

PRIME MINISTER

Inquiry into Local Government Practice and Procedures

Patrick Jenkin has recommended the appointment of Mr. David Widdicombe, Q.C., as Chairman of the Inquiry. The Law Officers were consulted, and endorsed his recommendation. The Chancellor raised doubts about Mr. Widdicombe on the grounds that he "had reason to believe that he remains far from sympathetic to the present Government".

I have tracked down the source of these doubts. Hartley Booth spoke to a senior bencher who claimed to know Mr. Widdicombe well and who expressed the view that he was unsympathetic to the Government. This was relayed to Peter Cropper and thence to the Chancellor. We therefore have conflicting sources of advice.

To resolve this issue, I have gone back to the Law Officers and the message I have received from both the Attorney General and the Solicitor General is that they have known Mr. Widdicombe for twenty years and they stand by their original endorsement without qualification. They have consulted members of the Planning Bar, including people who are closely in tune with Government thinking.

If Mr. Widdicombe is to be appointed, Patrick Jenkin would like to approach him tomorrow before he leaves for two weeks in the United States.

In these circumstances, agree that Mr. Widdicombe be approached?

AT

Yes not.

ANDREW TURNBULL

10 January, 1985