

SCRUTINY

FORWARD

YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER

DISCUSS

**YORKSHIRE
AND
HUMBER
ASSEMBLY**

The Regional Strategic Partnership



**‘This isn’t about celebrating
the past - it’s about building
on our experience to develop
even better arrangements
for the future’**

Scrutiny - a time of change

The region is changing and scrutiny is changing with it.

Recent Government announcements on the Sub National Review herald a new phase in the evolution of regional governance arrangements in England and mean that the way we do our business in Yorkshire and Humber will alter.

Whilst headlines from the SNR are relatively clear - including that Assemblies will not continue in “their current form” and a bigger role for Regional Development Agencies and local authorities - the detail of how the recommendations will be implemented has yet to be developed.

A vital part of that detail is future regional scrutiny arrangements, both within Parliament and the region itself.

As part of this on-going debate, we've asked five key regional players, who have had first hand experience of scrutiny Yorkshire and Humber-style, to give us their views in this pamphlet.

This isn't about celebrating the past - it's about building on our experience to develop even better arrangements for the future.

What's worked? What hasn't? Who should be involved? How can Parliamentary scrutiny dovetail with local authority scrutiny? These are just some of the questions we hope to answer as part of Yorkshire and Humber's contribution to the debate.

Key to all of this is taking forward the lessons we've learned to deliver real and positive change.



Paul Jagger, Chair, Scrutiny Board.

Q How have you been involved in scrutiny?

a As Chair, I have now led four reviews by the Assembly. Previously to that, as a member of the Yorkshire Forward Board, I was involved in three reviews. I have also been involved in the development and improvement of scrutiny in the region and have spoken on the region's behalf on this subject at a number of conferences.

Q What difference has regional scrutiny made in Yorkshire and Humber?

a We started with a process where the Assembly had both a cautious and aggressive approach and Yorkshire Forward were very suspicious of the process. I think in the early days, real in-depth scrutiny was not happening. We had to develop the process to bring some added value.

By adding public scrutiny and subject specific consultation meetings I think we have raised our game as scrutineers and built trust and more openness with the RDA. I think on skills and the economy, we have been able to drill down successfully and change the way Yorkshire Forward not so much develops policy but certainly delivers and communicates with its partners.

I believe during the SNR process, Scrutiny will become even more important as regional institutions start to move to new arrangements. Our role will be to scrutinise not only the recent past but also to think about how changes will effect the work of the RDA in the emerging environment.

Q How was your experience of the review/reviews?

a I have always enjoyed my involvement in the process and this is because I and, I think, my colleagues felt we were achieving added value for the wider region. I think the work is testing and challenging.

Q What could have been done to add more value to the work?

a The changes we have made have been achieved in the context of a modest budget with scrutiny board members giving a significant amount of time in addition to there other duties.

While I understand time constraints, I remain disappointed at the commitment of some local councillors. This factor needs to be borne in mind when considering the new arrangements.

The system could have been better resourced both to provide backup and help support those on the scrutiny board. Until the publication of the SNR we in the region were developing the process to allow us to drill deeper. The use of consultations and public meetings was part of that. It would also have been helpful to have had a strengthened reporting system on the RDA implementation plans.

Q What lessons need to be taken forward for future regional/Parliamentary scrutiny arrangements?

a I am tempted to say why change something that is working reasonably well but which was also evolving. The current proposals to engage with Parliamentarians is a good one in principle, but it should be in addition to strong regional scrutiny and should be based in the region.

I also worry that our MPs and Lords will always find other important things to do on the relevant scrutiny days. Having watched the select committees in action I would also be concerned if the process became too adversarial and specific to constituency concerns.

On regional scrutiny, I think we need to ensure full engagement with both the Local Authorities and the Social Partners. The process also needs to be fully and independently resourced from central government and to work closely with and complementary to, Parliamentary scrutiny.



Don Stewart, Executive Director, Yorkshire Forward

Q

How have you been involved in scrutiny?

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As Executive Director of Strategy at Yorkshire Forward I am responsible for overseeing Yorkshire Forward's role in the scrutiny process. This includes sitting on Yorkshire Forward's scrutiny panel, working with other teams and directorates internally to support them during the scrutiny process and liaising with the Assembly to ensure the scrutiny process is as efficient and worthwhile as possible. It is my job to make sure that Yorkshire Forward fulfils its scrutiny obligations well and that we get the maximum benefit from the process.

Q

What difference has regional scrutiny made in Yorkshire and Humber?

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Scrutiny helps create a world-class region. Our relationships with the Assembly and other key stakeholders in the region have been strengthened by good regional scrutiny. The process allows the region to take an in depth look at different areas of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) ensuring that the way the RES targets are delivered are as open and as innovative as possible.

Q

How was your experience of the review/reviews?

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Having been involved in scrutiny from the beginning I've seen major changes in the process. With any kind of scrutiny, there is always a fine line between compromise and conflict and in this region we have worked hard to avoid both. This is important to ensure that the process is a productive and beneficial one and not an adversarial game. Both Yorkshire Forward and the Assembly have worked hard to build a good working relationship which underpins scrutiny in this region.

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What could have been done to add more value to the work?

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Within the region, the scrutiny process is constantly evolving to ensure it is as relevant as possible. We need to make sure we continue to use modern methods and ideas to keep scrutiny current and interesting. Using regional experts to support the Assembly's Scrutiny Board is one valuable addition to the work, as this helps the Board make useful and coherent recommendations. I would also suggest scrutiny of other regional agencies and organisations would complement scrutiny of Yorkshire Forward.

Q

What lessons need to be taken forward for future regional/Parliamentary scrutiny arrangements?

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As a key public sector stakeholder and delivery body within one of the English regions, Yorkshire Forward has a considerable interest in having strong regional accountability arrangements in place. Any new regional scrutiny and accountability arrangements need to be both inclusive and effective in their scope and reach. They must also avoid duplication or impinging on the existing checks and balances of accountability. Communication and cooperation are key to successful scrutiny and these must be carried forward.

Future regional scrutiny should involve both Parliament and Local Government to better ensure the effective utilisation of public money and to maximise regional and local impact.



Councillor Natalie Warriner, Ryedale District Council

Q How have you been involved in scrutiny?

I have served on scrutiny committees ever since I was elected, undertaking several training courses and improving my skills. I am totally convinced that efficient scrutiny is the key to effective policy delivery. I find the whole process challenging and very satisfying most of the time. Along with the work for my Local Authority I have undertaken one review and participated in others for the Assembly.

I feel that scrutiny is often the last resort instead of the leading tool to effect robust delivery.

Q What difference has regional scrutiny made in Yorkshire and Humber?

Regional scrutiny has encouraged inclusivity in what is a predominately rural area, which is vast. The public generally do not appreciate that there is such a process. But when the reviews are published, interest is usually accelerated. I do wonder however, if the requested periodic reviews of progress are delivered!

Q How was your experience of the review/reviews?

Reviews are an excellent way to stretch knowledge of a topic to be challenged by other members, share skills, question witnesses to realistically evaluate the facts.

Q What could have been done to add more value to the work?

In my particular case, I found that some witnesses were very practiced in avoiding the issue - perhaps more openness in the spirit of collaborative outcomes would be more effective!

It is perceived by the public that many of the larger policy makers/deliverers are beyond the scrutiny process, which avoids that process of challenge.

In my view, it is a great shame that the very large agencies that control many of the outcomes nationally and regionally do not have to be subjected to the scrutiny processes that local regional and national elected members do.

Q What lessons need to be taken forward for future regional/Parliamentary scrutiny arrangements?

There should be a system of real transparency at all levels - it would give much more confidence to the general public who often seem to feel that their lives are controlled and led by unelected groups who do not have to answer to anyone. I fully realise that utilities and others have reporting systems to 'boards' and even Ministers but that is still seen as being remote and lacking awareness, knowledge and experience of local issues.

Scrutiny has to be encouraged as an accepted part of the efficient delivery of policies and services. It has to be properly resourced by well-trained officers and used as an effective tool or critical friend instead of a last resort when all else has failed.

There should be a group of well-trained scrutineers that can be drafted in because of their skills and knowledge along with some local expertise, balanced with knowledge of the subject matter and clear analytical skills.

There should be a review on local authority scrutiny panels for effectiveness, delivery, and officer identification and/training. Regional panels based on LAAs or RSSs would be able to deliver a better process.

Overall, the importance of effective scrutiny should be an integral part of all decision making at all levels. Training and administrative support should be ongoing with clear advance routes for skills development and delivery.



Nick Pontone, Director of Policy, Yorkshire and Humber Chambers of Commerce

Q How have you been involved in scrutiny?

a The President of Yorkshire & Humber Chambers of Commerce, first Frank Carter and now Michael Oughtred, have been members of the Assembly's Scrutiny Board to help provide some private sector expertise into reviews. In addition, YHCC has also participated in some of the public hearings, provided written submissions and participated in some of the business focus groups. Chambers have 12,000 business members across the region and we have also sought to raise awareness in the business community about the reviews and encourage businesses to participate directly or via their Chambers.

Q What difference has regional scrutiny made in Yorkshire and Humber?

a We firmly believe one of our roles at a regional level is to ensure Yorkshire Forward is subject to challenging yet constructive scrutiny from partners within the region over and above its accountabilities back to central government. The scrutiny process is one of the few formal mechanisms by which regional partners can get involved in this way. We believe the process has both helped Yorkshire Forward shape and review their strategy and implementation on certain issues as well as give an important voice to partners from the public, private and third sectors in the way £350m of taxpayers money is spent in the region each year.

Q How was your experience of the review/reviews?

a Our experience has been varied, largely depending on the subject of the review, although the overall impression is the quality of reviews and reports has improved over the past two or three years. The Scrutiny Board has been very well led, has effectively engaged SEE partners and some of the research and analysis underpinning each review has been good. Limitations have been structural rather than due to any lack of commitment from either Yorkshire Forward or regional partners. The lack of real teeth in the scrutiny process has meant recommendations have not always added value to either the region or Yorkshire Forward.

Q What could have been done to add more value to the work?

a The most important elements of scrutiny are to identify the right review topics, have very clear and relevant lines of enquiry and proactively engage the right partners to bring in a wide range of expertise. These three elements haven't always been fully applied to each review which has weakened the impact of the review, e.g. the innovation review which had too broad a definition of innovation. The use of focus groups in recent reviews has been welcome as they bring in more expertise and input.

Q What lessons need to be taken forward for future regional/Parliamentary scrutiny arrangements?

a At a regional level we need to consider what is scrutinised, how and by whom. The current system only has one gear. Two reviews of substantial policy areas per year gives depth but not breadth. Major RDA activities could go years without proper external scrutiny and there is too much temptation to try to cover too much ground in each review. An option would be for some short enquiries into the RDA's Annual Report or Corporate Plan which would involve the RDA Chair and Chief Executive being questioned by regional partners on either their plans or performance.

Scrutiny could secure the input and contributions of a wider range of stakeholders, perhaps by proactively inviting 'calls for evidence' in a similar manner to select committees to relevant regional partners and by co-opting specific topic review expertise.

In terms of 'who', Council leaders, rightly, have primarily a local focus but there is a bigger regional picture. Similarly, whilst there is a role for national politicians holding regional bodies to account this should not simply be seen through a partisan or 'Westminster-centric' perspective.

Our message is that non-local authority regional partners in Yorkshire & Humber, including business, should have a continued role in the scrutiny process.



Naheed Arshad Mather, BME Regional Panel

Q How have you been involved in scrutiny?

a Since becoming a Member of the Assembly in May 2006, I have sat on the Scrutiny Board for three reviews - Innovation , Employment and the most recent review into the region's Rural Economy, which finished in the Spring of 2008.

Q What difference has regional scrutiny made in Yorkshire and Humber?

a I believe the work carried out by the Assembly provides an extra tier of accountability to the RDA. However, I also have two main concerns - apart from collating very useful information on the area in question, it's very difficult to say precisely what difference the process makes to the strategic and operational management of Yorkshire Forward; and I don't believe the work has particularly benefited social, economic and environment partners and, in particular, the BME communities in the region.

Q How was your experience of the review/reviews?

a Despite my enthusiasm in taking an active part in providing the information, reading and commenting, the overall product has been a softly, softly approach which tried not to upset the RDA by being a real critical friend. I feel the process would be strengthened if scrutiny reviews and recommendations had more "teeth".

Q What could have been done to add more value to the work?

a As the critical phase in the process is agreeing the lines of enquiry, I think it's extremely important ALL views are listened to and discussed at that stage to ensure those lines of enquiry are truly reflective of the region. For example, recommendations have never stretched to mentioning the specific impact of the subject area on the BME communities.

Q What lessons need to be taken forward for future regional/Parliamentary scrutiny arrangements?

a I think that for any scrutiny arrangements in future to be really worthwhile, they will have to have more legislative powers, and sanctions where appropriate. In addition, they would benefit from being honest and up front in relation to scoping the overall impact on all the communities in the region.

Members must be also trained in the process of scrutiny and be skilled in actually asking the questions which inform and improve the resulting discussions and the overall product in question.

'I think that for any scrutiny arrangements in future to be really worthwhile, they will have to have more legislative powers'

Scrutiny - the story so far

1 New business start ups

The first scrutiny looked how people are being supported to start new businesses through the development of the region's Business Birth Rate Strategy (BBRS). The report recommended better co-ordination of delivering aid to business start-ups, and also found that improved information would help ensure money targeted to create and develop new businesses had the greatest possible impact.

2 Help for poorer communities

This review examined what contribution the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) has made in tackling social problems and inequality gaps in poorer areas. Measures recommended: ensuring that economic success benefits the most deprived areas included a shared vision setting out priorities to tackle social inclusion and asking Yorkshire Forward to review how they communicate their role and best practice to local delivery organisations.

3 Public sector funding

This examined how public sector investment in health, education and other related areas supports the region's economy and how they could be linked together to make more of the money available. Recommendations pointed out that Yorkshire Forward should both welcome innovation in public sector investment; and alongside others, especially the Assembly and partners in health, move forward the future alignment of public sector investment in relation to health.

4 The role of cities in the Region's economy

The role of the Region's five key cities (Bradford, Hull, Leeds, Sheffield and York) as drivers of economic growth was the subject of the fourth scrutiny which looked at how these cities develop the region's economic competitiveness, provide new jobs and act as a focus for investment.

5 Market towns

The Assembly's fifth scrutiny looked at how investment in market towns supports the RES, and whether - as well being popular places to live and visit - these towns attract jobs and investment. While the panel supported Yorkshire Forward's strategic approach to the regeneration of market towns and its commitment to bring about sustainable economic prosperity, it also made a number of recommendations, including more clarity around how action plans are developed, and projects implemented and funded.

6 Clusters in the spotlight

Cluster policy supports related businesses which buy and sell from each other and share the same infrastructure, technology, potential customers and skill base. The panel recommended that skills priorities for each of the clusters should feature in action plans; and that Yorkshire Forward must demonstrate how, through the Regional Skills Partnership, it helps deliver these.

7 Regional marketing and inward investment

This review looked at how far regional marketing and inward investment contribute to achieving the aims set out in the RES. The Panel supported the strategic approach taken by Yorkshire Forward, but made a number of

recommendations, including that Yorkshire Forward re-evaluate all inward investment and marketing activity to ensure value for money and improve stakeholder understanding of the inward investment strategy and its links to sustainable development.

8 Skills

The effectiveness of skills policy was the subject of the next scrutiny. Key recommendations were that Yorkshire Forward should work with partners to agree changes to structures that are too complicated and lack focus and that it must find ways to involve businesses in identifying skills needs.

9 The Northern Way

The Northern Way is a collaborative project between the three northern Development Agencies - Yorkshire Forward, ONE NorthEast and the Northwest Development Agency - and aims to exploit economic and transport links to boost the North as a business force in Europe. The panel's recommendations included that the Northern Way should reduce the number of initiatives to avoid saturating the market and that research should assess the capacity of the region's support for innovative businesses and demand for premises.

10 Innovation

The review looked at 3 areas of innovation - assessing existing innovation programmes and initiatives that are largely focused on science and technology and high-growth companies; how small and medium sized businesses and social enterprises are supported; what was stopping businesses from being innovative; and how innovation support could be widened. The Scrutiny Board made twelve recommendations for how innovation activity in Yorkshire and Humber can be strengthened, and how it can be made more accessible for businesses of all sizes and sectors.

11 Employment

This review looked at ways of how the right mix of employers and employees in the future will enable the region to compete successfully in a global economy.

Key recommendations from the review report included a need for Yorkshire Forward, Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council to clarify their individual roles and responsibilities in relation to employment to reduce confusion amongst the business community.

12 Rural Economy

This review explored the range of initiatives and challenges to make rural areas more enterprising and revitalise rural town centres. With significant involvement from all sectors of the rural economy, the report highlights actions to ensure that rural needs are taken into account in all Yorkshire Forward activities and that what works in an urban area may not necessarily work in a rural setting.

13 Meeting the Climate Change Challenge

The next scrutiny review will focus on Meeting the Climate Change Challenge in the region. Previous scrutiny reviews have highlighted the importance of sustainable development and recognised the need to adapt and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to minimise the impacts of climate change.

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