

**C · U · R · D · S**  
CENTRE FOR URBAN & REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

# **Nations and Regions: The Dynamics of Devolution**

**Quarterly Monitoring Programme**

## **The English Regions**

**Quarterly Report  
May 2002**

**John Tomaney and Peter Hetherington**



The monitoring programme is funded by the ESRC

# Monitoring the English Regions

**Report No. 7 (May 2002)**

**Research supported by the Economic and Social Research Council**

John Tomaney, Peter Hetherington and Lynne Humphrey



Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies  
University of Newcastle Upon Tyne  
NE1 7RU, UK  
Tel. +44(0)191 222 8016

## **1 Introduction**

Rarely has a Government subjected the governance of England to such scrutiny. The publication of the long awaited White Paper on regional governance, *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions*, (Cabinet Office/DTLR, 2002) suggested that the rumours of the death of the devolution project had been much exaggerated. For some, the White

argued that evolving institutions, with modest powers, provided a more realistic, practical way forward - something on which to build, addressing the political realities in a Government which, until relatively recently, was largely lukewarm to regional devolution. In this context, the strong hint that the limited package on offer would be the starting point for wider reform was significant — it is likely there will be ongoing developments in regional governance (see Section 3 below).

The general decentralist tone of the White Paper, largely overlooked in the immediate coverage, was also significant, particularly a broad plea to Whitehall to consider the balance of their staff between the centre and the regions. 'Departments will have to demonstrate the case for not locating new streams of work outside London and the South East.' Some senior civil servants detect a change in the Whitehall mindset, a recognition that if regional government is still some way off, the case for 'greater regionalism' is taking root.

Initially, however, some might argue that the centre is clearly finding it difficult to let go. Any elected assembly, at the very least, will be subject to some central control and monitoring, with the Government setting 'targets' similar to Public Service Agreements in local government. However, it is unclear at this stage whether this will involve a string of central performance targets and indicators and a local government-style inspection regime. The Government would also be able to force changes in draft regional economic strategy — the essential starting point for a new administration — if it considered it 'inconsistent' with national policies. And freedom to spend, by raising extra money through a small precept on council taxpayers averaging 5p weekly, would also be matched with local council-style 'capping' powers if ministers considered any increase excessive and unreasonable.

That said, Tony Blair's cautious support cannot be underestimated, in an exercise which can be seen as a small victory for the Deputy Prime Minister. Reports of early rows between the Prime Minister and his deputy, as inter-departmental meetings and Cabinet committees tried to reach a broad consensus, were wide off the mark. John Prescott was, by several accounts, a model of diplomacy during intense discussions in 10 meetings he chaired of the Cabinet's 'Committee of Nations and Regions Committee', spread over eight preceding months. Determined not to antagonise sceptics and opponents of English devolution — and, while quiet, they are still to be found in Labour's ranks — he had to give ground, in the face of resistance from departments, such as Education and Skills, determined not to cede powers (responsibility for Learning and Skills Coun9.13998503.2594 230.4229 Tm9 3Counr f diplca13Tj12 0 0 129e422-D14229

devolution in its referendum four years' ago, with Tony Blair insisting on the inclusion of a second question on limited 'tax varying' powers, so England had to face up to the consequences of more modest political devolution. The price to pay for a Regional Assembly, therefore, would be a precept of 5p weekly on the average council tax bill — potentially a powerful tax-raising tool, similar to that given to the GLA, but beyond anything possessed by the National Assembly of Wales (which has no tax-raising powers). Furthermore, on Tony Blair's insistence, people in a region earmarked for a referendum also had to be told that moves towards single-tier local government, involving the potentially painful elimination of either county or district councils, must be made before any electoral test.

While regions earmarked for a referendum — almost certainly in the North East and possibly Yorkshire and the Humber this side of the next election — will face only one question, if the government's plans come to fruition, it seems certain that an information sheet sent to every household will spell out these consequences in simple language. Tony Blair's rationale appears to be that it is better to be stra

Prime Minister's line is that he can only do so much. He has pulled rival departments together, even if losing out to some extent in inter-departmental 'turf wars'. Now he believes that regions, and regional campaigners (particularly in the North East) must show that they are up to the challenge, developing broad support and alliances - as in Scotland, four years' ago - to push the case for English devolution.

Are campaigners in the regions up a challenge which will see the emergence of a strong 'no' campaign, embracing Conservatives and perhaps some business interests, which will argue that an emerging assembly will prove costly, over-bureaucratic, threaten the unity of England and the existence of 'historic' county councils? Unlike in Scotland and Wales - and the latter registered only a wafer-thin 'yes' majority in its referendum - little, if any work, has so far been undertaken to 'sell' the case for regionalism in any English region. The Conservative leadership has already latched onto an issue which, it believes, could provide immense political capital for Ian Duncan-Smith in the run-up to an election which, conceivably, could also see the first devolution referendum taking place. In short, the wider political battle on the regional front has yet to begin. But the stirrings are visible. The issue has probably divided the Local Government Association, the representative body for all large councils, more than any other — with Conservatives overwhelmingly opposed and Labour and the Liberal Democrats generally in favour.

At the local level, some councils are already squaring-up. Durham County Council, for instance, while welcoming the White Paper and the prospect of regional government, has begun campaigning to be the local unitary authority. Predictably, the local district councils, while also welcoming the prospect of a Regional Assembly, are launching a counter-campaign based on promoting merged districts as single tier local government. Some Conservatives, however, appreciate the arguments for devolution in a region like the North East, if not for the country as a whole, on the grounds of isolation from decision-makers in London. Actively co-operating with new regional structures, from RDAs to Chambers, they have clearly shifted ground over the past few years. For instance, the (voluntary) Conservative-led South East Regional Assembly, took a notably pragmatic line, with a measured response. David Shakespeare, its chair, who leads Buckinghamshire County Council, noted that in the White Paper, the Government had heeded its message that 'it has to be horses for courses'. He added: 'Not all regions may feel they needed elected regional government. If regional diversity means anything, regions must be given the freedom to choose how they are governed at regional level' (see Section 8 below).



At a meeting in Daresbury, the North West Development Agency (NWDA) Chairman, Bryan Gray, welcomed the Government's proposals:

The overriding justification for further regional devolution must be to achieve greater ec



### **2.2.3 Other issues**

Meanwhile, RDAs continued to implement their strategies. For instance, MPs from the East of England attended at meeting at Westminster on 15<sup>th</sup> April to hear about the East Of England Development Agency's (EEDA) campaign to 'brand' the East of England. The 'Space for Ideas' marketing and advertising campaign was launched by the EEDA in January in order to promote the region 'as a great place to live, work, visit and invest'. The launch was centred on advertisements featuring companies from the six counties in the region, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Some of the first organisations to sign up include the East of England Tourist Board, Invest East of England, Sport England and a number of

sustainable future must continue, whatever the choice of the region in the future.' (EMRA, News Release, 'Assembly Chair urges all regions to "follow our example"', 9<sup>th</sup> May 2002).

Interestingly, in the alleged heartland of opposition to regionalism, the South East welcomed the fact that 'it will not impose elected regional assemblies on regions that don't want them'. Cllr David Shakespeare OBE, Chair of the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) said:

It looks like the Government has got the message that we've been pressing over the past year. It has to be 'horses for courses'. Not all regions may feel they need elected regional government. If regional diversity means anything, regions must be given the freedom to choose how they are governed at the regional level (SEERA News Release, 'Government heeds South East views in regional White Paper, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2002)

## **2.4 Other bodies**

### **2.4.1 New arrangements for culture in the regions take shape**

On 27<sup>th</sup> May, Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, announced the appointment of a new National Council for the Arts Council of England, following the controversial restructuring of the Arts Council of England and Regional Arts Boards (see previous monitoring reports). Tessa Jowell argued:

Today's announcement is a key stage in the process to restructure the Arts Council. Nine of the new Council Members will also serve as Regional Council Chairs thus giving the Regions more power at a national level and creating greater authority at a local level. (DCMS, News Release, 'New National Council for the Arts Council of England will put regions at heart of arts policy says Tessa Jowell', 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2002)

The White Paper on Regional Governance's proposals on cultures and arts remain ambiguous (see Section 3).

### **2.4.2 Responses to the White Paper by non-government bodies**

The TUC welcomed the publication of the Government's White Paper and supported the major principle that regional government should be about bringing decision-making closer to the people who use and deliver services'. John Monks, TUC General Secretary, said:

Regional government must be about revitalising the English regions and reconnecting regional policies with local communities rather than adding a new layer of bureaucracy. It should be about ending regional economic disparity whilst

respecting regional political and cultural diversity. The  
Assemb

### **3 Regional Politics and Policies**

#### **3.1 The White Paper on regional governance<sup>2</sup>**

##### **3.1.1 What does the White Paper mean?**

The publication of the White Paper was significant if only because it demonstrated that previous reports of the death of the devolution project had been greatly exaggerated. Yet it was significant in other ways. Notably, in the face of some Whitehall scepticism, the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, and his allies appeared to have fought a subtle and patient campaign, not least in the Cabinet's Committee of Nations and Regions, to extract a package of powers for Regional Assemblies from a reluctant Whitehall machine. At the same time, the nature of this struggle means that the White Paper presented a mixed bag of powers and responsibilities, reflecting the uneven gains which the Cabinet Office and DTLR were able to make.

The White Paper raised the prospect of at least some regions obtaining elected Regional Assemblies during the lifetime of Labour's second term. In his speech to the House of Commons, announcing the publication of the White Paper, Mr Prescott for the first time set out a timetable for achieving an elected Assembly in at least one English region. He stated:

We intend to introduce legislation to provide for referendums and local government reviews as soon as parliamentary time allows. We intend to allow a referendum to be held before the end of this Parliament. After a region has voted for an elected assembly, we intend to introduce further legislation enabling assemblies to be established. That would make it possible for the first regional assembly to be up and running early in the next Parliament — under a Labour Government, of course (*House of Commons Debates*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2002, Column 278).

The strong expectation was that North East England was the region the government had in mind. The White Paper was replete with references to the North East. Furthermore, it was noteworthy, that while launch events were held in all regions of England, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, Stephen Byers, chose to attend a launch in Newcastle upon Tyne. There both ministers made it explicit that the North East was the only region which would be expected to achieve this in the medium term. The Deputy Prime Minister stated:

I would hope that the North East will want to carry the torch, although we will be consulting all the regions over the coming months to gauge what the level of demand is elsewhere. To be

---

<sup>2</sup> This section draws heavily on a forthcoming analysis of the White Paper, written by John Adam's and John Tomaney to be published by the Institute for Public Policy Research in June 2002. (See also, Tomaney and Mawson, forthcoming, chapter 14).

first in line – to be in the vanguard - is an opportunity that

would take these powers from Government Offices where they currently reside.

In some areas the proposed powers go beyond what was expected. For instance, the proposed housing powers exceeded most predictions, with Assemblies taking a central role in the allocation of housing investment. These were powers that the Mayor of London coveted but, was denied by the Greater London Authority Act, 1999. The Mayor and his advisers have argued that successful regeneration policy requires the integration of economic development and housing policies with the planning system. The government's package holds out that possibility in the English regions. The creation of elected Regional Assemblies is likely, therefore, to add a further dynamic to the pressure for more devolution in London.

In a conscious acknowledgement that devolution is a process and not an event, the Government makes it clear, however, that the range of powers outlined in the White Paper is likely to evolve over time.

The package of assembly functions reflects the way in which these functions are currently organised. However, the Government is keen to further decentralise responsibility for policy and delivery where this will improve regional outcomes. As a consequence, it is likely that there will be ongoing developments in regional governance and organisational changes in the way functions are delivered. The government will therefore build into policy development the new opportunities offered by the creation of elected assemblies (Cabinet Office/DTLR, para 4.5)

The package provides a starting point upon which some in the regions would hope, over time, to build. There are a number of areas where early pressure to strengthen the powers of Assemblies was expressed. Skills and transport are areas where, in the regions, there was a widely held feeling that, to quote John Prescott and Stephen Byres: "Whitehall does not always know best" (Cabinet Office/DTLR, 2002: foreword). Indeed the White Paper made a strong case for these activities to be exercised at the regional level.

In the case of training and skills, the White paper noted that

Developing the skills of the workforce plays a vital role in economic development. So improving the skills base and equipping people to take up opportunities being created in a region will be an important component of delivering an elected assembly's objectives (Cabinet Office/DTLR, para 4.28)

According to the White Paper, Assembly's are to be given responsibility for the production of Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action, but the Assembly's relationship with the main delivery arms for training policy, notably local Learning and Skills Councils, will be only a consultative one.

Similarly the White Paper notes:

Good transport is essential for sustainable economic success,  
a better environm

new voting systems were introduced Labour came in for a shock, losing all three in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and North Tyneside (see Section 8).

The level of support for Regional Assemblies remains uneven at best. Even under the most positive prognosis, some regions are likely to remain unpersuaded of the charms of devolution. The government's approach raised the likelihood that some regions would not proceed towards elected Regional Assemblies in the foreseeable future, and those regions which do would not see actual assembly elections for some years. The White Paper therefore contained proposals to strengthen regional structures, even in regions where there is no appetite for elected assemblies.

However, the Government's strategy for regional governance short of elected assemblies appears solely to build up the role of the Government Offices (GOs) in each region. No added responsibilities seemed to have been allocated to, for example, the Regional Chambers. Many of the proposed extra responsibilities are assigned to the GOs: working with the Home Office on crime reduction and drugs; a new role in the 'community cohesion' fund; the enhanced role in emergency planning (Cabinet Office/DTLR, 2002: paras 2.31 and 2.33). Furthermore, the GOs are to be given 'extra responsibilities in working with and monitoring the performance of' the RDAs planning (Cabinet Office/DTLR, 2002: paras 2.31) and a responsibility to 'provide a forum for other public sector bodies in a region to review their high-level strategies and improve read-across by identifying mutual aims and removing any inconsistencies or duplication between them.' (Cabinet Office/DTLR, 2002: paras 2.27). Each of these functions would seem to better fit with the Regional Chambers, which despite their drawbacks, are more representative of the regions than the GOs which inevitably look to Whitehall for political direction.

The government makes it clear that it is looking to regions to produce innovative ideas for the inclusion of regional stakeholders in new regional governance structures. This is the one area of the White Paper, which has 'green edges', and upon which the Government is seeking inputs.

### **3.1.3 Fiscal flexibility?**

The United Kingdom, it is traditionally claimed, is one of the most centralised of developed nations — and the control of HM Treasury over public expenditure and taxation is high even by the standards of other unitary nations. Very little fiscal aflexpublic



and innovative policies and undermines the Mayor's ability to achieve 'joined-up' government.

The proposal for a block grant was influenced by the example of the 'single pot' made available to RDAs in March 2001. During the initial period of their existence, RDAs were constrained by Whitehall's accountability mechanisms. Monies spent had to remain within the programmes for which they were assigned by the relevant Whitehall Departments, and there was little room to switch money between different activities. RDA leaders felt this was a significant restriction on their ability to 'do their job' and made the single pot one of their top priorities. Following a successful lobbying campaign the decision to grant the RDAs their single pot was announced by both the Deputy Prime Minister (when he was responsible for RDAs in DETR) and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 2001.

The White Paper also proposed significant borrowing powers for Regional Assemblies, another example of significant financial flexibility. Such powers were not made available to the Scottish Parliament or the National Assembly for Wales in their respective legislation. In one of the most significant changes to the UK devolution settlements, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister visited Belfast in May 2002 to announce that a 'prudential' system for capital spending will allow the Northern Ireland Executive to undertake borrowing to help remedy its deficiencies in infrastructure investment, so long as it can service that borrowing from its revenue base. The fact that Northern Ireland does not have the same system of local government as the rest of the UK would undoubtedly have influenced this decision. Similar powers were also signalled for Regional Assemblies, although a 'prudential' borrowing regime may well have tighter limits than those available to local authorities. Nevertheless, this would give the administrations of Regional Assemblies options to invest in their region's infrastructure.

The White Paper also proposed to grant revenue raising powers to Regional Assemblies, via a precept

They would also be subject to a 'capping regime' (Cabinet Office/DTLR, 2002: para. 5.9).

The degree of fiscal flexibility proposed for Regional Assemblies surprised most commentators and potentially has radical implications. Having room at the margins to enable Assemblies to decide their priorities enhances fiscal responsibility and concentrates the minds of elected politicians about

particular circumstances of assemblies (Cabinet Office/DTLR, 2002: para 5.12).

Best value required local authorities to seek continuous improvements in economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and to do this by reviewing services periodically in order to gauge whether they are still necessary, and whether current approaches to service delivery are the most appropriate. While these may be objectives which many would support, the best value regime is a significantly centralising force, which has restricted the freedom available to local authorities. The Government would doubtless 'tailor' the best value regime for Regional Assemblies in its own way, and the potential remains for this to be a centralising provision.

The proposals of fiscal flexibility in the White Paper could be undermined by the fact that assemblies will be subjected to PSA and best value requirements. The Government may not strictly deserve its reputation for centralism, especially as it devolved power to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London. Nevertheless, these two provisions contained in the White Paper could tempt it to intervene in regional politics and policy-making. Successor governments could use these provisions with enthusiasm.

### **3.2 Growing debate on regional inequalities**

A loose campaign for a new regional policy, beyond that being pursued by eight Regional Development Agencies, appears to be in the making. After noises from countryside groups, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and — more recently — leading figures in the Royal Geographical Society, a new Alliance for Regional Aid, which includes senior academics and economists tied to the Regional Studies Association (RSA), has been launched.

A series of presentations on the widening economic divide, broadly between London, the South East, East Anglia and the rest of the country, were made at the launch in London on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. The Minister for Regions in the Department of Trade and Industry, Alan Johnson, who is in overall charge of RDA policy, gave a keynote speech in which he defended the Government against claims that it is disguising jobless levels to give the impression that Britain has Europe's lowest unemployment rate. He dismissed these claims as 'rubbish'.

Professor Steve Fothergill, of Sheffield Hallam University and co-author of a recent report criticising New Labour's regional policy, bluntly told the minister on the conference platform: 'You are falling into the trap of looking at superficial unemployment figures...Britain has a very good record of diverting (jobless) people onto other benefits and out of the system altogether.' *The Guardian* reported (April 24) that Mr Johnson, who is also in charge of the Government's relations with unions, whispered loudly: 'Rubbish, absolute rubbish.'

At the conference, Mr Fothergill told delegates from local councils, unions and other agencies, of the yawning gap between official jobless figures and employment statistics, which highlight the number of people in work. In Middlesbrough, and Merseyside, for instance, only 56 and 64 per cent respectively are in work — compared with 87 per cent in prosperous West Berkshire. 'And the gaps are not narrowing,' he warned. A report by the Regional Studies Association (RSA, 2001; See our February report for a discussion) has already argued that 1.4 million new jobs are now needed in the East and West Midlands, Yorkshire, the North West, North East, Wales and Scotland, to catch up with the South East.

Speakers at the launch conference complained that spending on industrial aid in Britain, Regional Selective Assistance — once designed to create jobs in poorly-performing regions — was the lowest in the European Union, with around £120 millions annually going to the English regions, compared with well over £1 billions in the 1970s. On an EU average of 100, the UK spends 30 per cent per head compared with 190% in Germ



## 4 Media

### 4.1 National (English) newspapers

We have noted in previous reports that, with one or two exceptions, the English regions have a low profile in the national (English) media. This changed with the publication of the White Paper when Fleet Street turned its attention, albeit briefly, to provincial politics. The White Paper received a mixed reception. The press split on broadly left -right lines. For instance, *The Guardian*, for the first time editorialised in support of English Regional Assemblies. It called on the government to be radical:

[...] unless the government acts now on devolution, the reality is that most power will remain in Whitehall and England will be left to fester. The government should therefore be brave. It should treat devolution as desirable in itself. It should give devolved institutions with real power to England. And it should trust the people to act wisely in their own interests ('Labour and the English', *The Guardian*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2002)

The *Financial Times* and the *Economist* have tended to give extensive coverage to the English regions. The *FT* broadly welcomed the government's approach (see 'Think regional, act local', *Financial Times*,

European Union broken up into regions is complex. The purpose has always been consistent: to create a Europe of the Regions, relating directly to Brussels, as a way of breaking up national identities, reducing the power of national governments and promoting a common European identity.

But the motor for this has not been a blueprint imposed by Brussels. Much of the initiative has come from various shadowy bodies under the aegis of the Council of Europe, such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, chaired by the former French President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who is also now chairing the convention to draw up the constitution for a United States of Europe. The groundwork has been done by local politicians, mainly French and German, who in recent years have been quietly joined by a phalanx of their counterparts from Britain, led by Councillor Ken Bodfish of East Sussex and the aptly-named Albert Bore, former leader of Birmingham city council and now president of the EU's Committee of the Regions.

[...]

The last building-block necessary to complete the project was to set up elected assemblies for those English regions, and it is this which Mr Prescott, Mr Blair and Stephen Byers have unveiled in their joint White Paper (Christopher Booker, 'Notebook: Prescott's map was drawn up 30 years ago', *Sunday Telegraph*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2002).<sup>4</sup>

A further proponent of the 'Europlot' thesis was Richard Littlejohn in *The Sun*, who claimed that Regional Assemblies 'are specifically designed to break up England into administrative units in preparation for our absorption into a federal Europe. The Regional Assemblies correspond exactly with plans drawn-up by Brussels for the government of a fully integrated European Union' (Richard Littlejohn, 'Carved up, stitched up ... Labour's England', *The Sun*, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2002).

A similar theme was rehearsed in the *Daily Mail*, which reported the government's proposals under the headline 'Prescott's folly'. Its columnist, Simon Heffer, argued 'You have to back to the Dark Ages in England to find anything approaching regional identities ... This has not prevented the Government from arbitrarily, in consultation with Brussels, carving up England into 'regions' (*Daily Mail*, May 10<sup>th</sup> 2002).

---

<sup>4</sup> In an editorial the *Daily Telegraph* maintained that the Scottish experience warned of the dangers of English regional devolution:

There is no need for us to peer into a crystal ball to discern the future. We already have a tin-plated example of what can go wrong with regional devolution in front of us, in the form of the Scottish Parliament - the best advertisement around for leaving things as they are in England. It has been a stunning disappointment, even to those who were once its greatest supporters (*Daily Telegraph*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2002).

Elsewhere comment was less febrile. Writing in *The Times*, Peter Riddell opined:

There is a strong case for having elected assemblies if there is sufficient demand. The level of support varies considerably, on a sliding scale from the highest in the North East to lowest in the South East. Regions will have to surmount a series of hurdles of legislation and referendum before assemblies are set up. That will produce a patchy framework; some regions will have devolved bodies, others will not. Devolution will vary considerably across Britain, strongest in Scotland and weakest in England, with Wales in between. There is nothing inherently wrong with such, provided devolution is a developing process rather than fixed (Peter Riddell, 'Political patchwork is no comfort for town halls', *The Times*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2002).

## 4.2 Regional press

The publication of the White Paper generated much coverage in the regional press and this section gives only a flavour of the diverse reaction. Not surprisingly, the press in the North East gave the issue extensive and favourable coverage. The *Northern Echo* editorialised:

This newspaper believes passionately that the North-East deserves a better deal than it gets. For far too long, the region has suffered from decisions — or lack of them — taken hundreds of miles away by politicians and bureaucrats who have only a flimsy understanding of its needs. The on-going outrage of the Barnett Formula — the woefully outdated system of targeting Government grants which discriminates against the North-East — is a prime example. That is why we have supported the principle of regional assemblies on the grounds that the North-East would have more relevant government and a stronger voice in running its own affairs (*Northern Echo*, [Darlington] 10 May 2002).

The regional press in the North East responded gleefully to John Prescott's call for the region to be the torch bearer of regionalism, with *The Journal* [Newcastle] proclaiming across two pages, 'North to lead the way over Home Rule', 9<sup>th</sup> May 2002). The North East had been impatient for the publication of the White Paper and critical of the government for its 'delays'. Ultimately, according to the paper's political editor, the publication of the White Paper was testimony to the tenacity of the Deputy Prime Minister:

It was, for Mr Prescott personally, a stunning ach0.26 162.0207 Tmd,9 w 0 0b3af16.7



way out of the Cabinet. The publication of *Your Region, Your*

In Cornwall, attention focused on its place in proposed arrangements for the South West. Members of the Cornish Stannary plan to take the

other hand, the BBC has been concerned for some time, about its poor audience penetration in 'the North' (across all broadcasts genres), reflecting an apparent perception that the BBC is a 'southern' organisation. The BBC has established a 'Northern Taskforce' to address this. 'Devolution Day' was the joint product of these two sets of concerns.

The BBC, both nationally and especially in the regions, gave extensive coverage to the publication of the White Paper. In the regions, in particular, TV and radio news and current affairs programmes covered the publication for several nights. Weekend regional political programmes also covered the publication. Coverage on ITV stations appears to have been less systematic, but nevertheless, especially in some regions, saw regional broadcast news programmes addressing the issue for the first time.

Meanwhile ITV has announced cutting the hours dedicated to regional programming. The ITC has agreed to new rules standardising the amount of local programmes across the network. ITV has suggested that the new rules will lead to fewer but better programmes. One effect of the changes will be to give regional news programmes a more prominent place in the schedule. The ITC said a new charter for the nations and regions would protect the regional identity of ITV if the network ended up under the control of one company (see, for example, *The Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2002).

## 5 Public attitudes and identity

### 5.1 BBC poll on regional attitudes

A major BBC poll on attitudes to regional government in England was published in March 2002<sup>7</sup>. The poll appeared to show a high level of support in the regions of England for devolving power from Westminster to elected regional assemblies. Almost two-thirds of people interviewed (63%) want regional government, according to the survey, with less than a quarter (23%) opposed to the move, 8% undecided and 6% with no opinion.

The BBC's poll showed enthusiasm varied between the regions.

- ! Support for the move was highest in the West Midlands (73%), the North-East, North-West and Yorkshire and Humberside (all 72%)
- ! The least support for a regional assembly came in those regions closest to London
- ! In the East 55% were in favour and 49% in the South-East — the only area where a majority did not favour the move

---

<sup>7</sup> The BBC survey was conducted by Opinion Research Business, who interviewed by telephone a random sample of 2,646 people in every English region from 1-10 March.

! In the South West 61% backed regional assemblies, with 59% in the East Midlands

The poll also shows the geographical areas with which people most identify. Four key groups emerged:

! Provincial (36%) — people who say they primarily belong to their local community

! Englanders (27%) — those who say they primarily belong to England

! Brits (22%) — people identifying most with Great Britain and the United Kingdom

! Cosmopolitan (13%) — Those who say they primarily see themselves as belonging to Europe or 'the world as a whole'.

The BBC poll suggested the most popular reason why people in England would support a regional assembly is to give their area a stronger voice in both Westminster and Brussels (72%) followed by a boost to their region's economic prospects. Other positive arguments given were that it would bring government closer to the people (60%) and increase public pride in the area (58%).

But most people also believed that regional assemblies could bring more red tape and bureaucracy (62%). Opinion was divided on whether devolution would just produce a talking shop for politicians and would be a waste of money — 48% agreed, 44% disagreed and 8% had no opinion.

Thirty-nine per cent were willing to pay extra taxes, levied by new assemblies in the form of a local taxation, to help improve local services, while 47% were opposed to such bills. The new poll suggested most people in England (54%) would not be worried if county councils were discarded to make way for the new bodies. But 42% would be concerned, with the figure highest in the South East (49%). Tackling unemployment, improving rundown areas and the environment and economic help were the responsibilities many people would like to see taken over regional assemblies, according to the poll.

## 5.2 Support for an English Parliament?

By contrast the Campaign for an English Parliament published the results of poll by NOP Telebus, which appeared to show that more people in England want an English Parliament than want Regional Assemblies. The results are published on the Campaign's website, although no details about sample size or methodology were given at May 2002 (see below).

*Campaign for and English Parliament Poll*

English Parliament	47%
Regional Assemblies	28%
Don't know	25%

Source: <http://www.englishpm.democ.co.uk/>

### **5.3 Business support for regionalism**

A survey by Opinion Leader Research for the Regional Policy Forum suggested that most businesses in northern England are in favour of regional assemblies. In the North East, 64 per cent of businesses were in favour, while in the North West and Yorkshire the figures were 65 per cent and 49 per cent respectively. The Survey also showed that 72 per cent of businesses thought that public policy making was too centralised and 59 per cent thought regional government would mean greater democracy. However, 69 per cent also said it would bring more bureaucracy (Opinion Leader Research, 2002; see also *Financial Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2002).

## **6 Regionalism at Westminster and Whitehall**

For obvious reasons regionalism figured prominently at Westminster in the last quarter. We noted in our February 2002 report that regionalism was increasingly being discussed at Westminster. The rising profile of regional issues has continued, as is demonstrated in the tan13c48r

next Parliament—under a Labour Government, of course (*House of Commons Debates*, 9 May 2002: Col278).

Replying for the Conservatives, **Theresa May** reaffirmed her party's opposition to regional government:

We are opposed to regional government because we believe that regional assemblies will take power away from local government, lead to the abolition of county councils, and take decision making further away from local communities. The Deputy Prime Minister claims that today's measures will bring decision making closer to the people of England, but far from devolving power, they will centralise it, taking it further away from local people. The Government are simply going in the wrong direction, pulling power up to remote bodies; we want to push power down to local people and to local communities. We want community government, not regional government (Column 279).

She focused many of her remarks on the future of county councils.

Counties count. They are historic areas, with which people identify clearly. I wonder how many people in the north-east realise that regional government will mark the end of Durham and Northumberland county councils. How many people in the south-west realise that it will mark the end of Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Gloucestershire county councils? (Column 279).

In reply, the DPM stressed that region's would be given a choice about whether to have elected Assemblies. He claimed that the C

**Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire):** As one who is proud of the historical identity of the county of my birth—Lincolnshire—and of the coun

in the same way as he welcomes comments from the north-east? (Col 286).

In the weeks following publication of the White Paper issues surrounding it were debated in various forums in the House. **Andrew George (St Ives)** used a debate in Westminster Hall to state the special claims of Cornwall (*Westminster Hall Debates*Cor403s5tmin/ Tc ao2 07606e6 Hal.000u54 15d2Wes8ij



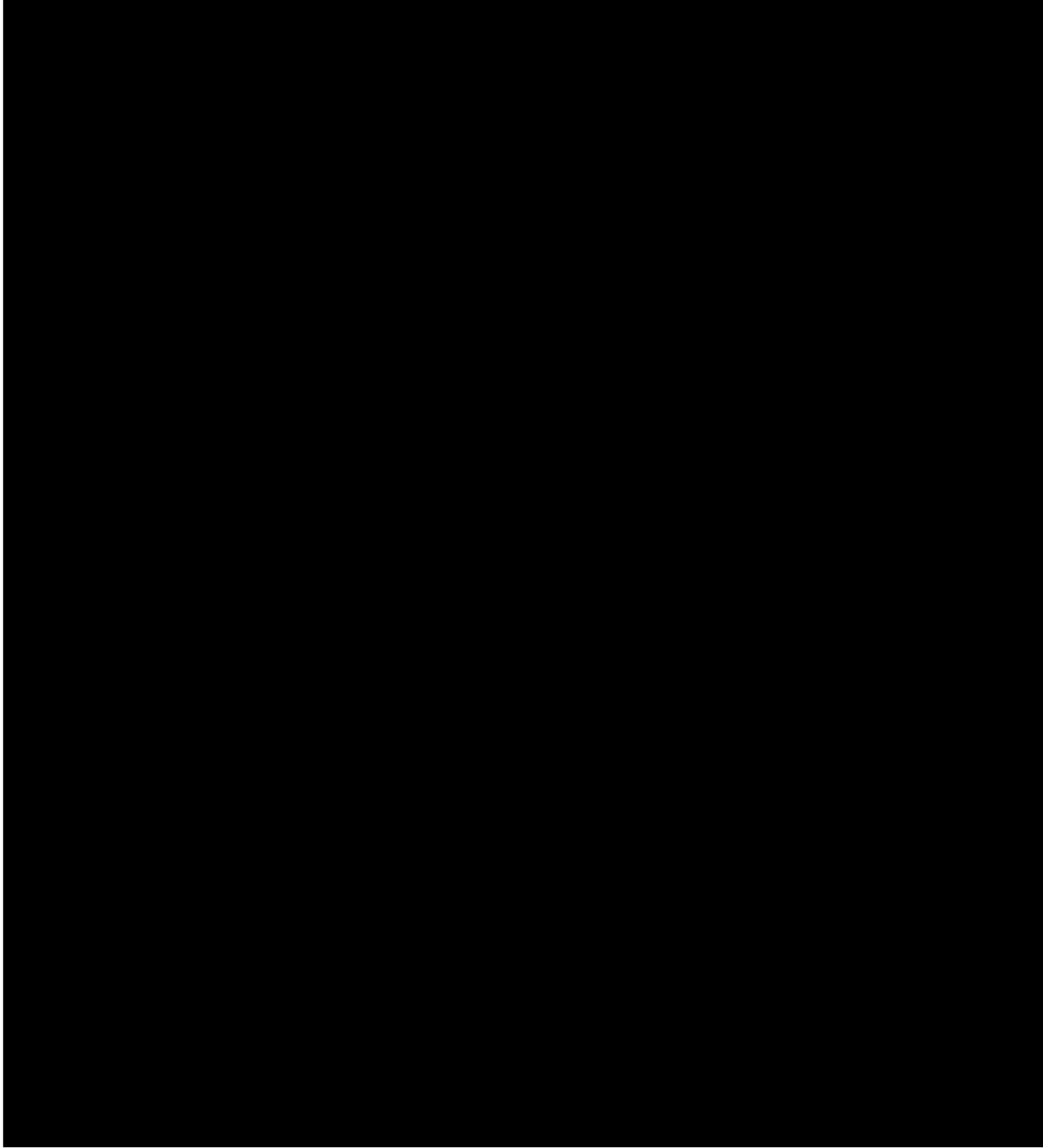
The then Secretary of State said that it was a m

Monitoring the English Regions, Report No. 7 (May 2002)

---

*Regionalism at Westminster*

Source	Date	Subject	Raised By
Commons	5 March	Regional Assemblies	David Lidington (Aylesbury)
Commons	5 March	Elected Regional Government	Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth)
Westminster Hall	5 March	Political Participation (Young People)	Vernon Coaker (Gedling)



Monitoring the English Regions, Report No. 7 (May 2002)

---

		Government Regional Offices	South)
Written Answers	22 May	Benefits of Regional Government	David Hamilton (Midlothian)
Written Answers	22 May	Regulation and Auditing of Regional Assemblies	Malcolm Moss (North East Cambridgeshire)
Lords Written Answer	22 May	Regional Government	Baroness Hanham
Written Answers	23 May	Regional Development Agency Boards	Theresa May (Maidenhead)
Written Answers	23 May	Regional Tourist Boards and Regional Assemblies	John Greenway (Ryedale)
Lords Written Answer	23 May	English Regions	Lord Alton of Liverpool
Written Answers	24 May	Sout	

0.72 -0.78 ref8

Leader of the LGA Conservative Group, Gordon Keymer, reacted in ways similar to Conservative MPs in the parliamentary debate on the White Paper:

The myth of panacea that the likes of Prescott and Mandelson have peddled over regional assemblies must be expunged. Not one extra school will be built, social services will not improve and street cleanliness will not get better. Local services will suffer as regional assemblies suck power from those democratically elected institutions, the councils, that are best placed to serve the interests of local communities and people ('Reorganisation argument hots up', *Local Government Chronicle*, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2002).

Faced with these sentiments, the LGA leader Sir Jeremy Beecham, was forced to acknowledge the publication of the White Paper in less than fulsome terms.

provide. The road ahead will prove a long one, however, with great potential for dissension.

It was noteworthy that in all the debate in the North East about local government reform, the 'historic' nature of counties was never mentioned, in contrast to the parliamentary debate on the White Paper. The reasons for this are complex, but may reflect that in Durham, for instance, the current county boundaries bear no relationship to any 'historic' ones (Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Hartlepool and Stockton, were all lost from the county in 1974, while Darlington was lost in the last round of local government reform resulting from the Banham Commission, set up by the former Conservative government). Among other things, this ensured that 70 per cent of the population in the regions live in unitary local authority areas.

In the south, the political and institutional terrain is different. As Lord Hanningfield, Conservative leader of Essex County Council noted:

Only 12 per cent of people in this region [East of England] live within areas served by unitary councils. So if we were to move to regional and unitary government, it would be more expensive here than anywhere else ('Reorganisation argument hots up', *Local Government Chronicle*, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2002).

## **8.2 Mayoral contests**

Seven mayoral contests on 2<sup>nd</sup> May provided the first concrete evidence that electors, when faced with a new concept — an executive mayor — are prepared to ditch traditional loyalties and opt for the rebel, the anti-

Monitoring the English Regions, Report No. 7 (May 2002)

---

Stoke-on-Trent	2 May	Yes	28,601 (58%)	20,578 (42%)	27.8%	In Person
----------------	-------	-----	-----------------	-----------------	-------	-----------

Source: New Local Government Network (<http://www.nlgn.org.uk/yourmayor/>)

**Mayoral Election Results - May 2002**

where Local Government and Regions Minister Nick Raynsford was considering forcing a referendum on a hostile council) never m



## 10 The political parties

In proposals published on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2002, Don Foster MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson on the regions, outline his plans for the creation of a directly elected regional tier of government. In his paper, *Empowering the People*, he claimed that there will be financial gains by reducing the number of places on the boards of quangos 'as the chaos of regional bureaucracy is rationalised'. The document also calls for a review of the Barnett Formula and the establishment a new needs-based formula with a Financial Commission for the Nations and Regions. Once fully established regional assemblies could move towards fully-fledged regional parliaments with law making powers (Liberal Democrats, News Release, 'Liberal Democrats promise to 'empower the people' through strong regional governme

## 12 Appendix: Pattern of voting in Mayoral elections

### **Doncaster**

Elected: Martin Winter (Labour)

Electorate: 216,097

Turnout: 58,487 (27.07%)

### **First count**

Martin Winter (Lab) 21,494 (36.75%)

Andrew Burden (Cons) 9,000 (15.39%)

Ms Jessie Credland (Comm Gp) 8,469 (14.48%)

Michael Maye (Ind Maye) 7,502 (12.83%)

Graham Newman (LD) 5,150 (8.81%)

Terry Wilcox (Ind Wilcox) 4,036 (6.90%)

Shafiq Ahmad Khan (Ind Khan) 2,836 (4.85%)

**Eliminated:** Ms Jessie Credland, Michael Maye, Graham Newman, Terry Wilcox, Shafiq Ahmad Khan

### **Second Count**

Distribution of Khan's, Maye's, Credland's, Newman's and Wilcox's votes

Martin Winter (Lab) 25,707

Andrew Burden (C) 12,707

---

### **Hartlepool**

Elected: Stuart Drummond (Independent)

Electorate: 67,903

Turnout: 19,544 (28.78%)

### **First Count**

Stuart Drummond (ND) 5,696 (29.14%)

Leo Gillen (Lab) 5,438 (27.82%)

Ian Cameron (Ind) 5,174 (26.47%)

Arthur Preece (LD) 1,675 (8.57%)

Stephen Close (C) 1,561 (7.99%)

**Eliminated:** Ian Cameron, Arthur Preece, Stephen Close

### **Second Count**

Distribution of Preece's and Close's and Cameron's votes

Stuart Drummond (ND) 7,395

Leo Gillen (Lab) 6,792

---

### **Lewisham**

Elected: Steve Bullock (Labour)

Electorate: 179,835

Turnout: 44,518 (24.75%)

**First Count**

Steve Bullock (Lab) 20,011 (44.95%)  
Derek Stone (C) 8,004 (17.98%)  
Alex Feakes (LD) 7,276 (16.34%)  
Sinna Mani (Green) 5,517 (12.39%)  
Ms Marie-Louise Irvine (Parents) 3,710 (8.33%)

**Eliminated:** Alex Feakes, Sinna Mani, Ms Marie-Louise Irvine

**Second Count**

Distribution of Feakes's, Mani's and Irvine's votes  
Steve Bullock (Lab) 24,520  
Derek Stone (C) 9,855

---

**Middlesbrough**

Elected: Ray Mallon (Independent)  
Electorate: 101,570  
Turnout: 41,994 (41.34%)

**First Count**

Ray Mallon (ND) 26,362 (62.78%)  
Ms Sylvia Connolly (Lab) 9,653 (22.99%)  
Joe Michna (LD) 3,820 (9.10%)  
Ronald Darby (C) 1,510 (3.60%)  
Jeffrey Fowler (Soc All) 352 (0.84%)  
Rod Jones (Ind) 297 (0.71%)

---

**Newham**

Elected: Sir Robin Wales (Labour)  
Electorate: 157,505  
Turnout: 40,147 (25.49%)

**First Count**

Sir Robin Wales (Lab) 20,384 (50.77%)  
Tawfique Choudhury (Ind) 5,907 (14.71%)  
Graham Postles (C) 4,635 (11.55%)  
Alan Craig (CPA) 3,649 (9.09%)  
Michael Davidson (BNP) 2,881 (7.18%)  
Ms Gabrielle Rolfe

Allan Pond (Ind PF) 4,993 (8.20%)  
Michael Elliott (Soc All) 2,119 (3.48%)

**Eliminated:** Michael Huscroft, Allan Pond, Michael Elliott

**Second Count**

Distribution of Huscroft's, Pond's and Elliott's votes  
Chris Morgan (C) 26,083  
Eddie Darke (Lab) 24,531

---

**Watford**

Elected: Ms Dorothy Thornhill (Liberal Democrats)  
Electorate: 61,359  
Turnout: 22,170 (36.13%)

**First Count**

Dorothy Thornhill (LD) 10,954 (49.41%)  
Vince Muspratt (Lab) 4,899 (22.10%)  
Garry Ling (C) 4,746 (21.41%)  
Stephen Rackett (Green) 851 (3.84%)  
Paul Woodward (Soc All) 390 (1.76%)  
Anthony Cooke (FCP) 330 (1.49%)

**Eliminated:** Garry Ling, Stephen Rackett, Paul Woodward, Anthony Cooke

**Second Count**

Distribution of Ling's, Cooke's, Woodward's and Rackett's votes  
Dorothy Thornhill (LD) 13,473  
Vince Muspratt (Lab) 5,269