

PRIME MINISTER

INNER CITIES

You are meeting Eric Sorensen to discuss the draft of his report. Richard Wilson and Hartley Booth will also be present, and Hartley has provided a note.

I found Sorensen's report disappointing. It is of course easy to have exaggerated expectations in this area and, given the time available, it may have been unrealistic to expect more. But the report at present suffers from many of the same weaknesses as John Fairclough's paper on research and development. It lacks vigour and bite.

Nevertheless, reading Sorensen's report, there are in fact quite a number of places where there are the germs of ideas or where recommendations are put hesitantly and in a sideways fashion. The report would be much improved and it would lead to a better discussion if at these places it were to say more precisely what is proposed, to indicate costs where appropriate and to direct the recommendation firmly at a Department or group of Departments. The recommendations will be lost unless they are directed firmly at someone who will be spurred either to accept them or to seek to reject them.

I have marked in the margin of your copy places where the report can be sharpened up in this way.

You will not want to discuss machinery of Government matters (on which see minutes from Sir Robert Armstrong and Bernard) at tomorrow's meeting. That is something to be talked through with Robert himself. But I do wonder whether an official Committee shadowing the Ministerial Committee is the best way of continuing work on the inner cities: interdepartmental disagreements in this area are sufficiently large that a report reflecting the lowest common denominator amongst Departments is likely to be low indeed.

I recommend that you ask Sorensen to sharpen up his report (taking more time if necessary) and discuss with him what he sees as the next stage. My suggestion would be that he should be invited to bring together material on the effectiveness of all the various programmes and grants now being directed specifically at inner cities. What output are we achieving from the various grants and programmes? Is there a case for stopping some and expanding others? Is the balance right as between, for example, MSC training programmes and work on clearing derelict land and building workshops? No-one can prove an answer in these cases, but it would be useful to have someone make an assessment which would look across Departments.

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