

Subject as marked

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bcc: N Owen FRS

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M/S, DoE
(Local Govt)
(Lord Callin)

10 DOWNING STREET

MAFF
CO

From the Private Secretary

12 July, 1984

Abolition: Trading Standards and Related Functions
in Metropolitan Counties

The Prime Minister held a meeting at the House today to discuss your Secretary of State's minute of 10 July. Present were the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Trade and Industry, Employment, and Transport and the Minister of of Agriculture.

Your Secretary of State said there was a clear conflict between the best way to organise the trading standards service in isolation and the organisation which was consistent with the general structure of local government which was being sought. The Government's policy was to limit as far as possible the number of joint boards and devolve as much as possible to the districts. He believed the districts were capable of administering the trading standards service. The environmental health function was already successfully devolved. The CBI and other professional organisations opposed devolution to the districts on the ground that this would produce a lack of consistency in the enforcement of the criminal law. This, however, was an argument for a national service. He believed that to attach trading standards to an existing joint board or to create a new joint board or a "statutory joint committee", which in his view amounted more or less to the same thing, would undermine the Government's stance and would create great pressure for the reduction of other services at county level.

Your Secretary of State said he was prepared to consider the establishment of joint technical committees under which responsibility for trading standards would formally be devolved to the districts but the latter would be required to co-operate with neighbouring councils in a number of areas.

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The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, supported by the Minister for Agriculture, argued in favour of retaining trading standards at county level. He said experience in London, where trading standards had been devolved to the boroughs, indicated that a fragmented service would be less efficient and more costly with insufficient standards of enforcement. Originally, the London boroughs had organised themselves in consortia but over time these had broken down leaving a service costing substantially more than in the rest of the country. He believed trading standards could be attached to fire boards in most shire counties. The committee dealing with the fire service was also responsible for trading standards.

The Home Secretary supported devolution to the districts. He did not believe that attaching trade standards to the fire joint boards was a correct analogy with having the trading standards dealt with by the same committee of the county council.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that on balance trading standards should be devolved to the districts but that the Secretary of State for the Environment should discuss with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister of Agriculture whether establishment of a joint technical committee would provide a way of improving the consistency and quality of the technical standards service.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the other members of MISC 95, to the Minister of Agriculture and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

ANDREW TURNBULL

John Ballard, Esq.,
Department of the Environment