

REGIONALISATION AND THE CHURCH

PREFACE BY THE BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK

The Government which came into office in 1997 has introduced a significant amount of constitutional change. The abolition of the hereditary element in the House of Lords and devolution of power to the Scottish Parliament and to Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland have led us to reflect more consciously on the constitutional arrangements by which we order our affairs and to ask what else could - and should - be changed. It is often said that Britain is 'over-centralised' and that too much power rests in Whitehall and Westminster. (Similar sentiments are sometimes even expressed in the Church!) The publication of the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions* earlier this year provides an opportunity to think through some important questions in relation to the regions and the interconnections between democracy, identity, efficiency, subsidiarity, and so on.

It is clear that the regional debate in England has been very uneven. Some people are enthusiastic and are convinced that devolution of power and control of budgets from the centre will energise their region - creating a much greater sense of common purpose, which will have economic benefits, as well as helping to restore local democracy. Others fear the creation of 'talking shops' and additional layers of costly bureaucracy. A few detect sinister plots, designed by Commissioners in Brussels but with English bishops their naïve accomplices, to destroy the United Kingdom. Many - perhaps the majority - find the discussion rather boring

and find it difficult to get excited about a debate which appears to bear so little relation to their everyday concerns.

I hope that we shall hear from all these voices, and more, in the General Synod debate. In the short time available and with the pressure of other demands it has not been possible for the Board for Social Responsibility to produce a major report. But I believe we can make a virtue of necessity for this is not a debate which requires a great deal of paper. The important thing will be to hear from members of General Synod who have been discussing these matters in their own regions.

The paper which follows has been prepared by the Revd Dr Julian Cummins who chairs the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber. We are most grateful to him for making the paper available to us and to his colleagues in the Churches Regional Network who have been working on regional issues as part of Churches Together in England. We are also circulating the summary of *Your Region, Your Choice*.

+THOMAS SOUTHWARK
Chairman
Board for Social Responsibility

12 June 2002

The English Regions



English Regions



MAKING A CHOICE FOR OUR REGIONS
A GUIDE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S WHITE PAPER ON
REVITALISING THE ENGLISH REGIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

On Ascension Day 2002, the Government published its long-awaited White Paper setting out its proposals for the future of the eight English regions outside London. The headlines focused on the proposal for elected Assemblies. However, the White Paper is also about better government in regions that do not opt for elected Assemblies. This guide has been designed to help the Churches think through the practical, constitutional and theological issues raised by the White Paper.

The White Paper fulfils a commitment in the 1997 Labour Manifesto. It follows the creation of a Parliament in Scotland and Assemblies in Wales, Northern Ireland and London. It also follows the strengthening of regional governance under both Labour and Conservative governments. The main milestones have been the creation of Government Offices of the Regions in 1994, Regional Development Agencies in 1998 and Regional Chambers of local authorities and stakeholders¹ in the same year.

The Churches have been active stakeholders in the development of the English regions. Every English region has

¹ 'Regional Chambers' are designated bodies under the 1997 Regional Development Agencies Act which scrutinise their RDAs. In most regions, they are now called Assemblies. Ranging in size from 35-100 members, they generally comprise two-thirds Local Authorities and one-third stakeholders. 'Stakeholders' are representatives of business, unions, voluntary organisations, churches, universities and other major components of civil society.

an ecumenical structure that focuses Church engagement in the new regional institutions. Most are represented on their existing regional Chamber. The Churches have played a crucial role in arguing for social inclusion, rural recovery and the significance of faith in social cohesion and culture. They have been active partners in working to use regional resources for the benefit of the least well-off. In most regions, Church leaders have also been active in the broad coalitions that have debated the shape of elected Assemblies.

The Government's White Paper significantly opens up the debate on the future of the English regions. It is not the Government's final word on the subject. There are a number of open questions, notably on the way in which the Churches and other stakeholders will be represented in regions that opt for elected Assemblies. The Government has asked for responses by the end of August 2002. This guide is designed to help Churches decide the lines on which they wish to respond.

2. WHAT REGIONS DO

There has long been a regional tier of Government in England, but it has been largely invisible. In the 1960's, Regional Economic Planning Councils tried to address the deep economic imbalance between the different parts of England. Local Authorities have collective responsibility for planning policy that affects a whole region, and have a body to develop that policy. Sports, arts and tourism have regional councils. Government departments - environment, agriculture, transport among others - have long had regional offices.

In 1994, the Conservative Government created Government Offices in each of the eight English regions. They brought together departments that had previously operated

independently. For the first time, officials could work across departmental boundaries for the benefit of their regions.

The functions determined at regional level have remained consistent over the years - economic development, planning, transport, culture, rural policy, business support, training and some input into housing, health and policing. In the last eight years, the exercise of these functions has become progressively more visible, more streamlined and more integrated. At the same time, some (but not much) real power has been delegated to regions from Whitehall.

In the rest of Europe, regions have long played a major role. The German *Länder* are responsible for 40% of Government spending, and have wide autonomy. In the last 20 years, all the other major European countries have introduced or expanded regional government. Within the EU, regions are represented by the Committee of the Regions which has consultation rights on European legislation.

3. WHY REGIONS ARE GROWING IN IMPORTANCE

If there has long been a regional tier in England, why is it now the focus of so much change? There are two fundamental reasons.

The first reason is the radical difference in income and quality of life between the regions in England. Chapter 1 in the White Paper sets out some of the differences. For example, in the North East, one and a half time more people of working age have no qualifications than in the South East. In the North West, death from heart disease among men is more than one and a half times greater than in the South East. For most of the twentieth century, these differences have grown. There is

increasing evidence that these disparities are better tackled at regional level than in Whitehall.

The second reason is constitutional change in the UK as a whole. In 1886, William Gladstone proposed Assemblies for the English regions as part of his policy of 'home rule all round'. The argument has not changed in a hundred years: if Scotland, Wales and (Northern) Ireland have 'home rule', some balance is needed in the English parts of the United Kingdom.

Some people have argued that an English Parliament could be created in response to devolution to Scotland and Wales. The problem is that England has 45 million people, Scotland 5 million and Wales 3 million. The sheer size of England would leave unresolved the question of how to deal with the great imbalances between the regions of England.

Chapter 2 of the White Paper identifies some of the benefits that have followed from the devolution that has taken place so far. For example, each region now has a strategy that links economic development, land use and training. Agencies responsible for health, social inclusion and education are how integrating their policies. Plans for inward investment now take account of the needs of local unemployed people. These processes may not seem exciting. The results are vitally important for ensuring that jobs, training opportunities and social support reach the most excluded.

The White Paper proposes that all regions will have a greater level of administrative devolution whether or not they chose to vote for elected assemblies. This will be carried out through the existing regional institutions of Government Office, Regional Development Agency and Regional Chamber.

4. THE CASE FOR ELECTED ASSEMBLIES

So why do we need elected Assemblies? Chapter 3 of the White Paper addresses this question. It makes two points. First, an elected Assembly would make regional government more *effective*. It would do so because it would have more powers than the current bodies, and it would take further the streamlining and integration of existing policies. Second, it would make regional government more *accountable*. It would do so because Assembly members would be elected by the people, and would be answerable to them for their actions.

These two arguments on effectiveness and accountability are the nub of the White Paper. The White Paper argues that in a democracy it is not possible to devolve more than a certain amount of power to non-elected bodies. The stronger the case for regional decision making, the stronger the case for it to be accountable.

The experience of Wales and Scotland would suggest that there is also an intangible element to this. Creating an elected focus significantly increases the sense of identity, cohesion and confidence. In itself this makes it more possible to tackle disparities of income and quality of life.

5. POWERS AND FUNDING FOR THE ASSEMBLIES

Chapters 4 and 5 of the White Paper set out the details of the powers and funding of the Assemblies. It lists 10 areas in which the Assembly would be responsible for developing strategies: sustainable development, economic development, skills and employment, spatial planning, transport, waste, housing, health improvement, culture and biodiversity.

These strategies will cover significant areas of public policy. However, the funding the Assemblies will be allocated is relatively modest. In the North West, the Assembly will have a block grant of £500m, and influence over spending of a further £1.3bn. That is out of total government spending in the region of £25bn. Direct responsibility will thus be for just 2% of total spending, with an influence on a further 5% of spending. It is a far cry from the 50% controlled by the Welsh Assembly. The reason is that Wales has responsibility for all health budgets and all local authority grants, together with significantly greater responsibility for rural support, business support and training.

The Assemblies will be 'hands off' operations. Half their direct funding will go to the existing Regional Development Agencies. These will continue to be responsible for economic development, but will answer to their Assemblies rather than to Whitehall. The remainder, and particularly European funding, will be allocated to other existing bodies which will become accountable to the Assemblies.

So what will the Assemblies actually do? Unlike the Welsh Assembly, they will not have powers of secondary legislation. Their main role will be to set and monitor strategies, and to make sure that all the different agencies and departments operating in the region work together. They will concentrate on joining up government, and making it more effective and accountable.

Many people believe that the Government has not gone far enough. The Small Business Service, the Learning and Skills Council and the Countryside Agency could all be devolved to the regions, saving the costs of their national structures. There is also no identification in the White Paper of savings in

Whitehall more generally. Yet if functions are to be exercised regionally, there should be a reduction in the number of civil servants employed in Whitehall.

There is also concern that Assemblies have only limited control over their own funding. They will be funded by direct grant from Whitehall together with a small precept on Council Tax. This is expected to be 5p per week for a Band D council tax payer, though Assemblies will have the right to levy more. In other European countries, regions are financed by a percentage of income or sales taxes. This creates a much clearer link between their spending and taxation policies.

There are two possible responses to this. One is to argue that the powers proposed for the Assemblies are too small to make an appreciable difference. The other is to argue that devolution in the UK is (in the words of the constitutional expert Vernon Bogdanor) 'a process and not an event'. The Assemblies may start off on a small scale, but acquire more powers from Whitehall as they become established. It is also possible that the Assemblies can exercise positive influence through their strategies without needing direct control of budgets.

The record of devolution to Scotland and Wales would support the view that devolution is an incremental process. It is also possible that more powers will be ceded as the Assemblies bill passes through Parliament, and Church representatives in Parliament may wish to argue for this.

6. BOUNDARIES

The question of boundaries is addressed in the first part of Chapter 6 of the White Paper. This proposes using the 'standard region' boundaries first established more than 20

years ago for statistical and administrative purposes. These are the boundaries used for European elections, Regional Development Agencies, Government Offices and a number of other purposes.

Every region has some question about their boundaries. Yorkshire & the Humber includes North and North East Lincolnshire, which is not part of the historic county. People in Cornwall question whether they should be part of a South West region. People in Essex question their location in the East of England. The South East extends from Kent in a sweep round London to Oxfordshire. There are evidently different levels of association within different regions - broadly, greatest in the north and least in the south.

The White Paper does not rule out reviewing the boundaries in the longer term. However, it cites polling evidence that in all but one region more than two thirds of people know which region they live in. It argues that the boundaries of *Lander* often did not follow historic boundaries, but have built up public allegiance. Finally, it argues that a major boundary review now would be disruptive and that it is better to get the process going on the boundaries we have. Others have argued that a one-off boundary review would enable people to decide which region they wish to be in, and that this need not delay the setting up of Assemblies. The Churches may wish to take a view on this.

7. ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Chapter 6 also deals with electoral processes. The White Paper proposes Assemblies of 25-35 members elected under the Additional Member System (AMS). This is the system used in Wales, Scotland and London. Under this system, two-thirds of

members would be elected on a first-past-the-post system. Constituencies would be based on local authority boundaries. A further third of members would be elected from regional lists to provide proportionality. The White Paper argues that this system maintains constituency contact while offering proportional representation.

The White Paper proposes that elections would be held every four years. Members would be paid on the basis of a three day week. The Assembly would be expected to elect a six-member Executive, who would work full time. It is expected that Assemblies will have a staff of 200, many drawn from existing bodies, and will cost about £20m each to run.

An argument can be made in favour of other voting systems, notably the Single Transferable Vote. However, greater attention is likely to be devoted to the size of the Assemblies. A maximum of 35 members may not allow a sufficient breadth of regional opinion to be expressed.

8. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

Chapter 7 deals with the major unresolved issue in the Government's plans for Assemblies. This is the means by which stakeholders can be involved. Many believe that stakeholders, including the Churches, have brought vision, expertise and independence to regional affairs, and have prevented the present Chambers from becoming narrowly political. The involvement of stakeholders mirrors the constitution of Local Strategic Partnerships. It is widely recognised that Assemblies will not be able to do their job without the active participation of the major institutions of civil society.

However, the White Paper argues that it is wrong on grounds of democratic principle for elected and non-elected members to sit together. Instead, it proposes that stakeholders could be involved in scrutiny committees, offer policy advice, and be involved in consultative forums.

Arrangements for stakeholder involvement differ in the devolved areas of the UK. In Scotland and London, Civic Forums exist on a non-statutory basis and may or may not be consulted by their Assemblies. In Northern Ireland, there is a statutory Civic Forum set up under the Belfast Agreement. In Wales, there are Partnership Councils set up under the Government of Wales Act for business, the voluntary sector and local government. These involve Assembly members and stakeholders and are chaired by the relevant Minister.

The Government has asked for views by the end of August on the best way to involve stakeholders in the English regions. Many stakeholders believe that there must be statutory rights of scrutiny and consultation for stakeholders, but that the details can vary by region. It may be that a series of partnership councils on the Welsh model is the most practical way forward. However, there are also advantages in encouraging stakeholders to cross the boundaries of business, voluntary sector and public authority. Whichever solution emerges, the Churches would probably wish to argue that faith communities should be considered as a distinct stakeholder sector, and that the Christian Churches should be recognised as important contributors to the life of our regions.

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IMPLICATIONS

One of the major political arguments within Government in the preparation of the White Paper was on the implications of

Assemblies for local government. The first question is whether Assemblies will draw powers upwards from local government or downwards from Whitehall. On this question, the White Paper is very clear. Assemblies are to be instruments of devolving power from Whitehall, not pulling it up from local authorities.

The second question is about the tiers of local government. Chapter 9 says that regions with Assemblies must have unitary (as opposed to two-tier) local government. This has been interpreted to mean the abolition of County Councils. In fact it means the replacement of both County and District Councils with new Unitary Councils. Proposals for their size and boundaries would be worked out by the Boundary Commission after local consultation and would be known before any referendum took place.

Some parts of England are already predominantly unitary. In Yorkshire and the Humber, 89% of people already live in unitary authorities. However, in the East of England, only 12% of people do so. Many people do not believe that unitary authorities should be a necessary condition for elected Assemblies. They argue that in most European countries, regional government exists together with the equivalent of both county and district councils. They also argue that local people should choose their structure for local government irrespective of their decision on regional Assemblies.

10. IMPLEMENTATION

Chapter 9 also considers the process for implementing Assemblies. These are the key stages

1. A bill providing for referenda is introduced into Parliament - perhaps in the next session
2. Ministers will 'take soundings' to assess whether there is demand in a particular region for a referendum
3. If there is, the boundary commission proposes local government changes
4. A referendum is held in one or more regions
5. A bill is introduced into Parliament setting out the powers of the Assemblies
6. Elections are held and the Assembly is formed

There are a number of points to note about this. First, it will be an 'asymmetric' process: only those regions where there is clear demand will have a referendum. Second, people will know the implications for local government before they vote (but not before they respond to 'soundings'). Third, the detailed powers of the Assembly will still be open to Parliamentary debate after a successful referendum has been held, and therefore not known at the time of the referendum.

Ministers are proposing that the first referendum is held 'before the end of this Parliament' - which means in 2005 or 2006. It is most likely to be in the North East, and perhaps in Yorkshire and the North West. If the bill to establish the Assemblies is introduced after the next General Election, the first Assembly could be up and running in 2008 or just possibly 2007. A case can be made for reducing the level of uncertainty that this process will introduce. In particular, the Government could legislate for the powers of an Assembly at the same time as the referendum bill.

The length of the process also underlines the factor that is consistent for all regions. The process of administrative devolution is underway whether or not regions opt for elected

Assemblies. The churches have a responsibility to play their part in the good governance of their regions irrespective of the outcome of referenda.

11. A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Christians need to approach the question of elected Assemblies within a firm theological framework. Four points can be made about this.

First, the Churches have a responsibility to take the issue seriously and to offer a considered response. This responsibility derives from the incarnational character of Christianity. It is strengthened in England by the presence of worshipping communities in every part of our land and by the long historic association of the Church of England with structures of government. Christian concepts of service and engagement urge us to work with issues that are difficult but far-reaching such as constitutional change.

Second, there is a preference for subsidiarity within the Christian approach to governmental structure. This principle states that power should be exercised at the lowest possible level consistent with the common good. The qualification in the latter part of the definition implies interdependence rather than independence. The needs of those beyond the local area need to be taken in to account by those exercising power locally. This principle is consistent with a variety of structures of government, of which regionalism is only one. It does not create a preference for regional government, but it does create a presumption in favour of devolution from the centre to whichever may be the most appropriate institutions at a lower level.

Third, concepts of justice, equity and community lie at the heart of the Old Testament understanding of a people living under God's covenant and of Jesus' teaching on the nature of social relationships. Our country is divided by inequities both between regions and within regions. Christian social teaching creates would support proposals to ensure the better delivery of policies on social inclusion, to join up economic, social and environmental issues, and to narrow the gap between rich and poor. It is incumbent on the Churches to take seriously an issue with far-reaching implications for services for the weakest in our society, and for our impact on environmental sustainability and biodiversity.

Fourth, St Paul teaches that all parts of the body have a role to play in both building the kingdom and in our human relationships. This has created in modern Christian thinking a preference for democratic systems of government which have a deliberate bias towards inclusion. It is strengthened by Christian understanding of the relational character of the Trinity and of God's call to us all to be engaged with each other. A system of non-elected bodies, in which only some are able to exercise authority, is less consistent with this teaching than a democratic system. Similarly, the distant exercise of power will fail to allow opportunities for true engagement at local level.

These theological arguments do not mean that all Christians can or will support the Government's White Paper proposals. Indeed, they may create grounds for arguing for a more open and inclusive arrangements than the Government currently proposes, and for more extensive devolution. There cannot be a direct read-off from theology to any particular constitutional pattern. However, they do create a presumption in favour of a system in which all can engage, which operates

interdependently with other tiers of government, and which has the interests of the excluded at its heart.

12. CONCLUSION

The White Paper is an important stage in the process of devolution from Whitehall to the nations and regions of the UK. It provides for England a more democratic approach to existing regional powers and some modest strengthening of them. It forms part of wide ranging change that includes a reformed House of Lords and devolution to Scotland and Wales. To many, it is consistent with theological understanding of the nature and task of government and is a helpful if imperfect step towards more locally-determined and inclusive government.

The White Paper is also a practical and specific document, with which everyone will find some point of disagreement. It provides for Assemblies with limited powers and only in those regions that choose them. It has practical implications for local government that need to be weighed and considered. It is designed to produce specific and measurable improvements in the co-ordination of government policies. It is not the last word on the constitutional structure of England, but part of a process on which the churches speak as active participants.

The Revd Dr Julian Cummins
Chair, Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the
Humber
June 10th 2002

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Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions

Summary

Preface

by the Prime Minister, the Right Hon Tony Blair MP

This White Paper is a great opportunity for the English regions.

It delivers on our Manifesto commitment to provide for directly elected regional assemblies in those regions that want them.

It gives people living in the English regions the chance to have a greater say over the key issues that affect them as well as the power to devise tailored regional solutions to regional problems.

And it builds on the success of devolution elsewhere in the UK – offering people more accountable, more streamlined, and more joined-up government.

This White Paper is about choice. No region will be forced to have an elected assembly. But where there is public support for one, we believe people should be given the chance to demonstrate this in a referendum.

We have already done a lot to decentralise decision-making to the English regions. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have been established to help strengthen the building blocks for economic growth in all regions, with a network of regional chambers to scrutinise them. We are also giving extra resources and greater freedom and flexibility to the RDAs, and – as we promised in our Manifesto – we will further strengthen the regional chambers and the Government Offices in all regions.

For some regions this may be enough. But other regions may want to go further than this and grasp the opportunities offered by an elected regional assembly.

These proposals will not mean creating more bureaucracy. In regions where people vote to have an elected regional assembly, we will move to wholly unitary local government to ensure that government remains streamlined.

Devolution has strengthened Britain because it has allowed the different parts of the UK to give

expression to their diversity whilst celebrating the values that bind us together as a nation. We believe that devolution can offer the same benefits to the English regions.

But in the end, it is down to the people in each region to decide. It is your region and your choice.

Tony Blair

Foreword

by the Right Hon John Prescott MP, Deputy Prime Minister, and the Right Hon Stephen Byers MP, Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

The White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice* signals the beginning of a new era for the English regions. It sets out our plans to decentralise power, strengthen regional policy and enable directly elected assemblies to be established in regions where people want them.

The English regions have been neglected for too long. At times national policy simply ignored them. At others it tried to determine everything from Whitehall. Our new approach to regional policy offers the prospect of our regions once again playing their proper role in the strength of the UK.

We want to build on the success of devolution elsewhere in the UK to give English regions greater powers to govern themselves, to tailor services better to regional needs, and to deliver greater prosperity and opportunity for all.

But there is little point in devolving power if you impose a solution from the top. So what this White Paper offers is an opportunity for change and a choice for local people. No region will be forced to have an assembly. But where there is public support, we want to put that to a test in a referendum. We intend to give those regions who want it the opportunity to hold a referendum in this Parliament.

We believe there can be real benefits for regions from successful elected assemblies. By taking powers from Whitehall and Government quangos assemblies can reduce bureaucracy, enhance efficiency, improve co-ordination, bring decision-making under closer democratic control and offer the regions a distinct political voice and a real say over decisions which matter to them. But in the end, the decision is down to people in the regions themselves. It is your region and your choice.

John
Stephen Byers

Prescott

Summary

The White Paper sets out a new regional policy for England. It explains how we will decentralise power and strengthen existing

regional structures. And it offers people living in England the chance to have an elected regional assembly.

An elected regional assembly will give people more say about the issues that affect their region. It can make government more effective and efficient. And it can enable regions to build on their unique strengths, to improve economic performance and quality of life.

Devolving power

Britain has had one of the most centralised systems of government in the western world. Decisions affecting our regions are often taken far away from the people and places they will affect. But there must be real doubt whether this has led to better government.

In a geographically small country, we have also seen wide economic disparities both between regions and within them. Regions have not had the chance to build on their strengths or to tackle their weaknesses. If we are to enjoy increasing prosperity in the UK we need strong economic growth in all our nations and regions.

This means a new approach:

- strengthening the building blocks for economic growth in all regions; and
- strengthening regional leadership – giving the regions powers to address their particular needs.

Decisions on issues which affect a region, such as planning and how to generate economic development, are often best dealt with in the region itself. Decisions made at the regional level can take better account of the unique opportunities and challenges faced by an individual region. This can lead to better results both for the region in question and the country as a whole.

This Government has worked hard to decentralise power and decision-making. Power has already been devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and London-wide government has been restored to the capital. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have been created in England as economic powerhouses in each region with a network of regional chambers to scrutinise them.

We believe that successful solutions to regional problems need to be rooted in the regions themselves. We are therefore:

- improving co-ordination of Government policy in the regions and joining up regional strategies to provide for more efficient and effective delivery;
- bringing decision-making closer to those it affects, by giving more responsibilities to the regional chambers and the regional Government Offices;
- improving arrangements for regional planning;

- ensuring a stronger regional input into national policy-making and spending decisions, thus adding to the extra resources and greater freedom and flexibility we have already given to the RDAs.

But some regions may want to go further than this, and may judge that an elected regional assembly will allow them the best chance to improve decision-making and accountability. We believe regions that want that chance should be given it.

A step further – elected regional assemblies

We believe elected regional assemblies can improve both the accountability of government and also its efficiency and effectiveness.

They will improve accountability by:

- making the existing government bodies in the regions more accountable to people in the regions;
- decentralising more power from Whitehall and bringing decision-making closer to the people; and
- revitalising democracy and giving the regions a new voice, both within the UK and in Europe.

They can improve effectiveness because they will:

- be able to join up – and where necessary rationalise – the many strategies and partnerships in the regions;
- have powers to offer tailored solutions that meet the particular needs of their regions;
- make it easier for regional stakeholders to contribute to decisions; and
- have greater freedom through their block grant to allocate resources and determine priorities in their region.

What will elected regional assemblies do?

Elected regional assemblies will develop a strategic vision for improving the quality of life in their regions, in particular improving economic performance.

They will be responsible for setting priorities, delivering regional strategies and allocating funding. In addition, elected assemblies will have a significant influencing role, including scrutiny powers and making appointments to regional public bodies ('quangos').

Subject to agreeing a small number of key national targets, an assembly will have complete freedom over how to spend the resources at its disposal.

There are many areas of policy where a regional dimension could improve both the decision-making process and successful implementation.

Among those areas where the regional assembly will have specific responsibilities are:

- **economic development**
- **skills and employment**
- **housing**
- **sport, culture and tourism**
- **transport**
- **land use and regional planning**
- **environmental protection, biodiversity and waste**
- **public health**

Delivering in the region

Successful redevelopment of an area depends on an integrated approach that provides jobs, homes, transport links and other facilities.

At present, responsibility for these issues rests with a number of different bodies, including the Regional Development Agency, the Government Office, the regional chamber and the Housing Corporation. This can mean duplication, disagreement and delay.

An elected regional assembly will produce integrated strategies covering all these issues. It will have direct responsibility for the Regional Development Agency and influence over other regional agencies and public bodies. It will also have money and other powers

to help it implement its strategies.

As well as drawing up – and delivering – regional strategies for each of these individual policy areas, their task will also be to ensure they all fit together effectively so they improve people’s living standards and quality of life. This is where we believe elected regional assemblies can have an important new role. They will be able to look at ‘cross-cutting’ issues such as sustainable development across the region.

Your region, your choice

Before an elected regional assembly is established in a region, a referendum must be held and a majority of those voting must be in favour of having an assembly.

Interest in elected regional assemblies varies across England. So we won’t require referendums to be held in all eight English regions outside London at the same time. Instead, we will hold a referendum in a region when we consider there is sufficient public interest in one.

We will gauge that interest by taking into account the views of members of the public and those of the regional chamber, local authorities and other key stakeholders in the region.

Democracy, not bureaucracy

Elected assemblies will provide direct accountability over key regional public bodies ('quangos'). Almost all of their functions will be taken from central government, not from local authorities. By providing stronger scrutiny and improving co-ordination between existing bodies, they should reduce bureaucracy, not add to it.

Even so, in areas that currently have a county and district council, a regional assembly would add a third tier of elected government below the national level. We believe that moving to a single tier of local government would:

- simplify relationships for both local authorities and regional assemblies; and
- make it much clearer to the public who does what.

So in any region where the Government decides that a referendum on an elected assembly should be held, there will first be an independent review of local government structures. The review will recommend the most effective wholly unitary local government structure for the region and will be carried out by the Boundary Committee for England. But restructuring of local government would only take place if the region votes for an elected assembly.

Size and constitution of assemblies

The Government wants elected regional assemblies to be:

- democratic and responsive;
- inclusive and representative;
- small and streamlined;
- effective and efficient.

We envisage assemblies will have between 25 and 35 members. They will have a leader and cabinet of up to six members chosen by – and fully accountable to – the full assembly. It would be the task of the cabinet both to develop policies and, after gaining approval for them from the full assembly, to implement them.

Regional assemblies will be based on the existing administrative boundaries used by the Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies.

Stakeholder involvement

The aim of the elected regional assemblies is to improve local decision-making. So they will need to ensure they harness the experience, expertise and commitment of others in their region. We want to see them making full use of all stakeholders – including the business community, trade unions, social and environmental partners, and other elected representatives.

Close working with regional partners should ensure that an assembly's policies are soundly based and have widespread support. Such stakeholder forums (such as the Scottish Civic Forum and similar arrangements in Wales and London) have worked well.

We would like to hear your views on how prescriptive the Government should be in setting out how regional assemblies should involve key stakeholders.

Elections

The voting system for elected regional assemblies will be the Additional Member System (AMS) form of proportional representation (PR). This is the system already used for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Greater London Authority. It ensures the overall composition of an assembly would broadly reflect the votes cast for the different parties at the assembly election.

Funding of assemblies

Most of an assembly's money will come through a single Government grant. The assembly will decide how it should use this to address key regional priorities. Based on figures for 2001/02, an assembly in the North East would be responsible for around £350 million. And it would influence decisions on how more than £500 million more is spent by its key partners.

Assemblies will be able to raise additional funds through the council tax. The money will be collected on behalf of the assembly by the local authorities in the region as part of their existing arrangements for collecting council tax. Non-domestic rates will not be affected.

The contribution of council tax-payers to the running costs of the assembly would be equivalent to around five pence per week for a Band D council tax-payer in any region. An elected assembly would be allowed to set a higher charge to fund additional spending if it considered this desirable. We will, at least initially, limit this amount through arrangements comparable to the existing local authority capping regime.

Timetable

We intend to introduce a Bill to provide for referendums and associated local government reviews when Parliamentary time allows, with the aim of enabling the first referendum to be held during this Parliament. Once at least one region has voted for an elected assembly, we intend to introduce a further Bill allowing them to be set up. Elections for these assemblies, in the regions where there has been a 'yes' vote in a referendum, would be held within months of the Bill becoming law. In practice, this would allow the first regional assembly to be up and running early in the next Parliament.

Sending us your views

We want to hear your views on the proposals on stakeholders set out in the White Paper. Please let us know if you wish your response to remain confidential. You can email responses and any other comments to regions.whitepaper@dtlr.gov.uk or send paper responses to:

Regional Policy Unit (White Paper)
Department for Transport, Local Government
and the Regions
Zone 1/A4
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Further information

This is a summary of the Government's White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions*. Copies of the full document are available from [The Stationery Office](#), priced £14.75.

If you would like further copies of this leaflet, contact:

Department of Transport, Local Government and
the Regions
DTLR Free Literature
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire LS23 7NB.

Telephone: 0870 1226 236 Fax: 0870 1226 237
dtlr@twoten.press.net

Resources

Copies of the full version of *Your Region, Your Choice* are available from the Stationery Office, price £14.75 or it can be downloaded from the internet at <http://www.regions.dtlr.gov.uk/governance/whitepaper/index.htm>

The Churches Regional Network is serviced by the Revd Geoffrey Roper through Churches Together in England: details from Pauline Main, CTE, 27 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9HH email: pauline@cte.org.uk

The August 2001 issue of *Findings*, published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, is entitled *Possible models for regional assemblies in England* and summarises the report by Paul McQuail and Mark Sandford *Unexplored territory: elected regional assemblies in England*. The full report is available from the Constitution Unit, University College London, 29-31 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9QU. The Constitution Unit has produced a number of other relevant publications including several by Robert Hazell, *Unfinished Business: Implementing Constitutional Reform*; *Constitutional Futures: A history of the next 10 years*, OUP, *An Unstable Union: Devolution and the English Question*, and *The State and the Nations*, Imprint Academic. Further details from the Unit.

Regular reports entitled *Monitoring the English Regions* are published by CURDS (Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies) at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne. <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/curds>

The English Question, Chan and Wright, Fabian Society

The People say Yes, Kenyon Wright, Argyll

The Devolution Debate: John Tomaney: Northern Economic Review No 31

For contrasting and more explicitly 'campaigning' approaches contact:

Campaign for the English Regions, www.cfer.org.uk

The Regionalisation of Britain by Bryan Smalley available on the website of

The Campaign for an Independent Britain
<http://www.cibhq.co.uk/>

(click on 'Articles') or tel 01279 842185. Mr Smalley is strongly opposed to the European Union and the activities of the EU Committee of the Regions (COR). He refers to its publication *Major steps towards a Europe of the Regions and the Cities in an integrated Continent* available from Directorate A by fax 00 32 22 82 23 30 or

<http://www.cor.eu.int/home.htm>

Mr Smalley also recommends Dr Richard North's article 'The regionalisation of Europe' in *The European Journal*, January/February 2002 and *101 Reasons for Leaving the EU* produced by a group of Anglican clergy and laity and available at £1 a copy (including postage) from St Matthew Publishing Ltd, 24 Geldart Street, Cambridge CB1 2LX email: PF.SMP@dial.pipex.com or fax 01223 512304