

# Assembly essentials

## What you need to know about...

### The EiP Panel Report on the Yorkshire and Humber Plan (RSS)

#### Background

1. The Assembly published the Yorkshire and Humber Plan (the draft Regional Spatial Strategy) for consultation in December 2005. The subsequent process of 'testing' and debating the issues raised during the consultation took place through an 'Examination-in-Public (EiP)' held in September and October 2006 and presided over by an independent Panel. Government Office has now published the report of the Panel that sets out the Panel's conclusions on the issues raised at the EiP. In total the Panel makes 118 recommendations as to how the Plan might be changed.
2. In overall summary, the Panel Report:
  - Backs the Plan's overall approach and strategy.
  - Supports the Plan's 'core approach', 'sub-area approach' and 'topic based' structure (but re-orders them).
  - Confirms that, with the recommendations, the Plan will be 'sound' (in terms of Government guidance).
  - Agrees that the Plan is strongly consistent with the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and the Northern Way growth strategy and supports the concept of city regions.
  - Confirms that the Regional Transport Strategy (incorporated into the Plan) does set out a long-term framework for transport in the Region.
  - Suggests that the house-building requirements set out in the Plan for 2004-2011 should remain the same, but does recommend a faster and steeper increase in the scale of house-building from 2011 onwards - about an extra 6,000 homes a year from 2011-16 and an extra 3,000 a year from 2016-21 compared to that proposed in the Plan.
3. The Panel's report is published for information, not for consultation – so a specific response is not invited at this stage. It is now for Government Office to consider the Panel's recommendations and to publish 'Proposed Changes' to the Plan for consultation with the Assembly and other regional partners. The 12-week consultation period is likely to start in late June.

#### The Panel's Conclusions and Recommendations

4. The Panel recognised that circumstances had changed in some policy areas after the Assembly had submitted the Plan to Government in December 2005 (for example with new national guidance and new projections of household numbers being published during 2006). The Panel makes recommendations in relation to these issues and with these dealt with the Panel consider that the Plan will be sound. It is worth noting that the soundness of plans (or lack of it) has had much recent national attention, with a number of Local Development Framework core strategies failing the tests of soundness.
5. Overall the Panel concludes positively that:
  - The presentation of the Plan is very good.
  - The Assembly made a particularly welcome contribution to the EiP.

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- The core approach of the Plan and its focus on transforming regional and sub-regional centres is supported.
  - The Plan does recognise the importance of addressing the consequences of climate change.
  - The Plan is strongly consistent with the Regional Economic Strategy and the Northern Way growth strategy.
  - The plan generally supports the concept of city regions.
  - A long-term transport framework is set out in the Plan's Regional Transport Strategy.
  - The Plan's approach to reviewing and rationalising employment land is supported – making sure we have the right land in the right place for the business development the region needs.
  - The Plan's proposals for the number of new homes to be built in the period up to 2011 are supported (about 15,000 new homes a year).
6. However, the Panel does recommend some changes/additions to Policies. These will need to be considered in detail. Based on an initial review of the Panel Report at this stage the key suggestions appear to be that:
- Streamlining overall objectives, outcomes and early core policies would generate a more specific vision and make the Plan's priorities clearer.
  - Hull should be identified as a Regional Centre (along with Leeds and Sheffield).
  - The roles of Bradford (as sub-regional centre) and the Sheffield City Region should be given more prominence.
  - The Plan should not specifically identify 'Principal Service Centres' (i.e. it should only identify the larger cities and towns - the regional and sub-regional centres).
  - Greater certainty could be given about how the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) will be implemented and the relationship between the RTS and the sub-area policies needs to be tightened up.
  - New policies are suggested for 'green infrastructure' (in environment) and for inequalities/health/well being (in the core approach).
  - The overall level of house building should be higher than suggested in the Plan from 2011 - reflecting the more recent (and higher) household projections that were not available at the time the Assembly prepared the Plan. In general the Panel's view is that the 'step change' in house-building rates that the Plan suggests should take place after 2016 should apply from 2011 and be more marked. The impact would be:
    - For the Humber - higher rates of house building proposed in the Plan for Hull, North and North East Lincolnshire from 2016 would be required from 2011 (East Riding's figures remain the same)
    - In North Yorkshire – the higher rates of house building proposed in the Plan for Scarborough and Selby from 2016 would also be required from 2011. In Craven, Hambleton and Ryedale, in contrast, the somewhat slower rates of house building proposed from 2016 would start in 2011. Figures for Harrogate and Richmondshire remain unchanged. For York, instead of stable rates of house building the Panel suggest an increased rate after 2011.
    - In South Yorkshire - the Panel recommend higher rates of house building than suggested in the Plan from 2011 onwards for all four authorities.

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- In West Yorkshire – with the exception of Calderdale the Panel recommend the most significant increases in the rate of house building from 2011 onwards (compared to the Plan's figures). Apart from Calderdale the Panel does not offer specific revised figures for individual authorities for the period after 2011 (it only provides a collective total for Bradford, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield) – so that will have to be addressed by Government Office when it publishes 'Proposed Changes' to the Plan for consultation in June.

#### Next Steps

7. The publication of the Panel Report is an important step forward in getting a new statutory Regional Spatial Strategy in place. On the whole the Panel supports the spatial approach and strategy set out in the Plan. However, the suggested need for higher rates of house building from 2011 is a key change.
8. Government Office now has to consider the Panel report in preparing the 'Proposed Changes' to the RSS to be published for consultation in the summer, although it is not bound by the Panel's recommendations. In preparing the 'Proposed Changes' Government Office can also take account of any new guidance or information published since the EiP took place. For example, it is worth noting that a further set of household projections has been published this year, which show even higher projected growth in the number of households than the projections considered at the EiP.
9. There is a large amount of information in the Panel Report. A key next step will be to listen to the views of Members, partners and stakeholders on the Panel's recommendations, alongside the Assembly staff team undertaking more detailed assessment of implications. This 'stock take' will help prepare the ground for an Assembly response to the 'Proposed Changes' when they are published in the summer, by identifying key/shared concerns or support for the Panel's recommendations. It will also help local authorities and other regional partners prepare for responding to the 'Proposed Changes'