

Our Ref: RW/NB/Rosie Winterton re SNR 20.06.08

20 June 2008

The Rt Hon Rosie Winterton MP
Regional Minister for Yorkshire and the Humber
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Minister,

Prosperous Places: Taking Forward the Review of Sub National Economic Development and Regeneration

This letter sets out some broad thoughts from the Assembly about the way that the Sub National Review can be moved forward to help deliver the improvements that Government and the region wish to see.

Firstly, on a personal note, can I thank you for your continued involvement and support in the numerous debates that the region has had in forming our responses to the Sub National Review. Your ongoing participation, with Leaders, Yorkshire Forward and other stakeholders has been widely appreciated, and I look forward to continuing working alongside you as we move into the next phase of this process.

As you know from our discussions, the Assembly has chosen not to respond formally and in full to the current consultation on the Sub-National Review. Members decided that it was important to allow the different constituent parts of the Assembly to respond with as much freedom and openness as possible. Therefore, there are two key responses from this region:

- A joint response from the RDA and Local Government Leaders and;
- A response from Social Economic and Environmental Partners.

You will have seen these responses, and I am sure you agree that they share a great deal in common. I am confident that, in moving forward, we will be able to find a way of working that reflects and builds upon the excellent partnership arrangements that we have seen in this region in the past.

What this letter does do is highlight a small number of key areas where our expertise and experience makes us well placed to add value to the responses submitted so far. This is intended to be helpful to Ministers and partners in taking recommendations forward into the next stage.

I think there are five key areas that I would ask you to feed into the ongoing debate within Whitehall as Government formulates its response to the consultation on SNR.

1. Government has a responsibility to ensure that the outcome of the SNR leads to better alignment at a regional level. Functions that currently sit together within the Assembly structures, for instance spatial planning and housing investment, should not be separated in the new arrangements.
2. The new Integrated Regional Strategy needs better traction, and Government must commit to make sure that the strategy has more binding and far-reaching 'bite' on other agencies and investment streams operating at the regional level. Regional alignment will only work if Government listens to what the region says – and directs investment to deliver our priorities. The way Whitehall operates is the biggest single barrier to regional integration. In delivering our strategy we ask that Government set out an expectation that its own departments and agencies will work with the grain of a statutory regional strategy.
3. One of the strengths of the current arrangements is local government, and partners working together to make policy. I know from my experience at a local level too that effective partnerships make effective policies – and ensure they are delivered. I am confident that this region will find a way to continue working in partnership, and both responses make a commitment to this. However, Government too has a role at national level in sending out very clear messages about the importance of partnership working at a regional level.
4. Strong and effective scrutiny is essential to the transparency and effectiveness of the new regional arrangements. It needs to be flexible and robust enough to extend into other areas of work – for instance the investment of other government agencies in the region. Our scrutiny arrangements at regional level also need to be properly resourced and have a clear and equal relationship with emerging national arrangements.
5. We have a responsibility to ensure there is an orderly and managed transition to the new arrangements. The region cannot afford to lose the existing member and officer capacity in those areas that are currently the responsibility of the Assembly – and this is precisely what will happen if transition takes place in a fragmented and piecemeal way. Government shares a responsibility with regional agencies to make sure that this does not happen.

Finally, you know well my own views on the transfer of powers from councillor led regional assemblies to unelected Regional Development Agencies. It is something

that I, and most local government colleagues, fundamentally oppose. I am heartened by the recent agreement from RDAs and the LGA that the draft strategy should be jointly agreed before its submission to Government. This is a welcome step forward, but this voluntary agreement should now be set out in the legislation as a safeguard against any future disagreements.

It continues to be my view that powers that have a major impact on people's lives and property need to sit with people who have a direct link back to the communities affected by those decisions. I have a close working relationship with the RDA in this region, but I will continue to argue, both privately and publicly, that giving them these powers is the wrong decision, and one that creates a serious democratic deficit.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Box', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Box

CC'd: The Rt Hon John Healey MP
Terry Hodgkinson – Chair, Yorkshire Forward
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