

RESPONSE BY THE YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER REGIONAL FORUM ON
BEHALF OF VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS TO THE
CONSULTATION ON THE YORKSHIRE FORWARD CORPORATE PLAN
2008/11

The Regional Forum is the strategic organisation for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in the region. The Forum promotes and supports the contribution of the VCS in improving the quality of life for people and especially those who are disconnected from society and the economy or who live in disadvantaged communities across our region.

The Regional Forum has consulted as widely as possible with its members, and with others, as the timescale for consultation has allowed. This paper deals with the two main types of comment that have been made to us:

- First that all the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of the region are inextricably linked with the economy of the region and are not separate in any way.
- Second, how the governance arrangements that will be expected to underpin the delivery of this Draft Corporate Plan must be inclusive of all the partner interests across the region.

There must be “buy in” across the region, and clear mechanisms in the Corporate Plan for this to be seen to be effective.

Introduction

The Trustees of the Regional Forum therefore welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Yorkshire Forward’s Corporate Plan. We recognise that this is a critically important period in the region’s development because the Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) has initiated a process to re-design regional and sub-regional governance. The draft Corporate Plan outlines how Yorkshire Forward will respond to the challenge of being the key partner in this process of redesign.

Crucially, the draft Corporate Plan shows how currently it intends to use the period from 2008 to 2011 to develop new ways of partnership working. The Plan acknowledges that the preparation of an Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) will require a holistic approach to the business of strategic thinking and partnership working. The Plan will also need to acknowledge that the close working relationships between Yorkshire Forward and its’ wide range of partner organisations across the region (including those in the VCS and Third Sector) will

need to be preserved and maintained. The Plan should articulate how this will be achieved so that our regional governance arrangements can stay fully inclusive.

The Regional Forum has considered the draft plan in this context. We believe that there is much in the draft to be welcomed, but we also have a number of issues and suggestions for change. We hope that this response can be the start of an ongoing dialogue between Yorkshire Forward and the Regional Forum to help deliver a comprehensive and deliverable vision for all the regions' communities.

Section 2.Championing RES Delivery

Paragraph 2.1 identifies the need to respond to the strategic implications of the Sub National Review. Paragraph 2.12 proposes to adopt an integrated approach to key policy areas, and 2.15 to 2.19 give some details about how Yorkshire Forward proposes to do this. We fully support the view that the Integrated Regional Strategy will significantly widen Yorkshire Forward's strategic leadership role, both in terms of functional responsibility and increased engagement and partnership responsibility. However, we have some concern that the strategy emphasises YF's economic role over and above other policy priorities. There is an underlying tension between the need to deliver on higher levels of economic growth and the requirement to link this with social and environmental priorities. Truly sustainable economic progress has to be the product of a holistic and integrated approach to policy development, so we believe that it is vital to set in place regional governance arrangements that mitigate and preferably remove this tension between the economic, social, and environmental factors.

It follows that we think it is crucial that this section explores and explains the inter-relationships between the economy and the social/ environmental issues that characterise our region. We are very concerned that if they are treated as separate policy areas the benefits of economic growth will reinforce existing inequalities.

Focussing largely on the economic imperatives may not be enough to ensure that everyone benefits from subsequent growth, and there needs to be additional emphasis on how the economy is going to include those who are presently excluded. Paragraph 2.18 could usefully identify the "other key partners"; the section emphasises the RDA/ Local Government relationship. In particular it should recognise both the potential of the VCS/ Third Sector to contribute to the development of the Integrated Regional Strategy and also the sectors' proven ability to deliver development in hard to reach communities. The Trustees also believe that this is an area of work which would benefit from broadening the

scope of research and intelligence identified in Paragraph 2.3 to include key policy linkages.

Section 3. Helping People to access good Jobs, Skills, and Transport. Product Range

Skills

There are a number of opportunities in this section to recognise the importance of the VCS/ Third Sector. In Paragraph 3.3, a sentence could be added at the end which reads- “The role of the Third Sector in engaging those hardest to reach is recognised by both the Learning and Skills Council and the Department for Work and Pensions as being a crucial factor in its employability commissioning process, and we will look to capitalise on this unique strength”. In Paragraph 3.10, after the sentence “the wider learning and skills agenda is not the responsibility of Yorkshire Forward alone”, a sentence could be added which reads-“We want to work more closely with public, private, and third sector organisations”.

Transport

We agree that the increase in rail capacity across the region should be a priority, but we are concerned that the section on transport is restricted only to consideration of the direct consequences of transport for economic growth in a narrow sense. The Trustees think it is also essential to see the exploration in this Corporate Plan of the wider implications of the transport agenda and especially the links between transport and the following:

- Access to training and education for all.
- Access to all forms of healthcare, and the full range of personal services that all people need across our region.
- Access to work. and to the services that support work, especially the care of dependent relatives.
- The removal of impediments to entry to the job market through the improvement of access to public transport.

These issues are particularly important, both for people living in rural communities as well as people in the more deprived of our large urban communities where poverty still lives side by side with great affluence. We would also welcome recognition of the importance of increasing the number and scope of small scale and community based transport initiatives that can reach these pockets of economic disconnection scattered across our region.

Economic Inclusion

The Trustees welcome the statement in Paragraph 3.24 and its recognition that deprived communities are economically excluded. We believe that this “product” also needs to tackle the problem of individuals who have never worked, as well as those who have, or who are claiming benefits. The link with skills is clear, and there could be specific reference to the potential of the VCS/ Third Sector to engage with young people not currently in education or training.

The Trustees also view the co-ordination of the new ERDF, ESF and “Single Pot” funding streams as a regional strategic objective in itself that needs recognition within this Corporate Plan. It should be a specific objective. These are the main publicly funded engines of economic advance in our region and they must be linked effectively.

Section 5. Regenerating Cities, Towns and Rural Communities

The Trustees are concerned that measures to improve the regions access to quality Housing does not feature in the Renaissance Policy Product range. Urban and rural regeneration will depend to a great extent on our ability to provide homes for people. The connection between economic, social and environmental policies is clear and requires some articulation and development in this section. We also feel that links need to be established between urban renaissance and the policy products on skills and enterprise. There should also be some reflection on the potential contribution of Culture for revitalising the economies of disadvantaged communities across the region.

The Trustees see the proposals for rural renaissance in their present form as being rather under-developed. The concentration on enterprise and competitiveness will not, in our view, address the real needs of people living in rural communities. Issues relating to poor transport, access to services, low wages, training and skills, and the closure of schools, post offices and shops, are complex and inter-related. “Rural proofing” needs to be turned from concept to reality and we would have liked to have seen this as a principle for measuring achievement.

Resources

We do not think that allocating resources equally between economic inclusion, business and renaissance is likely to deliver sustainable results. Economic evidence should reveal the areas of genuine need, and resources should be targeted appropriately. We also feel that more guidance should be provided in the Draft to show how the spatial dimension will work. What are the links in

planning, investment and governance terms below City Regions? This is a particular issue for rural and coastal areas which are not designated part of City Regions, but will still require investment.

Partnership Development

We believe that the Corporate Plan should give greater emphasis to the roles of a wider range of partners and agencies, beyond that of Local Authorities. This partnership with elected authorities will clearly be important, but it is not clear in the draft what the mechanisms will be for developing this. There are issues to do with how funding will be devolved, where strategic decisions will be made, and how accountability will be delivered. This will be complicated if, as the Sub National Review suggests, Local Authorities will also have a scrutiny responsibility.

There is already a wide range of public and third sector involvement in regional development and governance that goes beyond tackling social exclusion and the provision of social enterprise. The VCS/Third Sector effectively delivers services like learning and skills, (particularly matching up the needs of employers and employees), healthcare, childcare, community cohesion, rural transport initiatives, cultural activities, and advice services.

We and many other partners co-operate in meeting this wider inclusion agenda that seeks to involve everyone in the prosperity that we all want for our region. We do not believe that this is appropriately reflected in the current draft.

Indeed, Yorkshire Forward is on record as saying that the VCS is an important partner because;

“It is a significant employer, has a greater capacity to involve hard to reach groups and has greater contacts in deprived communities. It also has a history of innovation, and has the flexibility to respond to new ideas and ways of working”. (“Yorkshire Forward and Communities”: Presentation).

Again, this is not a stance that is fully reflected in this version of the Draft Corporate Plan. The Trustees are aware that other partners representing other interests across the region take the same view and we expect them to make similar observations.

The Trustees know that the Voluntary and Community Sector in the region clearly has the potential to assist Yorkshire Forward and its other partners in

achieving the priority for Economic Inclusion; “working with partners to increase the numbers of people in jobs, promoting economic development in the region’s deprived communities, and responding to the changing labour market by promoting diversity and equality for all” is a huge part of our agenda.

In addition, we believe that we can help to bridge the gap between the aspirations of economic programmes and the genuine needs of disadvantaged and disconnected people and communities across our region.

We hope these comments are helpful because that is the spirit in which they have been presented. We very much look forward to an ongoing dialogue with Yorkshire Forward as deliberations on the Corporate Plan 2008/11 continue.

Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum.

Suite D10,

Joseph’s Well,

Hanover Walk,

Leeds

LS3 1AB

Telephone- 0113 394 2321
