

MR SCHOLAR

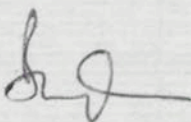
CF/  
P.A.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

MS 31/8

A friend of mine - a top level administrator in West Yorkshire - has sent me a copy of "The Case for Metropolitan Counties" and has suggested that I pass it on to the Prime Minister.

She may, of course, have seen it. If not, you may think she should.



B. INGHAM

30 August 1983

*The Case for  
Metropolitan  
Counties*



## THE CASE FOR METROPOLITAN COUNTIES

### Summary

The paper which follows makes the case for retaining Metropolitan Counties as an important and necessary tier in local government administration in the 80s.

It concludes that

- since the 1960s all Government reports and Commissions have concluded that metropolitan authorities are required for the conurbations
- the Metropolitan Counties have performed this task well since they were set up in 1974, with real achievements over the whole range of their functions
- it is not possible to give all metropolitan functions to District Councils. Joint Boards or Committees would spring up in an ad hoc way to the detriment of the public as far as public accountability and understanding are concerned
- the abolition of Metropolitan Counties would be an extremely costly exercise.
- any reorganisation of local government should be considered as a whole and not carried out piecemeal



## COUNTIES IN ENGLAND AND WALES<sup>1</sup>



## Introduction

Today, we find the local government system under attack, with the Metropolitan Counties in the front line. There has been much speculation about the way the Metropolitan Counties operate and whether they should be reduced in their powers or even abolished. It is in response to these suggestions and to inform the debate that this paper has been produced. There is no point in merely being negative about the present system of local government. If change is to be sought, one must have an idea of what kind of arrangements are to succeed the present ones and whether these are better or worse than the present system. These and other matters are tackled in the pages which follow. This paper does not deal with the problems of London, which clearly need special consideration.

### 1. The Metropolitan Counties

1.1 The six metropolitan areas of England (excluding London) are as follows:—

	Population	No. of Districts (36)	Population Range 000's
Tyne and Wear	1,143,245	5	161-301
South Yorkshire	1,301,813	4	222-543
Merseyside	1,513,070	5	176-513
West Yorkshire	2,037,510	5	188-724
Greater Manchester	2,514,778	10	178-474
West Midlands	2,644,634	7	198-1,030

1.2 The total population of 11.2 million is 24% of the population of England.

### 2. The Functions of Metropolitan Counties

Highways	Land Reclamation
Traffic Management	Economic Development
Public Transport	Recreation and Arts
Road Safety	Emergency Planning
Police	Coroners
Fire	Police Prosecutions
Consumer Protection/Trading Standards	
Strategic Planning	
Waste Disposal	

The functions are looked at again later in this paper.



### 3. **Why Metropolitan Counties were set up in 1974**

3.1 During the 1960s, several Government reports advanced the need for and role of large metropolitan authorities. The Transport Policy White Paper in 1966 confirmed the need for co-ordination of transportation and strategic land-use planning, especially in the conurbations. This led to the setting up of the Metropolitan Passenger Transport Executives in 1968.

3.2 A Royal Commission, under the Chairmanship of Lord Redcliffe-Maud, on the organisation of local government in England and Wales reported in 1969. While generally advocating unitary, all-purpose local authorities, the Commission recognised the need for a two-tier system in the large metropolitan areas.

“For each metropolitan area, there must be a metropolitan authority responsible for the planning, transportation, and major development group of functions throughout the whole area. . .”

The White Papers published successively by the Labour and Conservative Governments in response to the Royal Commission report both accepted the need for the metropolitan authority.

3.3 The Local Government Act 1972 set up the present system of local government in England and Wales, which included the Metropolitan Counties.

At this time one would have been very hard pressed indeed to find any objection to the idea of conurbation-wide government. It was taken as a self evident fact that large urban areas needed to be governed as a whole. This fact is still as true to-day as it was then and indeed it is still generally recognised by objective observers, although in some quarters vision has been clouded by problems rather than kept acute by the pursuit of opportunities.

3.4 In Scotland, local government was reorganised in 1975 and the Stodart Committee of Inquiry reviewed its operation in 1980. The region/district structure was confirmed and the need for strategic planning of major services endorsed. Selected extracts from the Stodart Report are set out in Appendix A. In Europe the tendency is towards a separate tier of government for metropolitan conurbations, as confirmed at the recent O.E.C.D. Conference in Madrid.

3.5 The Metropolitan Counties are cost-effective organisations. The opportunities of economies of scale have been realised in practice through streamlining of the staff transferred to them by predecessor authorities. These substantial savings can be contrasted with what happens when the functions of a larger unit are designated to smaller units. A major example in this area is the break up of the former West Riding County Council Education Service. That Council operated with relatively few administrators (0.3 per thousand population) compared with the Metropolitan

District (0.4 per thousand population). The transfer of education to the metropolitan districts in West Yorkshire is costing an additional £1.7m a year purely in additional administrative expenses.

### 4. **Characteristics of Metropolitan Areas**

4.1 The metropolitan areas of England are *areas of large population* concentrated within tight-knit and closely inter-linked urban communities. In terms of living, working, shopping and leisure, these communities operate as inter related units and look to one or a series of centres for the higher level commercial, retail, cultural, educational and administrative activities.

4.2 They are *areas of flux*. They were the principal centres of the industrial revolution, have suffered, and continue to suffer, disproportionately from economic decay, but still possess great potential in skills and technology. As a group, they hold the key to the nation's economic recovery.

4.3 They are *areas of great diversity*, with the most significant concentrations of affluence and poverty in England. Table 1 shows some of their leading characteristics. With the pace of change greater than in most other parts of the country, the need for Government action is correspondingly greater too. The 'inner city' problems and initiatives recognised and promoted by successive national and local governments, are prime examples.

4.4 They are *areas bound together by a common cause*. Local feelings and enterprise are worthy and have been fostered by the metropolitan authorities but the scale of activity in the late twentieth century requires government to look beyond local issues to broader problems and solutions which can benefit people over a wide but integrated geographical area. The idea of metropolitan government is to give expression to these ideals and to balance the needs of the conurbation.

### 5. **A Closer Look at the Functions of Metropolitan Counties**

5.1 Metropolitan Counties spend most of their resources in providing basic services such as Police, Fire, Highways and Transport. These services are in no sense expendable. Removing them from County control would not result in significant savings. The financial burden would merely be transferred elsewhere, probably at greater cost.

5.2 What follows is a brief examination of the services provided and how these services could be alternatively provided at district or regional level or through some kind of joint committee arrangement.



### 5.3 POLICE

5.3.1 The Police Act 1964 and subsequent legislation was intended to create effective police forces firmly linked to the operational authorities responsible for providing local government services. Apart from London, there is no strong movement to split Metropolitan Forces into smaller units and it is generally accepted that they are sound operational units.

5.3.2 Recent public debate has focussed on the question of accountability of the police and the need for local democratic control is unchallenged. Indeed, even the presence of magistrates on Police Committees is seen by many as anachronistic. All Metropolitan Counties (with the exception of Tyne and Wear, which has a joint force with Northumberland which was not big enough to have a force of its own) constitute Police Authorities. The alternative would be a Joint Committee arrangement with local Councillors drawn from the present Metropolitan Districts, or a larger Regional Police Force which would be more remote from the population it served. (See later on Joint Committees).

5.3.3 In a debate in the House of Commons on 25th March 1982 on Law and Order, the Home Secretary had this to say:—

“I don't believe that we should look to major institutional amendment of the Police Act 1964. Its basic structure remains, in my view, a fully adequate framework for developing the proper roles of Chief Officer, Police Authority and Home Secretary, and for enhancing police effectiveness”.

And Lord Scarman in his report on the Brixton Disorders says:—

“On the basis of evidence I have received, the urgent need is not a change in the formal powers (or duties) of Police Authorities . . .” and “The evidence I have received is that, on the whole, the statutory machinery works well”.

### 5.4 FIRE

5.4.1 The Metropolitan Counties are acceptable operational fire brigade units. For example, there were seven Local Authority Fire Brigades in West Yorkshire prior to 1974; the amalgamated force reduced control room staff from 90 to 53. In West Midlands, the number of appliances has been reduced from 75 to 66. A transfer of functions to the Metropolitan Districts would inevitably result in over-provision of fire cover and would need detailed arrangements for joint working. The benefits derived from standardisation of appliances, equipment and procedures, which allow flexibility and interchange between stations, would be lost.

5.4.2 The uniformity of approach of Metropolitan Authorities to fire protection measures, including petroleum licensing, has been welcomed by industries which

have premises spread over a number of Districts. Indeed a case could be made for the transfer from District to County of the licensing of premises used for public entertainment as far as safety measures are concerned.

5.4.3 Democratic control of fire brigades is long established and again the alternative would be a Joint Committee arrangement.

### 5.5 TRANSPORTATION

(A) In the Transportation field, the Metropolitan Counties, in spite of reductions in resources, have been able to

- rationalise and co-ordinate public transport provision and policies in association with wider traffic and planning objectives
- apply consistent standards to the maintenance of the highway system and traffic management measures
- provide a uniform approach to the need for, and priorities of highway and other investment — increasing emphasis being given to the movement of freight, the improvement of the environment, assisting public transport, the refurbishment of Inner Urban Areas, and increased use of navigable waterways (e.g. South Yorkshire Navigation)
- link with the Department of Transport and British Rail over the development of co-ordinated programmes for improvement of the trunk road and rail systems, including the opening of new railway stations.

#### (B) Public Transport

5.5.1 Debate on the politically controversial issue of fares has obscured the need for overall transport planning and operation in Metropolitan areas. Bus and rail journeys straddle District boundaries and the provision of public transport services must be co-ordinated with the highways traffic and overall land use planning functions of the Metropolitan Counties. This need has been recognised since 1968 when the function was taken out of the hands of elected members. It was put back in 1974 and with constant attention being given to improve economy of operation, there is no doubt that the Passenger Transport Executives are more effective units than any reversion to municipal bus undertakings or smaller private operators. The recent Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the West Midlands PTE paid tribute to the way in which the County Council and the PTE worked together and concluded that the present operations were in no way against the public interest.

5.5.2 There is a far greater dependence on public transport in the conurbations than elsewhere in the country. Major changes in public transport provision (cuts in services, rises in fares) therefore have a dramatic effect in the conurbations where



the diversion of trips onto highway networks that can barely cope with their present loads can have traumatic effect on the environment, economy and social life of the areas concerned. It is not difficult to appreciate the benefit of having the public transport, highways, police, and fire services dealt with by one authority.

5.5.3 Each Metropolitan County can demonstrate significant developments in the public transport field since 1974. Outstanding examples are the Tyne and Wear Metro and Merseyside's Loop and Link System. Progressive agreements negotiated with NBC subsidiaries have ensured fully co-ordinated systems in all the conurbations.

5.5.4 As long as the law provides that the needs of the public must be taken into account in the planning of services, the role of the democratically elected Councillor is vital in transport planning. Accountability is clear and it is through their local Councillors that members of the public can best express their needs. If Metropolitan Counties did not exist, then some Joint Committee arrangement would be needed because public transport cannot be sensibly and efficiently organised at District level.

(C) **Highways**

5.5.5 The Metropolitan County Council is the highway authority for its area. However, the law provides for three main ways of discharging that function. The first is almost total agency (excepting major highway works) in which the County Council simply gives an annual allocation to District Councils to carry out highway maintenance, improvements and other functions. The second is a mixture with some Districts having agency powers and others having none. The third is where the County Council, as in West Yorkshire, carries out almost all the functions itself.

5.5.6 While District Councils are anxious to obtain highway functions, the arguments for retaining this function with the Counties are strong; and, indeed, the case can be made for strengthening the function still further. Major highway and traffic management schemes have effects beyond the immediate locality of their construction. Before 1974, people who were affected by the proposals of a neighbouring local authority had no say in the matter. This is no longer true for the planning of improvements (and traffic and transportation measures) is country-wide. The scale of the Metropolitan County enables it to attract high calibre staff, and to provide increasingly specialised technology and support services to achieve maximum economy and excellence in design.

5.5.7 However, there is a major flaw in the system. The Local Government Act 1972 gave Metropolitan District Councils the right to maintain non-classified urban roads. Where this statutory right has been claimed, it has blurred responsibility

(and therefore accountability) and confused the public. In some Counties, the County Council will fill the potholes in one road while the adjacent road is patched by the District Council. This is duplication and the only solution is to place the service for an area firmly in the hands of one Authority — the County Council.

5.5.8 For the same reasons a strong case can be argued for the transfer to Metropolitan Counties from the Department of Transport of responsibility for all non-motorway trunk roads.

5.5.9 The Transport Policy and Programmes System (TPP) has achieved a large degree of success in identifying schemes, establishing priorities and allocating resources. In relation to TPPs and trunk road agencies, the Department of Transport is resourced to deal with six Metropolitan Counties. To deal with 36 Metropolitan Districts would require a significant increase in resources in both the Department and the Districts themselves.

5.6 **WASTE DISPOSAL**

5.6.1 Local government reorganisation probably came as a relief to many Urban Authorities so far as the disposal of waste was concerned. The availability of land-fill sites in the conurbation areas had been rapidly diminishing in the 1960's, particularly as a result of public concern over the environment and amenity. Some Authorities were forced to invest in largely untried, highly expensive incinerators (some already de-commissioned as expensive mistakes) in order to fulfil their statutory duties within their limited boundaries. In 1974, the West Midlands County Council inherited two incinerators within one mile of each other; and only six months tipping capacity in one former district, with no arrangements for the future.

5.6.2 The disposal of refuse is a major urban problem. The six conurbations generate about 6.5M tons every year. The Local Government Act 1972 recognised that its resolution required the flexibility given by large scale operation and bulk handling and hauling techniques, for which mechanical plant requirements were beyond the resources of District Authorities. In fact, it is clear that most Metropolitan Districts do not create enough refuse to be able to process it economically and dispose of it independently. Nor is it possible to rely on disposal sites within one District area.

5.6.3 Experiments in resources recovery (as instanced by Tyne and Wear's Byker and South Yorkshire's Doncaster Plants) have been pioneered by the Metropolitan Counties, with disposal of the by-products to industry. The Metropolitan Counties have also brought about a tremendous improvement in the level of operation of



waste disposal landfill sites at very modest cost. Disposal of toxic and other industrial waste is a major problem for industry. On hazardous waste, the Gregson Report advocated sub-regional organisations for disposal, suggesting that even County Councils were not large enough organisations. While this may apply to some shire Counties, with relatively small problems, the Government has not accepted such a need in respect of the Metropolitan Counties, which are able to employ the wide range of scientific staff needed to deal safely with such wastes.

## 5.7 LAND RECLAMATION

5.7.1 One of the great problems (some would say scandal) of urban living in this country is the existence of thousands of acres of derelict land within our conurbations. The removal of old industrial remains and tips and the reclamation of land to beneficial use requires the engagement of a wide range of skills as well as considerable resources. That much of the dereliction was concentrated in the poorer areas of the conurbations whose Authorities were least able to acquire those skills and resources led to this important function being tackled most positively by the Metropolitan County Councils.

5.7.2 Metropolitan Counties have the capability of carrying out the work of reclamation provided the resources are made available. Only Metropolitan Counties have the extensive and diverse technical resources to carry out this highly specialised work, and it is considered that the present concurrent powers of the Districts in land reclamation is another example of duplication which could disappear. The abolition of the Metropolitan County would make inevitable the creation of a further quango (as advocated by the Flowers Commission) for this function.

## 5.8 PLANNING

5.8.1 Metropolitan areas are large and contrasting and the County Council is required to develop planning policies to cover the main differing needs of the population. Areas of poverty and decline (especially the inner cities) are not forced to rely on their own resources to improve their lot. Strategic planning policies limiting the scope of housing and industrial development on the periphery of major conurbations to that which is necessary and unavoidable has enabled more resources to be channelled to the inner areas. Major mineral workings often straddle District boundaries and are of more than local significance, thereby requiring overall County control. Information and intelligence gathered on a county-wide basis is valued by Government, Districts, public bodies and private firms and would be more costly to produce on a fragmented basis.

5.8.2 Prior to 1974, the Government had already recognised the limitations in District Council's ability to deal with strategic planning, and Joint Planning Conferences and Committees had been set up across the country to co-ordinate structure plans which had their own schemes and priorities, conflicting demands and policies. Before reorganisation the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company had to deal with six authorities in the Port of Liverpool. Now it negotiates with just one.

5.8.3 Some development control powers have passed from County to Districts since 1974 but it was recognised that the Strategic Planning function of the County remained a necessity. The present system is now working well, particularly bearing in mind that the present Development Plan System is only as old as the present authorities, but it would be better if Metropolitan Counties had the power to "call in" strategic applications to ensure compliance with the Structure Plan. Experience has shown that it is often difficult for Districts to agree on strategic policies (the green belt is an example) and the overall view must be maintained.

## 5.9 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

5.9.1 Over the past few years Metropolitan Counties have contributed significantly to the economic development and regeneration of their areas. Apart from building industrial estates and small factories, imaginative schemes to give substantial support to private, commercial and industrial development have been worked out. New Enterprise Boards, grants and loans to small businesses, innovation centres, employment premium schemes, technology links with Universities and the like, have helped to sustain the economic base of the County. A Department of Industry commissioned study confirmed that the County Council was the best agency to co-ordinate the economic regeneration of Merseyside.

Economic "blackspots" can be identified and the Government's own initiatives complemented, thus avoiding wasteful proliferation and competition which would occur if this were solely the responsibility of authorities with smaller geographical boundaries.

5.9.2 In 1976 and again in 1980 Tyne and Wear promoted local legislation to provide powers to assist industry, and new concepts (such as industrial improvement areas, guarantees and loans for plant and machinery) proved so successful that they were followed by other Authorities and subsequently by Central Government in the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978 and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.

5.9.3 Action at County level means that large resources can easily be directed at short notice to local areas, with quick results. District authorities do not have the resources to give the level of support needed.



5.9.4 Major partnerships between local government and the private sector are possible where the local authority is large enough to match the negotiating power and funds of large institutions. Central Station development in Manchester is an example of public money being used to guarantee and stimulate private investment.

#### 5.10 CONSUMER PROTECTION/TRADING STANDARDS

5.10.1 In a service such as consumer protection, centralisation within a county authority brings substantial advantages of specialisation. Increasing EEC intervention in various areas of this work requires increased standardisation. Manufacturers need to deal with the minimum number of local authorities to reduce the problems created by a diversity of interpretations of the law.

5.10.2 Smaller authorities could not afford the wide range of specialised and expensive technical expertise and equipment required, or keep the necessary standard measures and the like, without considerably increasing the cost of the service overall. Large authorities maximise the use of that equipment. A suggestion to the Stodart Committee in Scotland that consumer protection should return to districts was strongly opposed by the CBI and trade and consumer organisations.

5.10.3 Certain aspects of the law enforcement element in the consumer protection service work very closely with the Police. It is more efficient and cost-effective to have both organisations working to the same geographic areas.

5.10.4 Most of the recent initiatives in the sphere of trading standards, consumer safety, textile labelling, etc., have originated from the Metropolitan Counties.

#### 5.11 RECREATION AND THE ARTS

5.11.1 The Metropolitan Counties have been very successful in developing recreation areas of major significance. In the Greater Manchester area, river valleys penetrating right into the conurbation core are being harnessed to open space, parks and special recreation. Country parks and long distance footpaths serving wide areas have been developed. Museums, theatres, orchestras, opera companies and other cultural facilities of regional significance have been sensibly supported by county authorities since it is illogical and unfair to expect small populations to support such places and events for the benefit of many.

5.11.2 Some counties have established successful county-wide archives and archaeological services which link the history of their areas in a way which could not be done if such work was left to smaller authorities. County-wide organisations have been supported in ways impossible for individual districts to match.

#### 5.12 OTHER SERVICES

5.12.1 The Metropolitan Counties have also made a success of administering a whole range of county-wide services which could not sensibly be looked after by any other means than with joint committees, boards or non-elected bodies. The Public Analyst's Office, Rent Officer service, Coroner's service and Probation service are good examples of services not always identified with their parent authorities, and public appreciation of what is being done is lost.

### 6. Change and its Consequences

#### 6.1 POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS OF CHANGE

6.1.1 Change for change's sake would be a great disservice to taxpayers and ratepayers alike. And any advantage seen in change needs to be weighed carefully against the inevitable costs implied.

6.1.2 If functions are to be taken from the Metropolitan Counties, there would need to be a downwards or upwards shift of Government. Alternatively, some other arrangements would have to be made at the County level.

6.1.3 Most of the services (e.g. Police, Fire, Transport, Highways, Waste Disposal, Land Reclamation, Strategic Planning) only make sense if provided at least across the Metropolitan areas as a whole. The options here then would be to provide such services by some kind of regional authority or to establish a series of ad hoc arrangements within the present County area.

6.1.4 An elected regional authority would obviously imply consequences for those areas outside the Metropolitan Counties and is therefore unlikely to emerge in the short term. It was one of the proposals of the Redcliffe-Maud report in 1969 which was rejected by the Government of the day. On the other hand, it would in theory be possible for **Central Government** to administer services direct through their regional offices. The other option would be to establish **jointly administered Boards or standing committees** for the purposes of running particular services or groups of services.

#### 6.2 TRANSFER TO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

6.2.1 Any services transferred to Central Government would involve a substantial loss to local democratic determination and would be directly contrary to the Government's often-stated aim to devolve power and responsibility. It would involve a significant change in the role of Government, make the services very remote, and lead to an unacceptable degree of centralised power and direction — a



trend which needs to be strongly resisted in a society which already has strong forces making centralised control more possible (e.g. computing and micro-technology). Indeed, concern is already being expressed that the present central/local relationship does not allow effective democratic control, and attention needs to be given to the widening gap in the relative prosperity of the various regions of the country.

6.3 **JOINT BOARDS/COMMITTEES**

6.3.1 Any Joint Board arrangement for services would bring an inevitable dilution of local democratic control. Four of the six Metropolitan Counties have already had two changes of political control since 1974. At present the controlling group on the County Council has won an election based on a manifesto and has a mandate for its policies in respect of the major functions of the Authority. It is accountable at the ballot box at the next election.

6.3.2 This would not be the case with a Joint Committee. Appointees or representatives would not be directly elected with a particular mandate. Political control would be reduced; accountability would be remote. Past experience has shown that it is impossible to eliminate parochial attitudes when resources are required or are being allocated and clear policy direction would be weakened. Joint Committees would not have to weigh the competing claims of different services one against the other as is the case at present.

6.3.3 There would be no savings in the administration of such boards as they would need to be serviced with the ability to implement decisions. Indeed, it is only too likely that each board would set up separate and costly administrative hierarchies. The following gives some interesting statistics on what has happened in the period 1974-1980 for consumer expenditure:—

	% Increase
Telephone and Telegraph .....	226
Electricity .....	211
Gas .....	203
Household disposable income .....	190
Water .....	170
Retail Price Index .....	140
<b>Metropolitan Counties Precept (Average) .....</b>	<b>124</b>

6.3.4 More Joint Committees would cause more confusion in the minds of the public. Unlike a local authority, a Joint Committee involves a diffusion of responsibility towards disparate parent authorities and makes understanding and control difficult. Several precepting authorities would take the place of one.

6.4 **CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGE**

6.4.1 The Metropolitan Counties are at present able to provide a range of services in a co-ordinated way in pursuit of a comprehensive and consistent series of aims. They are also able to provide those services over a wide geographical area to uniform standards. An equitable distribution of resources, policies and programmes can be achieved. This would be lost, or at least would be very difficult to achieve, if changes in the local government system were to go so far as to abolish the Metropolitan Counties, or even markedly reduce their powers and responsibilities.

6.4.2 No District could conceivably plan its transportation system in isolation. Dozens of small scale disconnected schemes would be put forward for government consideration, to be considered either ad hoc, or the responsibility for developing the strategic approach transferred to Whitehall or the Government's regional office. In planning terms, each District would be regarding its housing and employment potential in isolation.

6.4.3 The Metropolitan Counties are large units and constitute an important counter-balance to Central Government power. In a speech in September 1982 Mr. Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for the Environment, said that local government was like capitalism — a means of preventing undue concentrations of powers in society; the health of the constitution depended on local government's freedom. Because of their substantial resources and potential negotiating power, the Metropolitan Counties are able to act as an important lobby for improved attitudes and greater resources from Central Government. They are also able to sustain important lobbies to European Government, pressing the needs of the larger British conurbations. If the Metropolitan Counties were significantly reduced, or abolished, the net result would be a reduction in the influence of local government in both national and local affairs, and a reduction in the lobbying powers of those areas — the Metropolitan Counties — which have the most severe social and economic problems.

6.5 **THE COST OF CHANGE**

6.5.1 It is impossible to predict accurately the cost of abolishing Metropolitan County Councils. No-one tried to predict the cost of Local Government reorganisation in 1974, and no-one has attempted to count the cost of that reorganisation since the event.

6.5.2 However, no-one would deny that there would be a cost, as well as disruption to services. First, it is not possible to eliminate the vast majority of Metropolitan County staff. Policemen, firemen, roadmen and others providing a direct service



to the public will continue to be needed. Staff moved to different places of work would get disturbance payments. There would be a need for buildings in different locations, with redundant buildings being left behind. Specialist equipment would be duplicated and administrative hierarchies set up for each service, in whichever direction it went.

- 6.5.3 A detailed study has been carried out of the potential direct cost of transferring the services of one Metropolitan County — West Yorkshire — and this is set out as Appendix B to this paper. It concludes that the annual costs of abolition in West Yorkshire would be £8.1 million and other associated costs would be between £19.9 and £29.3 million. If these figures were transposed to cover all six Metropolitan Counties, using population as a multiplier, the whole exercise would give a recurring annual burden of £45 million and other costs ranging between £110 million and £165 million.
- 6.5.4 The study also showed that some reduction could possibly be achieved in central services and joint functions staff, i.e. financial, legal, computing and other administrative staff; planning and recreation staff. However, it was also found that this would be more than offset by increased staff numbers in operational services to perform functions currently carried out centrally.
- 6.5.5 The six Metropolitan Counties employ around 5,600 staff in central services and joint functions. It would not be feasible to entirely dispense with their services as some are engaged in activities such as Superannuation Fund administration, which could not be readily absorbed by existing district council staff. Other central services staff — e.g. legal and finance — would be needed for the function they serve.
- 6.5.6 The ripple effects of abolition would permeate into the many different sections of society and there would be an indirect cost to these sections as established procedures and working arrangements were disrupted. This disruption would affect different economic sectors in many ways but would certainly direct resources away from their main purpose.
- 6.5.7 The largest part of this cost would fall on industry and commerce, principally in the depressed Northern Regions, and could have drastic consequences for marginal business. It is also ironic that an attempt to save money by abolishing Metropolitan County Councils would result not only in increased running costs but could also reduce the country's productive capacity.

## 7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 This paper shows why it is important to retain Metropolitan Counties for financial and constitutional reasons and for the efficiency of public services to the community.

The paper also concludes that if any local government reorganisation is to be carried out, it must be done as a whole and not as a piecemeal tinkering operation. If at some time in the future a major reorganisation is to be instituted, serious consideration should be given to devolution to local government of services now run by central government and non-elected public bodies, e.g. water and sewerage, the health services, and local administration of a number of other government services.

Consideration would also have to be given at that time as to whether education and social services are currently administered by the right level of local government.

- 7.2 This paper has demonstrated some of the ways in which Metropolitan Counties have proved effective organs of government. It has shown that they cannot be simply abolished and their powers given to Districts. Any ill-considered scheme would result in the establishment of numerous non-accountable quango-type bodies (which are already unpopular) with power to issue precepts.
- 7.3 The most appropriate conclusion is a quotation from the White Paper (Cmnd 4276) February, 1970:  
*"In view of the time, effort and disturbance which such change involves, the new structure must be designed to last in its essentials for many decades"*.



## 'STODART' COMMITTEE — SELECTED EXTRACTS

Appointed By: Secretary of State for Scotland December 1979

## Terms of Reference

- “(i) to review the working relationships among the new authorities since May 1975;
- (ii) to recommend whether any transfer or rationalisation of functions between them is desirable and consistent with fully maintaining the viability of existing authorities; and
- (iii) to report by December 1980”.

## Main Conclusions Drawn from the Terms of Reference:

- “a Given the need to maintain the viability of the existing authorities, it was clear that the broad framework of the present structure of local government must remain. It therefore followed that we could not think in terms of any major reorganisation.
- b We did decide, however, that it was competent for us to consider the aspirations of several district councils to become all — or most-purpose authorities, provided we kept the viability factor firmly in mind Conversely — and perhaps anomalously — we could not consider unitary status for regional councils, as this was bound to result in the destruction of their constituent districts. Similarly, we took the view that it would go beyond the intentions of our remit for us to think of establishing any entirely new authorities. Thus we felt unable to examine the representations which we received, urging that Rutherglen and Gambuslary should be given district council status.
- c There was scope in particular for close examination of the functions which were discharged concurrently by regional and district councils, to see whether rationalisation was either necessary or desirable. Likewise it was appropriate for us to consider the transfer of individual functions from one tier to another.

The relatively short period allowed to us for making our report meant that we had to set a strict timetable for the submission and consideration of evidence. It meant also that it was virtually impossible to commission any independent research in real depth on issues where further information could have been very valuable.”

## Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations.

“All — or most — purpose authorities

- (1) A system of all — or most-purpose authorities would involve a major change in the structure of local government. If such a change is thought worthy of

Table 1

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF METROPOLITAN COUNTIES COMPARED TO ENGLAND AND THE SHIRE COUNTIES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Tyne and Wear	Population Present on Census Night 5/4/81	Population Expressed as Percentage of Total Population in England 5/1/81	Population Change 1971-81 expressed as a percentage	Average Gross Weekly Earnings of Full-time Man April 1981	Professionals, Employers and Managers expressed as a Percentage of all Economically active Persons 1977-79	Unemployment Rate Expressed as Percentage July 1981	No. of Households without Car or Van, expressed as Percentage of all Households 1977-79	No. of Households Lacking at least one Basic Amenity Expressed as Percentage of all Households 1977-79
Merseyside	1,143,245	2.5	-5.65	131.8	10.7	15.7	59.4	4.7
Greater Manchester	1,513,070	3.3	-8.66	137.4	11.6	17.9	52.7	7.4
West Yorkshire	2,594,778	5.6	-4.92	136.6	13.1	13.4	50.2	6.9
West Yorkshire	2,037,510	4.4	-1.46	132.0	13.2	12.1	51.1	4.7
South Yorkshire	1,301,813	2.8	-1.57	139.3	10.7	13.7	52.6	6.0
West Midlands	2,644,634	5.7	-5.32	133.8	11.7	15.2	46.7	6.6
England	46,220,955	—	0.44	141.0	15.5	11.2	42.4	5.8
All Shire Counties	—	—	—	—	16.5	—	35.4	4.5

Sources 1-4 Central Statistical Office, Regional Trend, H.M.S.O. 1982

Sources 5, 7, 8 Department of the Environment, National Dwelling and Housing Survey, H.M.S.O. 1980

Source 6 Central Statistical Office, Regional Trend, H.M.S.O. 1982 and Employment by Region, Employment Gazette



consideration by the Government, it should be examined specifically on a country-wide basis (paragraph 21).

- (2) To establish the four city districts — Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow — as most-purpose authorities within the present structure would undermine the corporate identity of the encompassing regions and run counter to the concept of the two-tier system (paragraph 27).

*Planning and associated functions*

- (4) The existing distribution of planning functions at the strategic and the local level should remain (paragraph 49).
- (10) Regional and district planning authorities should agree procedures for consultation about categories of planning applications (paragraph 58).

*Infrastructural services and associated functions*

- (13) Responsibility for highway functions should remain with regional councils (paragraph 65).
- (18) Regional councils should provide and manage public car parks (paragraph 70).
- (20) The traffic management content of local plans should be approved by regional councils (paragraph 72).
- (21) Regional councils should be responsible for clearing snow from roads and for gritting, but district councils should regard it as an obligation to give positive assistance.
- (31) Regional councils should have powers to assist industry, but they should be required to establish industrial development committees on which district councils could, if they wish, be represented (paragraph 116).

*Environmental services*

- (47) Consumer protection should stay with regional councils (paragraph 172).
- (52) Public Lighting should become the responsibility of regional councils alone. Developers should have to install lighting in new housing schemes (paragraphs 182 and 183).

*Transport*

- (58) Local government responsibility for public transport services including aerodromes, ferries and harbours and providing and maintaining bus shelters should lie with regional councils (paragraphs 205, 207, 208 and 212).

*Protective services*

- (60) Local government responsibility for the police and fire service should remain with regional councils (paragraphs 215 and 217).

APPENDIX B

**THE FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF REORGANISATION**

1. In order to assess the costs of reorganisation the approach adopted has been to examine in detail the effects upon West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council. The costs would involve:

- (a) staffing costs associated with severance schemes, recruitment, training and disturbance;
- (b) accommodation costs for staff in the new locations;
- (c) specific operational costs.

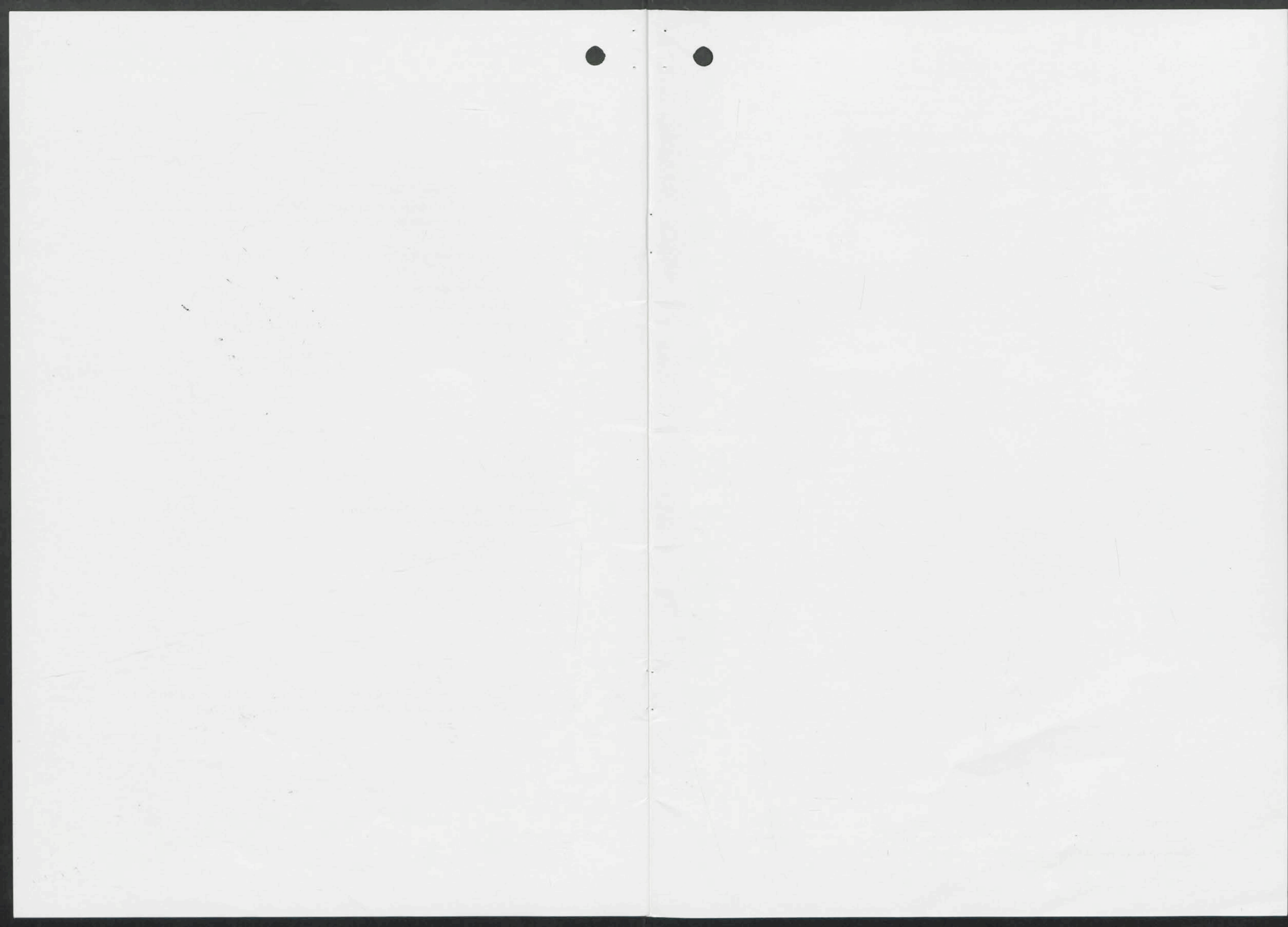
The price base used in the calculations has been 1982/83 outturn prices.

2. The various costs of reorganisation are summarised below.

	Annual Costs £m	Other Associated Costs £m
Staff Costs		
Severance		12.3-21.5
Disturbance		5.1
Net Additional permanent staff	3.3	
Additional staff recruitment expenses		0.3- 0.5
Temporary staff and overtime		1.2
Land and Buildings Costs		
Additional Accommodation	1.1	
Disposals		2.0 CR
Operational Costs		
Additional Waste Disposal Facilities	2.1	
Computer	1.6	3.0
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	8.1	19.9-29.3

A detailed report showing the make-up of these figures is available on request from the Director of Finance, County Hall, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF1 2QN.







*Published on behalf of the Metropolitan Counties of Greater Manchester, Merseyside,  
South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire by West Yorkshire  
Metropolitan County Council, County Hall, Wakefield, WF1 2QW.*



