

Ms. Turnbull

TF
the file

Note of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and Conservative Councillors on Monday, January 9th at 5.45 pm

Also present were Patrick Jenkin, Irwin Bellwin, William Waldegrave, John Gummer and Michael Alison

It was agreed that confidentiality of the meeting would be respected.

The Prime Minister reaffirmed that the Bill would be passed: the Government had a large majority and Conservative MPs had fought on the proposals contained in the Manifesto.

Councillor Lovill expressed his opposition to the Bill.

Councillor Patnick supported the Bill to prevent the excesses of local councils like South Yorkshire and Sheffield.

Councillor Bowness supported the Bill but was worried that it might raise unrealistic expectations of rate limitation.

Councillor Morgan opposed the Bill and believed that despite reassurances that the general scheme would be held in reserve, the general powers would inevitably be used. Reference was made to figures published in the Financial Times supporting this argument.

Councillor Parker-Jervis complained that European Community proposals for reduction in the working time of local authority workers from 39 to 35 hours a week would impose a £1½ billion burden on local authorities. The Prime Minister said she always opposed such proposals but we would need to discuss the future of working time.

Councillor Spangin said the present system was taxation without representation.

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Councillor Thomason disagreed with this view. He also believed general rate-capping was inevitable.

Councillor Moss said that voting on the White Paper had been 95 for, 2 against with 7 abstentions and that no Conservative authority in England and Wales supported general capping. He also said that rate payers may want economy in general but not in particular.

The Government should take greater care in new legislation over the cost and manpower implications for local authorities and the Government should look at de-legislation to make the free provision of some services eg. libraries, voluntary rather than mandatory.

Lady Porter complained of too many requirements, eg. in safety at work and consumer protection, being imposed on local authorities. Mr. Jenkin in reply to this point said that 86 measures, the so-called "Berkshire List", was being looked at. Lady Porter also said that rate-capping concentrated the mind of councillors to find savings but that the arguments for rate-capping should be expressed in simpler terms.

Councillor Wall said the Manifesto commitments should be honoured. It was not a constitutional issue but the technical arguments that general rate-capping was inevitable should be examined.

At the end of the meeting it was agreed that the line to be taken with the media was that the meeting was private, there had been a good discussion and the Prime Minister was well pleased.

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