

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref. A084/2017

PRIME MINISTER

---

At your meeting on 2 July you invited me to do further work on a possible structure for managing the urban programme and urban policy. I thought you would find it helpful to have a preliminary report before the first meeting of MISC 104 on 16 July.

2. There seems to be general agreement that Sir Robin Ibbs's idea of a new executive agency has too many practical and presentational disadvantages (including the need for legislation) to commend it as a way to implement the Government's policy objectives. You were also not attracted by the idea of taking the lead in urban policy away from the Department of the Environment. But there seems to be scope for adapting the interdepartmental Task Force approach, which we have used successfully on Merseyside, to the development and management of policy both in other inner areas and at national level.

3. One way to get the basic elements of a National Task Force (and some modest arrangements at local level) in place without too much difficulty or delay would be to relabel some existing staff within the Department of the Environment and establish some interdepartmental committee machinery. The present leader of the Merseyside Task Force would be available to lead the new national task force, and would be well qualified to do so. This is the solution favoured by the Department of the Environment.

4. If Ministers simply wanted a cosmetic response to the review, then I would not advise anything more elaborate than that. If, however, you accept Sir Robin Ibbs's view that the arrangements at both national and local level need to be much more effective, not simply in terms of the management of £350 million or so now spent on the urban programme, but also in meeting the wider objectives of urban policy, then we should need something more radical. To get that right needs more

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

clarity than yet exists about the problems and tasks the new structure will have to tackle.

5. If Ministers want more than the cosmetic (as I hope they do), I should like to carry out further work, in consultation with Sir Robin Ibbs and with the Permanent Secretaries of the Departments concerned, with a view to letting you have detailed proposals in good time before the second meeting of MISC 104 after the Recess. That assumes that MISC 104 will decide on Monday against immediate publication of the report of the review. If Ministers opted for publication before the Recess, we should need to produce a less than perfect outline of a structure.

ReA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

13 July 1984

CONFIDENTIAL