



LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

SHORT VERSION OF THE REPORT OF THE
ROYAL COMMISSION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND

CHAIRMAN: THE RT. HON. LORD REDCLIFFE-MAUD

*Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty
June 1969*

LONDON

**THE REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON
LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND**

**“LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM”: SHORT VERSION OF
THE REPORT**

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VOLUME I REPORT

Cmnd. 4040

VOLUME II MEMORANDUM OF DISSENT BY MR. D. SENIOR

Cmnd. 4040-I

VOLUME III RESEARCH APPENDICES

Cmnd. 4040-II



Andrew Kinnock
2 July 1969
[Signature]

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Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty
June 1989

ROYAL COMMISSION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND

1966—1969

To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY

We, the undersigned Commissioners, having been appointed to consider the structure of Local Government in England, outside Greater London, in relation to its existing functions; and to make recommendations for authorities and boundaries, and for functions and their division, having regard to the size and character of areas in which these can be most effectively exercised and the need to sustain a viable system of local democracy; and to report:

HUMBLY SUBMIT TO YOUR MAJESTY THE FOLLOWING SHORT VERSION OF OUR REPORT.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

INTRODUCTION

Personal liberty, freedom of thought and freedom of speech are familiar to English people. But it is unwise to take them for granted. Their safeguard today lies in representative government, in the power of the body of citizens to express their will through their government and in the use they make of that power. The present national system has no doubt a number of defects and it does not lack critics. The fact remains that it commands enough positive support to ensure a turnout of some 75–80% of registered electors to vote in general elections.

This should be true of local government, the only representative political institution outside Parliament, but it is not. Everyone can vote but normally less than half do. Local government deals with matters of the closest concern to everyone—the layout of their town and its neighbourhood, the look of their street or village, traffic and buses, much of their housing, the way their children's schools are run, the care of the old and the handicapped among them, the public health services (so largely taken for granted), and a score of other things that touch their own and their neighbour's personal interests and purses. Yet for the most part few trouble—or feel able—to keep in touch with what is done for them and in their name.

Democratic life depends on a reasonably close working relation between the citizen and his elected representatives. In local government this is too often lacking. Since the people are the same as those who concern themselves much more actively with national issues, the fault must lie in the difficulty that citizens have in understanding what the local issues are; and this, we believe, is due in large part to the way local government itself is organised.

Nor is this to be wondered at. English local government is in a sense a random growth. It has not been planned systematically in the light of what it has to do and the social and geographical conditions of each place. The Royal Commission set up in May 1966 was the first attempt ever to examine the government of our towns and countryside from top to bottom, and to plan a radically new start. There are two reasons why this has exceptional importance at the present time.

One is that scientific discovery and industrial progress are reshaping the life and work of the people of England faster and more fundamentally than in any previous period of our history. The material on which local government has to work, the situations that confront it, the patterns of settlement in town and country, have never stood still; but in recent years and in the years ahead they have altered and will alter in a quite new way. A new pattern of local government is needed urgently, to catch up with past and present changes and to keep up with changes still to come.

The second reason is of a different kind. In a period of great change, when huge unrepresentative organisations seem to control the lives of individuals and restrict personal freedom, people might be tempted to give up as a bad job the effort to master these impersonal forces. If they yielded, the loss would be irreparable. In this situation, local self-government should be a crucial influence. It should represent the citizen and be the means whereby he brings his views to bear on those public problems that touch most nearly his personal and domestic life. If local self-government withers the roots of democracy grow dry. If it is genuinely alive, it nourishes the reality of democratic freedom.

WHERE THE PROBLEM LIES

The purposes of local government

The pattern and character of local government must be such as to enable it to do four things: to perform efficiently a wide range of profoundly important tasks concerned with the safety, health and well-being of people in different localities; to attract and hold the interest of its citizens; to develop enough inherent strength to deal with national government in a valid partnership; and to adapt itself continuously to the unprecedented changes that are going on in the way people live, work, move, shop and enjoy themselves. These purposes have guided our assessment of the present and our proposals for the future.

After studying the evidence of some 2,000 witnesses, analysing the results of our research, and nearly three years of intensive discussion among ourselves, we are unanimous in our conviction that local government in England needs a new structure and a new map. Ten of the 11 members of the Commission agree about the principles on which the new structure and map should be based¹. Our reasons are as follows.

The facts of change

There have been vast changes in the situation with which local government has to deal. Here are some of the main ones, as brought out in the evidence presented to us and by our researches.

England's population has risen in the last twenty years by 5 millions, or 12 per cent. On current forecasts, by the year 2000 or thereabouts another 14 millions may have been added. This is in a country which is already one of the most densely populated in the world.

1. Mr. Senior agrees with our diagnosis and with some of our principles but cannot accept many of the proposals we base on them. His alternative proposals are set out in his memorandum of dissent, printed as volume II of the report and summarised on pages 20 and 21 of this short version.

There was a car for every five families in the early 1950's. Now there is one for every two. By 1980 there may be one for every family.

People now have higher expectations and wider horizons than formerly. They demand more and better services of every kind.

The mass of old houses and schools, the obsolescent fabric of towns, and many other legacies of the past, contrast more and more sharply with people's rising expectations, and call urgently for replacement.

In modern conditions where everything is bigger than it used to be— industrial organisation, financial needs, popular demand for services— central government's increasing power calls for increasingly strong local government. Otherwise local government will be swamped by the pressures and the power of the central authority, and a highly centralised form of government will result. To most people in England this is wholly unacceptable; but if there is no adequate counterpoise it must come.

Four basic faults

In the light of our review of the present pattern and working of local government and of our efforts to foresee the future, we became convinced that there are four basic faults in the existing structure which call for drastic change. Together they seriously reduce, and will increasingly reduce, the chances of ensuring that local government works efficiently and economically, is understood by the citizens who elect it, and holds their interest.

These are the four faults:

1. Local government areas do not fit the pattern of life and work in modern England. The gap will widen as social, economic and technological changes quicken.
2. The fragmentation of England into 79 county boroughs and 45 counties, exercising independent authority and dividing town from country, has made the proper planning of development and transportation¹ impossible. The result has often been an atmosphere of hostility between the county boroughs and the counties, and this has made it harder to decide difficult questions on their merits.
3. The division of responsibility within each county between the county council and a number of county district councils², together with the position of county boroughs as islands in the counties, means that services which should be in the hands of one authority are split up among several. This greatly complicates the work of meeting comprehensively the different needs of families and individuals.
4. Many local authorities are too small, in size and revenue, and in consequence too short of highly qualified manpower and technical equipment, to be able to do their work as well as it could and should be done.

1. "Transportation" covers transport planning, the design, construction and maintenance of highways, traffic management, control of car parking and the provision of public transport.

2. There are at present in England 1,086 county district councils, consisting of 227 non county borough, 449 urban district and 410 rural district councils.

Further failings

Partly but not wholly because of these structural faults, and in spite of the devoted efforts of councillors and officers, there are serious failings in local government's relationships with the public and with national government:—

The complex local government machinery seems, and often is, irrelevant and therefore impotent in face of the problems that confront people in their daily lives, either collectively or as families and individuals. Hence the feeling of many people that local government cannot help them, and the frequent sense of frustration among councillors and officers.

Parliament and central government doubt the ability of local governors, within the straitjacket of the present system, to run local affairs.

The variety in type and size of local authority, and the existence of several associations reflecting that variety, mean that local government seldom acts effectively as a single body in its dealings with central government.

TOWARDS A SOLUTION

One fundamental question

In considering what changes are needed to correct these structural and other defects there is one fundamental question. What size of authority, or range of size, in terms of population and of area, is needed for the democratic and efficient provision of particular services and for local self-government as a whole?

After examining each of the main services in turn, we decided that the answers to that question must be found by seeking to apply to each part of the country the following general principles.

Our general principles

1. Local authority areas must be so defined that they enable citizens and their elected representatives to have a sense of common purpose.
2. The areas must be based upon the interdependence of town and country.
3. In each part of the country, all services concerned with the physical environment (planning, transportation and major development) must be in the hands of one authority. Areas must be large enough to enable these authorities to meet the pressing land needs of the growing population, and their inhabitants must share a common interest in their environment because it is where they live, work, shop, and find their recreation.
4. All personal services (education, personal social services¹, health and housing), being closely linked in operation and effect, must also be in the hands of one authority, as strongly recommended by the recent report of the Seebohm Committee².

1. The "personal social services" include child care, various welfare services, care of the homeless, care of the handicapped, education welfare and child guidance, day nurseries, home help, mental health social work, adult training centres, social work services and welfare work undertaken by some housing authorities.

2. The Report of the Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services. Cmnd. 3703. H.M.S.O. 1968.

5. If possible, both the "environmental" and the "personal" groups of services should be in the hands of the same authority, because the influence of one on the other is great and likely to increase. Further, concentrating responsibility for all main local government services in a single authority for each area, as in the present county borough, would help to make the idea of local self-government a reality. Through allocation of priorities and co-ordinated use of resources, a single authority can relate its programmes for all services to objectives for its area considered as a whole.
6. Authorities must, however, be bigger than most county boroughs (and all county districts) are at present, if they are to command the resources and skilled manpower which they need to provide services with maximum efficiency.
7. The size of authorities must vary over a wide range if areas are to match the pattern of population. But a minimum population is necessary. What this should be is a question of great difficulty and we received much evidence about it. We concluded that this pointed to a minimum of around 250,000. Though authoritative witnesses would prefer a higher minimum for education—perhaps as high as 500,000—we did not accept that this was essential. Moreover, a minimum above 250,000 would be too high to provide coherent and reasonably compact areas in many parts of the country. It would also be unnecessarily large for the other personal services (the personal social services, health and housing), which must be kept together with education.
8. At the other end of the scale, authorities must not be so large in terms of population that organisation of their business becomes difficult and the elected representatives cannot keep in touch with the people affected by their policies. This is especially important in the personal services. There was little evidence to guide us but we concluded that a population of not much more than 1,000,000 should be the maximum for the personal services, though much would depend on the social and geographic characteristics of each area.
9. Where the area required for planning and the other environmental services contains too large a population for the personal services, a single authority for all services would not be appropriate; and in these parts of the country, responsibilities must be clearly divided between two levels, and related services kept together.
10. The new local government pattern should so far as practicable stem from the existing one. Wherever the case for change is in doubt, the common interests, traditions and loyalties inherent in the present pattern, and the strength of existing services as going concerns, should be respected.

APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES

The next question is what structure of local government would do most justice to these principles.

City regions

In considering this question, we first concentrated on the "city region", since this was the idea strongly advocated for the whole country by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, the department with chief responsibility for English local government¹. We examined various possible local government maps of England in turn, and the following points emerged:—

The city region idea has value because it takes account of the fact that people are now much more mobile than they were, and that activities in town and country are much more closely interlocked.

Witnesses put forward a variety of possible areas as city regions, ranging in number from 25 to 45 for the country as a whole. This suggested that the city region was not an idea which could be applied uniformly all over England, and in some parts of the country it did not seem to us to fit reality. In a number of areas it does provide the clue: around the great urban concentrations of Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, and also in areas where a big town is the natural centre for a wide area of surrounding countryside and smaller towns. But in others, such as the south west, insistence on the idea of the city region seemed to mean creating artificially constructed areas whose people have no sense of looking to a city centre or of sharing interests peculiar to themselves; and in the south east the idea leads to no clear local government pattern because the influence of London overshadows that of other centres.

Many suggested city regions would be so large as to need a second and lower level of authorities if local government is not to be too remote for effective contact between the elected representatives and the people. But many of these second level authorities would be too small to find the resources needed for the main local government services; and in any case the present splitting of personal services which ought to be concentrated in one authority would be reproduced over a large part of the country.

Alternatives

We therefore next considered various alternatives to applying the idea of the city region to the whole country. We examined a series of maps illustrating the other main proposals for a new structure which had been put to us in evidence. These proposals were: a single level; two levels of various kinds and sizes; main authorities performing most functions but with a level above them, covering a "province", to perform the rest. Other maps which our staff prepared for us showed that the country could be divided into 130 to 140 areas which had some coherence because of internal social and economic ties; but many of these areas have populations far too small to enable them to employ the range of staff needed for the efficient provision of any of the main services.

The need for local councils

Meanwhile we had become increasingly convinced by those who emphasised the need for an organ of community at grass roots level. Our first firm conclusion was that any new pattern of democratic government must include elected "local councils", not to provide main services, but to promote and watch over the particular interests of communities in city, town and village throughout England.

1. According to the Ministry's evidence, a city region "consists of a conurbation or one or more cities or big towns surrounded by a number of lesser towns and villages set in rural areas, the whole tied together by an intricate and closely meshed system of relationships and communications, and providing a wide range of employment and services."

The need for provincial councils

Our examination of England had also led us to a second firm conclusion: local government, however organised, needs to include a new representative institution with authority over areas larger than any city region, not unlike the eight areas of the present regional economic planning councils. This "provincial council" would handle the broader planning issues, work out provincial economic strategy in collaboration with central government and be able to act on behalf of the whole province.

One operational level of local authorities or two?

Assuming therefore that whatever arrangements are made for the operation of the main local government services there will be need for complementary institutions "above" and "below", at the levels of the province and the local community, we decided to re-examine each part of England in turn, apply our general principles and ask ourselves where there are areas in which operational responsibility for all local government services can appropriately be concentrated: that is to say, areas which

- (i) can properly be treated as units for carrying out the "environmental" services;
- (ii) have populations broadly within the range of 250,000 to not much more than 1,000,000, the size that we had concluded would be appropriate for the efficient performance of the "personal" group of services;
- (iii) can be looked after effectively and democratically by one council.

Where areas exist that meet all these three conditions, the argument in favour of one authority for each of them would be decisive. Elsewhere responsibility would need to be divided between authorities at two levels; and we recognised that this would be necessary where we found that the planning problems of big urban concentrations have to be dealt with over areas containing such large populations that a single authority would be unwieldy and, for the personal services, remote.

Drawing the new boundaries

In working out possible boundaries with these alternatives in mind we had to judge in each case where the balance of advantage lay, by weighing a number of different considerations, and in particular these three:—

- (i) *The pattern of living.* That is to say, the distribution of population and industry and the pattern of travel for employment, shopping, entertainment and other purposes, together with prospective developments likely to change these facts and modify the social and economic future of the area.
- (ii) *Democracy and efficiency.* The best practicable balance between the needs of efficiency (in terms of population, geography and resources of money, manpower and technical equipment) and the requirements of effective representation.
- (iii) *The present pattern* of local government.

In making this survey, which led us to our final conclusions, we had two kinds of material to work upon. One was the evidence (which we have published) of a wide variety of witnesses, including the great departments of state and many local authorities, the local authority associations, and experts in planning, administration, and welfare.

The other was the fruit of a great number of detailed researches, some already done, some specially carried out for us (most of these too we have published). Between them these investigations have shown us many of the changes that have taken place over the past 80 years in the way that people live and work. We have seen the changes in the pattern of settlement where towns have grown up and new roads been made; the effect of the transport revolution on where people live, their shopping habits and their recreation; how hard or easy it is to move between one place and another, where bus routes run, where letters are sorted and distributed, where local newspapers circulate and where the various broadcast and television programmes are heard.

What we had to decide for each part of the country was how much weight to attach to each of the three considerations listed above—the pattern of living, the needs of democracy and efficiency, and the boundaries as they now are. Sometimes all three pointed one way, and the shape of a satisfactory authority settled itself. Sometimes this was not so: for example, the pattern of people's lives and movement might suggest an area too small to support an authority that could carry out services efficiently. Sometimes—quite often, in fact—the existing boundaries cut across areas that appeared in the light of the other two considerations to be the right ones.

In an annex to the main report, at the end of volume I, the reasoning that the Commission followed in each area is set out for all the proposed new authorities. The citizen who wishes to understand what lies behind the recommendations that concern his own area will find his answer there. What follows now is a summary of our main conclusions on the new system of local government.

OUR MAIN CONCLUSIONS

England (outside London which was not within our terms of reference) should be divided into 61 new local government areas, each covering town and country. They are shown in the figure on page 10. In 58 of them a single authority should be responsible for all services. In the 3 very large and, for some purposes, indivisible metropolitan areas around Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, responsibility for services should be divided in each case between a metropolitan authority whose key functions would be planning, transportation and major development, and a number of metropolitan district authorities whose key functions would be education, the personal social services, health and housing¹.

These 61 new local government areas should be grouped, together with Greater London, in 8 provinces, each with its own provincial council. Provincial councils should be elected by the authorities for the unitary and metropolitan areas (including, in the south-east, the Greater London authorities), but should also include co-opted members. The key function of these councils would be to settle the provincial strategy and planning framework within which the main authorities must operate. They would replace the present regional economic planning councils and collaborate with central government in the economic and social development of each province. They will therefore play an essential part in the future adaptation of local government to the changes in ways of life and movement that time and technical progress will bring¹.

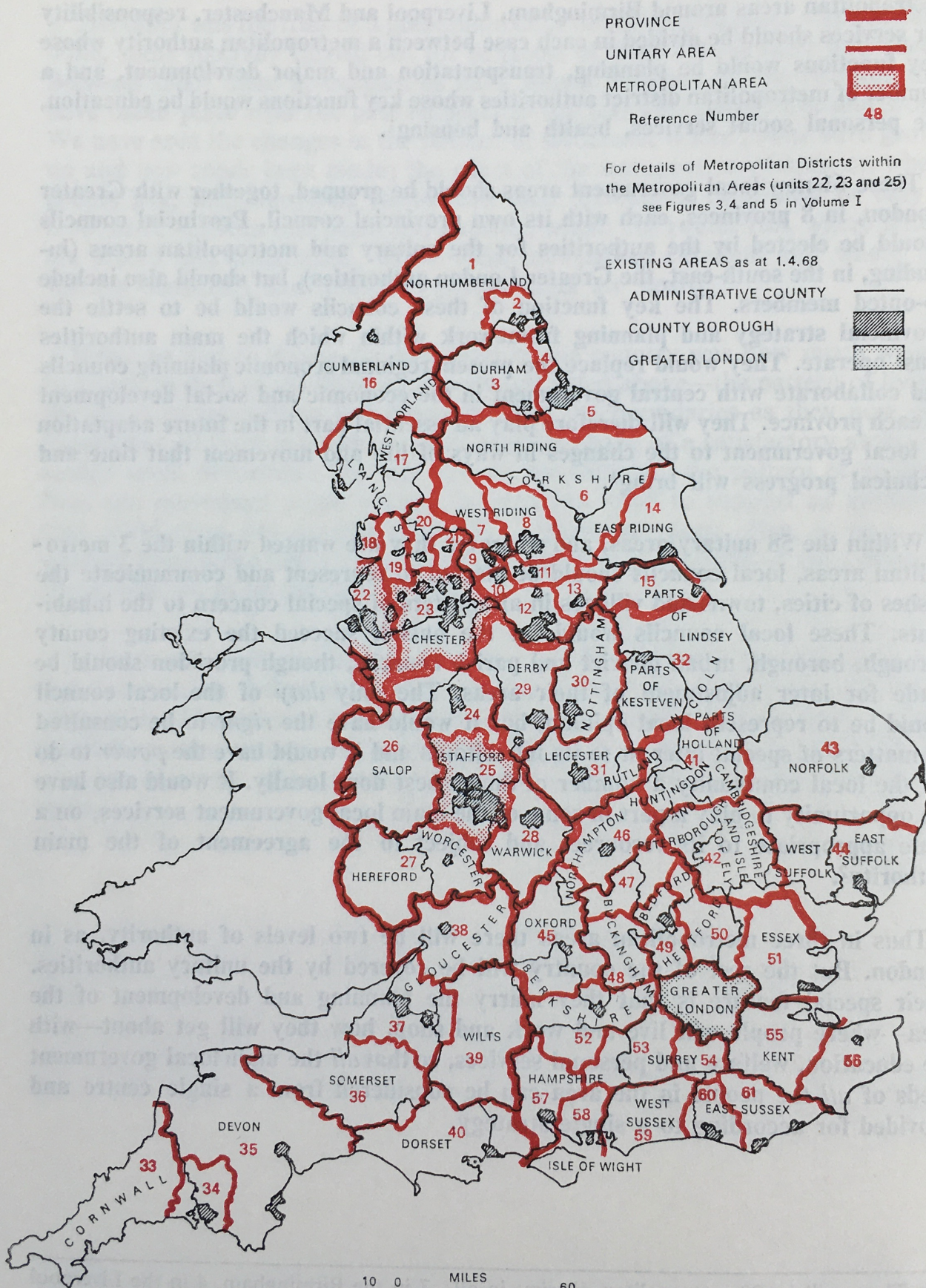
Within the 58 unitary areas, and wherever they are wanted within the 3 metropolitan areas, local councils should be elected to represent and communicate the wishes of cities, towns and villages in all matters of special concern to the inhabitants. These local councils would, at the outset, succeed the existing county borough, borough, urban district and parish councils, though provision should be made for later adjustment of their areas. The only *duty* of the local council would be to represent local opinion, but it would have the *right* to be consulted on matters of special interest to its inhabitants and it would have the *power* to do for the local community a number of things best done locally. It would also have the opportunity to play a part in some of the main local government services, on a scale appropriate to its resources and subject to the agreement of the main authority².

Thus in three metropolitan areas there will be two levels of authority, as in London. But the rest of the country will be covered by the unitary authorities. Their special feature is that they marry the planning and development of the area—where people will live and work and shop, how they will get about—with the education, welfare and personal services, so that *all* the main local government needs of *all* the people in the area can be considered from a single centre and provided for according to a single strategy.

1. There will be 20 metropolitan districts in all—7 in the Birmingham, 4 in the Liverpool and 9 in the Manchester area. On page 18 we show in more detail how services would be divided between metropolitan authorities and district councils.

2. On page 19 we describe in more detail the work of the local and provincial councils.

THE NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT MAP



MAKING IT WORK

How will the new councils be run?

The new main authorities will be big organisations. We have kept them as compact as we could; and we do not think they will be too big to be both efficient in organisation and democratic in the opportunities they give for councillors and their constituents to keep in close, informal touch and exchange ideas. But they are big; not only that, they will have to deal with a much greater range of different sorts of problem than most large businesses. So the need for adopting the right principles on which to base their methods of operation is critically important.

This is all the more so since traditionally local authorities are ill-suited to the conduct of a very big business. Most councils have in the past divided themselves for working purposes into a large number of committees, each one taking fairly complete responsibility for running one service—housing, education and so on—with their members, the elected councillors, dealing personally with many of the detailed, individual questions that arise week by week for settlement. Neither this breakdown into semi-independent committees, nor this involvement of councillors in the “nuts-and-bolts” of administration, is appropriate to the running of a big authority in an age of highly specialised methods of management.

We do not propose one uniform system of organisation for all authorities: we think each should work out its own methods as it judges best. But we do lay down two principles:

The first principle is **integration**. It means ensuring that all the different aspects of a council's work are looked at as a whole. For this there should be a central committee, however named, to advise the council on its strategy and priorities, co-ordinate the work of the service committees (which should not be too numerous), weigh the relative importance of the various measures each may wish to adopt (all of them costing money), see that all their policies are mutually consistent, and ensure that the best and most modern managerial methods are adopted in each department and in the work of the council as a whole.

This principle not only makes for efficiency, economy and a proper sense of priorities: it also reflects the growing interconnection of each form of local authority service with many of the others—health with welfare, housing with both, education with the other personal services, planning with transportation, and so on.

The second principle is **delegation**. There must be a clearer definition of the respective roles of elected member and local government officer. Members should be freed from detailed matters so that they have time for the study and discussion of broader policy questions. Once policies are settled, their day-to-day running should be left to the officers. They must be trusted to know where the boundary lies between key questions and the rest. They must also be trusted to have a sharp eye for the apparently small issue that councillors should know about because it is politically sensitive or may involve a point of principle.

How will the new councils be financed?

Recently the expenditure of local authorities has been growing three times as fast as the whole income of the country. The former has been rising by nearly 2s. in the £ every year, the latter by 9d. or 10d. So local authorities have claimed a steadily increasing part of the wealth the nation produces. There are several reasons for this. Central government, representing public demand, wants more and better local authority services; there are more people, they move about more, and a bigger proportion of them are children and old people, whose needs for the services local authorities provide are greatest; finally, there have been inflation and rising costs, which may account for half the increases in expenditure. Most of this is likely to continue, though overhead expenses should certainly be cut down when the new authorities replace the present 1,200.

The local rates, which are local authorities' sole independent source of income, have risen substantially, but much less than expenditure. The difference has been made good by the Exchequer—by grants from central government. These now account for over half the income of local authorities, and the percentage is rising higher still. The tendency is not a healthy one. It limits not only the freedom of local authorities in making decisions that should properly belong to them, but also their sense of responsibility, to the extent that they are spending money they do not raise and do not have to account for to their electors.

We are in no doubt that it would contribute a great deal to the vitality and efficiency of the new authorities if they could be given access to other sources of income, to add to their revenue from rates. Various suggestions have been made about how this should be done: local income tax, local sales tax, petrol tax, motor licence fees. We have not examined these and other possibilities in any detail and make no recommendation. We do think, however, that under the new system, with wide areas combining town and country, new sources of local revenue can be found, given the will to find them. We also think it will become increasingly odd to exempt agricultural land and buildings from all rates.

The essential point, however, is the need to liberate local government from too much dependence on central funds. A decision of this kind would call for some sacrifice by central government of the very great influence now exercised, largely through its financial dominance, over local authorities. Obviously central government must retain control over all issues that are vital to the conduct of national policy. But short of that we believe that national government could give local government greater independence, knowing that both would reap considerable benefit as a result.

Stronger local authorities would be able to conduct their affairs more efficiently. Their greater resources and wider areas would enable them to provide better services—an important objective of national policy—and to give better value for money. They would do better the things that central government relies on them to do, and would be in a position to react more flexibly, to better effect, when changed financial conditions—for good or ill—lead central government to ask for changes in the total level of local authority expenditure.

The same objective of greater freedom and responsibility for local government should lead to modifications in the present system of controlling its capital expenditure programmes. The broad national total of these programmes and the broad total to be spent locally in developing each of the main services—education, housing etc.—must be determined centrally. But local authorities could well be given more freedom of manoeuvre and adjustment within the total capital expenditure allowed to them.

Living within one's means is always a discipline, especially when needs are great and means are limited. It enforces some hard choices. But local authorities of character and ability—and the new, powerful ones should have both—can face these tests. If they succeed in keeping their citizens informed of what they propose and why, and in carrying them along with their decisions, the whole quality of local public life will gain.

THE FUTURE

Before we go on to review the main advantages that may be hoped for from the changes which the report recommends, we must make one point quite clear. The new structure will clear away many obstacles now hampering good local government and open many doors to progress. But structural changes provide opportunities, they furnish no guarantee of better things. What counts is the response that people make to the new system—elected councillors, professional staffs and, still more, the citizens who elect the one and employ the others. The value we shall all get from local government will depend on the quality, humanity, and efficiency of councillors and their staffs, and above all on the mutual awareness and understanding that local governors and citizens can develop and maintain.

The virtue of the new system is that it offers opportunity for the following main gains.

The main gains summarised

Greatly improved *service to the public*, both in providing a better environment and in taking care of the needs of individual people and families.

More effective *use of scarce resources* of money and skilled manpower.

Increased *ability of local governors* to meet the challenges of technological and social change.

More likelihood that people will *recognise the relevance* of local government to their own and to their neighbour's well-being.

The revitalising of local self-government throughout the country, so that in England as a whole we have more sense of taking an active part in our own government.

1. Better services

Local government can become a more effective instrument for providing citizens with the particular services they need. Here are some examples.

Planning and transportation

In each part of England it will be possible for the various problems of the environment to be grappled with as a whole, by the people directly concerned and with due concern for people's lives and circumstances.

Decisions where people's houses or flats are to be built, and where the factories and offices are to go, will therefore be more likely to match real needs.

As the number of people and cars constantly increases, questions of land-use—for housing and schools, industry, commerce and transportation—will continue to become more and more complicated; but in the new and larger local government areas it will be possible (as it is not today) to work out and apply coherent plans for meeting the challenge of present and future local problems.

Among the chief of these are finding room for the new houses, clearing slums, renewing urban centres, fostering new employment opportunities, deciding what additional roads are needed, determining the balance between public and private transport, and trying to reconcile development with use of the countryside for agriculture and recreation.

Education

Education (outside universities) requires co-ordinated local administration. In the new system primary, grammar and comprehensive schools, further education colleges, polytechnics and colleges of education, will for the most part all be in the charge of one authority in each part of England. These 78 authorities (58 unitary and 20 metropolitan district) will take the place of the present 124 education authorities, 31 "excepted districts" and 125 divisional executives. Governors and heads will have more scope to develop the individual character of their schools and colleges.

Personal social services

Everywhere a single authority will be responsible, not only for all the various personal social services but also for the intimately related services of education, health and housing. This will open the way for the development of a comprehensive service for families and individuals.

House-building and house-management

Eighty-one authorities will take the place of more than a thousand. In the 58 unitary areas one authority will be responsible not only for all aspects of housing and the other social services but for planning too. In each of the three metropolitan areas a single authority will measure the extent and nature of the need for housing, decide how it can be met, and secure a common housing policy; while strong district councils will be responsible for most of the building and all of the management. Housing output everywhere is likely to improve, thanks to the strength of the new housing authorities and their ability to place larger and longer orders, while those in need of houses will have fewer authorities to deal with and tenants will have the chance of moving house over wider and more varied areas.

2. Better use of resources

Structural change cannot of itself increase the supply of scarce and highly qualified manpower, but it does make possible its better and more economical use, thanks to the concentration of activities in fewer and larger councils.

The full use of new and developing management techniques, computers and other equipment will be brought within the reach of all authorities.

Thus the public will be able to obtain increasing value for whatever money they decide to spend on the services provided through local government. This will make it easier to meet growing demands for services without spending proportionately more of the national wealth.

3. Responsiveness to change

The new authorities have been designed to deal flexibly with the local problems of a dynamic society in which the present high rate of social and economic change may well grow faster still. This flexibility should ensure that the new local government structure can operate successfully without radical alteration. But the new structure includes machinery for adjustment, either by local government itself or, where necessary, by central government, when and where this is called for by significant economic or social change. In drawing the new local government map we have taken account of plans for future development that we regard as reasonably firm. But no-one can do more than guess the effects on some localities of the growth and movement of industry and population, of technological advance and changing social habits. Adjustments will be needed as time goes on and the provincial councils will be in a position to see the needs and propose changes as and when these prove to be required.

4. Democratic strength—a double gain

There will be new opportunities for making local self-government a reality.

A better balance between local and central government

Local government will be strengthened in its relationship with central government:

Provincial councils will give the national government new opportunities for decentralising power and developing new methods of collaboration between central and local government.

The new metropolitan and unitary authorities will be strong enough, in terms of area, population and resources, for Parliament and central government to trust them with increased responsibility and substantially relax the present detailed supervision.

It will be easier for local government to speak with a united voice.

Improvement of the rating system and a broadening of the base of local taxation will become more feasible with the establishment of fewer and more powerful authorities. It will thus become possible to reduce the dependence of local government on grants from the Exchequer.

The local government structure will be capable of organising and supplying new services to meet new national and local needs. There will no longer be the need to create unrepresentative machinery for special purposes.

The scale of the new authorities will make it reasonable to consider bringing the national health service within the framework of local democracy and linking it with kindred social services.

More encouragement to take part

There will be fresh encouragement for citizens to take an active and effective part in their own local government, and new vitality can thus be breathed into our local life.

The main authorities will operate in areas linking town and country, corresponding to the life and work of those they represent. They will have comprehensive powers to deal with the real problems that need solution now or will arise in future. People will therefore have more reason to recognise that local government is important to their lives and to feel that it deserves their active interest; and it will be easier, assuming that the new authorities actively collaborate, for press, radio and television to play their crucial parts in aiding communication between the public and their local representatives. Thus people, from a wide cross-section of society, may be the readier to concern themselves with local government and to consider standing for election; a larger proportion of the electorate may feel it worth while to use their voting powers; a better understanding of what local government can do will become possible.

Within the wider framework of the main authority, local councils can put fresh life into the rural parish and give communities in cities and towns new kinds of opportunity to speak and take action for themselves.

At the provincial level for the first time there will be representative councils, enabling large areas of the country that share common interests to have a powerful say in their development.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY: THE PROSPECTS

Local government is more than the sum of the particular services provided. It is an essential part of English democratic government, and reorganisation on the lines that we propose will make it a more powerful part than it has ever been before. Elected bodies will be far more able to resolve their problems—shaping the physical environment to meet human needs; seeking to reconcile traffic with civilised living and to make transport a better servant of the public; helping the individual, as national wealth increases, to become healthier and better educated; enabling neighbours to help each other more effectively.

These are the possible gains from a radical reorganisation of the existing structure. If we are not willing to face the pains involved the prospect for local government is bleak. Local governors under the present system, we are convinced, cannot grapple effectively with their problems; this indeed was generally admitted to us. Already the odds against success are heavy, but present problems are not going to stand still. Their weight gathers momentum every year. During the next decade, unless the system is reformed, local government will be increasingly discredited and will be gradually replaced by agencies of central government.

Reorganisation of the system will make heavy demands on present local governors, both council-members and their officers. Many of them, while accepting that some reorganisation is needed, will disagree with our particular proposals. Most of them will regret disturbance of their own local authority. But if they believe that local government should have a long and fruitful future,

can they resist the logic of the need for drastic and immediate change? Will not such change give them a better chance of serving effectively as local governors in years to come? There is room, of course, for endless argument about *what* change; no one knows that better than we do. But we believe that our analysis points conclusively to the new system we propose.

Throughout the course of our enquiry we have become steadily more convinced that a powerful system of local government can in some crucial ways enhance the quality of English national life. The whole Commission is unanimous in its conviction that if the present local government system is drastically reformed, its scope extended to include functions now in the hands of nominated bodies, and the grip of central government relaxed, England can become a more efficient, democratic and humane society.

ALL OF WHICH WE HUMBLY SUBMIT FOR YOUR MAJESTY'S GRACIOUS CONSIDERATION.

REDCLIFFE-MAUD (*Chairman*)
JOHN BOLTON (*Vice-Chairman*)
EVELYN SHARP
FRANCIS HILL*
A. H. MARSHALL
VICTOR FEATHER
PETER MURSELL
J. L. LONGLAND*
T. DAN SMITH
R. C. WALLIS*

J. M. DOUGLAS (*Secretary*)

E. W. L. KEYMER (*Assistant Secretary*)

28th May, 1969

* Sir Francis Hill and Mr. Wallis consider that instead of 58 unitary authorities there should be 63. Mr. Longland considers that instead of 58 unitary authorities there should be 47 and that instead of 20 metropolitan districts there should be 16. Their reasons are explained in their notes of reservation in volume I of our report.

ALLOCATION OF SERVICES IN THE NEW SYSTEM

A unitary authority will be responsible for all local government services. (Some authorities will have to be combined for police purposes.)

In metropolitan areas, services will be allocated to metropolitan authorities and district councils as in the following table.

Metropolitan authority

- (i) Planning
 - Building regulations
 - Transportation
 - Intelligence
- (ii) Housing
 - (a) metropolitan housing policy
 - (b) building in the interests of the metropolitan area as a whole
 - (c) building to ensure fulfilment of planning policies
 - (d) policy for selection of tenants
 - (e) metropolitan rent policy
- (iii) Water supply
 - Main sewerage
 - Sewage disposal
 - Refuse disposal
 - Clean air—metropolitan priorities
- (iv) Arts, entertainment, sports, parks and recreation (in interest of whole metropolitan area)
 - Nomination of members to authorities for national parks
- (v) Police
 - Fire
 - Ambulances
- (vi) Co-ordination of investment in metropolitan area

Metropolitan district councils

- (i) Education
 - Libraries
 - Youth employment
- (ii) Personal social services
 - Personal health services
- (iii) Housing (within framework of metropolitan policy)
 - (a) building (except as allocated to metropolitan authority)
 - (b) house management
 - (c) all other housing powers
- (iv) Local sewers and drains
 - Refuse collection
 - Clean air—local action and enforcement in accordance with metropolitan priorities
 - Cemeteries and crematoria
 - Coast protection
- (v) Arts, entertainment, sports, parks and recreation (in interest of individual districts)
- (vi) Food and drugs
 - Weights and measures
 - Consumer protection
 - Shops Acts
 - Licensing of places of public entertainment
 - Registration of births, deaths and marriages
 - Registration of electors
- (vii) All other local government functions
- (viii) Rating

Provincial councils will:

- (1) settle the provincial framework of land-use and economic strategy within which planning authorities must operate
- (2) plan the development of
 - (i) further education
 - (ii) specialist education of handicapped and other children
 - (iii) child care
 - (iv) other personal social services
 - (v) cultural and recreational services
 - (vi) tourism
- (3) have a reserve power to undertake development necessary to ensure the success of a provincial plan
- (4) be able to give financial assistance to projects intended to benefit a whole province or a number of authorities within it.

Local councils will vary greatly in size and resources, from small villages to large cities.

- (1) They will have the *duty* to represent the wishes of their inhabitants.
- (2) They will have the *right* to be consulted by the main authorities on any significant proposal affecting their communities.
- (3) They, like main authorities, will have the *power* to spend money for the benefit of their inhabitants without statutory limit and to provide, at their own expense, anything within the ambit of local government required for the amenity and convenience of their localities—from village greens to municipal parks, fair grounds to theatres, community centres to concert halls.
- (4) In unitary areas, they will also be able, according to their resources, to take part in the provision of some of the main services, such as house-building, house improvement, preservation, conservation, local development, highway improvement, and the appointment of school governors and managers.

MR. SENIOR'S SUMMARY OF HIS ALTERNATIVE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I cannot agree with my colleagues that a pattern of all-purpose local authorities conforming to a predetermined range of population size would enable essential functions to be effectively discharged or a viable system of local democracy to be sustained over the greater part of England. Especially in the more populous regions, the units they recommend would fragment planning and development problems; in most cases they would also be too remote for the democratic and responsive administration of the personal services and too unwieldy for the efficient co-ordination of the whole range of local government functions.

These unacceptable defects result, in my view, from a theoretical approach to the problem of local government organisation in which the requirements in population terms of administrative efficiency and democratic control are analysed in abstraction from the facts of social geography. My colleagues take account of these facts only as considerations to be weighed against others (including the present pattern of local government boundaries) in applying their population limits to the definition of all-purpose units in particular areas.

The right approach, in my view, is to analyse functional and democratic needs in relation to the patterns of settlement, activity and community structure in which a motor-age society organises itself. This analysis points to a general need to define units in terms of the potential service and commuting hinterlands of major centres for the functions associated with planning, transportation and development, and in terms of accessibility and population size for the personal services. In a few parts of the country the units so defined coincide, and all criteria can be satisfied by a single all-purpose authority. Elsewhere a two-level structure is indicated as the only means of reconciling functional effectiveness with local democracy.

Accordingly I recommend a predominantly two-level system of service-running local government, comprising 35 directly elected regional authorities, responsible for the planning/transportation/development complex of functions (including water supply, sewerage, refuse disposal and other technical services), for capital investment programming and for police, fire and education; and 148 directly elected district authorities responsible for the health service, the personal social services, housing management, consumer protection and all other functions involving personal contact with the citizen. In four areas the same authority would exercise both regional and district responsibilities. (The regional units are shown on figure B (page 22): for district units see maps in volume II).

Where there would be two levels of local government, I recommend that they should be articulated in two ways: first, by the delegation of responsibility for the more personal and locally variable aspects of a regional authority's functions to district officers, dealing with areas coterminous with those of the region's component district units and advised by committees of the district authorities; and secondly, by the concentration of responsibility for the wider aspects of district functions in a joint organisation of the districts within each region. I indicate possible variations in the definition of both regional and district units in the less populous parts of the country, and hence in their total numbers, and recommend special arrangements for the London Metropolitan Region and for the northern tip of Northumberland.

I propose that these two levels of administrative local government should be complemented, for other purposes, by directly elected common councils at "grass-roots" level, representing existing parishes and towns or parts of towns small enough to have a real feeling of community, and by five appointed provincial councils with members predominantly nominated by the regional authorities within their areas.

The primary function of a common council would be to act as a sounding-board for community opinion on all matters affecting the local environment. It would also share with district and regional councils a general *power*, superseding all existing permissive powers of local government, to provide as many social and recreational facilities, amenities and conveniences for the benefit of its area's inhabitants as they were prepared to pay for through a local precept on the rates. But it would play no part in the discharge of the statutory *duties* of local government.

The provincial councils would be responsible for long-term strategic planning and for bringing the needs and aspirations of each province as a whole to bear on the discharge by central government of its responsibility for the healthy growth of the national economy. They would have adequate staffs, nationally financed, but no executive powers of their own. They would need as their executive counterparts province-based arms of central government responsible for the co-ordination at this level of departmental and regional investment programmes.

If central government prefers to transfer to local government the decision-making powers needing to be exercised at this level, I suggest, as a second-best alternative, the creation of 12-15 directly elected "sub-provincial" authorities, which would take the place both of the regional and provincial councils I have recommended and of the province-based arms of central government I have postulated.

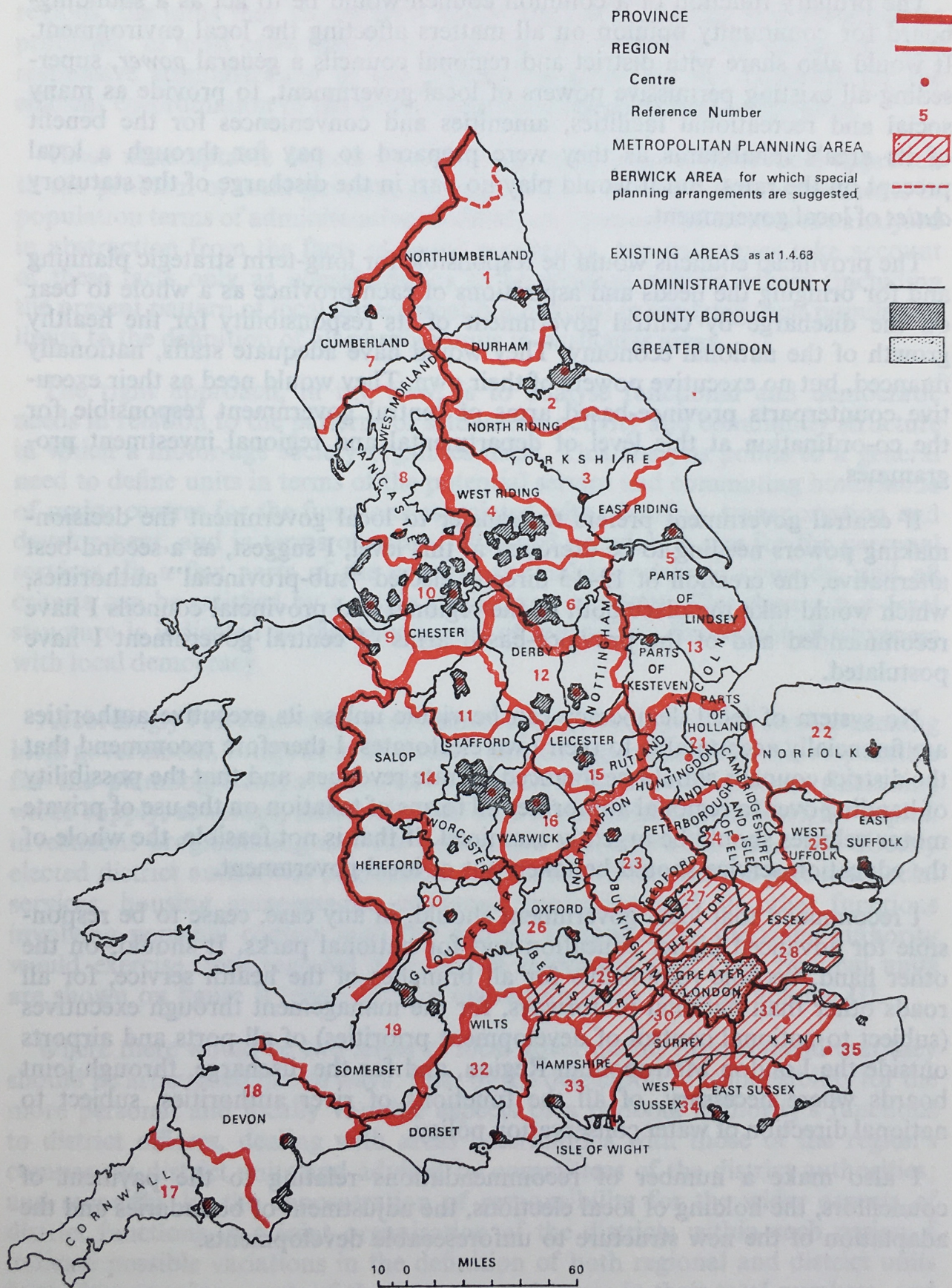
No system of local democracy can be viable unless its executive authorities are financially accountable to their own electorates. I therefore recommend that the district councils should be financed by rate revenues, and that the possibility of handing over to regional authorities all forms of taxation on the use of private motor vehicles should be urgently examined. If that is not feasible, the whole of the education service should be taken out of local government.

I recommend that local government should, in any case, cease to be responsible for advanced higher education and for national parks. It should, on the other hand, become responsible for all branches of the health service, for all roads other than national motorways, for the management through executives (subject to national control of development priorities) of all ports and airports outside the London Metropolitan Region, and for the discharge, through joint boards where necessary, of all the functions of river authorities, subject to national direction of water conservation policy.

I also make a number of recommendations relating to the payment of councillors, the holding of local elections, the adjustment of boundaries and the adaptation of the new structure to unforeseeable developments.

DEREK SENIOR

MR SENIOR'S ALTERNATIVE NEW AREAS: THE REGIONAL UNITS (FOR DISTRICT UNITS SEE VOLUME II, MAP 7)



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