



EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY POSITION ON REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

1 BACKGROUND

The Government published "Your Region, Your Choice – revitalising the English regions" in May. This White Paper set out their proposals for strengthening regional governance in England and proposed that regions could either move towards the establishment of directly elected regional assemblies or build on the existing partnership based regional assemblies to improve regional working.

The special Regional Assembly meeting held on 21 June in Melton Mowbray gave an opportunity for Assembly Members and partners to consider the implications of the White Paper for the East Midlands region. The detailed notes of that day's discussion have been posted on the Regional Assembly website ([http://www.eastmidlandsassembly.org.uk/documents/CHOIR Commentary Report and workshop notes 21 June 2002.doc](http://www.eastmidlandsassembly.org.uk/documents/CHOIR%20Commentary%20Report%20and%20workshop%20notes%2021%20June%202002.doc)) but hard copies are available on request.

The Steering Group considered the balance of views expressed at the 21 June meeting and concluded;

- 1 The balance of views expressed at the 21 June meeting were in favour of retaining and building on the existing partnership approach to regional governance for the foreseeable future.
- 2 It will be increasingly important to ensure that assembly members and partners are better informed about the work of the assembly and regional agencies in order to enable them to play a meaningful part in discussions about the region's future.

2 PROCESS FOR AGREEING POSITION

The Steering Group in issuing this statement would like all Regional Assembly Members and stakeholders to discuss the proposed position within their organisation, sector or geographical area. It is hoped that all Regional Assembly Members will attend the 6 September meeting able to formally consider and agree the proposed regional position.

3 PROPOSED REGIONAL POSITION

The East Midlands Regional Assembly supports a progressive approach to regional governance that will be delivered through an evolving, partnership based assembly.

The Assembly will review the region's future development as circumstances change. Our response to any proposed change will be guided by the following principles. Any change must:-

- *achieve democratic accountability*
- *meet the interests of the people of the east midlands*
- *be shaped by the active engagement of all stakeholders*
- *be at an appropriate pace and to an agreed time scale*

4 IMPLICATIONS OF ADOPTING THIS POSITION

Should this position be agreed by the Regional Assembly on 6 September the main implications are;

- A The region will have a clear position to steer regional activities "for the foreseeable future" which would enable us to focus our attention on strengthening regional partnership work and we would specifically advise the government that the region **does not wish** to trigger the process that could lead to a referendum on introducing a directly elected assembly in the East Midlands (with the consequent reorganisation of local government).
- B The assembly and regional partners can focus on strengthening the role of our existing assembly to drive the improvements needed in the East Midlands region and improve the coordination and effectiveness of regional bodies. The 21 June assembly meeting agreed that the Chair and his two Vice Chairs would begin discussion with emda, GO-EM and key regional partners on how to improve partnership working at the regional level. This work will commence and a progress report will be given to the 6 September Assembly meeting.

In effect this work will begin to shape the region's response to the Government's following White Paper proposal:

"The Government will also encourage public bodies operating in the regions to improve joining up. However, it will be up to the regions themselves to decide exactly how to take this forward, and the government will invite regional chambers (partnership assemblies) to take a lead in establishing the best arrangements for their region".

- C The regional Assembly will welcome and build on the proposals set out in chapter two of the White Paper which would specifically include strengthened responsibilities to include:
- continuing scrutiny of the relevant Regional Development Agency

- co-ordination and integration of regional strategies
- a formal role as the regional planning body
- a new relationship with the Regional Director of Government Offices and senior officers in other government-funded bodies in the region, who will be ready to discuss their work
- input to the spending review process, through the relevant Government Office.

We will build on the region's best practice (commended in the White Paper) in developing the Integrated Regional Strategy.

- D The Assembly will have a clear context to undertake a review of its own working arrangements and the activities it undertakes with partners (as agreed in its current Business Plan). The current task group structure and operation will be reviewed to ensure they meet the needs of the evolving roles, responsibilities and regional agenda.

5 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE WHITE PAPER

Notwithstanding the proposed position the Assembly Steering Group felt that there would be some merit in the East Midlands submitting comments on elements of the white paper proposal which relate to elected assemblies as follows;

- 1 The establishment of unitary local government should not be a prerequisite for introducing directly elected regional assemblies.
- 2 The proposed size of elected regional assemblies would seriously constrain their effectiveness and democratic legitimacy.
- 3 Any arrangements for elected assemblies should ensure the effective involvement of the range of partners and stakeholders.

6 SUPPORT FOR DISCUSSIONS

Any organisation or sector wishing to consider this position either in advance of or after the 6 September meeting is welcome to invite a member of the Assembly staff or Steering Group to attend and should contact me or Simon Brian on 01664 502563.

Barry Horne
Secretary