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Regional Assemblies - Regional Housing Responsibilities, Grant Allocations 2006/07
I would like to thank you and your colleagues in the Regional Assemblies for your very positive responses to my letter of 18 November in which I invited each to provide details on how your assembly would take on a new regional housing board responsibility. I was also very interested to hear from each on the internal structures and procedures in place to help deliver effective and informed regional strategies.

It is important that each region should be free to decide for itself the most appropriate organisation and structure within certain overriding principles. I am pleased to see, that each assembly is proposing to build on the existing arrangements and deliver closer coordination between the regional housing strategies and other regional strategies, particularly the Regional Spatial Strategy. In these circumstances I would now like to ask assemblies to assume formal responsibility for the Regional Housing Board. The new arrangements need to be fully operational from September, but I would be content for assemblies to take on this work from 1 April.

Each Chair has I know included the rider that they could only assume responsibility for housing if the transfer of work is accompanied by the necessary resources. I do recognise that for assemblies this is a new burden that does need to be funded. Discussions are I understand continuing in each region with Government Offices and I trust that in each region there will be a successful outcome. I will ask my officials to bring this to a speedy conclusion and to ensure that each assembly receives the appropriate additional funding for 2006/08.

I read with interest details of the various executive / policy committee structures in place across assemblies. It is important that all local authorities in a region are able to engage with the assembly and I recognise the number of authorities must impact on the structures of assemblies. However, I am pleased to see that in each region arrangements are in place to enable the various sub-regional areas to contribute and influence regional strategies.

There was broad support for the revised guiding principles circulated with my letter. We have received some suggested amendments which we have taken on board and I am attaching a copy of the final version. This will be published on the ODPM website for future reference.

I am also taking this opportunity to notify you of the funding allocations for 2006/07. You will be aware that the total indicative allocation for the eight assemblies and the English Regions Network was set at £19 million comprising single pot grant of £12 million and a contribution of £7 million from the Planning Delivery Grant (PDG). PDG is performance related and future allocations are subject to the possibility of abatement. You will be aware that it was proposed the grant to be paid to assemblies for 2006/07 be reduced by £0.5 million. I am pleased to be able to report that the bulk of this money has now been restored, and the PDG element of the 06/07 grant is £6.835 million. This will result in the final allocation for each assembly being £19,000 below the indicative figures each used in the business planning round. I recognise this is unwelcome news, but the overall figure for assemblies for the coming year remains substantially higher than that for 2005/06. Full details for each assembly are set out in the table.

The allocations for each assembly are:

Assembly	Single Pot	Planning Delivery Grant	Total
East	£1,478,000	£735,000	£2,213,000
East Midlands	£1,386,000	£771,000	£2,157,000
North East	£1,265,000	£544,000	£1,809,000
North West	£1,588,000	£1,049,000	£2,637,000
South East	£1,725,000	£1,656,000	£3,381,000
South West	£1,409,000	£793,000	£2,202,000
West Midlands	£1,459,000	£713,000	£2,172,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	£1,450,000	£574,000	£2,024,000
ERN	£240,000	-	£240,000
Total	£12,000,000	£6,835,000	£18,835,000

I am copying this letter to each of the Regional Assembly Chairs.
DAVID MILIBAND

GUIDANCE ON THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF DESIGNATION OF VOLUNTARY REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

1. This note sets out guiding principles for voluntary Regional Assemblies in undertaking functions on behalf of Government.

Background

2. The Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 contains provisions enabling the Secretary of State to designate a Regional Assembly for purposes connected with a Regional Development Agency (RDA). Similarly, section 2 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (PCPA) provides for the Secretary of State to recognise a body as Regional Planning Body (RPB) for the region. In each of the eight English regions outside London the designated body for these functions is the voluntary Regional Assembly. 'Regional Assembly' means an unincorporated voluntary association or an incorporated body (including companies limited by guarantee) established by partner local authorities and social economic and environment partners in a given region.

3. Regional Assemblies are bodies of their regions and the Government takes the view that parties involved must be able to agree arrangements that they believe best reflect the particular circumstances of their region: it does not impose a uniform rigid framework for the form of each Assembly. Membership criteria are however set out in the relevant legislation (and are not reproduced in full here), and requirements for the preparation of a Regional Spatial Strategy are set out in 'Planning Policy Statement 11: Regional Spatial Strategies'. The principles set out here are intended to ensure that Assemblies operate in an efficient, inclusive, fair, and transparent manner.

Principles

Membership

4. Assemblies should provide for representation from local authorities on the basis of broad political support across the region; i.e. there should be some representation from all the main parties even if they may not be the party of control in any of the local authorities in the region.

5. Assemblies should seek to ensure they secure the involvement of all local authorities and key interest groups in the region. They should provide for the appropriate representation of sub-regions, major cities and city-regions, and rural areas outside the big conurbations, and should have regard to population size in the allocation of seats on the assembly.

6. The legislation (PCPA) requires that the local government members should comprise not less than 60 per cent of the membership of the Assembly when it is carrying out its functions as RPB, and that non-local authority members (sometimes referred to as 'social and economic' members, or 'stakeholder' members) should comprise at least 30% of the membership. This should not be allowed to prevent the full range of regional interests from being involved. The Assembly's constitution should provide for an open process of nomination of non local authority members, including consultation with regional partners and the opportunity for those not directly consulted to make their views known. Its constitution should also allow for consultation with partners in adjoining regions on issues of cross boundary interest.

7. The 'members' of the Assembly, in the context of Assemblies that are incorporated associations or companies, means the full, wider membership of the Assembly encompassing all regional partners.

8. An Assembly should provide for all members to have the opportunity to contribute to debates, and for their views to be reflected in published statements.

9. The Assembly should achieve an appropriate gender, ethnic and disability balance among its members. Arrangements should be made to keep this under review. Ministers will expect to see steady progress towards a position in which men and women are equally represented on regional assemblies and the proportion of disabled members and members from the ethnic minorities reflects that in the adult population.

Procedures/structures

10. The Assembly should have streamlined procedures and structures in place to enable members to deliver effective and timely decision making at the appropriate level (whether full Assembly, committee, official).

11. Business should be conducted primarily through small executive and policy boards (of members) that report to the full assembly as and when appropriate, subject to the need for all members to be able to vote on matters relating to their RPB functions.

12. Membership of executive and policy boards should be open to all members who should be able to contribute and influence decision making and the overall balance between local government and regional economic, environmental and social stakeholders should be reflected on these groups.

13. These structures should facilitate efficient delivery of the core functions supported by ODPM grant: planning, RDA scrutiny, [and other strategic work such as strategy alignment

Voting

14. While it is expected that Assembly business can be conducted on the basis of consensus, it is for the regional partners to decide whether voting arrangements are necessary.

15. Where a voting system is employed then all members must be able to vote and the proportion of votes of the local government members and social and economic partners should reflect the overall balance on the assembly between the groups.

Subscriptions and other financial contributions

16. Government funding supports the core functions of planning (including transport strategy), housing and RDA scrutiny, with some support for other strategic work such as strategy alignment. Assemblies are encouraged to seek subscriptions or contributions in kind from members and other sources. Regional interests (e.g. the voluntary sector, small businesses) should not be effectively excluded from membership because of funding/subscription requirements.

General

17. The Assembly's constitution must be consistent with the provisions of the RDA legislation in setting out its role vis-à-vis

the RDA. RDAs continue to be public bodies with statutory duties for which they are accountable with the assemblies providing a mechanism through which RDAs can take account of regional views and give the region an account of their activities. The assembly's constitution must also be consistent with the relevant legislation and guidance relevant to its role as Regional Planning Body.

18. The aims and objectives of Assemblies' unincorporated associations or companies, must be compatible the roles and duties associated with the strategic, scrutiny and planning functions of a regional assembly.

19. The Assembly should be mindful of its duties and obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998, and should ensure that its policies, procedures and activities are consistent with the provisions of the Act.

20. The Assembly should conduct its proceedings as openly and transparently as possible, and it should have policies and procedures in place to ensure the integrity of its decisions and activities. Although not subject to the legislation, the Assembly should be mindful of the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and should ensure that its constitution and activities are consistent with the spirit of the legislation. Assemblies should also be mindful of their duties under the Environmental Information Regulations.

21. Queries on the content of this guidance note should be addressed to the relevant Government Office in the first instance; or to [Cotmore] at cohin.cotmore (or 020 7944 4023

Regional Assemblies and Future Strategy Division
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
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