

ECLADM.

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RECORD OF MEETING HELD AT OFFICES OF MERSEYSIDE TASK FORCE
AT 1225, 2 OCTOBER 1984

Present:

Prime Minister	Mr Keva Coombes (Chairman,
Secretary of State for	Merseyside County Council)
the Environment	Mr Ray O'Brien (Chief
Mr Renshaw	Executive, Merseyside
Mr Turnbull	County Council)

Mr Coombes asked that before Ministers took final decisions on abolition they examined carefully the circumstances of Merseyside. He believed a strong case could be made for its retention. He said that many of the developments the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State would see, e.g. Speke Airport, Albert Dock, Wavertree Technology Park, had come about with the cooperation and support of the MCC. It was a council with a proven record of success, which had attracted cross-party support in favour of its retention.

He believed that an authority going beyond the boundaries of Liverpool was essential to ensure cooperation between the districts. He regarded Merseyside as a natural community which, for the purposes of local government, should not be artificially divided.

He went on to discuss the problems of the City of Liverpool. He had noted the reference in the Prime Minister's speech to the drain of the "able and adventurous". He confirmed the existence of this phenomenon and confessed that he and his family had themselves moved to the Wirral. He did not believe that the problems of Liverpool could be solved in the political environment that

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was left.

The Prime Minister said the powers of the metropolitan counties were limited - they did not for example have responsibility for health, education or housing.

(Mr Coombes argued that transport, fire and police plus a development role provided a sufficient basis for an elected authority.) The Prime Minister said that Mr Coombes' argument was effectively that a higher tier of local government had to be created to make good the deficiencies of the lower tier. The logic of this would be to dissolve the districts. She asked why it would not be possible, after abolition, to get more able people involved in Liverpool politics.

Mr O'Brien argued that, although Merseyside had a population comparable with say Lancashire, Nottinghamshire or Kent, education was divided amongst five districts. The same was true for social services.

The Secretary of State for the Environment warned against the "nothing else will change" fallacy. After abolition the behaviour of the districts could well change. He reminded Mr Coombes that the idea of a non-elected body to undertake industrial promotion for the Merseyside area was still on the agenda.

The meeting ended at 1240.

AT

3 October 1984

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CC MASTER SET

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 October 1984

I attach a copy of a record of the meeting with Merseyside County Council. I assume you will be sending me in due course the record you are doing of the meeting with the Liverpool City Council.

I am copying this letter to David Renshaw of the Merseyside Task Force.

(Andrew Turnbull)

John Ballard Esq
Department of the Environment.