

RESTRICTED

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MINUTES OF THE THIRD MEETING OF MIO(IC), HELD AT 10 DOWNING STREET, MONDAY, JULY 27, 1987

Those present:

Mr B Ingham (Chairman)	-	No 10
Mr E Sorensen	-	Cabinet Office
Mr B Mower	-	Home Office
Mr D Wilkinson	-	DES
Mr D McDonald	-	DOE
Miss R Christopherson	-	DHSS
Mr O Prince-White	-	COI, Manchester
Mr A Thompson	-	Welsh Office
Mr S Reardon	-	D/Employment
Mr F Corbett	-	Scottish Office
Mr A Moorey	-	DTI
Mr T Perks	-	No 10
Mr S Dugdale (Secretary)	-	No 10

Apologies for absence were received from:

HM Treasury

The Chairman welcomed Mr Eric Sorensen, Cabinet Office, and introduced the members of MIO(IC) who had, he said, identified three main points to consider in the presentation of inner city policy:

- the lack of a coherent inner city policy as such;
- the desirability of appointing a "Minister for Inner Cities" as a figurehead;
- the need for a systematic attempt to co-ordinate Government activities across Departmental boundaries.

COI, Manchester then summarised the views of COI's regional directors as:

- the need to define what was meant by the term "inner city" and the areas to which it was applied;
- the need to establish a focal point within each region, both to co-ordinate Departments' activities and to provide a single Government spokesman in the area;
- the desirability of producing a logo and other presentational material to help identify cohesion in the Government's efforts.

He added that Peter Davenport of The Times now had a roving brief on inner cities and might be receptive to stories and feature material on the subject.

Department of Employment said that information staff had long recognised the need for co-ordination. Through MSC, the Department expected to be highly involved in inner city developments.

Welsh Office indicated that the spread of urban deprivation in Wales was different from that in England; and Welsh Office had its own inter-disciplinary approach to the problem. Despite the differences, Welsh Office would want to be involved in national initiatives.

Scottish Office said that the situation in Scotland was similar to that in Wales; and ways of linking up with national developments were currently being explored.

DHSS pointed out that, to a degree, the Department dealt with cases where other Departments' efforts had failed.

Home Office said that its specific interests were in crime prevention, public order and race relations. Presentationally it might be difficult to stress what was being done on these fronts in inner cities without risk of being accused of ignoring other areas.

Department of the Environment underlined the view that co-ordination would be the key to presenting all the grounds of Government involvement in the inner cities.

Department of Education and Science warned of the difficulties they would be faced with in stressing the inner city application of general policies intended to bring benefits nationwide.

The Chairman said that presentation would have to be handled with particular care given the way that inner cities had become a political issue during the General Election. The aim would be to improve the condition of the nation's urban areas, not to make any party political gain.

Responding to these points, Mr Sorensen acknowledged the lack of a coherent inner cities policy and agreed that presentation of Government measures would require a good deal of improvisation. He said that the targets of the Government's efforts would vary from time to time, directed at different clients and different problems, but would inevitably be labelled 'inner city' initiatives.

On the question of appointing a single spokesman in each English region, he said that he had been impressed with progress already made by regional civil servants in the co-ordination of their activities. He thought that COI might be a natural existing channel for media contact. On presentational material, he said that he was broadly in favour of its use as a means of relieving ignorance of Departments' work.

Cabinet Office had just completed its interim report to Ministers. It suggested that there should be an authoritative inter-departmental statement of inner city policy, not necessarily a White Paper, to act as a base document from which to operate. There already seemed to be some support for this at E(UP). Subsequent co-ordination was likely to prove more difficult within Whitehall than at regional level.

The interim paper identified 20 separate areas of Government activity. It appeared that Departments' initiatives were most effective when supported by similar schemes by other Departments. They were at their best when clearly structured and co-ordinated and therefore likely to attract private sector support. There were lessons to be drawn from the concentrated efforts made at Salford and Consett. A model of best practice would be useful.

Depending on Ministers' reaction to the interim paper, a more substantial report was envisaged for E(UP) in the Autumn. Individual suggestions - such as a presentational booklet - could, of course, be tackled separately.

On the appointment of a "Minister for the Inner Cities", Mr Sorensen said that it was not for his unit to propose this concept; nor could he envisage all Ministers being willing to defer to one or two lead Ministers. Rather, it would draw attention to key issues to which Ministers could subscribe when talking about inner city issues. These would emphasise the collective nature of the problem and the collective solutions required.

No 10 pointed out the difficulty of responding, with a single Government voice, to requests for interviews if a lead Minister were not appointed. Home Office, supported by other Departments, repeated the view that co-ordination of policy required demonstrable co-ordination at Ministerial level, citing the recent success of Mr Mellor in leading the Government's attack on drugs.

The Chairman said that he, and COI's regional directors, did not share the impression that policies were being effectively co-ordinated. What was required, he believed, was:

- a clear and simple definition of the inner city policy 'product';
- a clear understanding within Government that somebody accepted responsibility, under the Prime Minister, for presenting the policy;
- a clear indication of what was expected of Departments' regional offices and what was needed to improve co-ordination.

He suggested that MIO(IC) could provide E(UP) with a separate paper, or annex to the Cabinet Office report, on presentation. The objective would be to provide Ministers, at an early stage, with the hard facts of what was required to achieve effective presentation. He further suggested that each COI region could prepare the story of what had been done so far to improve the urban environment in its area. As well as providing a presentational baseline from which to start, the exercise would serve to underline the continuity of the Government's approach to urban problems.

The desirability of appointing a single Government spokesman in each region was again stressed. Civil servants could fulfil the need where factual corrections to adverse publicity were required; but there was also a need for political rebuffs - by Ministers, relevant PPSs or local MPs.

The Prime Minister would be making a number of inner city visits in September and the Chairman would submit to her a paper on presentational difficulties and how they should be handled. This could then form the basis of the proposed annex to the Cabinet Office report for E(UP).

SIMON DUGDALE
SECRETARY
28 July 1987

MR WICKS

MR NORGROVE

I attach, for your information, a copy of the minutes of a meeting on inner city policy presentation held here last Monday.

Simon Dugdale

SIMON DUGDALE
28 Jul 1987