



The **Con**stitution Unit

**A commentary on the Constitutional
Government
Your Reg
Revitalising
Cm 5**

by Ma

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Executive Summary

- The White Paper is a cautious docu

Introduction

'Of course, one of the main reasons why the Government wants to establish elected regional assemblies is our wish to increase democratic accountability over decisions taken at the regional level. It is clearly not possible to quantify the benefits of greater democracy.' (White Paper, 5.16)

1. It was never expected that the White Paper on regional government, despite being very long in the making, would herald a revolution in the governance of England. Expectations of a set of new regional institutions akin to the National Assembly for Wales had been dampened down for a long time by Ministerial statements. What was anticipated was an evolutionary step: breaking the democratic barrier of instituting a regional assembly, and a sufficient basket of powers for the regional body to have a visible impact on regional fortunes.
2. Given the lack of political interest in the issue of elected regional assemblies, the Government, and in particular John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, deserves congratulating for persevering with the production of a White Paper at all. The degree to which the concept of regional government remains alien to Whitehall mandarins and Labour Party traditionalists should not be underestimated. Reading between the lines, much of the

likely to, at best, restrict interest to the three northern regions, and at worst obstruct the whole regional agenda.

6. In terms of regional responsibilities, there is a discontinuity between the Government's stated aspirations for elected regional assemblies and the tools on offer for achieving them. At the same time, a strong centralising streak runs through the White Paper. Frequent powers only to 'influence' organisations and appoint to their board; the demand that assemblies agree high-level targets with Government; and the frequent requirements of consultation with agencies that remain accountable to the centre, all add up to a limited room for manoeuvre for elected regional assemblies.
7. This commentary reviews the events leading up to the publication of the White Paper. It then looks at the most important features of the Government's proposals. The conclusion highlights the overall impression gained from the White Paper.

Brief background to the White Paper

8. The establishment of elected assemblies in the English regions formed part of the Labour Party's 1997 Manifesto. This was one of only two commitments in that manifesto on which no action was taken in the first Labour government. Regional Development Agencies and Regional Chambers were set up under the 1998 Regional Development Agencies Act; for a majority of the then Cabinet this was enough devolution for the English regions.
9. However, in the run-up to the 2001 General Election several shifts occurred. The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, made a speech praising regional economic development in January 2001, followed by similar public contributions from Stephen Byers and David Blunkett. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, long a supporter of regional assemblies, was able to promise a green paper on the issue not long after, which was upgraded to a White Paper during the

Analysis

Functions

12. The Government's proposals for elected assemblies open a different debate. Expectations of wide-ranging powers have been very effectively dampened in the months leading up to the White Paper, a very weak form of regional government was anticipated. In the event, the Government has opted for a 'broad and shallow' form of regionalism rather than a 'narrow and deep' one: that is to say, the proposed functions of regional assemblies, though limited, are drawn from diverse policy fields, rather than representing full power over a small range of responsibilities. This is a valuable approach, because it establishes the remit of elected regional assemblies as spreading into a number of areas of government. It marks a significant shift from the 2001 Labour Party manifesto statement that 'economic development is the core of regional policy today'.² Economic development remains the core, but it is far from the only function.
13. Alongside this is the suggestion that 'there are likely to be further proposals for the decentralisation of responsibilities to assemblies as time goes on.' (White Paper, Overview, 18). Although this sentence appears to be encouraging to campaigners, the precise language used is notable: the use of the word 'responsibilities' rather than 'powers' appears to replicate what Professor Kevin Morgan called 'the chronic disjunction between [the RDAs'] powers (which are modest) and their tasks (which are awesome).'³ This statement does not, therefore, amount to a clear promise of moving extra *powers and money* away from central government control.
14. The Government has also followed the recommendations of most commentators in taking the powers proposed from existing regional

15. It is open to debate whether the proposals are 'weaker' than the powers available to the Greater London Authority, as some reports in the press have suggested.⁴ The GLA's responsibilities for fire, police and transport are unique in covering the area of a 'region': they derive from the fact that London was formerly a county area. Elsewhere in England these functions are organised on a county or sub-regional basis. And some of the responsibilities proposed for elected assemblies by the White Paper are not, and will not be, available to the GLA.
16. There have also been suggestions that the White Paper's proposals will mean removing the powers of county councils and giving them to regional assemblies. This is not correct. Under the Government's proposals, county councils' powers will be absorbed by the new unitary authorities proposed in chapter 9 of the White Paper.
17. The Government identifies three types of functions to be undertaken by regional assemblies. The first is the writing of a set of ten strategies, which are listed in Table 1. Most of these strategies already exist in some form (see Table 6). But elected assemblies' strategies will have statutory force; and they will have the ability to promote 'integration and rationalisation of the separate strategies' (White Paper, 4.10). They will also be encouraged to develop an integrated regional strategy.

strategies. Central government agencies in the regions often have difficulty committing to regional priorities where they conflict with national ones.

- 20. As long as the tools for implementation of strategies remain dispersed around central government agencies, implementation will be slower, less easily monitored, and more subject to changing priorities within central government or the agencies themselves. Co-operation with other agencies is a worthy aim, but strategy-writing alone faces in achieving co-ordinated government.
- 21. The other proposed functions are those for which the assembly has an **executive** role, and those for which it has an **influencing** role (White Paper, 4.16-17). The executive functions proposed for the assemblies are summarised in Table 2, and the influencing functions proposed are summarised in Table 3.

Table 2 : Executive functions of elected assemblies

Function	Current location
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Table 3 : 'Influencing' functions of regional assemblies

Function	Nature of function
Business support	Consultation by Small Business Service
Skills	Draw up Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action Appoint two members to every local LSC and have regard to Assembly on plans (statutory)
Planning	Power to request call-in of major projects by Secretary of State if not consistent with Regional Spatial Strategy
Transport	Advise on allocation of money to local transport plans (Government Offices) Make proposals to Highways Agency and Strategic Rail Authority: consultation by those bodies

23. Both of these tables reveal that the Government is suggesting a very peculiar hotch-potch of responsibilities for elected regional assemblies. The White Paper makes no attempt to relate the choice of these particular functions to the aspirations outlined for elected regional assemblies in Chapter 3. Although the current working of each function is discussed, no rationale is given for the location of any of the functions, whether in the 'executive box', in the 'influence box', or outside either. It is quite apparent that the range of functions to be offered to elected regional assemblies owes everything to political bargaining and little to rational analysis.
24. Politically, there is no doubt that the Government has done well even to obtain this range of responsibilities: they are more than many campaigners or commentators anticipated. Ironically, the commendable 'broad and shallow' approach to allocating powers which was highlighted above means that, almost despite itself, the White Paper makes a good case for a stronger portfolio of powers than it itself proposes. It makes little sense to propose executive responsibilities in a given area but only policy influence in a closely-related one. Examples of this point are:
- **The Small Business Service (SBS):** Support for small business is inherently interlinked with the economic development functions of the RDAs. Although the SBS is organised on a sub-regional/local basis, this need not prevent its funding stream being channelled through an elected regional assembly, so as to allow regional assemblies to allocate funds in accordance with their priorities;
 - **Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs):** Likewise, the functions of the Learning and Skills Councils are so closely linked to economic development that it seems perverse to divide funding for the two policy areas between two different institutions. Local LSCs are organised at sub-regional level, but funding could still be channelled through a regional assembly. Though assemblies will have the power to appoint board members, and both assemblies and LSCs must have regard to one another's strategies, this lacks the flexibility inherent in direct funding. In both this case, and that of the Small Business Service, there may be an argument that relatively new organisations should be given time to bed down; but that argument will begin to wear thin by 2005, which is the earliest date by which any assemblies will take up their powers. (The Government concedes an equivalent point with regard to the Arts Council in paragraph 4.41 of the White Paper.)
 - **Transport:** Assemblies are to be restricted to an 'advisory' role on local transport scheme funding. The decision to restrict involvement with the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and the Highways Agency to 'powers to make proposals' means that, in reality, assemblies will have no transport expenditure at all, save for the tiny Rail Passenger Partnership grants. Given that both the SRA and Highways Agency tend to be locked into long-term plans lasting for many years, and therefore have little immediate funding flexibility, 'powers to make proposals' are of very thin value in this instance.

- **Culture:** It is proposed that regional assemblies should take over the Regional Cultural Consortiums. These bodies are three years old, and are, by all accounts, irrelevant. Their strategies (which are really wish-lists) have had no discernible influence on regional cultural activities; their funding between 1999 and 2004 averages £60,000 per annum.

The Government proposes awaiting the outcome of the current review into the funding of Sport England before deciding on whether to devolve its responsibilities to regional assemblies. The White Paper states that 'accountability and funding for the arts and sports which are regional in character will be devolved to the assembly, in a way which protects strategic national priorities.' (White Paper, 4.42). Implementation of the assemblies' proposed regional cultural strategies would be aided by the addition of all of the funding for Sport England and the regional arms of the Arts Council for England.

The same comments apply to the proposals for English Heritage. Judging from the figures given for a notional North-East Assembly budget (White Paper, Box 5.1), the Government proposes transfer of only a small part of

Unitary local government

'[Regional government] would ... comprise a third elected tier—region, county, district—below national government, and the Government recognises the concern that this would be one tier too many.' (White Paper, 9.5)

26. The above sentence is the Government's case as to why a regional assembly should require fully unitary local government. The concern with unitary local government has been expressed widely in the media as 'Labour's desire to abolish the county councils'—because, so the argument goes, English county councils are more likely to be controlled by the Conservatives. Though county identity does not depend outright on county-level government, counties remain popular amongst the public, and this carries over into attachment to county councils. The recent poll carried out by the BBC,⁹ which indicated that over half of respondents were unworried about losing their county council in favour of a regional assembly, is not sufficient evidence to reject the popularity of counties outright.
27. The Government does not commit itself to abolishing county councils in the White Paper. It specifies that a review by the Boundary Committee for England should predate any referendum, so that the proposed new structure of unitary local government will be available to voters at the time of the referendum.
28. The Government may have misjudged both the mood of the electorate towards traditional local government structures, and the mood of local government itself. Much of local government will have no appetite for more reorganisation after the chaotic review of the mid-1990s. Though the argument of 'one tier too many' is superficially attractive, the attendant reorganisation, costs and loss of traditional structures are a high price to pay. Making that price mandatory is a gift to opponents of elected regional assemblies. Public opinion was one of the central reasons why the initial drive towards unitary authorities by the 1992-5 review was severely tempered by the then Government.
29. Some sections of local government may well

perceived benefits were not going to flow to them, initial positions often changed.'10

The costs of reorganisation

would result from unitary local government—a claim that is recycled in this White Paper—have not materialised.

33. If a further reorganisation costs anything like this amount, it will offset any administrative efficiencies gained from regional assemblies several times over. Chisholm's study also shows that early estimates of transition costs in the 1990s review process (from the Government, the Association of County Councils, the Association of District Councils and the Local Government Commission itself) all turned out to be far too low. To bury one's head in the sand about the possibility of these kinds of extra costs is a perilous omission by the Government. Both politically and financially, they could become a millstone around the neck of regional assemblies.

A separate agenda?

34. The White Paper leaves the impression that the agenda of unitary local government—long tacitly supported by both major parties—is in fact a separate interest of the Government with its own momentum, which has been smuggled into the debate over regionalisation. The arguments in paragraph 9.5, in favour of unitary local government, suggest this:

'Elected regional assemblies will need to work closely with the local authorities in their region. Moving to a single tier of local government in such circumstances will simplify relationships for both local authorities and regional assemblies. This should lead to more effective local and regional government and facilitate effective partnerships between the two tiers;

Similarly, the creation of regional assemblies will mean that many existing public and private sector bodies will have to enter into a new series of relationships. Moving to a single tier of local government in such circumstances will avoid creating extra complexity for them;

Voters are not always clear at present about what activities are carried out by which tier of local government. To add a further tier would confuse matters still further. Moving to a single tier of local government in such circumstances should reduce this confusion: the local authority will deliver local services and act as the community champion and advocate for local people, whilst the regional assembly will set strategic priorities.' (White Paper, 9.5)

35. All of these arguments carry weight. But they relate to two-tier local government *per se*, not just to two tiers under an elected regional assembly. Local authorities work with regional bodies already, and are involved already in complex relationships with a wide variety of bodies. Confusion about the roles of counties and districts has existed for decades. These issues were not triggered by the concept of regional assemblies.
36. Without any real knowledge of public opinion about tiers of government, it is not necessary to assume that this alone dictates that local government reorganisation must accompany

million. This may have been substantially inflated by the disorganised manner in which the review was carried out.

elected regional assemblies. It would have been more politically effective to leave the final decision to the elected assemblies when they were up and running.

37. Alternatively, the regional electorate could be offered two questions in the referendum. One could ask if the voter wanted a regional assembly, and the other could ask if the voter wanted unitary local government in the region. This would provide a valid test of the Government's assumption that three tiers of sub-national government is 'one too many', in the absence of more detailed research.¹⁴

Funding of elected assemblies

38. Chapter 5 of the White Paper, dealing with funding, is the most radical section of the White Paper, but in many ways it is also the most opaque.

39. Two items stand out as worthy of praise in the Government's plans. The first is the decision to propose a single block grant, consisting of an amalgamation of the current budget lines of the bodies proposed for devolution to regional assemblies. This will allow regional assemblies greater flexibility, notwithstanding the 'high-level targets' discussed below, than the Greater London Authority. The GLA has a variety of hypothecated budgets, which limits its budgetary flexibility. A block grant is a welcome move away from that.

40. The funding system proposed by the White Paper resembles the local authority Standard Spending Assessment system. The Government claims that 'Regional allocations of the main programmes which will go to an elected assembly are presently, or will soon be, formula-based.' (White Paper, 5.4). What is proposed implies a system where regional assemblies' budgets are amalgamated from a group of separate, policy-area and formula-based budget lines. The Barnett Formula will therefore not be extended to cover regional expenditure in England.¹⁵

41. The decision to provide a general grant for administration costs is also sensible. The Government estimates extra administration costs at around £20 million.¹⁶ It deserves praise

¹⁴ This suggestion has been made by Sir Jeremy Beecham, chairman of the Local Government Association.

¹⁵ The Barnett Formula is the mechanism used by the Government to allocate spending to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There has long been pressure from the North to end its use, on the grounds that it discriminates (in practice) against the poorer regions of England, and for its replacement with a more transparent needs-based formula. It is significant that the B5nd,

for its honesty over this potentially frightening figure. It would be unrealistic to oblige assemblies to find their running costs from within their overall budgets, which the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales were obliged to do, when the budgets proposed for regional assemblies are so slim.¹⁷

42. The decision to permit regional assemblies to

46. The proposal that elected assemblies must sign up to 'high-level targets' has affinities with the Public Service Agreements currently being rolled out to all local authorities.¹⁸ Depending upon what the targets are, this could limit considerably assemblies' room for manoeuvre. This is complemented by the proposal that extra funding will be available for assemblies that meet or exceed their targets (which is discussed further under **Funding of elected assemblies**). This could well amount to an inducement to assembly executives to stick close to UK government priorities. The Government also proposes retaining reserve powers to alter the RDAs' economic development strategies, and to dis-approve assemblies' appointments to RDA boards.¹⁹

Sums available

47. Difficulties with the financial chapter relate principally to the lack of clarity over the true amount of money likely to be available to a regional assembly. There is no detail over the size of the 'bonus pot' available to regions which meet or exceed their targets. It is hard to gauge the effects of the precepting and borrowing powers. And the White Paper makes some rather wild and over-optimistic statements about improvement of efficiency through scrutiny.

48. It is very difficult to gain a clear picture of what resources will (or might) be available to a regional assembly from Chapter 5. The Government may not want to appear to commit itself; but the subject is a fundamental one, and the lack of clarity will not aid public debate. Below, the hypothetical budget for a North-East Assembly (plus additional lines from the present author) is reproduced, from the White Paper, at Table 4.

¹⁸ There is another antecedent to these proposals, in the *contrat de plan* which the French regional governments must agree with central government: they last six years (which is the length of time between regional elections in France).

¹⁹ The right to alter the Regional Economic Development Strategy, and to dis-approve appointments to RDA boards, is not even available to central government in the case of the Greater London Authority.

Cost savings

51. The Government suggests that assemblies would be able to make savings through effective working:

‘An assembly would cover most of its own additional running costs if, through more effective targeting of resources and efficiency improvements arising from scrutiny by assembly members, it increased value for money from its own programme expenditure by three to five per cent.’ (White Paper, 5.13)

52. This statement is unrealistic. Even if savings could be clearly attributed to the scrutiny process, scrutiny as often results in pressures for increased expenditure as it does in reductions. The evidence available from Scotland, Wales and London suggests that increased costs of some 25-40% have followed the advent of a democratically accountable body in those territories, even leaving out of account the costs of running the new democratic institutions themselves. The Greater London Authority cost £36 million in its first year and £49 million in its second: this is mostly new money which has been raised by significant precepting on the London boroughs. It is foolhardy of the Government to claim that a new tier of government will reduce administration costs. Extra costs are an inevitable corollary of increased democratic accountability.

Boundaries

53. The White Paper states correctly that:

‘a prolonged debate over the composition of individual regions is likely to generate a good deal of fervour but with no obvious prospect that boundaries that are more widely acceptable or practicable would emerge at the end.’ (White Paper, 6.4)

54. The White Paper maintains the existing mechanism for changing Regional Development Agency boundaries, which enables the Secretary of State to do so under section 25 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. S/he may adjust the boundaries, but not increase or reduce the number of regions.

55. This proposal therefore rules out for the time being the possibility of new regions—for instance, in Cornwall, which has its own regional campaign. The Constitution Unit will shortly produce a study on devolution in the South-West Region in which these issues are explored in more detail.

Constitutional issues

Electoral system

56. The Government has chosen the Additional Member system of proportional representation for use by elected regional assemblies. This

seats—similar to the proportion in the National Assembly for Wales—will help to ensure a strong degree of proportionality. Elections will be held every four years, and 5% of the vote must be obtained to gain election (as only 30-35 seats in each assembly are on offer, this is not far above what the ‘threshold’ would be without such a provision).

57. A single top-up constituency will be used in each region. The White Paper argues that this will enable top-up members to more easily take a ‘region-wide view’. Though this sounds intuitively right, there is scant evidence from Scotland, Wales or London to support the idea that regional list members are better able or more inclined to take a regional viewpoint than those elected in single-member constituencies. This is an academic point, however. The small number of seats on offer is a good enough argument for a single top-up constituency: if several top-up constituencies were used, the electoral arithmetic would severely dent proportionality.²¹
58. The White Paper proposes groups of local authority areas as the basis for the single-member constituencies. There is a precedent for this in the elections to the London Assembly. The Government may wish to be more flexible about this decision: in some regions, local authority areas are so irregular that it would be very difficult to create constituencies of approximately equal sizes.²² Besides, it seems unlikely that assembly members would suffer a clash of roles with MPs, as regional assemblies’ roles will be far closer to those of local government than national government.

Numbers, roles and pay

59. The White Paper largely follows the suggestions made during the course of recent debates with regard to constitutional issues. It proposes a formal separation of powers between an executive of six and the back-bench members. The back-benchers will be obliged to convene scrutiny committees to take an overview of the activities of the executive.
60. On the issue of size of assemblies, the Government is correct to state that the size of assemblies should reflect their functions. Functions, not population size, are the decisive factor in assembly workload. It is likely that 35-50 members would be a more workable number than 25-35. It will be very difficult, with below 30 members, to run enough scrutiny committees to both monitor the functioning of the executive and to carry out ‘general

²¹ This is because each top-up region would contain fewer seats in total; this would mean that the proportion of votes required to win a seat would be greater. See Annex G of *Your Region, Your Choice*, at p.102, for an explanation of the Additional Member voting system.

²² The Boundary Committee for England normally does not permit the ratio of seats to electors in local government to vary beyond 10% from the average: for the Parliamentary Boundary Committee the figure is about 14%. Neither of those figures could be adhered to if local authority boundaries were used. This is not such a problem in London, as the ratio between the smallest and largest London boroughs by population is 1:2; even so, there is a wide variation in London Assembly constituency sizes.

scrutiny' matters such as finance, audit and standards. The White Paper is silent on whether any or all of these will be obligatory, as many are in Scotland, Wales and London.

61. The White Paper proposes that 'back-bench' Assembly members should be paid two-thirds of the salaries paid to members of the executive, and should work an average three-day week (White Paper, 7.24). It is hard to see the justification for this proposal. It risks putting potentially good candidates off because of the low salary (and low status) that the position would attract as a result. Also, the breadth of responsibilities proposed for regional assemblies means that back-bench assembly members are likely to be occupied with plenty of work.
62. The Government may fear that full-time membership will encourage 'professional politicians' to dominate the list of candidates for regional assemblies. In Scotland, Wales and London, the percentage of members elected at those bodies' first elections who had previous political experience was 73%, 77% and 92% respectively. But it is doubtful that part-time positions themselves will avoid this possibility, as it will make the holding of dual mandates (for example, in regional and local government) more easily justifiable. Party selection procedures are more likely to produce more women, ethnic minorities, 'non-traditional' politicians, and other groups, as members of a regional assembly, than are part-time as against full-time positions.²³

Stakeholders

63. The proposals to involve stakeholders 'within the structure of an elected assembly' (White Paper, 7.8) are important. Stakeholder contributions have been a success in the restricted forums of the Regional Chambers up till now, and it is valuable 'to encourage the elected members to draw on the experience and skills of individuals in the region who may not have the time or inclination to stand for election themselves' (White Paper, 7.8). Paragraph 7.14 commits the Government specifically to providing resources to facilitate engagement with stakeholders.²⁴
64. The Government has decided not to permit stakeholders to be either executive or assembly members. Allowing stakeholders to sit on scrutiny committees may be a good idea, as they will be able, in theory, to bring their expertise to the scrutiny process. This does not

²³ A survey carried out by the (current) North-East Regional Assembly in late 2000 found the greatest fear of regional assemblies—particularly in the business community—to be that they will provide 'jobs for the boys': that assembly members will be stuffed with familiar faces who inspire no confidence in the electorate or business.

²⁴ That said, the argument that relations with stakeholders will be strengthened because of the proposed small number of members seems unjustified. There is no reason to think that assemblies of 50 members instead of 25 would discourage the use of expertise.

necessarily require co-opted members to have voting rights, which would raise issues of representativeness.

Referendum and process

65.

executive bodies, and quangos, spending public money in the regions. All of them are nominally accountable to Parliament, but in practice the chain of accountability is weak.

- 70. Alongside the executive agencies, with their significant spending powers, are a number of more shadowy bodies, such as Regional Cultural Consortiums and Sustainable Development Round Tables, as well as the Regional Chambers themselves.
- 71. Joint working in the regions takes place at present through strategy and consultation, between regional bodies and Government agencies, and private and voluntary sector. There are limits to the effectiveness of these arrangements.²⁸ In particular, government agencies must follow central policy, and thus they are limited in the degree to which they can participate in regional joint working and alter their behaviour accordingly.
- 72. The strategies produced in each region at present are listed in Table 5.

Table 5 : Current regional strategies			
Strategy		Produced by	
Regional Strategy	Economic	Development	RDA with Regional Chamber

Table 6 : Regional Planning Guidance allocation 2001-02³⁰

Region	Amount
South West	£510 000
South East	£920 000
East of England	£590 000
East Midlands	£440 000
West Midlands	£590 000
Yorkshire and Humberside	£560 000
North East	£290 000
North West	£800 000
London	£1 310 000
Total	£6 000 000

77. For the most part, however, Chapter 2 of the White Papers is long on words but short on action. This is demonstrated by Box 2.5 on page 27 (reproduced below). The first four bulleted suggestions are already in place in most regions. In most cases, senior officers in Government Offices and other bodies have been ‘discussing their work’ with the Regional Chambers since the Chambers were set up. Representatives from several regional bodies either sit on Regional Chambers or have regular dialogues with them. Concordats, commended by the White Paper, exist in many regions. But they give written form to understandings that were already in place: they do not signify a qualitatively different relationship than in those regions which do not possess them. It is strange that the Government goes on to promise that Government Offices will act as ‘forums’ for regional public-sector bodies to come together to dovetail their strategies, when Chambers are already well-placed to carry out this role.

78. The fifth bulleted suggestion, of input to spending reviews through Government Offices, is nebulous. Given that Government Offices are not distinct organisationally from their parent departments, but report back to them, it is hard to believe that either GOs or Regional Chambers will have any meaningful input to spending reviews in this way, however genuine the Government’s intentions. The institutional framework all but precludes it. That is why, whilst Government Offices are able to channel information to the centre more effectively than would occur without their presence, they have not been effective at taking on

³⁰ Source: Planning Directorate at the former DTLR. These sums are not hypothecated, and may be spent on other matters if local authorities choose.

board the concerns of other regional bodies. For the same reasons, they would be unlikely to be more effective as 'forums' than Regional Chambers already are.

[Reproduced from *Your Region, Your Choice*, p.27]

Box 2.5 : A Stronger Role for the Regional Chambers

The chambers have a valuable role to play in the regions alongside the Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices. Their responsibilities are being strengthened to include in the future:

- 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 Directors 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.

79. Some possibilities for extensions of Chambers' powers include: ³¹

- A statutory basis for the existence of the Chambers, which would be stronger than the provisions in the Regional Development Agencies Act;
- A statutory basis for the strategies that Chambers must produce: this would go some way towards giving extra 'teeth' to the Chambers in delivering those strategic objectives;
- The right for Chambers to appoint some members to regional or sub-regional boards;
- Closer relationships, or merger, with the Regional Cultural Consortia, Public Health Observatories and Sustainable Development Round Tables, and with the variety of joint policy forums now being set up in the English regions;
- A consequent increase in funding.

80.

Conclusion

Annex: Glossary of acronyms

Acronym

