

sub-national review and city regions

Briefing Paper 9
The Regional Forum
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Introduction

The landscape of local, sub regional and regional government is changing. City Regions, the Sub-National Review and Multiple Area Agreements as well as the Northern Way are all set to shake up the landscape.

This briefing sets out what is happening, its implications for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and what the Regional Forum and its members are doing.

What is it all about?

Sub-National Review (SNR)

The SNR led by the Treasury and published in July 2007 has examined economic development and regeneration. Its aim is to encourage economic growth and tackle deprivation. It will do this by making changes to the roles and responsibilities of different bodies. Key proposals are:

- The devolution of 14 -19 year old skills/learning responsibilities from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to local authorities;
- A Single Regional Strategy bringing together the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and the Regional Spatial Strategy which will be the responsibility of Yorkshire Forward - the Regional Development Agency (RDA);
- Regional Assemblies will not continue in their current form. The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly will no longer have responsibility for housing and planning or scrutiny of Yorkshire Forward. The scrutiny role will go to local authorities and a Select Committee arrangement - as yet not clarified - and housing and planning will become a RDA responsibility;
- The Minister for the region will have a role – as yet not clarified - in relation to the scrutiny of Yorkshire Forward;
- Greater devolution of powers to regions to influence investment priorities;
- Multiple Area Agreements
There is a permissive power for voluntary arrangements of local authorities to work together, across boundaries, for example on economic development;
- City Regions
The SNR suggests that Government explores the potential for allowing local authorities to set up joint structures to pool responsibilities, as they do already for things like transport.

The SNR will be consulted on during the autumn/winter.



City Regions

Yorkshire Forward (YF) is also going to replace their sub regional investment structures (for South, West and North Yorkshire, and the Humber) with 3 City Regions; Sheffield, Leeds, and Hull and Humber Ports. Within the new boundaries are a number of local authorities, some from outside Yorkshire and the Humber:

Sheffield

- Barnsley
- Bassetlaw
- Bolsover
- Chesterfield
- Derbyshire Dales
- Doncaster
- North East Derbyshire
- Rotherham
- Sheffield

Leeds

- Barnsley
- Bradford
- Calderdale
- Craven
- Harrogate
- Kirklees
- Leeds
- North Yorkshire
- Selby
- Wakefield
- York

Hull and Humber Ports

- Hull
- East Riding of Yorkshire
- North East Lincolnshire
- North Lincolnshire

There is also discussion of the creation of a “rural/coastal city region” but the boundaries are not clearly defined.

Northern Way

This is being led by the three northern RDAs in the North West, the North East and Yorkshire and the Humber. The aim is to collaborate and with Government to improve productivity and grow the regions’ economies.

Local Government White Paper

Published in November 2006, the White Paper “Stronger and Prosperous Communities” proposes:

- To devolve more powers to local authorities and communities.
- Double devolution.
- To strengthen local responsibility for economic planning.
- Develop further partnerships through the Local Strategic Partnership mechanism.

There is a growing link here and in the SNR between the local roles of the RDA and local authorities.



Implications for the VCS

In terms of all the structures mentioned above there are some significant implications for the VCS:

- How can the inclusion, equity and sustainability aspects of development - as well as the economic - be strengthened in the proposals?
- The sector has played an important partner role in the Regional Assembly, sub regional partnerships and other bodies to ensure both that the VCS plays its part in regional progress and so that the sector is involved in the design, management and delivery of programmes and can bring the needs of communities to the table - what is the future of this role?
- Changing or uncertain boundaries create an organisational challenge to the VCS structures that have been set up over the last 5 years.
- How will the accountability and scrutiny role of Yorkshire Forward work and will local authorities on their own hold Yorkshire Forward to account for the whole region?
- How are the different voices, perspectives and the diversity of the region - often provided by voluntary, community, BME, faith and environmental partners - to be included in the decision making of Yorkshire Forward and other emerging structures?
- The needs of rural communities may be missed if the “trickle out” from cities to rural areas does not actually happen.
- How can the conduit of connection provided by the VCS to communities both of place and interest be maintained in the new contexts?
- The Assembly provides a degree of democratic accountability for crucial programmes concerned with housing and planning - what are the implications for decision making and democratic engagement if decisions about planning and housing move out of the direct control of local authorities?
- The links between the spatial strategy, housing and transport planning and representative structures are not clear and thus the sector’s role of encouraging engagement in civic society is similarly unclear.
- ...and, in all this: we need to set our agenda, drawn from our collective experience and expertise, about the needs of disconnected and disadvantaged communities.



What commentators are saying

- The think tank, ippr, in a paper about “Two Track Cities” notes that cities are the economic powerhouses of the nation. However, it says that cities face a major economic challenge of “connecting economic development and growth with communities that do not benefit from those opportunities”.
(Two-Track Cities, Athey, Lucci & Webber, Centre for Cities, July 2007, <http://www.ippr.org/centreforcities>)
- The journal “Regeneration & Renewal” emphasises the new role of town halls - in conjunction with RDAs - in controlling economic development and education and training. (Regeneration & Renewal 20th July 2007)
- “Yorkshire Post”- never a friend of regionalism - says that there are “...genuine fears that the new arrangements (SNR) are designed to bypass democratically elected councillors...”
(Yorkshire Post editorial, July 18th 2007)
- The Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber (CRC) says that faith communities may be concerned about the loss of focus on social and environmental issues and of a faiths perspective.
(The Abolition of Regional Assemblies, CRC Briefing Note, July 2007)
- The Local Government Association (LGA), reflecting on the disbursement of powers, says that RDAs will be responsible to Whitehall AND to local councils and asks if they can be “the servant of two masters”.
(Paul Raynes of LGA writing in New Start, 27th July 2007)



What's happening in the region?

a) City Regions

The VCS in the different city regions is making links and developing relationships. The Regional Forum will be working with the sector in continuing these discussions.

b) The Assembly response

The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly has set a Position Statement about the new regional arrangements. This emphasises the role of partners in regional decision making and: "...regrets the fact that the SNR does not recognise or reflect the enormous contribution that partners have brought to regional policy...", that the SNR reflects "a very narrow focus on GVA" and that "partners bring a different range of voices... to the table".

The Assembly goes on to commit to non local authority interests - the social and economic partners - continuing to meet at regional level. The Chair of the Assembly, Councillor Peter Box and Deputy Chair, Paul Jagger have gone further in saying that "neither the Assembly nor Local Government Yorkshire and Humber support the initial proposal that social policy (planning and housing as opposed to economic development) should be created by an unelected quango". ("Securing the Region's Future" 4th Oct 2007)

In a paper jointly written, they have underlined the importance of all partners in making a strong case for Yorkshire and Humber and go on to say that if partnership working is the expected norm at local level then this should be the principle at regional level too ~ "A diverse range of organisations and people from all sectors must be part of the decision making process if we want them to be fully signed up to the delivery of regional strategic goals".

Yorkshire Forward has been very positive in wanting to discuss the Assembly's concerns.

c) The Regional Forum City Regions' Task Group response. The RF Task Group has agreed to:

- work with the Assembly to promote the partnership approach outlined above;
- emphasise the need to build on what is working well;
- discuss these issues with MPs and others;
- meet City Regions' Secretariats with an agreed common agenda;
- brief the voluntary and community sector about developments;
- plan a consultation on the SNR when its operational arrangements are detailed.

Pictures courtesy of:

Regional Forum
Yorkshire and Humber Assembly

You can keep up to date with all relevant developments on the Regional Forum website at:

<http://www.regionalforum.org.uk>
or email:
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