me there were big issues, big challenges and going back to [before] the 1980s talking about a time when Labour was in opposition. When I'd first went on to Camden council in 1978 there was a Labour government, it had one year to go, and it was starting to be difficult perhaps, for the Labour party, to fund the projects, fund the services: the health, local government and education, that it would have liked to have done. There'd been various national crises, which we're quite familiar with these days. But that was the last year of the Labour government in 1979 when I'd been on Camden council for one year only. There was a general election and Margaret Thatcher was elected, I think That changed/transformed the landscape of politics ever since. (11:37)

VO: Would you be able to talk about the relationship to ILEA and the GLC?

NF: (12:00) I think in terms of overall policies we were of the same mind, we believed it was necessary to transform society. I think it's fair to say that in terms of the policies that the Labour Party pursues these days, we were already doing it. I always used to think when we went up to Sheffield or Birmingham or other parts of the country for national conferences we were regarded as being progressive, for example we had a commitment to equal opportunities, we had a commitment to women's rights, we wanted to see women in jobs. I remember my commitment was really to do the same thing in my area in the further and higher field. I think I appointed probably between 10 and 12 principals of further education colleges that were women and I am proud of that. They were the best candidates obviously but they were perhaps more frequently overlooked in other areas in parts of the country. ILEA had that real commitment, we also appointed people from ethnic minorities into senior positions, I enjoyed that this is, it seemed to me, what London was all about and why I still live in London. I enjoy that culture, that community spirit and I think what London was all about. On its own sometimes, but yeah we were doing that in those days and I enjoyed very much the opportunity to work in terms of pushing the barriers and making sure that we were trying to identify the community groups that were under pressure, that were not succeeding well.

We used to look very carefully on the ILEA relative success stories in terms of exam passes of kids with different social backgrounds. It wasn't true to say that, if you like, all the community black kids did badly and the white kids did well, that actually wasn't the way it was at all. There were some of the ethnic minority communities who did particularly well, who succeeded better than the white working class communities. So you had kids from India, kids from China, kids from Sri Lanka who did really well and they performed at the top of the, if you like, league table, A-levels, O-levels, or GCSEs as they are now called, different name same sort of examinations. The largest proportion of these kids who went off to university when they 18 or 19, who were successful at all of those 3 levels, tended to come from the, if you like, more successful communities in London. You then got some of the white communities, some of the white European communities who did pretty well.

At the bottom of the league table were perhaps Bangladeshi kids, kids from Pakistan, tended to find it difficult perhaps they were the most recent arrivals in London and their families were perhaps struggling a wee bit more than some of the African communities as well as the ones I've mentioned, but what we did have was a situation that at the very bottom of the league table, the charts, were the white working class kids, sadly that still is the case today and I think statistically, I can't quote you them here, but if you look at the success stories from kids, I think the test is the free school meals, but then look at the kids who are on free school meals i.e. from poor families and you look at the white working class kids or the white kids amongst that group then you will find that they do particularly badly at those classic examinations, the tests that are set, the Ofsted tests, and also the GCSE and A-level exam, which is a pity but it means that there is something still to campaign for, to improve, to spend money. The government we've got at the moment doesn't want to spend money but what we should be doing is spending even more money educating those communities. (16:08)

VO: So GLCs interest in ILEA was what?

NF: (16:14) GLC didn't have any involvement in education at all. The education service in London actually goes back to 1870 and the London school board which was established in 1890 was responsible initially for setting up and founding schools in inner London for kids from poor backgrounds. And the London school board then became the London county council in, I think, 1905 and it was the London county council that carried on for the rest of the century running the education, obviously running more schools, but there was a legal requirement to provide an education for all London kids, there hadn't been before 1870 but after 1870 it became the law of the

land that there were proper education for kids certainly up until the age of 11 and then a bit later 13, 14, 15 and now of course it's gone up until 18, but those were commitments that were carried out in London by the London county council.

The London county council was abolished but then was immediately replaced by the GLC, struggling to be precise about year it was but it was in the 1970s that that happened, and you then had 12 or 13 boroughs which ran all the services other than education. They ran all the big services like transport, like housing, fire services and so on but they didn't run the education service because it had been run by the London school board and it was felt that the outer London boroughs were running education but all the 12 or 13 inner London boroughs didn't do education it was done for them by the school board and then by ILEA. So it's a significant bit of history that the borough councils do now run education in their own borough but that's only since 1990, before then they had had no involvement in running the schools. (18:46)

VO: How was ILEA administered?

NF: (19:30) Actually legally ILEA was a special committee of the GLC, that said it was a simple technical, well almost legal description. The GLC had no legal powers over education at all. All the members who were elected in to the GLC, those who came from London constituencies were on the ILEA automatically. So if you came from Camden, or Southwark or Westminster, on the GLC you were also on the ILEA that was a matter of fact from the start of the ILEA and remained so right until the end. In addition to those maybe 40 or even up to 50 members of the GLC, who served on ILEA from the inner London constituencies, each of the 13 London boroughs nominated one person each to serve on the ILEA so that there was a link between the borough councils and ILEA and working closely with the GLC members. I was initially fortunate to be in Camden council, I lived in Camden council, I was a councillor already and I was able to be the Camden representative on ILEA from 1979, and I stayed on as the Camden member until 1986 which was the year that the GLC was abolished. The government had a problem what was it going to do about ILEA, they were abolishing the GLC or clearly they were planning what to do but the argument was the ILEA was too important, too powerful, too significant and spent so much money that it was best to leave it in place but to set it up on its own local authority. So technically rather than being a subcommittee of the GLC we became from 1986 to 1990 we became a separate local authority. I think and I would need to check the books on this that we became the biggest local authority in the United Kingdom. I think in terms of the number of people we employed, we employed over 120,000 people.

We had a large number of schools to look after and colleges as well, polytechnics too. There was an awful lot to do, our budget was about half a billion pounds which in those days was a phenomenal amount of money, it really was a privilege to spend it to look after the schools and polytechnics and be responsible for the public funding of them all.

VO: What were the kinds of things you were using the money for?

NF: (22:53) Well schools tend to run themselves, we used to have divisions so all the schools were in divisions according to, not necessarily the borough boundaries that we have today but the same kind of areas, whereby we had 10 divisions and I think those divisions were looked after at a local level by officers that had their own divisor. Schools and polytechnics and the adult's education and the youth service were not really divided up and managed in a borough based way, we ran them from county hall. We had teams of officers, we had teams of inspectors and they're job was to go out and inspect the polytechnics and give help and support and if necessary sort out problems which occasionally

arose in any organisation so that was the sort of relationship that we had. If we go back to when I started in 1979, I think that the politics were extreme as I hinted at earlier, was very extremely left wing by those standards, not to say that we were doing things that were irresponsible many of the things that we were doing many of the plans that we had, these days would be regarded as being very normal. Those days some of the things we were talking about; working with ethnic minorities spending extra money providing support to families that were struggling and actually providing far more teachers per school so that kids were in smaller classes than anywhere else in the country one of the enormous things I'm proud of is how successful we were just as one of the members, I can't take any personal credit for it.

We were proud that we did spend so much on our schools and employed some of the best teachers in the country and the kids benefitted from it and when it was all abolished I think it was really setting the clock back and unfortunately the kids that suffered from that, and I suspect that many are still suffering today, because they didn't benefit from the kind of largesse, the wealth, the spending power and I think the political power the inner London education authority had.

VO: Is there anything you wished you'd done differently at the time?

NF: (25:20) That's a big question. I don't think there were significant problems that I think I got wrong, there may have been this or that decision. We were responsible for handing out large amounts of awards, we gave lots of grants to kids to go off to university and adults as well where it wasn't actually the law of the land that we as a local authority could give out grants for adults to go off to university or get qualifications, but we did, we called them discretionary grants and awards. That was very important, in terms of things that we got wrong, I guess we made the odd mistake in giving someone a grant or award who shouldn't have. I think there were some examples where people would pretend that they lived in inner London so that they could apply for a discretionary grant but it was doing something that was probably wrong but for a good reason.

As far as some of the reorganisations were concerned there may have been things that we could have done differently. I don't know whether you want me to talk about it or not but one of the big reviews that I conducted when I became chair of the further and higher education committee in 1981, carried on for 6 years doing that. I said I wanted to review the way that the further and polytechnic colleges were organised I wasn't sure that we were doing it in the right way, for example, were they overlapping doing the same subjects that could be done differently and there were concerns that we needed to look at some of the art and design colleges, which some people were saying we had too many in inner London and actually what we did was have a review. I set it up, I chaired it and I think sometimes perhaps one of the more significant things I did, was chairing that review of further education, colleges and polytechnics. But we created something which is now University of the Arts. I chaired the review that brought together 7 different art colleges, that was phenomenal, there was a lot of opposition, that each the colleges resisted being merged, they didn't want to be merged. Chelsea didn't want to be merged with Central, St Martins didn't want to be merged and so on, there was London College of Fashion there was London College of Communications (that's using today's term), the College of the Distributive Trades, there was a meat college and it was a real struggle getting them to merge. I mean we had the power to do it, we did it, and did they want it to happen? No. were they wrong? Yes, was I right? Yes. And the merged colleges were something that became the London Institute from 1987 onwards and I chaired the governing body of London Institute when it came into existence in due course it became the University of the Arts which is what it is now, and I think it became a very successful London based university and I take great pride in it still, I go to things that I have no responsibilities to anymore, I'm not on the governing body. That was one of the achievements that the ILEA done that nobody else could have done. These days if you want to merge 2 colleges it's God's own job, I meant the

resistance is enormous so the idea that we merged 7 and added a couple on later, they squealed, they didn't want it to happen but we said that we are going to do it, and we did, and I think it was a success. If you go to the University of the Arts and you talk to students, people who work there, vice chancellors I think they all think it was a great step forward. I take a lot of pleasure from that and I take a little bit of pride. (29:24)

VO: Can you share your perspective on the GLC, its workings, policies and its events?

NF: (30:05) I wasn't a member of the GLC but many of the people on my committee that I worked with at the ILEA were. Like I said there was a possibility that you could be a borough member of ILEA but nevertheless we shared county hall, we used the same offices, we talked together, we went to the same canteens together, we went to meetings and I served on various GLC committee meetings and of course the GLC members that were in inner London boroughs were in ILEA as well so we were one big happy family. I think there was a good degree of commonality even understanding between people in different parties, we weren't fighting each other. It was recognised that the GLC from 1981 onwards was controlled by Ken Livingstone, controlled by a very determined, and to use the jargon of the press, a very left wing council. I was very proud to be involved in it, I think it was the most progressive local authority in the country, and I think the ILEA shared exactly in that position and I don't think there has ever been and there probably never will be a progressive authority to begin to compare with the GLC and the ILEA in those times.

If you want me to say why it was, I think we did challenge some of the assumptions that local government made nationally about the rights and power about provincial or middle class people, presumably in the most cases, white men, from running services. We actually stood that on its head and I think at that time that was the GLC and ILEA equally both shared the commitment to London people. If you're voted for as a councillor by a mixed multi-racial community you've got to serve their interests, you've got to look after them, all of them, all groups, and not just the interests of rich white people, of course I want to make sure that they get everything they can out of education but I'm also gonna make sure that struggling groups within society are looked after are protected are assisted are educated, trained and helped to get into university. I think we did that. Somebody once said to me that if you took all of the kids that had been through ILEA schools and ILEA college and were at university they could fill Stamford Bridge football ground. At any one time people used to say it was a waste of public money it's too rich, it's too extravagant, it spends too much money, but what we were doing was a filling a football ground with Londoners who were getting university degrees and going on to get good jobs, or jobs, I hope they did well at least they had a chance and I think it was that positive discrimination. Standing out against those racists and working with Tories. There were some Tories that I liked and got on with that shared some of our aspirations and ambitions but they wouldn't have done it if they had been in power it's because we were in power and had the backing of the communities and we the backing of the London Labour Parties and they shared everything that we did. It wasn't a battle, the battle was with central government and in the end central government won, and we were abolished. (33:34)

VO: Can you speak a little bit about that time when the GLC was abolished and ILEA went on?

NF: (33:50) Well it was very very difficult, very very painful. We were, certainly all of the elected Labour councillors of the GLC and the ILEA, were horrified and appalled that in spite of a campaign that Ken Livingstone had led, a great campaign to save the GLC, he failed in the end. I don't believe there was a sensible reason for abolishing the GLC other than political stupid prejudice on the part of Margaret Thatcher and her friends. I don't apologise for saying that, I think it's a matter of simple facts if you look at what happened after the GLC was abolished. In the end of course, 20 years later or so, they reinvented the London Assembly, and of course the London Assembly was in its earlier

form the GLC. If it made sense then to create the London Assembly, which of course Ken Livingstone went on and he became the Mayor of London, but he'd been the leader of the GLC some 10-15 years before. There were people who said well haven't we been here before but nevertheless that was what had happened. It was personal spite on behalf of Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet abolishing the GLC. It was difficult for the ILEA to carry on because we were losing our people, we were losing lots of our staff because they served both authorities, we did have people who had expertise in buildings, salaries and recruitment and other office areas, we had the education experts, and the GLC didn't have them nevertheless we were of the same cloth.

We were working together with the GLC when they were around and I think it was clear that they were going to be abolished from about 1984 onward so there was 2 years when they were preparing for the end. We knew we were going to be going on, on a different elected basis but nevertheless the ILEA was going to continue. It was a setback for most of our aspirations. It would have been much better to have a GLC alongside us cos we did work well together, it was a time when it was in question whether we were going to be able to stay in County Hall and then in 1990 it was sold off as a hotel, it was paid for by the ratepayers of London, County Hall was built by you and our, and our predecessors money. It was a London funded project built on the Southbank, splendid building, what it is now is a hotel making money for rich people and that stinks as far as I am concerned.

But we were nevertheless doing our best to continue making sure to keep the ILEA going and the traditions. I think we did a good job and when the GLC was abolished we got stuck in and it became a matter for all the councillors, there were some conservatives as well on the Inner London Education Authority and our job was to keep the tradition going, keep the spirit going, keep the policies alive and make sure if we could that we kept the traditions of the GLC going in the educational field. I think we did a good job of that but of course Margaret Thatcher decided we had to go as well. (37:44)

VO: Can you tell us why the ILEA had to go after the GLC?

NF: (37:48) Well, Margaret Thatcher, had been PM since 1979 and we are now talking about 1986. We carried on I was elected from 1986 and all the other councillors were elected by parliamentary constituencies so I was elected by Holborn and St. Pancras electors so it was the same parliamentary constituency as Frank Dobson, who was the MP for of that constituency in parliament. We carried on we fought hard but nevertheless I think it was clear that Margaret Thatcher was under pressure from some of her Tory friends to abolish us. I think it was for no good reason, I think it was for spite and because spent a lot of money and they thought we were spending money on working class people and middle class people we were not spending it on the rich. Of course people in Kensington, most of the people who'd got kids in Kensington and Chelsea send their kids to private schools they're paying their rates to County Hall but actually they were paying for their own kids education themselves, same was true in Westminster and the same was true to some extent in Wandsworth, there were other boroughs as well but it was those ones that had gone to the biggest number, the biggest size, that were paying for an education service that they didn't use.

There was an election in 1987, and during the general election campaign, Margaret Thatcher and her manifesto said what they would do was allow boroughs to opt-out and in others the ILEA would continue but if any of those 13 local authorities decide to opt-out and become their own education authorities she would let them. That was in the Queen's speech in 1987 when the Tories won the general election again, interestingly though once the bill was published mid 1987 which was going to reform the education service it was clear that some of Margaret Thatcher's backbenchers wanted her to go for abolition. (40:25)

We fought and we campaigned against it, we didn't want to lose Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, we didn't want to lose them at all we didn't want them to have the right to opt out. But at least if they had done the rest of the inner London boroughs, the labour controlled boroughs would have continued and would have run the education service. But once Margaret Thatcher was ganged up on there were two prominent members of Parliament who were responsible, one was called Michael Heseltine and the other one was called Norman Tenant, they are still around they still crop up on television, from time to time different political persuasions within the Tory Party but they signed an amendment which moved to add to the Queen's Speech or add to the Education Reform Act that the government should go for outright abolition and that really was the final straw, and marked the, I think the beginning of the end. I became leader in 1987 and replaced Frances Morell as leader, she was not popular, it was clear she was losing support within the Labour councillors, the Labour group didn't like [Frances] and I was elected to replace her as leader. So for 3 years I lead it but unfortunately for two of those three years it was very clear that we were going to be abolished, and indeed the last year was one of the most miserable of my life, because basically I was simply preparing to hand over the Education Service to the London boroughs. Whilst they of course were saying on the one hand that it was outrageous that ILEA was being abolished, privately they were licking their lips and thinking that it would be good to get our hands on all that money, and get our hands on the Education Service and run schools in our own boroughs. They'd never had run schools in their own boroughs before but, they thought it was very exciting and a great opportunity. I guess I can understand that but I don't sympathize with them, but nevertheless once it was down to the fact that we were felt that we were going to be abolished come 1988, the Education Reform Act that Kenneth Baker was responsible for bringing through the House of Commons, eventually the House of Commons and the House of Lords, in spite of all that we had done to campaign as hard as we could we were abolished in the House of Commons. And that meant effectively we had to years to go two years that we would you to be abolished, and we were abolished on the 31st of of March, in 1990, at which point ILEA came to an end, my political career came to an end, it was all over, and the boroughs took over, a very sad moment. Not making a personal point but very sad for Londoners Education Service which had been around, had been together, had been United since 1870 (43:32)

VO: So you had two years to prepare for the end of ILEA how did you prepare?

NF: (44:05) I think the heart had gone out of the elected members. They knew that what their job was to stay around, not to plan but to improve the Education Service over the next five or ten years, which of course politicians like doing. Yes there's this week, this year, there's the opportunities to get things done, but the big things, the big issues, whether its housing, whether it's travel, transport, are the projects that run ahead over five or ten years into the future and that's why politicians I think are often misrepresented and misunderstood.

But nevertheless they have to do those things and take the long view to be around in London and to be around in running the Education Service over the next 5 years or 10 years and start to think about the schools, and think about the colleges, thinking about the way you should be training your teachers, the way you should be helping your kids to qualify and go in to colleges, and go into 6th forms (45:02) and then go on to university or going to colleges and get qualifications that will get them jobs. All of that is the big picture and what happened in 1988 once the Education Reform Act had passed was that it disappeared off the screen. We no longer could start to think beyond March 1990 and that meant we just focused on doing what we could. I think we did a good job I think none of us liked, it I certainly didn't like it, going to meetings with the leaders of 12 London boroughs and telling them what I thought they should be doing in order to get ready to take on of what I said was 100,000 employees. If an average borough had perhaps 70, 80 or even more schools that was a big job if you'd never run a school before, you take on 90 at one go in one sitting big problems, so all I

could do was try to help our staff our inspectors and our offices to work with all of the boroughs so that they could be almost trained and inducted in what they would do to manage the schools, and everything from managing them appointing them checking their credentials seeing that they were being managed properly being sure that you were in touch with the head teachers, and your conscious that the head teachers need inspectors to go in and help them run their school and help them. And also you are wanting to make sure that you've got systems in place to pay wages, to check qualifications to run the schools, to employ the groundskeepers, to employ the school caretakers and so on and so forth, all of that brand new job and 2 years was not really enough. But they all did fairly well I think by the time 1990, 1st of April came along most of the borough councils had got prepared and were able to pick it up and start running with it but it was a long learning curve for them. I think the schools suffered I think they still suffer, simply because they don't have that great historical culture of support and tradition, of a great Education Authority, perhaps the biggest Education Authority in Europe and I think to have abolished that was an act of sabotage, it was a desperately sad thing to happen and I think it set back education in London a long way. This isn't to say it's bad at the moment, there are some good things, there are some good schools, there are some good people, there's been various campaigns to help improve education in London and these days I think London schools look fairly good when you look at them on the map when you look at statistics. Many of the schools in London are doing pretty well but I bet they're not doing as well as would have done if the old traditions of the London school board and the inner London Education Authority continued.

VO: What is the legacy of the GLC and ILEA, where are you at now with it?

NF: I don't have any close involvement these days my own kids have grown up and I've now got grandchildren and schools so I'm interested in seeing what's happening what's going on I keep my ear to the ground. I have no involvement and don't wish to be involved closely in it anymore on a political basis although I do go to Labour Party meetings and argue for the kind of policies that I still believe are important and I don't have a problem doing that within the Labour Party I think that the Labour Party stand very much in the same places as it did before, certainly the London Education Authority. I think there have been other changes of funding of education is now very different, the money goes straight to the schools. I think that's a pity because what the ILEA was good at was taking strategic decisions taking the reference taking the points that we needed to be focused upon setting the compass in the right direction and also doing the big picture. For example the ILEA and the LCC before that introduce a comprehensive school system, we abolished grammar schools, that goes back before my time but we said every secondary school in London should be a comprehensive school, we should see that kids go to their local school and get a good education alongside all the other kids from their area, yes we had church schools - I've got views about church schools which we probably won't go in to now but I am opposed to them. Nevertheless we had church schools, but we ran them we provided funding for them but across the area if you were in a neighbourhood there would probably be a state-run comprehensive school maybe a church school who knows. But what we were able to do was see that all kids got access to a good decent education, wherever they were and introducing comprehensive schools was a good example of where ILEA had taken the lead, most authorities in the country took the same view and in the end they also abolished grammar schools there are still a few boroughs they make a lot of headlines in the newspapers at the moment because the prime minister seems to want to re-introduce grammar schools, which isn't supported by the majority of her own party but nevertheless if she wants to go down that road she will learn for herself, but by and large comprehensive schools make sense you are educating everybody together the kids that are backward or a bit slow perhaps at one stage with help and support they can catch up and make progress, people with difficult social backgrounds home problems can get some support in school and that can compensate them for perhaps some problems they have got with their families with the parents or whatever, so all of that

means a good comprehensive school is a community focussed school and that's brilliant and I think we should be supporting that policy and those sorts of schools, what we're now seeing of course if ILEA still was around today it would be having to come to terms with academies, and with free schools, both of which I am totally opposed to I think local education authorities whether it's ILEA or whether it's the borough council's or the county councils throughout the land are best placed to take those strategic decisions to keep an eye on the schools, they can identify schools that have got problems, they can take action they can go in they can put inspectors in, they can help turn schools around but by enlarge the majority of schools perform well are giving good education and helping kids to get on in a progressive way, we don't need academies we don't need free schools, it's a desperately sad state of affairs and I will do all I can to fight to see that academies and free schools are abolished, and if we do have a Labour government later this year or at some point in the future I hope that they will take that step as well because we want schools to serve the entire community and I mean the entire community, not just the brightest, not just the kids from the richest families but I mean entire communities and I think that's an overriding policy commitment that the Labour Party sometimes need to fight a bit harder about but by and large I think they do a good job.(53:38)

VO: I want to ask you about the positive elements of life in London today as part of the legacy of the GLC as you're aware of it and also the ILEA?

NF: (54:04) Well I believe that we need are big cities and I think London is a big city unfortunately divided into 35 or 36 borough council's. I think that's far too many and I don't think we should be different from New York, New York has 5 boroughs so you've got a city the size of London like London in terms of its being a multiracial community, it's the centre of the arts, the theatre, museums and all the stuff that we love going to New York to enjoy. London is the same New York has got 5 boroughs each borough has got I think 7 or 8 councillors who work on it, London has got 36 borough councillors and it really doesn't make any sense you've got 36 town halls, 36 chief executives, 36 deputy chief executives so on and so forth, you've also got each borough is perhaps going on 50 or 60 councillors who are all drawing salaries they are all elected at great expense every 4 years, we don't need that we need London to be one big city, each of our boroughs are tiny there are no boroughs outside of London as small as the London boroughs they really are too small in my view. I think what GLC demonstrated is that regional councils are best and as we move into more modern times with social media, with Internet access and so on and so forth what I think we see is a need to abolish the borough councils that we've got at the moment, bring them together whether we've got the big councils of the GLC or whether we create 5 or 6 borough councils, perhaps 2 or 3 north of the river 2 or 3 south of the river perhaps 1 for the central part of London, the inner London authority I don't know, that is for a decision to be made but I would welcome a decision that came to one of those conclusions and you then start to see grouped and delivered effectively. We're talking about you are asking about the GLC success story, what it was good at and what the LCC before it was good at I think, it's brilliant at transport I think London Transport we all complain about it I'm sure you and I will have complained about it today, at least once if not more often, but actually London transport is superb the congestion charge brought in by Ken Livingstone perfectly sensible thing it makes London, you drive through it slowly I know but at least you can get through it some capital cities you can't drive through because they're just clogged solid with people parking, so I think what we have got are: public transport, a superb fire service, ambulance service – sorry I don't think ambulance service is part of local councils, but yes and lots of other services that are provided and could be provided much better, on a London wide basis, housing perhaps social housing, housing for the homeless, all those kinds of issues which the GLC used to do, ILEA used to help, and I think if we were to be able to go back to a situation or to invent for the future a situation, where we had one authority dealing with all the homeless people in London, dealing with transport dealing with all the other services liaising with the health service which the GLC could do for the whole of London, but a London wide government would be able to do the same again in the

future. 36 borough councils can't relate to the National Health Service it's not possible and we see some of those some of those problems today, so I'm conscious that regional government is coming back not in London yet although we do have a mayor and we could see more powers going to the mayor I would like to see that happening but it is true in Birmingham, in Manchester, in Merseyside, up in Tyneside, in Leeds, in Bradford, in Sheffield, in city areas around there as well as some big counties, they work well they are effective they deliver services well, they're relatively cost-effective, they don't waste money they look after their services well they employ expert people, and I would love to see much more of that, whether it will happen I don't know but it would be fantastic I think if one of the legacies of the GLC and ILEA was the rediscovery that big authorities can really kick hell out of the private sector organisations and can deliver services that real people want and need and can rely on. (59:22)

VO: Lots of people don't know about the GLC or even the ILEA, why do you think it's been forgotten?

NF: (59:35) I guess, the London population does turnover at great speed, lots of people come here and if they have come from the abroad they live here and then they move on somewhere else they move out of London, so the verbal tradition, the passing on of the history of London and its tradition, it's record, the GLC and the ILEA, I think there are not that many people who have got families that have grown up, my kids were born in London they've grown up they still live in London, but I think there are fewer and fewer people like that. They can remember the ILEA, they can remember the GLC and they can remember what good things used to happen. There used to be youth services, there used to be adult education that was provided across London on a phenomenally large scale hardly any adult education exists any longer in London which I think is tragic, I mean free-is or almost free if you were paying almost a fiver or something to join a class, you could then study another language you could become fluent in English if you've come from abroad, you could study art music you could go and start preparing to go to university and get your O's and A Levels and things like that, so I think what's happening at the moment is that there is a real struggle to make sense, I've forgotten the question you asked me.

VO: I was asking about I suppose the erasure or the fact that young people don't know about the history of the GLC or the ILEA.

NF: (1:01:19) Yes, the history, I'm sorry, yes, you were asking me about the tradition about passing it on I think that it is the case that London is a vibrant lively young city, people come here they grow up and then they move on to a very large extent, at the moment we are seeing people coming from abroad living for a few years perhaps wealthy people working in the media, working in finance, working for the inner city of London. I have no problems about that but I think a lot of young people from working class backgrounds are being forced out, the housing isn't there any longer. The GLC used to be a housing authority across London, used to be responsible as a landlord for hundreds and thousands of tenants, and I think that was an enormous invaluable service to the people of London of course the government at the moment is abolishing council housing, it wants housing to be put out, it wants it to be cost-effective, wants rent to go up, wants people to pay more, and if you can't pay more you just have to move on. So I think what the legacy of the GLC really is the consequence of a conservative government that has just gone out of its way, to destroy public services, to destroy councils, to take their powers away, to give them less money. Funding by London councils at the moment is at 50% of what it was when Labour was in office in 2010 and you can't take any organisation and take away 50% of its funding and expect it to carry on, it just can't, it can struggle and do its best but it can't deliver the same service and the same quality once you've taken 50% of its funding and 50% of its staff away. And I am afraid that's what happened and one of the legacies of the GLC and the ILEA is there are at least people around who can remember how good that was, how important that was, how cost effective it was, and services that were provided for

Londoners are still there they could be revived if we had a Labour government that was prepared to start spending on the same scale again and, restore powers to local government, restore power to the education service and abolish free schools and academies I would be a very happy man but I think we would be looking at a lot of very happy Londoners too.

VO: We've come to the end of our time, how was it?

NF: I've enjoyed talking about it, I hope I've not been too dull or boring, but it's been fascinating just to have an opportunity to reflect on all those great experiences that I had and enjoyed and I think London has benefited from as well and I was happy to have been the leader of the Inner London Education Authority for 3 years and involved in it for 11.

VO: Thank you so much for speaking.

NF: It's a pleasure (1:04:03)