

Yorkshire and Humber
Assembly

**Evaluation of
Appropriateness and
Effectiveness of the
New Yorkshire and
Humber Assembly
Governance
Arrangements**

Final Report

ARUP

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June 2007

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Summary

Introduction and Background

In April 2006 the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly (YHA) put in place new governance and organisational structures. Members of the Assembly requested a review to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of these new arrangements. This Final Report of the evaluation, produced in June 2007, provides an assessment of the new governance arrangements one year on from their introduction.

Main Findings

The Assembly has put the right governance and organisational structures in place. These structures have bedded down well with many of the key decision-makers in the region engaged. The Assembly has moved successfully from a phase of organisational re-building to one of sustained progress in taking decisions and developing policy strategically on behalf of the region.

The Assembly is a more streamlined body than it was previously, pursuing a more focused agenda. The new structures are 'fit for purpose', aligned closely and clearly to core areas of responsibility. The Assembly is seeking to do less than it did previously, but has the right decision-making structures in place to do it better. However, some of the officer-level and wider advisory group structures are a little unwieldy and resource-intensive.

The new governance arrangements have brought Assembly Members closer to the work of the organisation. Assembly Members are playing a lead role in the new structures, including many senior local government and non-local authority decision-makers. Those with real clout and influence are involved, particularly through the Regional Executive Board. This senior-level involvement has largely been maintained over the past year. Relationships between Assembly Members and officers are good, and have developed positively over the year with growing mutual confidence.

Relationships between the Assembly and its principal regional partners are strong, and have improved progressively over the last year. There is scope for the Assembly to build on these foundations to further strengthen and deepen the engagement of member and partner organisations, developing working relationships in the context of the Assembly increasingly fulfilling a "Regional Strategic Partnership" role. This implies a more active approach to engaging and influencing partner organisations than previously.

The Executive Board is a highly positive aspect of the new structures. It provides a streamlined body to manage the policy business of the Assembly, and is well-placed to take strategic decisions. The development of the roles and the policy output of the functional policy boards has been positive, although the rates of progress have been variable. In some cases progress has been slowed by limitations in the clarity and understanding of roles of the boards, capacity constraints, and in some instances a lack of confidence in pursuing a proactive policy agenda. Policy work across the different Boards is being integrated well. Joining-up planning, housing and transport work will continue to be essential, particularly as the Assembly takes forward work to oversee the implementation of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), and to revise the RSS in the future.

Over the course of this project, the Assembly has made sustained progress in establishing and embedding the working of the new structures and in developing an increasing proactive and confident policy development role. The main findings set out in the Interim Report for this project, which was based on research undertaken in late 2006, were that, following a difficult process of organisational review, the Assembly had successfully rebuilt its organisational structures and relationships with member and partner organisations. Since then the Assembly has moved on from a (predominantly internal) main focus on putting in place and getting the new structures working. The Assembly has developed a stronger external focus on taking decisions and influencing and

developing policy on behalf of the region. Over the course of this evaluation, the organisation as a whole, including both officers and Members, has grown in confidence in developing a more proactive policy role. There has been a sense of real momentum. The challenge now is to build on this progress.

Despite these generally positive findings, the Assembly continues to work in a context of significant uncertainty in relation to the future of regional governance and the role of the Assembly. There has also been uncertainty regarding the possibility of future city-region governance structures, and engagement by the Assembly in policy work at sub-regional or city-region level has been variable. The Government's Sub National Review should provide some clarity, although there may be a process of further transition and change. This context is not unique to Yorkshire and Humber, and exists despite, not because of the Assembly's governance arrangements. Assembly Members have adopted a pragmatic position of engaging in the work of the Assembly constructively, regardless of their view about the Assembly's future.

Challenges for the Year Ahead

In general, the challenge for the organisation and the region as a whole is to build on the sustained progress of the last year in relation to the governance structures. As the Assembly continues to move from a phase of organisational rebuilding, to one where it can play an increasingly confident and influential role in shaping policy, the organisation will need to respond. It will increasingly need to be outwardly (not inwardly) focused, and proactive and confident (not reactive) in further strengthening its policy role and influence.

Seven specific main challenges for the year ahead have been identified:

1. Enhancing engagement with policy development work being undertaken at sub-regional and city-region level, helping support, steer and coordinate this work;
2. Strengthening the engagement of member organisations by working more proactively to forge deeper and stronger partnership relationships to enhance the Assembly's ability to fulfil its role as the "Regional Strategic Partnership";
3. Further improving communication with Member and partner organisations, focusing on providing the information they need to support their involvement;
4. Continuing to adopt a more proactive and confident policy role, working with Yorkshire Forward and other principal regional partners to engage key regional decision-makers in debates on the "big issues" for the region, such as how to accommodate future economic and housing growth, how to respond to the challenges posed by climate change, flood-risk and so on;
5. Maintaining the current structure of the five policy Boards whilst, strengthening the role of the Regional Transport Board to be more proactive and influential in developing the strategic transport agenda for the region, and seeking to enhance wider understanding of the "challenge" role of the Sustainable Development Board;
6. Considering how best to reform the structure of officer advisory groups and wider forums supporting the policy boards, with the aim of freeing up capacity to develop relationships with and engagement of partners in a more strategic and proactive way; and
7. Responding to uncertainty regarding the future of regional governance arrangements, by leading a constructive and open debate in the region on future regional roles, to respond to the Government's Sub-National Review and Comprehensive Spending Review, once published.

In moving forward, even if through a period of transition, it will be vital to build on the positive progress the Assembly has made over the past year in strengthening partnership working, decision-making and policy at regional level.

1 Introduction

1.1 This Project

In April 2006 the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly put in place new governance and organisational structures. Members of the Assembly requested a review to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of these new arrangements.

The Assembly commissioned Arup to undertake an independent evaluation. The aim was for a light-touch, largely qualitative longitudinal test of: the Assembly's structures and processes; the adequacy and implications of the Assembly's approach to decision-making; and the extent to which the Assembly has secured an appropriate level of accountability back to member organisations in the region.

An assessment was undertaken in late 2006 of the baseline position in terms of how well the new governance arrangements had bedded down. The findings of this initial work were set out in an Interim Report. Progress was monitored in the period to April 2007.

1.2 This Report

This, the Final Report of the project, sets out the position one year on from the introduction of the new governance arrangements. This report builds on many of the points outlined in the Interim Report that was produced in January 2007. Most of the findings of the Interim Report still stand; positive progress has generally been maintained or accelerated. This report was produced in June 2007, prior to the publication by Government of the *Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration*.

1.3 Method

A set of criteria were established against which the effectiveness of the Assembly's governance arrangements could be assessed. These were structured around four themes:

- **Organisational structures and efficiency** – the extent to which the structures are fit-for-purpose and work efficiently, with clarity of roles, flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, and good integration of work across different parts of the structure;
- **Accountability and engagement** – the extent to which Assembly members and member bodies lead and have ownership of the work and decision-making of the organisation, and partners recognise and respond to the remit of the Assembly;
- **Decision-making** – the extent to which the Assembly plays a lead role in regional strategic decision-making, and does so in a robust, transparent and collaborative manner; and
- **Policy effectiveness and impact** – the extent to which the Assembly is developing robust, evidence-based policy, adding value to policy in the region, and in shaping higher-level policy from a Yorkshire and Humber perspective.

The research undertaken to inform the evaluation comprised:

- A desk-based review of relevant documents and discussions with Assembly officers;
- Interviews in late 2006, and repeated in April and May 2007, with a range of Assembly members and partners (a list of interviewees is included at Annex A of this report); and
- Three case studies to assess the role of the governance arrangements in relation to the Assembly's approach to dealing with specific issues – the planning conformity role (see case study box 1, section 3.2 of this report), decisions on regional housing investment priorities (see case study box 2, section 3.3), and the Integrated Regional Framework (see case study box 3, section 3.4).

2 Context

2.1 Overview of the Assembly Governance Structures

The new governance structures were introduced following a strategic review of the Assembly. The review stemmed from a widely perceived need to refocus the role and therefore the structures of the Assembly, and to strengthen the engagement of member organisations and accountability of the Assembly to its member organisations.

An important feature of the new structures and funding arrangements was a de-merger of the Assembly from the regional local government organisation; with Local Government Yorkshire and Humber being constituted and funded as a separate body.

The main features of the new structures are set out below and detailed on the diagram overleaf.

The Full Assembly provides overarching leadership for the organisation, leading on production of the Integrated Regional Framework, and endorsing the main regional strategies. Its membership comprises all 22 local authorities in the region, plus 15 Social, Economic and Environmental partners, and (for planning purposes) the National Parks.

The Regional Executive Board, which is accountable to the full Assembly, manages the policy business for the Assembly and, where appropriate, the region. It provides a forum for key decision-makers in the region to coordinate regional policy, align regional activity and resources and strengthen partnerships.

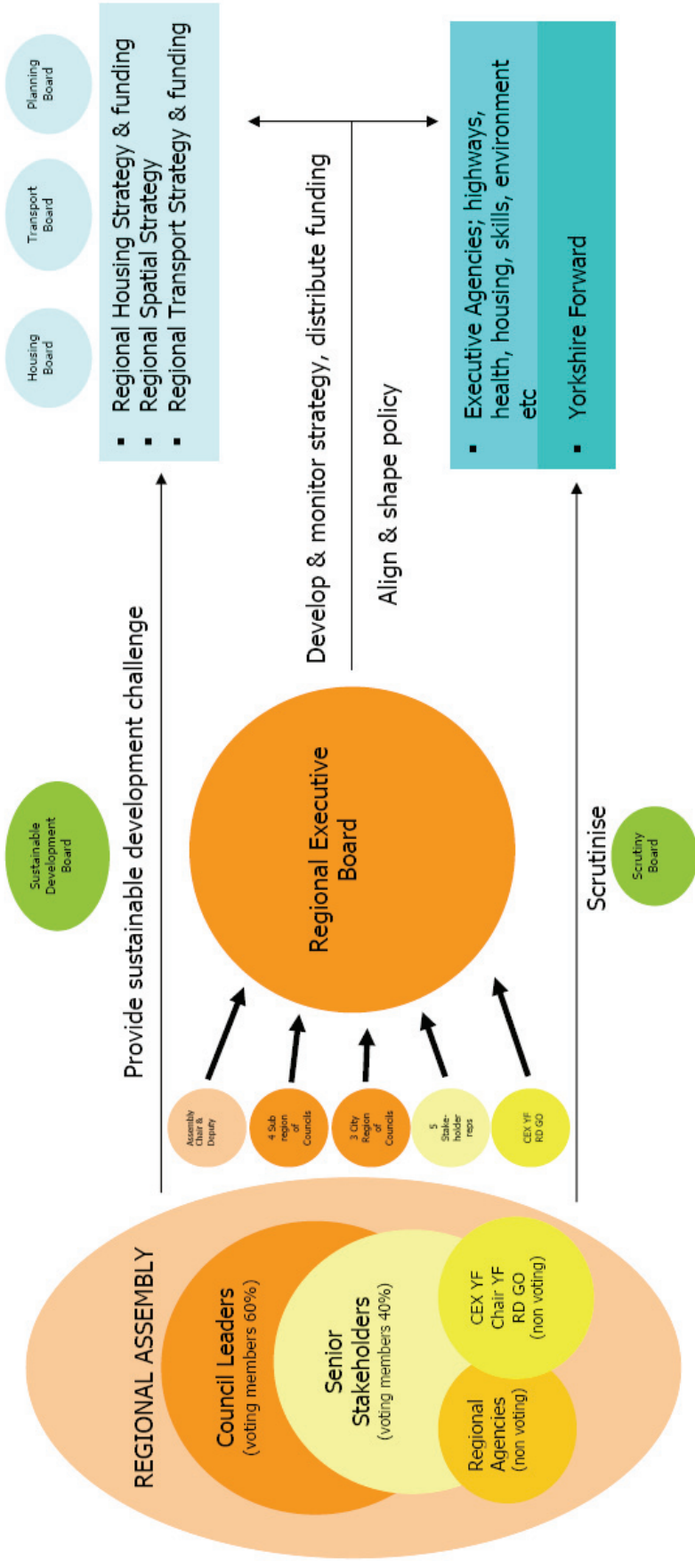
The Regional Housing, Planning and Transport Boards lead the core policy-making activity of the Assembly in its roles as the Regional Planning Body and Regional Housing Body are carried out through three functional Boards dealing with housing, planning and transport. They have full operational responsibility for their area of activity, and are accountable to the Regional Executive Board.

The **Scrutiny Board** undertakes scrutiny of Yorkshire Forward. It is accountable to the Assembly and works closely with the Sustainable Development Board to assess the impact of the Regional Economic Strategy, acting as a 'critical friend' to institutions and bodies working in the region.

Sustainable Development Board provides guidance on sustainable development to the full Assembly, the Regional Executive Board and the other Regional Boards. The Board has a particular responsibility to act independently, and provide constructive, robust and insightful advice. The Sustainable Development Board works closely with the Scrutiny Board to ensure effective challenge on sustainable development issues.

Several of the functional policy Boards have an officer-level technical advisory group. In some cases there is also a wider forum comprising officers and Members from partner bodies, which provides further opportunities for discussion and provision of information. The four-strong Executive Coordination Team, comprising the Chair, Vice Chair and two lead officers, manage the organisation's work and business.

Figure 2.1: Yorkshire and Humber Assembly Governance Structures



2.2 Wider Context

The Assembly's new governance structures were put in place and have bedded down in the context of significant developments in the wider policy context affecting regional governance in England.

There was a reassessment in several regions of the focus, role and structures of the Regional Assembly, following the "no" vote in the November 2004 referendum in the North East on the introduction of an Elected Regional Assembly, and the subsequent abandonment of the proposals for Elected Regional Assemblies.

Over the past two years new forms of partnership working and policy development exercises have emerged at city-region level. There has been a wider national policy debate regarding the future possibilities of new city-region governance structures. This debate has led to some uncertainty regarding the roles of Regional Assemblies.

The reforms to the planning system as a result of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 strengthened the role of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), and of the Assemblies' role as Regional Planning Bodies.

The Government has requested advice from regions on investment priorities as part of its "Devolution Decision Making" agenda, including through the Regional Funding Allocation process in late 2005 and early 2006, and in relation to Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

New advice has been published by Government on the role of Integrated Regional Frameworks in providing an overarching strategic policy framework and mechanism for securing integration of various regional strategies.

The Government's Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, being led by HM Treasury is considering the future of regional and sub-regional governance arrangements. The recommendations of the Sub National Review are due to be published in the summer or autumn of 2007. This, and associated speculation, has created significant uncertainty regarding the future of current regional governance arrangements, including the future role of Regional Assemblies.

3 Findings from the Evaluation

3.1 Introduction

The main findings from the research are set out under the main headings for the evaluation criteria.

3.2 Organisational Structures and Efficiency

3.2.1 Overarching points

This section sets out comments in relation to the various components of the new decision-making structures.

The governance structures is perceived to be fit-for-purpose and aligned to the core functions of the Assembly: scrutiny of Yorkshire Forward, its role as the regional planning, transport, and housing body, and in helping integrate policy across a range of organisations and strategy processes.

Those with clout and influence in the region are leading the work of the Assembly. There is a positive sense that confidence in the Assembly has been re-built, and the organisation has moved forward positively and with increasing confidence.

Over the course of this evaluation, the Assembly has made sustained progress in moving from a phase of the new governance structures bedding-down, to a phase of growing focus and confidence in developing and shaping policy on behalf of the region. In the interviews for this study undertaken in late 2006, Assembly Members, partners and officers commented mainly on the nature of the new structures. The general view was that whilst good progress was being made, the structures were generally yet to be tested in terms of difficult decisions or the development of policy. When follow-up discussions were held in April and May of 2007, the focus of interviewees' comments had changed and moved on to what the Assembly was doing and how it could help address the key policy issues and challenges facing the region.

However the wider uncertainties regarding the future of regional governance do pose a problem for the Assembly. This uncertainty stems partly from the Government's Sub National Review, partly from the debate regarding city-region governance, and also from the fact Members of the Assembly have various views regarding the role and future of Regional Assemblies. But there is widespread acknowledgement that there are a number of functions which need to be performed at regional level. This context of uncertainty is not unique to Yorkshire and Humber and exists despite, not because of, the Assembly's governance arrangements.

Responding to this uncertainty, and moving forward in the context of the Sub National Review and the Comprehensive Spending Review, when they are published in Autumn 2007, will be important challenges for the months ahead (see section 4).

3.2.2 Executive Board

The Executive Board is proving an effective body in overseeing the work of the Assembly and managing and brokering agreement on policy decisions and direction.

There is general consensus that those who sit on the Executive Board are from key regional organisations and are of sufficiently senior status. Members are drawn from regional leaders and influencers, a mix and profile that are essential if the Executive Board is to act as the regional strategic decision-making body.

The quality of discussion and decision-making during meetings is regarded as good. Because the Executive Board is the main body that manages the policy business of the

Assembly, the meetings of the Full Assembly have been freed up, enabling more strategic and higher quality discussion.

As a result of directing policy business through a smaller, more strategic body, senior members are working more closely with Assembly officers. There is support for the Executive Board to act as the regional strategic decision-making body. This support was strengthened by the performance of the Executive Board in developing and delivering the Comprehensive Spending Review submission.

Whilst there were some initial concerns regarding the relationship and relative responsibilities between the Full Assembly and the Executive Board, most of these concerns have lessened as the Executive Board has proved its worth.

3.2.3 Executive Coordination Team

The four-strong Executive Coordination Team comprises the Chair, Vice Chair and two Executive Directors of the Assembly. This body manages the business of the Assembly in order to enable the Boards and Full Assembly to deal with strategic policy issues.

This team is regarded to be working well, and it is clear that individuals in the grouping have complimentary roles, capabilities and strengths. The hands-on role played by the Chair and Deputy Chair, and the close joint-working between them and the two directors, is helping bring Members closer to the work of Assembly officers.

3.2.4 Planning Board

The role and work of the Planning Board is considered clear. Work has progressed successfully to develop the Assembly's planning conformity role, advising on the conformity with the RSS of Local Development Frameworks and planning applications of strategic importance. Through this process, the Board have increasingly delegated to Assembly officers for advice (see case study box 1, section 3.3).

In terms of developing spatial planning policy, responding to the consultation on proposed changes to draft RSS will provide a first main challenge for the Board. The Assembly has commissioned and published a review of the process it underwent (largely under the old governance structures) to produce draft RSS, and to make recommendations for the approach to revising RSS in the future.

3.2.5 Transport Board

The Transport Board is as yet untested in its role to advise on transport investment priorities through the Regional Funding Allocations process. Some progress has been made in strategic policy work, including lobbying on transport investment, monitoring progress (or lack of) in implementation of regional transport priorities, and responding to policy consultations.

There is widespread recognition that the region faces significant challenges in relation to transport congestion and securing investment to strengthen the transport network to support sustainable growth in the region. The Transport Board has been constrained in its response to these challenges, partly as a result of a lack of confidence in pursuing a strategic policy agenda, and partly due to limitations in terms of officer capacity.

Strengthening the role of the Transport Board is a main recommendation from this project (see section 4.1.6). There is a need for the Transport Board to be more confident and proactive in shaping policy thinking around key strategic transport issues for the region, to oversee technical work to enhance the evidence base and policy understanding on key transport issues. The Assembly needs to lead work to help the region needs to position itself in relation to key strategic transport issues, such as the future of rail, demand management and pricing of road transport, new forms of metropolitan transport governance, and new approaches to transport funding.

3.2.6 Housing Board

The Regional Housing Board transferred to the Regional Assembly in April 2006. There has been a process of capacity building and raising awareness and improving understanding of housing issues amongst the members of the Housing Board.

Positive progress has been made in relation to decision-making on the allocation of investment from the Regional Housing Pot (see case study box 2, section 3.4) and in informing the region's submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review.

There has also been close joint working with the Planning Board on housing and planning matters. A number of papers have been taken to both Boards. Work has been commissioned on sub-regional housing markets, which has been funded jointly by housing and planning funding streams. The Housing and Planning conference organised by the Assembly and held in February 2007 engaged a wide range of stakeholders in discussion about future work on housing and planning issues.

Overall, the Housing Board has made an increasingly significant positive policy impact, as the new arrangements have become established, levels of awareness of Board Members have increased, joint-working with planning colleagues strengthened, and agreements on investment priorities have been brokered. This has been achieved in the context of limited staff resources (the Assembly did not acquire significant additional resources to support and service the Regional Housing Board – Government Office still retains dedicated housing staff). The Assembly has worked closely with partners such as the Regional Housing Forum, the Housing Corporation and the Government Office, leveraging in additional capacity and expertise where appropriate.

3.2.7 Scrutiny Board

The work and role of the Scrutiny Board is understood clearly. There is willingness amongst Assembly Members for scrutiny work to be more searching and incisive; a view shared by Yorkshire Forward. The use of the public sessions as part of the scrutiny process is regarded as a positive development, which has improved significantly the quality of scrutiny work. The approach to scrutiny and the manner in which Scrutiny Board meetings are run is generally considered to be constructive, collaborative and investigative, not overly adversarial.

The Assembly commissioned a review of the scrutiny work undertaken to date, to inform future approaches and choices of topics, and this demonstrates a willingness to reflect on work undertaken previously and to seek to achieve further improvement of the scrutiny function.

Yorkshire Forward take seriously the Assembly's scrutiny role, and the recommendations of its scrutiny reports. This point, and the value of the Assembly's input, was recognised in the recently published report of the Independent Performance Assessment of Yorkshire Forward¹.

3.2.8 Sustainable Development Board

The Sustainable Development Board is an innovative aspect of the new governance structures, which is intended to play a cross-cutting "challenge" role by seeking to influence all of the work of the Assembly, as well as a wider range of regional strategies prepared by external organisations. This challenge role is not understood widely, both internally within the Assembly and by external partners. There is some concern that because the issues dealt with by this Board are so wide-ranging, it could lead to a lack of focus in its work. It is recommended that the Assembly seek to strengthen understanding within the organisation and amongst partners of the nature of the Sustainable Development Board's "challenge" role (see section 4.1.6).

¹ *Independent Performance Assessment, Yorkshire Forward*. National Audit Office, 2007.

There is however increasing recognition of the importance of sustainable development issues for the region, and the need for clarity amongst the main regional organisations regarding who leads and who does what in relation these issues. The production (overseen by the Regional Executive Board) of the draft Integrated Regional Framework (IRF) has been a positive development (see case study box 3, section 3.5). The IRF identifies the most important sustainable development issues for the region, and this provides a framework for future activity of the Sustainable Development Board.

The Sustainable Development Board has overseen important work on how the various regional strategies have responded to the challenge of climate change.

3.2.9 Technical Advisory Group and Forums Supporting the Boards

Supporting the Boards a range of officer-level technical advisory groups and wider officer and member-level policy forums have been put in place.

The technical advisory groups are considered to play a vital role in providing support to the Boards, and in helping engage Member organisations in the work of the Assembly. The role of the Regional Executive Board Advisory Group has scope to play a particularly important role. The role of the wider policy forums is considered to be less clear. The forum meetings provide a useful means of disseminating information to Member and partner organisations, but are resource intensive for all concerned.

The combination of the technical advisory groups and policy forums results in a somewhat complex and unwieldy set of structures supporting the main decision-making Boards. Significant amounts of Assembly officer time is spent in, or servicing these meetings.

A recommendation from this evaluation is that the Assembly should consider restructuring the network of advisory group and forum structures (see section 4.1.7). There is potential for the policy forums to operate on a virtual basis, with information disseminated and input obtained electronically or in writing. The officer time that would be freed up could be spent to work in a more proactive manner to develop policy, and strengthen partnerships, including improving engagement with policy development at sub-regional and city-region level (see sections 3.5 and 4.1.2).

3.3 Accountability and Engagement

3.3.1 Engagement of Assembly Members

The new governance arrangements have brought Assembly Members closer to the work of the organisation. Assembly Members are playing a lead role in the new structures, including many senior local government and non-local authority decision-makers. Those with real clout and influence are involved, particularly through the Regional Executive Board. This senior-level involvement has largely been maintained over the past year.

This engagement of the important regional decision-makers has enabled the Assembly to act and take decisions on behalf of the region, for example in signing off the region's submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review. This in turn builds wider confidence in the Assembly, and recognition of the need for organisations and individuals to remain engaged in order to input into important regional decisions.

The functional policy Boards have also helped bring key figures from Member and partner organisations closer to the specific policy work of the Assembly, although in some cases attendance at meetings is patchy.

Relationships between Assembly Members and officers are good, and have developed positively over the year, with increasing mutual confidence. The officer team of the Assembly is well-respected and held in high regard. Some Assembly Members interviewed for this project expressed a wish for Assembly officers to be more confident in leading policy

work and policy debates. The problem of capacity constraints within the offer team is recognised.

The strengthened engagement of local authority Members of the Assembly has been a major achievement of the Assembly over the past year. There is no evidence that this has been at the expense of engagement of Members from social, economic and environmental (SEE) partner organisations.

Research commissioned by the Assembly² has found that SEE partners have very different needs in terms of support for engagement the work of the Assembly. The research has identified areas where some SEE partners would welcome greater support (including induction, clearer point of contact with Assembly officers and improved communication). However, the same findings could apply to the engagement Assembly Members from local authorities, and indeed relevant recommendations are made in relation to all types of Assembly Members in sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4 of this report.

3.3.2 Engagement of Principal Regional Partners

Relationships between the Assembly and its principal regional partners are strong. There is recognition and support for the Assembly's important role in developing policy and brokering regional decisions. Yorkshire Forward work closely and constructively with the Assembly across a number of policy areas, and engage seriously in scrutiny activity. It will be important for the Assembly to continue to work closely with Yorkshire Forward as it develops its policy work.

3.3.3 Engagement of Member Organisations

Engagement of member organisations has continued to be strengthened over the course of this evaluation. As part of putting the new governance structures in place, the Assembly successfully rebuilt relationships with and confidence of many partner organisations, particularly local authorities. These relationships have continued to improve over the past year as engagement of partner organisations has become deeper and is increasingly delivering results.

A recommendation from this evaluation is that the Assembly should focus on building on these foundations to further strengthen and deepen the engagement of member and partner organisations (see section 4.1.3). The challenge is to develop working relationships in the context of the Assembly increasingly fulfilling a role as "Regional Strategic Partnership". This implies a more active approach to engaging and influencing partner organisations, compared to previously when the Assembly's aim to be "Voice of the Region" implied a more passive role focused on representing the views of Members. If the Assembly is to act as a regional strategic partnership, there will need to be an emphasis on a more active and strategic approach to building relationships and delivering with and through member bodies.

3.3.4 Communication

Formal and informal communication between officers and members, particularly those on the Executive Board and Functional Boards, is seen as strong and technically sound. With the wider membership, however, there is a feeling that information could be more succinct, accessible and hard hitting with less of a promotional tone. Members do not want to be overwhelmed with information but do want to know about the strategic issues and critical decisions facing the region that they must resolve through the Assembly. There is also scope for providing information in a format that can be used by members to involve the wider membership of member bodies or networks. Progress has been made through the redesign of the Assembly's website.

² *SEE Partner Engagement and Support*. Dr Lynne Dowsen, Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University, on behalf of Yorkshire and Humber Assembly. Draft Report. May 2007.

It is recommended that the Assembly investigate further how communication and dissemination of information can be improved to provide member and partner organisations with the information they need to support their involvement in Assembly work (see section 4.1.4). One option might be a regular, concise electronic information bulletin, providing a brief one paragraph introduction to each information item with a hyperlink to the Assembly website which can be followed by those who wish to seek further information and detail.

Case Study Box 1: Planning conformity role – joint-working between assembly officers and members in overseeing the provision of advice to Local Planning Authorities

The Assembly acts as the Regional Planning Body, responsible for producing the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and overseeing the implementation of the RSS. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 strengthened the Assembly's planning functions, including specifying a "conformity" function. This provides a remit for the Assembly to provide advice to Local Planning Authorities on the extent to which planning applications of strategic significance are in conformity with the RSS, and also on the conformity with RSS of local planning documents produced as part of Local Development Frameworks.

The Assembly has developed this role over the last year, putting formal procedures in place under the new Governance structures. Conformity work is overseen by the Regional Planning Board. A series of criteria were worked up in relation to planning applications that should be referred to the Assembly for advice. These criteria were developed through discussion with and feedback from Local Planning Authorities. Clear procedures have been put in place for considering and providing advice on applications and Local Development Frameworks.

The Assembly has taken a proactive approach to communicating to Local Planning Authorities the nature of the conformity role and procedures. A series of seminars with authorities have provided an opportunity to discuss and allay concerns. The Assembly has emphasised the role of the RSS as the region's spatial strategy, not just the Assembly's, and the fact that the RSS forms part of the Development Plan.

Procedures have been developed and refined for securing input and sign-off from members of the Regional Planning Board. Generally this is undertaken through written circulation of and comment on draft advice prepared by officers. This has the benefit that the conformity case load does not clog up meetings of the Board. Members' have developed confidence in officers taking a proactive role in relation to conformity, recognising the function is mainly associated with the implementation of policy as opposed to policy formation.

In conclusion, the approach to developing the planning conformity role has shown the benefit of the new structures and ways of working with the Assembly. The Assembly has worked proactively to engage partners in the development of procedures, and to communicate and allay concerns about the nature of the conformity role. A pragmatic and efficient approach has been adopted to joint-working between officers and Members in relation to input to and sign-off of conformity advice. This provides evidence of the strong officer-Member relationships in the Assembly, and the fact that the organisation is seeking to maintain a strategic policy focus in the discussion at meetings of the Planning Board.

3.4 Decision-Making

The Assembly is acting effectively as a decision-making body on behalf of the region. The linking of representation on the Regional Executive Board and on functional policy Boards to sub-regions, city-regions or sectoral interests has encouraged a strategic approach to decision-making, helping avoid parochialism.

In general, the approach to decision-making through the Boards is considered to have been constructive and pragmatic. The involvement of key local authority leaders has been instrumental in ensuring those engaged in the Assembly are empowered to make decisions on behalf of their organisations, and also in providing the clout needed to broker difficult decisions.

Examples of areas where the Assembly has taken specific decisions include the regional submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review, and the allocation of investment from the Regional Housing Pot (see case study below).

Some concern was expressed in interviews that as the Assembly increasingly seeks to take decisions on investment priorities, the supporting evidence base and wider understanding and discussion of issues and outcomes need to be in place. The point being made is that it is important that the Assembly and the region as a whole develops its policy thinking and evidence base on the outcomes it is seeking to achieve in specific areas such as transport, housing and regeneration. This will enable more sophisticated and informed decisions on investment priorities. This will also strengthen the region's position in influencing Government in relation to investment in the region, including flexibility in terms of how funding is raised and delivered.

Case Study Box 2: Role of Regional Housing Board in Taking Decisions on Housing Investment Priorities

One of the first real tests of the new Regional Housing Board was to agree the allocation of the Housing Pot amongst the sub-regions in accordance with a new set of indicators. This involved some challenging decisions, and the presence of representative members with a sub-regional remit proved valuable in coming to an agreement. The brokerage that occurred was a departure from the previous approach that would typically have occurred, and demonstrates the value of democratic spatial representation on the Board. This in turn has helped to add legitimacy to the important wider role of the Board.

The presence of a significant number of political members on the Regional Housing Board (including the Chair) presents a significant departure from the previous model which consisted almost entirely of officers with a technical housing remit. There is evidence that the new composition of the Regional Housing Board, together with being part of the Regional Assembly is helping to empower it to take a more pro-active role in lobbying and advocacy. This was demonstrated recently with a robust submission to the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review and a forward programme that will include a strengthening lobbying role.

3.5 Policy Impact

As the new Assembly governance structures have become well-established, the Assembly has played an increasingly active and successful role in developing strategic regional policy.

The production of the draft Integrated Regional Framework has been a notable success, demonstrating the Assembly's ability to develop policy on behalf of the region as a whole and to coordinate policy development across the different parts of the governance structures (see case study box overleaf).

The work of the Scrutiny Board, particularly through the engagement of external expertise via the public sessions, is strengthening shared understanding with Yorkshire Forward on specific economic development issues.

The Sustainable Development Board is leading a range of important work, which will strengthen regional understanding of and policy responses to challenging sustainable development issues, including climate change.

Through the Planning, Housing and Transport Boards there is scope to build on positive initial work to develop the evidence base and policy positions on key regional issues such as how best to accommodate growth, strengthen communities and deliver regeneration, and provide a planning policy framework, transport network and housing supply and offer to support economic competitiveness.

Case Study Box 3: Production of the Draft Integrated Regional Framework

Each of the regions has been tasked with development of a single high-level strategic framework in order to rationalise current policies and enhance delivery of sustainable development. These frameworks are to align with the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, be based on government guidance, and be produced by December 2007.

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly (YHA) is leading development of the IRF in the region. The IRF builds on the content of previous regional strategies such as *Advancing Together* and the Regional Sustainable Development Framework. Development of the IRF is seen as an opportunity to strengthen the regional policy framework as well as address any underlying inconsistencies.

Development of the IRF involves all components of YHA government arrangements. Although it is too early to say whether the new structures will produce a strategic IRF with wide support, progress so far is positive. The Regional Executive Board (REB) is playing a strategic role, overseeing the process and making strategic decisions, without undertaking too much of the detailed work. Appropriate support structures are in place to carry out the technical work in the form of an Advisory Group with technical sub groups. There is widespread support for the REB in this role, reflecting the embeddedness of the new structures in Yorkshire and Humber regional governance.

The functional boards are providing input, ensuring that policies are aligned and relevant evidence is used in support of the IRF. The quick response of the boards reflects the flexibility of the new system. The Sustainable Development Board is also providing a challenge function by overseeing the Sustainability Appraisal of the IRF.

Partners have inputted through membership of boards, debate at the Full Assembly or through responding to the discussion paper or consultation draft. The significant number of responses suggests support for the process as well as commitment to an IRF for Yorkshire and Humber. All working has been transparent and undertaken at an appropriate level in YHA, balancing the need for consultation with leadership.

The structures will be tested further in finalisation of objectives, development of the monitoring framework and implementation. These will require strategic decision making as well as widespread buy-in. Initial progress suggests that YHA will be well placed to lead this process.

One specific area where there is scope for the Assembly to have a significantly greater policy impact is through stronger engagement in policy work at sub-region and particularly city-region level. Whilst there is debate and uncertainty regarding the potential in the future for city region governance, some important work to develop policy and the supporting evidence base has been undertaken at city-region level. This provides an opportunity for the Assembly to support, and help steer this work to the benefit of the region as a whole. The

Assembly will also have an important role in helping coordinate this work, including advising on conformity with regional policy.

There has been some valuable and positive involvement of Assembly officers in sub-regional and city region work, and representation on most Assembly Boards is structured on a sub / city regional basis. However, there is scope for a more structured, concerted and proactive approach to be taken by the Assembly in engaging with work and partnership structures at this level.

4 Conclusions and Future Challenges

4.1 Challenges for the Year Ahead and Recommendations

4.1.1 Maintaining momentum

The general challenge for the Assembly is to continue to move to being a more outwardly focused organisation, more confident, proactive and strategic in developing partnership relationships and shaping policy. This leads to specific recommendations on the role of the Assembly in engaging with partner organisations and in leading, supporting and coordinating policy development in the region.

4.1.2 Enhancing engagement with policy development work being undertaken at sub-regional and city-region level

Whilst the Assembly has engaged in a number of ways with policy work at sub-regional and city-regional level, there is scope to take a more structured and proactive approach across the range of Assembly work. It is important the Assembly benefits from, as well as supports and help steer this policy work, particularly the valuable technical and policy development work being undertaken at city-regional level. There would be merit in the Assembly engaging in a formal dialogue with relevant city-region and sub-regional partnerships, to agree areas for joint working, and better integration of policy. There may be scope to replace the Assembly's policy forums with more structured engagement of sub-regional or city region partner groupings.

4.1.3 Strengthening further the engagement of member organisations

There is scope for the Assembly to adopt a more proactive and strategic approach to further strengthening the engagement of member organisations, with the aim of enhancing the ability of the Assembly to act as the "Regional Strategic Partnership". This might be taken forward through more structured dialogue with partner organisations to agree strategic priorities, areas for joint-work and sharing of expertise. There is also scope in this respect to develop the role of the Regional Executive Board Advisory Group.

4.1.4 Improving communication with Members and partners

Assembly Members and partners do not want to be overwhelmed with information but do want to know about the strategic issues being dealt with by the Assembly. The Assembly should investigate how communication and dissemination of information can be improved. The emphasis should be on providing member and partner organisations with the information they need to support their involvement in Assembly work, not providing information that is promotional in tone. One option might be a regular, concise electronic information bulletin, with links to more detailed information if required.

4.1.5 Developing a more proactive policy development role

The Assembly is well-placed to continuing to adopt a more proactive and confident policy role. There is scope for the Assembly to working with Yorkshire Forward and other principal regional partners to engage key regional decision-makers in debates on the "big issues" for the region, such as how to accommodate future economic and housing growth, how to respond to the challenges posed by climate change, developing housing and places in the region in the context of a changing economy etc. The Assembly will also need to take work forward to implement the IRF by influencing a range of strategy and policy development activity in the region.

4.1.6 Maintaining the existing structure of the policy Boards, whilst strengthening the role of the Transport Board, and enhancing understanding of the role of the Sustainable Development Board

The structure of the five functional policy Boards should be retained. This structure is sound, with decision-making structures aligned with the core areas of Assembly responsibility.

There is a need to strengthen the role of the Regional Transport Board. In addition to, and in support of, its role in advising on transport investment priorities, the Transport Board needs to play a more prominent and confident role in developing the strategic transport agenda for the region. The Board needs to be more proactive in considering and investigating transport issues, commissioning research, and developing strategic transport policy and proposals.

There is a need for the Assembly to seek to improve understanding amongst its Members and partners of the nature of the Sustainable Development Board's "challenge" role.

4.1.7 Restructuring the network of officer advisory groups and policy forums supporting the roles of the Boards

The combination of the technical advisory groups and policy forums results in a somewhat complex and unwieldy set of structures supporting the main decision-making Boards. Significant amounts of Assembly officer time is spent in, or serving these meetings. A recommendation from this evaluation is that the Assembly should consider alternative approaches to the current format of the policy forums. The forums could operate on a virtual basis, with information disseminated and input obtained electronically or in writing. The aim should be to free up officer time to enable a more strategic approach to developing policy, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing engagement with policy development at sub-regional and city level.

4.1.8 Responding to uncertainty regarding the future of regional governance arrangements and the possibility of future change

One of the problems with the uncertainty about the future of regional governance is that the issue is not being discussed or debated through the Assembly. This leads to a risk that the Assembly will not have a sufficiently influential role in helping shape any new arrangements that might be introduced in the future, and that the momentum and progress made over the past year will be lost. It will be important for the Assembly to engage Assembly member and partner organisations in a constructive and open debate on future regional roles in the context of the implications of the Government's Sub-National Review and Comprehensive Spending Review.

4.2 Conclusions

The Assembly's governance arrangements are generally appropriate, and are operating with increasing effectiveness.

The Assembly has made highly positive progress over the past year. The new structures bedded down well. The right people – the key regional decision-makers – have remained engaged. There has been a significant restoration of confidence in and credibility of the Assembly. As the new structures have become established, the Assembly has played an increasingly active and positive role in brokering strategic decisions and developing strategic policy on behalf of the region. The Assembly is a more confident, effective and outwardly-focused organisation than it was a year ago.

The challenge is to build on this progress, and build on the foundations provide by the governance structures. There is scope to strengthen further the way the Assembly engages with partner organisations, supports the decision-making Boards, engages with work at sub-regional and city-regional level, and pursues a strategic and proactive policy agenda.

Despite the very positive findings from this evaluation, the Assembly faces a major problem: the significant uncertainty regarding future regional governance arrangements. It will be important for the Assembly to seek to address and respond to this issue in the months ahead, following publication of the report of the Government's Sub National Review. In moving forward, even if through a period of transition, it will be vital to build on the positive progress the Assembly has made over the past year in strengthening partnership working, decision-making and policy at regional level.

Addendum – Implications of the Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration

Introduction

The Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration, published by Government in July 2007, sets out proposals for significantly reshaping regional governance arrangements.

The Government's intention is that there should be a single regional strategy, which will provide the strategic regional framework, combining what is currently covered by the Regional Economic, Spatial and Housing Strategies. Regional Development Agencies will have the executive responsibility for producing this strategy, working closely with partners. New scrutiny arrangements for RDAs will be put in place. Regional Assemblies in their current form will not continue. It is intended that the new arrangements will be put in place, and the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly in its current form will be wound up by 2010.

This addendum has been produced to set out some initial thoughts on the implications of these reforms for the work and role of the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly in the transitional period to the new regional governance arrangements being put in place in 2010.

It is vital for the region that the new regional governance, strategy, scrutiny and delivery arrangements work well. As this report has shown, the Assembly has made significant progress and has been adding real value in strengthening partnership working at regional level, and taking forward policy and decision-making. This provides a strong foundation for the new arrangements. It is vital that the Assembly's positive impact and progress is sustained in the transitional period.

Initial Thoughts on Implications for the Assembly's Role in the Transitional Phase

Don't throw the baby out with the bath water

There will be continued need for partnership working at regional level, particularly as YF will need to work with and through others to develop and deliver strategy. Indeed, whilst Yorkshire Forward's strategic roles will be strengthened under the new arrangements, it will need to increasingly push delivery out to others.

Maintaining the momentum and continuing the good policy work

The difficult issues the region faces (such as climate change, delivering housing growth, managing flood risk and so on) are not going to go away. There is important work to be done now and throughout the transitional period to develop the regional evidence base and policies on these landmark issues. The Assembly has a central role in working with Yorkshire Forward and others to take forward this work. It is vital that the region does not let a 2-3 year period of uncertainty and change become one of hiatus.

Clarifying the role of the Assembly in the transitional phase

Partners need to be clear about the role of the Assembly in the transitional phase:

- undertaking planning, housing, and transport work, as part of the Assembly's role as the Regional Planning and Housing Body;
- Leading on the production of the Integrated Regional Framework;
- Undertaking sustainable development work;

- Continuing to influence Yorkshire Forward's work through the scrutiny function;
- Strengthening regional strategic partnership working as the precursor to any new arrangements; and
- Playing an active role in shaping the new arrangements

Completing the Integrated Regional Framework (IRF)

The region should complete work to develop the IRF - securing buy-in and commitment to a shared regional vision, set of objectives, and identify key landmark issues. This will help maintain momentum and mean the region will be well-placed under the new arrangements to produce a regional strategy that is robust and commands the support of stakeholders.

Strengthening the evidence base and policy on spatial development

The Assembly should work closely with Yorkshire Forward to:

- Consider how the region responds to the opportunities presented by the Housing Green Paper;
- Undertake the partial review of the Regional Spatial Strategy that Government required to be complete by 2011 (as set out in the Housing Green Paper, published by Government in July 2007);
- Strengthen the evidence base and policy on spatial development-economy issues; and
- To build capacity and ensure existing expertise and knowledge is retained in bringing economic development, spatial planning, housing and transport together as part of the new arrangements

Seeking to inform the new scrutiny arrangements

Drawing on the successes and experience of the Assembly's scrutiny work to date, and in particular:

- Clarifying role of partners in the new arrangements;
- Considering the scope / clarify the arrangements for an independent sustainability body / Board to play the "challenge" role currently played by the Regional Sustainable Development Board, seeking clarity from Government on the guidance document *Securing the Regions' Futures*³; and
- Influencing and shaping the development of Regional Select Committees.

Working closely with Yorkshire Forward to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements

The Assembly and Yorkshire Forward will need to work together closely in the transitional period to maintain momentum, and build capacity around the new arrangements. It will be important to avoid duplication with the same business being undertaken by different organisations.

Arup, September 2007.

³ *Securing the Regions' Futures. Strengthening delivery of sustainable development in the English regions.* 2006. Department of Trade and Industry, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

A1 Annex: List of External Interviewees

Name	Organisation	Role	Partner or member?
Jan Anderson	Executive Director, Yorkshire Forward	Regional Planning Board Member, Regional Housing Board Member	Partner
Cllr Peter Box	Local Government Yorkshire Humber, Leader of Wakefield MDC	Chair of Assembly and Regional Executive Board	Member (LA)
Councillor Andrew Carter	Leader of Leeds City Council/ Leeds City Region Partnership	Regional Executive Board Member	Member (City region rep)
Councillor Mark Crane	Leader Selby District Council	Assembly Member	Member (LA)
Michael Gahagan	Chair of Transform (South Yorkshire Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder)	Regional Housing Board Member	Partner
Councillor Steve Galloway	Leader York City Council	Regional Executive Board Member, Chair of Regional Planning Board	Member (LA)
Professor David Gibbs	Geography Department, University of Hull	Sustainable Development Board Member	Sustainable Development expert engaged through the public
Chris Glen	Business Sector, Federation of Small Businesses	Regional Executive Board Member, Chair of Regional Transport Board	Member (SEE)
Councillor John Harris	Richmondshire District Council	Scrutiny Board Member	Member (LA)
Carole Hassan	Chief Executive, Local Government Yorkshire and Humber		Partner
Penny Hemming	CBI Regional Director	Regional Executive Board Member	Member (SEE)
Cllr Kris Hopkins	Leader, Bradford City Council	Regional Executive Board Member, Chair of Regional Housing Board	Member (LA)

Neil Irving	Regional Voluntary Sector Forum	Regional Executive Board Member	Member (SEE)
Margaret Jackson	Director of Economy and Strategy, Government Office Yorkshire Humber	Regional Executive Board Observer	Partner
Paul Jagger	Learning and Skills Council	Deputy Chair of Assembly and Regional Executive Board, Chair of Scrutiny Board	Member (SEE)
Cllr Minns	Leader of Hull City Council	Assembly Member	Member (LA)
Nick Pontone	Director of Policy, Yorkshire and Humber Chambers of Commerce	Supports Members	Member support
Kieran Preston	Director General, West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive	Regional Transport Board Observer	Partner
Gareth Roberts	Local Councils Association (Parish & Town Councils)	Assembly Member	Member (SEE)
Paul Rogerson	Chief Executive Leeds City Council Regional Local Authority Chief Executives Group	Regional Executive Board Observer	Partner
Don Stewart	Executive Director for Strategy, Yorkshire Forward	Regional Executive Board Observer	Partner
Cllr Jan Wilson	Leader Sheffield City Council Sheffield City Region Partnership	Regional Executive Board Member	Member (City region)