



Evaluation of the Role and Impact of Regional Assemblies

Second Annual Interim Report



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On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

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Summary

Introduction

This Report

This is the second annual interim report of the study, *Evaluation of the Role and Impact of Regional Assemblies*. The study has assessed the eight Regional Assemblies in England over the period from spring 2004 to the end of 2005. This report sets out the main findings on in relation to the progress, issues, and achievements of the Assemblies over this period.

This Study

The main aims of the study are to assess the extent to which Assemblies have met their aims and objectives, and the extent to which they have facilitated change or difference. A feasibility study was undertaken to develop the research methodology and evaluation framework. The main objectives of the research are to:

1. *Evaluate the extent to which Regional Assemblies have met their (implicit and explicit) aims and objectives, including the impact on policy development, delivery and effectiveness; and on regional and sub-regional co-ordination and co-operation;*
2. *Assess the effectiveness of the Regional Chambers' Fund in enhancing and developing the scrutiny and strategic roles of Regional Chambers; and*
3. *Learn about the different approaches to scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Chambers and assess their effectiveness within regional contexts.*

In addition to the feasibility study, research undertaken to date includes:

- An “**Initial Evaluation**” was undertaken in Spring 2004, which involved, in each region, desk-based research, and in-depth interviews with the Assembly and regional partners, with the main emerging findings set out in the **first Annual Interim Report**;
- **Interim monitoring of Assembly activity and output** was undertaken in the period spring 2004 to the end of 2005 and a series of **case studies** were undertaken in late 2005 to examine specific issues in more depth;
- **Interim feedback seminars** were held in summer 2005 to feedback and discuss emerging findings from the research, and specific issues for each region; and
- A “**Final Evaluation**” was undertaken in late 2005, following a similar approach to the “Initial Evaluation”.

This report follows the completion of the interviews and the desk-based research for this study. The next stage is to produce the main study outputs, including three summary reports, the main study reports and feedback seminars to discuss the research findings.

Main Roles of Regional Assemblies

Regional Assemblies are voluntary bodies. They are not directly elected; their membership is drawn from elected local authority members, and from a range of other partners. The main roles of the Assemblies were identified in the feasibility study are as follows:

- **Scrutiny** – of the Regional Development Agency and the Regional Economic Strategy;
- **Planning and Transport** – including producing the draft Regional Spatial Strategy;
- **Policy Development and Regional Coordination** – across a range of topics;
- **Partnership Working** – strengthening regional cooperation; and
- **“Voice of the Region”** – making the case for the region, influencing higher-level policy.

Main developments over the evaluation period

The 18 months from mid 2004 to the end of 2005 was a period of significant change for Regional Assemblies. The main changes and developments are summarised below.

- The “no” vote in the November 2004 referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North East undoubtedly had an impact (to varying degrees) on all the Assemblies, with greater scrutiny and debate on the role and remit of Assemblies.
- All Assemblies have been developing Regional Spatial Strategies, responding to the challenges posed by the Growth Agenda, the Northern Way initiative, the emergence of city regions as a main policy theme, and the new planning system.
- The Regional Funding Allocations (RFA) advice, submitted to Government in January 2006, required Assemblies to work closely with regional partners to take difficult decisions on regional investment priorities.
- Approaches to scrutiny of Regional Development Agencies have been refined, and continue to be developed. In some regions there was a breakdown and subsequent rebuilding of the consensus between the RDA and Assembly on the approach to scrutiny. Future challenges are posed by the context of changing performance management regimes for RDAs.
- The three Assemblies in the North of England have gone through a lengthy and difficult restructuring process, with new financial and organisational structures now in place, and with a new political consensus in these regions as to the role and remit of the Assemblies.
- In the other regions, organisational structures and political support for the Assemblies have largely been maintained.

The extent to which Regional Assemblies have met their (implicit and explicit) aims and objectives

Regional Planning and Transport

Regional planning and transport is one of the key duties for the assemblies, which are all now recognised as the RPB in their respective regions. Regional plan making has been happening in all regions, and, at the time of writing, a new round of RSS has been prepared or is under preparation in all regions. The East and West Midlands are preparing a new RSS and selective review of existing RSS respectively, and expect to submit draft polices by the end of the year.

In general, the recent round of regional plan making can be seen as a success. In particular the extent of the evidence base is much better than anything that has gone previously, as planning funding from DCLG to the Assemblies has been used to commission consultants to undertake specific studies and to strengthen in-house technical resources. This technical evidence base has been important to assemblies dealing with the politics of growth in housing provision, particularly EERA and SEERA, where accommodation of new housing to meet Growth Area targets has required a degree of political deal-making, including linking growth to new infrastructure provision. It is also clear that regional planning and transport is now a much more central policy function in the assemblies, as the RPB role has matured.

The new round of RSS takes a pragmatic and functional approach to sub-regional planning, breaking away from the old county-based sub-regions to functional sub-areas and city regions. These sub-areas respond better to the concept of city-regions as economic drivers and allow the RSS to include more responsive spatial policies, and have even included over-lapping areas. The Upper Tier Authorities (UTAs) have been responsible for a number of sub-regional studies that have informed these policies; however the role of UTAs in regional plan making needs to be clearer in terms of whether the UTA is acting in its own right or on behalf of the RPB. A number of 'studies of studies' have been required to resolve differences in approach and methodology of sub-regional studies.

The Assemblies are also now discharging their statutory consultee and conformity role, assessing the conformity of strategic planning applications, Local Transport Plans (LTPs) and Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) with the RSS. This has been slow to develop in some regions as the pressures of EiPs and finalising the RSS for draft submission has taken precedence.

Regional Funding Allocations Exercise

All the regions were required to submit regionally-agreed advice to government on how defined spending on transport (LTP major schemes and selected Highways Agency schemes), economic development (the RDA single budget) and housing (the regional housing pot). Funding was based on current spending review period allocations, with a new regional allocation for the transport. Beyond this period, a uniform uplift of 2%pa (in line with the inflation target) was applied to 2016. Regions were required to submit proposals in a document no longer than 30 pages, by the end of January 2006. The aim was to demonstrate how spending could help deliver regional priorities.

The timetable for submissions was seen as challenging by all regions, although they all met the submission deadline. However, existing regional decision making structures did not prove capable of turning around such major decisions quickly, and new structures were created in most regions to facilitate the process. It was clear that this process really forced regional partners to cooperate and take difficult decisions on investment priorities

The Government Offices took a co-ordinating role in all of the regions, with varying degrees of contribution from the RDAs and Assemblies. In some regions the Assembly was lead author, and in others it was the RDA. Two regions employed consultants to draft their RFA submission. The Assembly led on the technical transport element in most regions, this being the key area of capability in regional transport, along with the Government Offices.

Whilst a valuable exercise, it did highlight that at a regional level there is no single body that can make the type of decisions that were required by the RFA exercise, and that the necessary degree of joint working between groups is, still developing. The integration of the regional housing boards into Regional Assemblies with regional planning body (and ‘shadow’ regional transport boards in some regions) will help to improve matters.

Other Policy Work

A general trend over the evaluation period has been for Assemblies to adopt a focused approach to policy work outside the planning and transport remit. The vast majority of Assemblies’ policy work and output has been focused on planning and transport work, scrutiny, and the RFA process, and the evidence base underpinning policy and outputs in these areas. Assemblies have participated, contributed and endorsed a wide range of policy initiatives and documents taken forward by other bodies or groupings in the region.

What is clear is that outside this work within the core areas of Assembly activity, Assemblies have undertaken and published very little policy work in their own right. This is in contrast to the previous situation (identified in the first Annual Interim Report) of some Assemblies pursuing a very wide range of policy work, with insufficient focus on the added-value to existing initiatives in the region, which was leading to organisational overstretch.

There are a number of reasons for this change: pressure from Assembly members; greater recognition by Assemblies of their limitations in terms of resources and direct powers; the fact that a more strategic and wide ranging “spatial planning” approach has been adopted to RSS production; and several Assemblies are adopting a wider remit for scrutiny activity.

Where Assemblies do undertake wider policy work in their own right, they are being increasingly selective in identifying areas where there is a particular need for the Assembly to take a lead.

Assemblies have strengthened the evidence base for their policy work. Some have worked very closely with the RDA and other partners to develop a shared regional evidence base for regional policy making. This has included a common set of assumptions, scenario planning and economic and population forecasts to underpin the RES and RSS. However in other regions, joint-working on the evidence base has been less well developed, and this has resulted in inconsistencies in relation to the regional evidence base. One area where there is scope for improvement in many regions is the quality of the *economic* evidence base brought together by Assemblies.

Influence on Higher Level Policy

All Assemblies undertake European policy activity and have a presence in Brussels. The positive impact of Assemblies is greater impact within the region than in it is in influencing policy and funding decisions in Brussels. Common approaches to European issues across main regional organisations have been forged through the regional European strategies and joint-funding of Brussels offices, and there is evidence of greater awareness of European issues in various regional strategies and policy documents as a result. Assemblies provide a useful service in providing information and updates on European issues to local authorities and other organisations in the region.

It is difficult to identify a significant impact on policy of European institutions stemming from Assemblies' presence and activity in Brussels. Assemblies identify the Structural Funds as an important issue. But in this area the Assemblies' scope of influence is fairly limited.

Only limited Assembly staff time appears to be dedicated to influencing Whitehall. The Assemblies' approach to influencing national policy has focused mainly on responding to policy consultations or specific requests from Government Departments for policy input. The Assemblies have often seeking to influence Whitehall by working collectively under the auspices of the English Regions Network (ERN). In the area of planning and transport, Assemblies are exerting a significant influence on national policy.

Partnership Development

Regional Assemblies have generally helped strengthen regional partnership working, particularly by pursuing policy, strategy and planning and transport initiatives by working closely with different organisations. This has resulted in enhanced shared regional understanding of issues, better integration between partners in different policy areas, and greater consensus on regional policy priorities. The *process* of producing Integrated Regional Strategy documents has been positive in engaging a wide range of partners and building trust and consensus on main regional issues.

In many cases however regional consensus and partnership has been at the expense of taking difficult decisions on regional priorities, main economic accelerators and investment priorities. This has been reflected in policies and strategies that have sought to spread economic and housing growth and public investment across the region. To some extent this reflects that it is difficult for voluntary bodies such as Regional Assemblies to take decisions that do not command wide support of their membership.

The City Regions agenda has important implications for how Assemblies engage with sub-regional partnership initiatives. Some Assemblies are taking a lead in forging new sub-regional approaches to policy development. It is vital that there is integration between regional level policy and that emerging at city region level (particularly through the City Region Development Plans), and it is vital there is positive engagement by Assemblies in city-region initiatives.

The Different Approaches to Scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Assemblies and Their Effectiveness

Remit and main approaches

The scrutiny of RDAs, which has a statutory basis, is an important role for Assemblies. Assemblies' scrutiny remit is only defined loosely in legislation and Government guidance.

The main approaches to scrutiny (some Assemblies combine approaches) are as follows:

- Most Assemblies have adopted a “select committee” model of scrutiny with topic specific scrutiny inquiries and scrutiny hearings involving the RDA, and in some cases, other partners, leading to publication of a scrutiny report;
- “Liaison panel” mechanisms to provide a framework for Assembly-RDA liaison and comment, with a flexible approach to discussing relevant issues; and
- In one region, “Accountability meetings” convened by the Assembly, enable stakeholders to question the RDA and other main regional organisations.

There are pros and cons of these approaches. The select committee model enables specific topics to be investigated in-depth, and provides scope for scrutiny reports that can strengthen the shared evidence base in the region. But is a fairly inflexible, resource-intensive process, with long lead times, and can be overly adversarial. Ad-hoc feedback from the Assembly to the RDA is likely to continue in parallel, but in the absence of a clear and transparent framework. The more flexible “liaison panel” model is generally less adversarial, more flexible and timely, enabling issues to be addressed at an earlier stage. It is less resource intensive, but issues are not examined in depth.

Developments over past 18 months

Several Assemblies have sought to strengthen their scrutiny approach. In almost all regions, scrutiny protocols have been agreed with the RDA. Several Assemblies have revised the scrutiny process and relevant organisational structures. In some regions, formal frameworks have been introduced for monitoring and follow-up of recommendations. Some Assemblies have sought to broaden the focus of scrutiny to a range of organisations and topics beyond the RDA and the RES, whilst in other regions the Assembly is focusing scrutiny more clearly on the RDA. Assembly scrutiny output will be considered as part of the Independent Performance Assessment process which was introduced in April 2006. More generally, it is important that Assembly scrutiny work complements the IPA regime, rather than duplicating it.

Impact of scrutiny and factors for success

In some regions there is evidence (including RDA views) that scrutiny is providing a valuable contribution to policy development, and is helping build wider support and commitment to the work of RDAs. However in other regions there is evidence that scrutiny has become overly adversarial, with an unhelpful and inappropriate focus on seeking to “hold the RDA to account” and a tendency towards “micro management” addressing (particularly through monitoring frameworks) points of minor detail.

For its positive contribution to be maximised, scrutiny needs to be approached and managed in the right way, with clarity and consensus on the general remit and approach. Scrutiny should be based on good technical understanding of officers and members, and on robust evidence. It is important that scrutiny is pitched at the right level, focused on contributing to a more robust and wide-ranging shared evidence base, maintaining a strategic approach, and avoiding the tendency to address points of minor detail. Scrutiny works best when it is timely; when it can influence the formation of policy and delivery initiatives. There should be clarity as to what stage in the policy development and implementation cycle scrutiny is being undertaken. The nature and scale of scrutiny activity should be commensurate with the Assembly and RDA resources that are available.

Financial and Organisational Structures

Assemblies are heavily reliant on central Government funding. In several regions the levels of local authority subscriptions have reduced over the evaluation period. There remains significant scope for Assemblies to investigate wider funding sources, including opportunities for leveraging in additional resources to support specific projects.

Most Assemblies have now adopted a more focused remit and workload, compared to that at the start of the evaluation period. This has highlighted the importance of robust corporate planning, and the benefits of a strategic approach to producing Assembly business plans.

Over the evaluation period, several Assemblies have put in place organisational and decision making structures that are more streamlined, effective and fit-for purpose than previously. There is general recognition of the limitations of the full Assembly as a decision making body, and partly as a result, the Executive Boards of Assemblies have emerged as key strategic decision-making bodies. However, in several regions, the constitution of the full Assembly does not reflect accurately the distribution of population in the region, and as a result urban areas are under-represented.

Assemblies are increasingly focused on ensuring member-level support for and involvement in main decisions and this has highlighted the importance of effective mechanisms for managing the engagement of Assembly members.

1 Introduction

1.1 This Report

This is the second annual interim report of the study *Evaluation of the Role and Impact of Regional Assemblies*. The study has assessed the work of the eight Regional Assemblies in England over the period from spring 2004 to the end of 2005. This report sets out the main emerging findings in relation to the progress, issues, achievements of the Assemblies over this period, and the current and future challenges they face.

1.2 This Project

1.2.1 Aims and Objectives of Research

The main **aims** of the study, stated in the project brief, are to undertake:

“An evaluation of the role and impact of Regional Chambers both individually and collectively. The evaluation should include:

- *An assessment of the extent to which Regional Chambers have met their (implicit and explicit) aims and objectives*
- *Measurement of the extent to change or difference facilitated by Regional Chambers, including whether their impact has been positive or negative.”*

The main **objectives** of the research, stated in the project brief, are to:

1. *Deliver a feasibility study which has developed a framework within which the impact of Regional Chambers can be analysed and assessed over time.*
2. *Evaluate the extent to which Regional Chambers have met their (implicit and explicit) aim and objectives, including:*
 - *The impact of Regional Chambers on policy development, delivery and effectiveness, again with a view to drawing out general and specific lessons;*
 - *The extent to which Regional Chambers have had a positive or negative impact on regional and sub-regional co-ordination and co-operation.*
3. *Assess the effectiveness of the Regional Chambers’ Fund in enhancing and developing the scrutiny and strategic roles of Regional Chambers.*
4. *Learn about the different approaches to scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Chambers and assess their effectiveness within regional contexts with a view to drawing out general and specific lessons.”*

1.2.2 Previous Research and Reports

The **Feasibility Study** was completed and the Feasibility Study Report produced in January 2004. The aims of the Feasibility Study were to:

- identify the main roles of Regional Chambers (now more commonly referred to as Regional Assemblies);
- establish the baseline for the research by analysing Chambers' stated and implicit aims and objectives, structures and work programmes; and
- design the evaluation framework and methodology for the main research (Full Evaluation), including identifying evaluation criteria.

An “**Initial Evaluation**” was undertaken in Spring 2004, which involved, in each region, desk-based research, and in-depth interviews with each Assembly and regional partners. The **first Annual Interim Report** (published in June 2005) set out the main emerging findings from the “Initial Evaluation.”

Interim monitoring of Assembly activity and output was undertaken in the period spring 2004 to the end of 2005. This, predominantly desk-based, research enabled the progress and issues for all Assemblies to be tracked over time.

Interim feedback seminars were held in summer 2005. A seminar was held in each region to feedback and discuss emerging findings from the research, specific issues for each region, and future challenges. Each seminar involved staff and members from the relevant Assembly, Government Office, RDA, and ODPM (now DCLG).

A series of **case studies** were undertaken in late 2005 to examine specific issues in more depth. Each of these involved desk-based research and interviews in several regions. The case study topics are listed below, along with details of where in this report a brief summary of main findings is set out:

- The involvement of Upper Tier Authorities in regional planning (see section 4.2.3 of this report);
- Europe – regional assemblies' activity and work of their Brussels offices (see section 4.5.1 of this report);
- Engagement of the private sector by Regional Assemblies (see section 4.6 of this report);
- Business planning by Regional Assemblies (see section 6.3 of this report);
- Scrutiny – the approaches to scrutiny and choice of scrutiny topics (see section 5 of this report); and
- The engagement of local authority members (see section 6.4.3 of this report).

1.2.3 Future Outputs

This report follows the completion of the interviews and the desk-based research for this study. The next stage is to produce the main study outputs:

- Three **Evaluation Summary Reports** to provide a brief overview of the main findings in relation to each of the evaluation themes (set out under objectives 2 to 4 in section 1.2.1 above).
- The **Main Study Report** will describe the method, set out the detailed findings and conclusions from the research.
- **Feedback Seminars** will be held to discuss the findings of the research with the Regional Assemblies.

1.3 The Main Roles for Regional Assemblies

Details of Chambers' roles are set out in the Feasibility Study Report, produced at an earlier stage of this study. That report identified six main roles for Chambers, which are summarised in table 1.1 overleaf.

Regional Assemblies (defined in legislation as “Regional Chambers”) are voluntary bodies, which are not directly elected. Around two thirds of their representation is drawn from elected local authority members in their region, and around one third from non-local authority partners.

Table 1.1. Main roles for Regional Chambers as identified in Feasibility Study

Chamber role	Brief description	Principal sources of guidance and advice
Scrutiny	Statutory requirement for RDAs to have regard to the views of the Chamber in preparing and delivering their Regional Strategies. In practice, Chambers have adopted more formal scrutiny roles.	1998 RDA Act (clause 18(1)) and Guidance to RDAs Strengthening Regional Accountability Paper (DETR 2001) Guidance on Regional Chambers Fund
Regional Planning and Transport	All Regional Chambers have been designated at the Regional Planning Body (RPB), responsible for preparing draft RPG, and in the future RSS (incorporating a Regional Transport Strategy). Other regional planning roles include overseeing RSS delivery, monitoring LDFs and strategic applications for conformity with RSS, and contributing to technical studies.	Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (including regulations) PPS11, Regional Planning, and previously, PPG11, Regional Planning Performance management framework for Planning Delivery Grant ODPM Regional Spatial Strategies Supplementary Guidance (April 2003) DfT and ODPM Guide to Producing Regional Transport Strategies (2002)
Policy Development and Regional Coordination	The White Paper, Your Region, Your Choice, gave Chambers an enhanced remit to strengthen policy development and coordination at regional level. Most Chambers have undertaken work to help join-up policies and strategies, as well as new policy development to fill gaps.	Your Region, Your Choice (ODPM, Cabinet Office May 2002) Guidance on Regional Chambers Fund Chambers' own corporate plans, strategies etc.
Partnership Working	Most Chambers have undertaken work to strengthen regional-level partnership relationships and structures, and to strengthen and widen stakeholder involvement in regional initiatives.	Ministerial Guidance on Regional Chambers Your Region, Your Choice (ODPM, Cabinet Office May 2002) Chambers' own corporate plans, strategies etc.
Voice of the Region	There is no formal Guidance to Chambers; most have developed a communications function to raise the profile of their work and to influence policy development in the region, in Whitehall and in Brussels.	Chambers' own corporate plans, strategies etc.
Corporate Affairs	Not a 'role' as such, the growth in Chambers' resources, staff and workloads has meant that financial and organisational management issues have become increasingly important	ODPM Guidance on Chamber two-year business plans (2004) Guidance on Regional Chambers Fund Chambers' own corporate plans, strategies etc.

The Assemblies are designated as Regional Chambers under the 1998 Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) Act, which sets out a statutory requirement for Chambers to be consulted on the RDA's work and Regional Strategy. All Regional Chambers received designation under the RDAs Act 1998, in mid-1999. All Chambers are designated under planning legislation and guidance as the Regional Planning Body (RPB), responsible for leading regional spatial planning work, including the production of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) incorporating the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS).

Initially, most of the Assemblies relied upon subscriptions from members for their funding, and on upper tier authorities providing funding for regional planning work. This led to resource constraints, restricting the scope of Chambers' work. This problem was alleviated by provision of direct funding from Government, following the ODPM *Strengthening Regional Accountability* paper.

In addition, chapter two of the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, published in May 2002, set out a wider range of policy development and coordination roles for Chambers.

1.4 Structure of this report

Chapter 2 of this report describes briefly the study methodology.

Chapter 3 of the report briefly summarises the main developments and activities of Assemblies during the evaluation period for this study.

The next three chapters are structures around the main evaluation themes:

- Chapter 4 sets out main findings on the extent to which Assemblies have met their (implicit and explicit) aim and objectives, including Assemblies impact on policy development (including in relation to planning and transport), and on regional and sub-regional co-ordination and co-operation.
- Chapter 5 describes the different approaches to scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Assemblies Chambers, and considers their effectiveness; and
- Chapter 6 considers financial and organisational issues, assessing the effectiveness of the Regional Chambers' Fund in enhancing and developing the scrutiny and strategic roles of the Assemblies.

2 Method

2.1 Development of the evaluation framework

The Feasibility Study Report and the Full Evaluation Inception Report set out detailed evaluation framework, evaluation criteria and methodology for the study.

Evaluation criteria were developed to provide a transparent and comprehensive framework for the analysis. This framework was designed to take into account the differences between Assemblies, including their starting points in terms of previous regional institutions and partnership structures, the varying policy contexts, and differing implicit and explicit aims and objectives of each Assembly.

The criteria were identified through:

- an assessment of Chambers' own aims and objectives;
- advice and guidance from central government, across a range of Chamber activities;
- informed judgement of the project team, based on an understanding (achieved through research for the Feasibility Study) of Chambers' development as organisations, and their work; and
- accepted good practice identified through the Feasibility Study.

It was not the intention to develop an evaluation framework to score the relative performance of each Chamber or prompt a 'tick box' approach to the analysis. The aim was to facilitate the identification of good practice and transferable lessons, and assist in analysing the progress made by Chambers over the course of the longitudinal evaluation. The criteria were intended to provide a guide, establishing the type of practice and evidence that the research team would seek to identify.

The evaluation criteria enabled the analysis to consider issues of regional context. Chambers have developed in different ways in different regions, in response to their specific regional circumstances.

In undertaking the analysis, there was a focus on comparing the impacts attributable to the work of the Chamber with an assessment of what would have been likely to occur had the Chamber not existed. Some researchers call this point of comparison *the counterfactual*.

2.2 Structure of the evaluation framework

The criteria were structured in terms of:

- **Inputs** – the internal issues, structures and processes that are vital to the effectiveness of Chambers; and
- **Impacts** – the outputs of Chambers, and the outcomes of their activities, over the timescale for the evaluation.

The Assemblies have focused mainly on producing strategies, influencing policy, and building regional partnerships. Some Assemblies have recently been focusing on the challenge of securing implementation of strategy and policy. Assemblies do not have the powers, resources or remit to undertake direct delivery. Implementation is likely to be achieved by Assemblies influencing, and working with and through other bodies. This poses challenges for identifying these impacts, and the role of the Assemblies in achieving them. An important consideration for this research is the *counterfactual*: identifying impacts that would not have occurred without the existence and work of the Chamber.

For both inputs and impacts, criteria were set out to identify the *expectation* (the minimum standard that Chambers were expected to meet), as well as *possible good practice*. A brief explanation of the rationale was also set out for each set of criteria.

The evaluation criteria were structured around the main roles for Assemblies identified in the feasibility study (see table 1.1):

- scrutiny;
- regional planning and transport;
- policy development, regional co-ordination and partnership working;
- ‘Voice of the Region’ and communications;
- organisational and decision-making structures; and
- inclusiveness and stakeholders.

2.3 Research undertaken in each region for the Initial Evaluation

The research in each region comprises analysis of relevant documents and interviews with Chamber officers and members, the Government Office (GO), the RDA, and a range of other partner organisations.

Initial contact was made with the Chamber and GO, who made documents available and suggested possible interviewees, although in practice the process of identifying interviewees took longer than envisaged. The study team developed a list of detailed questions (derived from the evaluation criteria) for the document analysis and interviews. Prior to the interviewees, briefing notes were sent to interviewees, and the detailed questions sent to the Chambers, GOs and RDAs.

The study team spent at least a day with each Chamber, holding interviews with the Chief Executive and senior staff team. In most regions the Chamber Chair was also interviewed, and in several regions the non-local authority Deputy Chair was also interviewed.

Interviews were held with the GO Regional Director or senior official responsible for liaison with the Chamber, and the RDA (generally the Director of Strategy). Individuals from around eight other organisations were interviewed. These included local authorities, business, environmental or voluntary sector bodies or government agencies. These were chosen to provide a broad cross section of views and perspectives. In most cases, these interviewees were actively involved in the work of the Chamber: several sat on Chamber groups or were Chamber members.

Analysis of the findings from the research and interviews was undertaken using a framework for drawing together evidence and relating it to the evaluation criteria. A set of confidential “Regional Profiles” were produced as internal working notes summarising the main points in each region.

2.4 Interim Monitoring of Assemblies Activity and Output

The activity and output of each Assembly was monitored throughout the 18 month period between the initial and final evaluations. This was a predominantly desk-based activity, with documentation sourced directly from contacts at the Assemblies as well as from the Assemblies websites.

Meetings were held with each Assembly in Spring 2005 to discuss developments, and to clarify points from the desk-based analysis. The interim feedback seminars in summer 2005 provided a further opportunity for discussion.

The confidential “Regional Profiles” were updated at regular intervals to reflect the information from the internal monitoring.

2.5 Research undertaken in each region for the Final Evaluation

The methodology for Final Evaluation was similar to that followed for the Initial Evaluation: desk-based analysis, in-depth interviews with Chamber staff and members, interviews with the GO, RDA, and discussions with a range of other partner organisations.

The study team reflected on the operationalisation of the methodology for the Interim Evaluation, and also on the implications of the changing circumstances for Regional Assemblies.

As a result of significant work already undertaken, the project team had a good understanding of the aims, structures and work of each Assembly. Compared to the Initial Evaluation, where an important task was to establish the baseline and to understand the structure and aims of each Assembly, a greater focus could be placed in the Final Evaluation on discussing and analysing main issues in more depth.

It was important to consider how Assemblies’ implicit and explicit objectives had changed, or were changing. Following the “no” vote in the November 2004 referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North East, in most regions there was pressure from members to restrict any expansion of the Assembly aims and objectives. The next chapter covers the restructuring of the three Assemblies in the North of England, which in all cases led to the development of a more focused set of aims, objectives and areas of work.

It was considered that the approach to the Initial Evaluation, and the partial knowledge of many interviewees meant it was difficult to discuss in-depth all the main areas of Assembly work. The discussions with some wider partners of the Assemblies, whilst useful in providing triangulation of the Assemblies' views and research team's initial findings, yielded partial and often anecdotal opinions. Partners' views were often polarised between supporters of the concept of Assemblies on one-hand, and sceptics on the other, with detailed comments framed by these pre-determined points of view.

For these reasons it was decided for the Final Evaluation to focus effort on detailed discussions with a range of Assembly, GO and RDA officers. Interviews were held with wider partners to identify the extent to which their views had changed since the initial evaluation. In some regions, it was also considered to place emphasis on understanding the views of Assembly members, particularly where the Assembly had been restructuring in response to member pressure.

3 Main Developments Over the Evaluation Period

3.1 Introduction

The 18 months from mid 2004 to the end of 2005 was a period of significant change for Regional Assemblies. This section briefly describes the main changes and developments. This is relevant because, the wider policy and political environment in which the Assemblies were operating changed significantly, with important implications for their roles and impact.

3.2 Implications of the “no” vote in the November 2004 referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North East

The “no” vote in the November 2004 referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North East had an impact (to varying degrees) on all the Assemblies.

Government had specified¹ important roles for voluntary Assemblies regardless of whether directly elected versions are introduced in the future. Despite this, many partners and some Assembly members considered the voluntary Assemblies as an integral part of a wider project leading ultimately to elected regional government. There is no doubt that the “no” vote in the North East led in all regions to increased scrutiny, questioning and debate as to the role and remit of Regional Assemblies. This was heightened in the run up to the 2005 General Election, with different positions on regional governance taken by the main parties. In several regions there were important changes in the pattern of local authority political control.

3.3 Main Policy Developments

3.3.1 City Regions

There has been an increased focus in national policy, and through inter-regional initiatives such as the Northern Way, on the importance of city regions as drivers for economic growth. New forms of city region cooperation and policy making are emerging. This has had implications for regional policy making, particularly in planning and transport. There is also a degree of confusion and uncertainty regarding the future development of the city regions agenda. There is a widespread view amongst Assemblies and their partners that the development of city regions as units of governance could undermine the importance of regional-level policy making, and in particular the role and remit of Regional Assemblies.

3.3.2 Housing

In all regions, the work of the RHB has been brought progressively closer to that of the Assembly over the evaluation period. This has meant that the Assemblies have been well placed to move forward following the transfer of the RHBs. The Barker Review has led to increased focus on the importance of housing markets and housing choice in relation to regional economic and spatial development.

¹ Particularly in the 2002 White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, and in planning legislation and Guidance.

3.3.3 Regional Funding Allocation Advice

Preparation of advice to ministers on Regional Funding Allocations (RFA) in late 2005 and January 2006 was an important activity for Assemblies and their main regional partners (see section 4.3 for further details).

3.3.4 Regional Planning and Transport

All Assemblies have been developing Regional Spatial Strategies, responding to the challenges posed by the Growth Agenda in the South East, East of England, South West and South Midlands, and the Northern Way initiative. Assemblies have embraced new sub-regional approaches have been developed following the demise of County Structure Plans and the emergence of city regions as a main policy theme. Assemblies have been managing the transition to the new planning system, including new Guidance on RSS production, and developing capability to undertake a conformity role in relation to Local Development Frameworks and planning applications of regional strategic importance. (see section 4.2.5 for further details).

3.3.5 Scrutiny

Approaches to scrutiny of Regional Development Agencies have been refined, and continue to be developed. Future challenges are posed by the context of changing performance management regimes for RDAs, in particular the new RDA tasking framework set by Ministers, and the new Independent Performance Assessment (IPA) overseen by the National Audit Office (see section 5.5.6 for further details).

3.4 Main Developments in the Regions

3.4.1 Introduction

The main development in the regions was the strategic review process of the Assemblies in the three North of England regions. In other regions, the aims, objectives and organisational structures of the Assemblies have remained fairly stable over the evaluation period.

3.4.2 The Strategic Reviews of the Assemblies in the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and Humber

In each of the three regions in the North of England, the Assemblies have undergone a process of strategic review.

This has led to reorganisation and a new financial structure for these Assemblies. In the North East and Yorkshire and Humber, the review resulted in the Assembly de-merging from the regional local government body. This has led to a reduction in financial and staff resources available to these Assemblies. New committee and decision-making structures have been put in place in each of the three regions.

There are a number of reasons the strategic reviews were undertaken. The three North of England Assemblies had previously adopted a wide ranging, ambitious and high profile remit and set of objectives and ambitious. There were concerns that they were spreading their efforts and resources too thinly. In light of the North East “no” vote in the November, there were calls in the three regions to re-assess the role and remit of the Assembly.

These concerns were held most deeply by Local Authorities, although they had a wider resonance. Some Local Authorities expressed concern as to the extent to which their needs and interests were being addressed by the Assembly whether they were receiving value for money from their subscriptions. There was a general view that, in an effort to build wider regional partnerships, insufficient effort was devoted to building the support and involvement of local authorities and their leaders and senior members. It was commented that the Assembly staff teams lacked experience in managing the involvement of local authority members. In Yorkshire and the Humber one interviewee commented that the Assembly had been leading policy and technical work of a high quality, but had failed to secure adequate political underpinning for this work.

Several interviewees commented that these concerns were held widely before the no vote in the North East and the announcement to cancel the referendums in the North West and Yorkshire and Humber. However, these views were kept “below the waterline” and were rarely expressed publicly, because some partners saw the Assemblies as acting implicitly as “shadow bodies” to a future elected assembly.² The “no” vote in the North East changed the context for the Assemblies, and led to concerns and criticisms to be expressed publicly.

The impact of the North East “no” vote in prompting the organisational view is clear in the Chair’s introductory comments to the North West Regional Assembly 2005 Annual Report:

The decisive “No” delivered by North East voters in their referendum on elected regional government means that the North West Regional Assembly needs to refocus its aims, objectives and activities for the future....The aftermath of the North East referendum means that we will continue to operate within our existing stakeholder structures and seek to deliver a limited number of strategic objectives – in other words to do less than we perhaps anticipated but to do it better.

Whilst important policy, scrutiny and planning work continued to be undertaken at the time of the reviews, the over-riding impression in the three regions was of a loss of momentum and damage to the standing of the Assembly. In all cases, the review process was protracted, lasting between six and nine months. This led to uncertainty, a diversion of effort from day-to-day work, and damage to staff morale and partners’ confidence in the Assembly. The review process led to real financial pressures, in some cases with a freeze on staff recruitment. This hindered core areas of work, particularly planning and transport, where resources were already stretched due to involvement in the Northern Way workstreams. This contributed to delays in the draft RSSs. There was churn in the senior staff teams. In all three regions, for various reasons, new interim Chief Executives were appointed to lead the review process.

² This was despite the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, which set out (in chapter two) the roles and remit of Assemblies regardless as to whether an elected assembly would be introduced in the future, and the fact that all of the three Assemblies adopted a neutral position on the issue of elected regional government.

In all three regions, the scrutiny process has been under review, and a more streamlined process has emerged in Yorkshire and Humber and the North West.

At the time of writing, the three Assemblies were moving forward with the new structures, in place since the start of financial year 2006-07. The Assemblies also have new permanent Chief Executives. There is optimism amongst these Assemblies that the difficulties of the previous year can be put behind them, and that they can refocus of delivery with a renewed sense of purpose based on the new political and partnership consensus as to their role and remit, which has emerged from the strategic review process. All three of the Assemblies will benefit from stronger support and involvement from senior local authority figures. In the North West, more senior and influential non-local authority figures are engaged in the work of the Assembly.

3.4.3 East of England and South East

The Assemblies in the East of England and the South East have continued to pursue policy agendas based mainly around regional planning and transport, and in particular the Regional Spatial Strategies. In these regions, the RSS has been clearly positioned as the central policy-making exercise of the Assembly, based on a broad definition of spatial planning. Other policy work has been underway in both regions to seek to integrate regional strategies and policies. This has been a fairly “light touch” process, aimed at strengthening regional partnership working, as opposed to being a high-profile exercise in its own right.

The scrutiny process in both regions has continued to work well, based on a model of two-way liaison between the Assembly and RDA. In the East of England this is undertaken by an Assembly-RDA liaison panel. In the South East specific scrutiny inquiries are undertaken, and follow-up is based around bilateral meetings of senior Assembly and RDA staff and Members/board members. In both regions, the process is considered by the RDA as constructive (as opposed to adversarial).

In both regions political support for the Assembly has been maintained, although the positions of both Assemblies have at times been at odds with central Government over the issue of the rate housing growth and the associated infrastructure improvements.

3.4.4 South West

In the South West, the RSS has also been a central policy making exercise of the Assembly, far more so than previously. More of a spatial planning approach has been adopted. The RSS work has sought to address challenging growth issues, with an increased focus on cities as drivers for growth. The other main policy development initiative has been the production of an Integrated Regional Strategy, which is widely considered a useful and positive development.

Political support for the Assembly has been maintained amongst local authorities, and at the same time, non-local authority members have played key leadership roles (including Chair) in the Assembly.

The scrutiny process, based on standing scrutiny panel and topic-specific inquiries, is generally considered to have been working increasingly well. The Assembly and RDA undertook jointly a recent review of the scrutiny process. This recommended various improvements, but not a radical change in the approach.

The Assembly has reviewed its organisational structures and is making minor changes to streamline its decision making groups.

3.4.5 East Midlands and West Midlands

In the East Midlands and West Midlands the Assemblies have continued to pursue fairly wide ranging policy agendas. The Assemblies have maintained a clear focus on prioritising activity in areas where most value can be added through a regional approach. There is strong and wide ranging political leadership and support of the Assemblies.

In the West Midlands there has been a fairly smooth process of restructuring of the Assembly decision-making structures and staff team, and this is generally considered to have enhanced the organisation's effectiveness. In the East Midlands, the organisational and decision-making structures that were in place (following a previous reorganisation) have been largely maintained, and are viewed widely as efficient and effective.

Regional Planning and Transport has been an important priority in each region. In the West Midlands, significant functions have been commissioned from the Upper Tier Authorities. In the East Midlands, a sub-area approach is being adopted to the draft RSS, and there has been significant inter-regional working through the Milton Keynes South Midlands strategy, and the Midlands Way initiative.

Scrutiny has been a contentious issue in both regions, with a breakdown (and subsequent process of rebuilding) of the Assembly-RDA consensus on the approach to scrutiny. In the West Midlands the *Regeneration Zones* report was highly critical of the RDA. There was a subsequent process of discussion between the RDA and Assembly on the future approach. In the East Midlands, the move to a more structured process of monitoring and reporting back on progress against recommendations was not well received by the RDA, and the Government Office has been involved in brokering an agreement on the way forward.

4 The extent to which Regional Assemblies have met their (implicit and explicit) aims and objectives

4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the extent to which Assemblies have met their aims and objectives in relation to policy and partnership development (scrutiny is covered in chapter 5).

The implicit and explicit aims of objectives of Assemblies have varied between regions and over time. The first annual interim report described how some Assemblies had a focused set of objectives and workload, based mainly around a wide-ranging spatial planning agenda, but only limited involvement in wider areas of work. In contrast, other Assemblies pursued a wider range of aims and objectives working across an extensive range of policy topics, in some cases with regional planning work defined fairly narrowly. To some extent these different approaches reflected the varied nature of previous regional-level partnership working, regional identities, and political support for the concept of regionalisation.

The roles and responsibilities of Regional Assemblies have evolved over time, in response to changes in policy at national as well as regional level (as set out the Feasibility Study). The previous chapter of this report has described how, over the evaluation period, most Assemblies have adopted a more focused approach to their policy and partnership, with some Assemblies retracting from previously wide-ranging aims, objectives and workloads. Planning and transport work has assumed greater prominence and profile in all regions. The Regional Funding Allocations advice process has been an important new area of activity.

4.2 The impact of Regional Assemblies on policy development, delivery and effectiveness: Planning and Transport

4.2.1 Introduction

The current position with regard to the production of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) in the regions is set out in the table in Annex 1. The position varies, but on the whole, a round of regional plan-making has been concluded with Examinations in Public (EiP) completed recently in the North East and East of England. Examinations are now scheduled for the North West, Yorkshire & Humber, South West and South East. The East and West Midlands have a recently issued RSS in place. In the East Midlands the Assembly is working on a complete review, and in the West Midlands thematic selective reviews are being undertaken.

4.2.2 The Growth Agenda

The latest round of regional plan making has been challenging for the Assemblies, particularly those in the Sustainable Communities Growth Areas. The press coverage of the East of England EiP served to underline the political challenges faced by the Assembly producing an RSS that had to accommodate very significant growth in the region. The resolution in terms of achieving a political settlement on the draft RSS in both regions has been to link the principal of increased growth to additional

investment in infrastructure. In the South East, significant issues remain to be resolved through the EiP. In both regions, whilst there has been significant attention and controversy on the issue of housing growth, the Assemblies have produced draft RSS documents that are strategic and spatial in nature, underpinned by a significant body of evidence.

The Sustainable Communities agenda has also been a catalyst to inter-regional working. The most obvious example is in the Milton Keynes South Midlands Growth Area, which covers parts of the East Midlands, South East and East of England regions. Another example is the Thames Gateway, with the production of an inter-regional planning statement by SEERA and EERA jointly with the Greater London Authority.

4.2.3 Sub-Regional Working

An important feature of recent RSS production has been the adoption of new sub-area approaches to planning, based on functional sub-regional boundaries, in contrast to the old 'sub-regions' which tended to comprise the former County structure plan areas. The new sub-areas often do not follow County boundaries and sometimes do not even follow administrative boundaries, and overlap (as is the case in the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber). This is a much more responsive and pragmatic approach to regional planning, and has required a degree of political consensus building. The sub-area approach has also allowed the introduction of the city-region concept into RSS, recognising the importance of city-regions as the drivers for growth.

The new sub-regional approach has led to increased reliance on sub-regional technical studies to inform policy-making. This has raised its own challenges of coordination between the studies, and ensuring they are based on consistent assumptions and methodologies. In both the East of England and South West, a "study of studies" was commissioned to address these issues. In some cases there have been difficulties with sub-regional studies, because it has not been sufficiently clear whether the sub-regional partners (particularly the Upper Tier Authorities) have been acting in their own capacity, or on behalf of the RPB.

The new planning system has required Assemblies to reconsider the role of Upper Tier Authorities in regional planning. This topic was considered in a case study, which is summarised in box 4.1 below.

Box 4.1 Case Study on The Involvement of Upper Tier Authorities in Regional Planning

The Upper Tier Authorities (UTAs) comprise the English Shire Counties and Unitaries and, in the context of regional planning, should be taken to include a number of ad-hoc joint officer units and groups such as exist in the Tees Valley in the North East and Berkshire in the South East, whose primary role was until recently to discharge requirements for the production of Joint Structure Plans and to deal with related case-work.

There have been a number of changes in the way that RPBs are constituted and funded in recent years. The removal of the requirement for Structure Plans under the provisions of the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, together with the parallel requirements for sub-regional approaches in the new Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) also presents a new policy landscape. These factors have all impacted on the relationships between RPBs and UTAs.

Previous to the Assembly-based RPBs the role was held by various groupings in each region, with officer support provided by local authorities, principally from the UTAs. This presents an historic context for UTA involvement in regional planning.

UTAs have variously continued to have a role in the new round of regional plan-making. This has varied from staff secondments, or continued reliance on staff time 'donated' by the UTAs, to UTAs undertaking region-wide work on a 'consultancy' basis for the Assembly. Another common model is of UTAs undertaking sub-area studies that are intended to form part of the RSS evidence base.

UTAs and their officers clearly have a vested interest in their own area, an interest which might not be wholly consistent with the sustainable development of the whole region, for example. This raises particular issues about the involvement of UTAs in regional planning, particularly with the move away from traditional sub-regional approaches to one of sub-areas and city-regions. Whilst there are many examples of success, in particular with regard to the additional resourcing UTAs can offer, it is important that the role of the UTA is clear and well understood by all parties at the outset.

4.2.4 The Evidence Base

Another common theme of the most recent tranche of RSS is the extent of the evidence base. Most of the Assemblies have risen to the challenge and the evidence base for regional plans is more thorough than ever before. However there remain challenges, in particular to strengthen the economic evidence base for regional planning

A robust evidence base is essential because RSS is required to go into much more detail than RPG did (in particular to the level of district level housing numbers in the absence of structure plans) and the assemblies now receive significant direct funding for discharging the RPB role. This funding has been used to strengthen in-house technical skills as well as to commission studies by consultants. The increased capability has also allowed assemblies to become more pro-actively involved in the national policy arena, and many now make representations on draft policy and guidance, for example.

4.2.5 The Conformity Role

Assemblies are now developing their role as a statutory consultee (conferred in August 2005) on planning applications in relation to conformity with the RSS, and also on conformity of LTPs and LDFs with the RSS. Most assemblies now have an established procedure in place, with sharing of experience between assemblies helping to shape and refine the statutory consultee process. It is noteworthy however that the pressure of resourcing the recent EiPs in the East of England and North East has impacted on the ability of the respective assemblies to discharge the statutory consultee role. SEERA initially engaged consultants to assist in the statutory consultee role, but this has now been taken back in-house.

4.2.6 Transport

There is increasing evidence that the integrated approach to transport and land use planning that has long been advocated is now closer to being realised at the regional level. The move towards an outcome-based approach to regional transport priorities means that more thought needs to be given to how transport investment and management can help deliver the wider regional strategy.

The first Annual Interim Report for this study identified the difficulty most regions had experienced in producing policy advice on prioritising transport investment. In many regions, a predominantly “scheme-led” approach resulted in regional transport strategies comprising a “shopping list” of schemes that were being promoted by the various local transport authorities without due regard for scheme costs or the wider outcomes.

Significant progress has been made in developing more robust, outcome based approaches to identifying transport priorities. This has been led by the RSS work in Yorkshire and Humber and the South East, regions where the role of the pilot Regional Transport Boards was also important. The recent RFA exercise instilled the need to make difficult choices on transport schemes at a regional level in the context of limited funding, requiring political consensus building (see section 4.3 below).

4.2.7 Housing

The integration of the Regional Housing Boards into the Assemblies is now happening, and they bring with them the ongoing work of the RHB, and they continue to roll forward their ongoing workload. The recent RFA exercise was the first time that housing had to be seriously considered in its wider context within the assemblies. Whilst this did not cause significant issues, it is clear that much of the housing agenda, dominated by achievement the decent homes standard and addressing affordability/market failure, does not leave much room for manoeuvre.

4.2.8 Planning and Transport as the Central policy Making Activity of Regional Assemblies

In general, the planning and transport activities in the assemblies have become a much more central function, forming the central policy making activity of most Assemblies. Previously, there were examples where this was not the case, where the function was more marginalised and seen as a technocratic task, but as the organisations have refocused (or been the subject of a review in the case of the northern Assemblies) the planning and transport function has taken more prominence.

4.3 The impact of Regional Assemblies on policy development, delivery and effectiveness: advice on Regional Funding Allocations

4.3.1 Introduction

The *Devolving Decision Making* paper produced by the Treasury, together with the DTI, DfT and ODPM, invited each of the English Regions to provide advice on how funding across three existing funding streams in the region should be better spent and prioritised to help meet regional priorities:

- **Transport** – capital funding projected for Local Transport Plan Major schemes, and major Highways Agency schemes, other than on those roads specified by Government as of the greatest strategic national and international importance;
- **Housing** – Regional Housing Pot; and
- **Economic Development** – Regional Development Agency Single Budget, decisions on which will remain with the respective RDA Board.

Funding was based on current spending review period allocations, with a new regional allocation for transport. Beyond this period, a uniform uplift of 2%pa (in line with the inflation target) was applied to 2016. Regions had to submit regionally-agreed proposals in a document no longer than 30 pages by the end of January 2006. The following is a summary of how the regions responded to the challenge.

4.3.2 Timetable

The Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) task set was a challenging one for the regions. It tested the resolve of regional partners to work together, and more importantly, to work together to make some challenging decisions. All the regions rose to the challenge to submit advice within the timescale set, despite a number of complaints about the short timescales.

What the RFA process demonstrated is that the regions are capable of making substantial decisions within relatively limited timescales. Many regions had to establish new decision-making structures to achieve this. Some regions have recognised the value of the experience and propose to permanently adopt variations of the decision making structures that were created for the RFA process.

4.3.3 Decision-making Structures

Most regions established new structures to cope with the RFA process, both to develop and sign-off the advice. However, virtually all the submissions have also been endorsed by the RDA Board and either the full Regional Assembly or the Assembly's Executive Committee. Noteworthy was Yorkshire & the Humber's formation of a 'Regional Co-ordination Board' to oversee the advice populated by RDA Board and Assembly members. The West Midlands also seems to have found the process valuable and now plans to form a permanent "Forward Planning Executive" comprising chairs and vice chairs of the Assembly, Transport Partnership, Housing Board and the RDA Board to ensure that investment and planning is integrated with regional priorities.

4.3.4 Reallocation of Funding Between Streams

The RFA guidance offered the potential to reallocate funding between the different funding streams beyond the current spending review period. None of the regions felt they had a sufficiently robust evidence base to demonstrate the case for this, or the time to broker the deals with all the stakeholders. Some regions suggested top-slicing one or more funding streams in future years to form a 'regional infrastructure fund' and the South West additionally suggested the creation of a 'regional capacity fund' to help develop the evidence base for transport projects in particular.

The boldest reallocation decision was perhaps made in Yorkshire & the Humber, where partners suggested that if the region had an increase of 10% in the available allocation, then all the additional funds from all three streams should be directed to transport investment.

4.3.5 Transport

Introducing a finite budget for transport spending introduced a useful discipline for regions, in terms of ensuring that expectations are realistic. This presented some difficulties for regions promoting very large projects. Leeds Supertram (although rejected by ministers during the RFA process) and the A46 Newark to Widmerpool schemes are examples. In general, all the regions kept within the budgets, although the South West still budgeted for significant overspend, on the basis that scheme costs might be reduced.

The Regional Assemblies were key players in all regions, and generally took the lead on managing the technical work on transport priorities (although not in Yorkshire & the Humber, where this was led by the GO), together with inputs on housing. However, it appears that the GOs were the brokers in the process.

Overall, the transport element of the RFA submissions appeared to be very scheme-focused. Few regions fully looked to the transport outcomes that would be necessary to secure regional priorities, and in particular the potential of emerging (and therefore un-costed) schemes to fulfil regional priorities. Yorkshire & the Humber did do this to an extent, reflecting existence of outcome-based transport priorities in the emerging Regional Transport Strategy.

4.3.6 Housing

The housing sections of the RFA submissions were understandably focussed on meeting the targets for achieving decent-homes standards, and it was this element of housing funding that would be protected in most regions in the event of a -10% scenario.

The advice for the housing stream was mainly focussed on specific issues of spending the regional housing pot funding without necessarily a wider appreciation of the role that housing (in terms of offer, location and type) has to play in wider economic development and future transport investment decisions, and indeed the housing issues raised in the Barker agenda.

4.3.7 Economic Development

In most regions the RDA essentially wrote the economic development elements of the RFA submissions, with a focus on their respective RES and Corporate Plans. In some regions, these sections lacked spatial specificity, with a tendency to focus on the various RDA thematic investment streams, not specific outcomes to be achieved on the ground. In these regions the opportunity for the RDAs to engage with objectives in combination with transport and housing spend was not fully exploited

In contrast, the submissions in the South East, and the northern regions, indicated priority outcomes to be achieved in specific locations. This reflected perhaps the engagement of the relevant RDAs in the Northern Way Growth Strategy and the relevant city regions work.

4.3.8 Content and Style of RFA Submission Documents

The RFA submission documents varied in content and style, with most adopting an introduction to the region and its priorities, followed by three thematic sections by funding stream and a final 'synthesis' section. The South East is notable for not following this format, and the result is a successful integrated document, which has clearly taken more time to prepare. The East Midlands and East of England submissions were prepared for the region by consultants, and this introduces clarity in the presentation and key issues. A 30-page limit was imposed on by the guidance, which helped to focus the advice to genuine priorities.

4.3.9 Conclusions

There have been a range of positive impacts of Assemblies' involvement in the process of developing RFA advice. The process brought greater realism in policy on investment priorities, with the finite allocations requiring regions to avoid a "shopping list" approach. The process also resulted in greater understanding of the importance of a robust evidence base to underpin investment strategies, although the quality of the submissions varied in this respect.

In most regions a productive dialogue, joint-working and a greater consensus was forged between senior decision makers in the region on shared regional investment priorities. The RFA process enhanced integrated working between senior housing, transport, economic development and spatial planning professionals, with evidence in most regions of a more integrated strategy for main regional investment priorities.

4.4 The impact of Regional Assemblies on policy development, delivery and effectiveness: other policy work

4.4.1 General Approach

A general trend over the evaluation period has been for Assemblies to adopt a focused approach to policy work outside the planning and transport remit.

An analysis of Assemblies' policy output was undertaken for this study. A main finding is that the vast majority of Assemblies' policy work and output has been focused on planning and transport work, scrutiny, and the RFA process, and the evidence base underpinning policy and outputs in these areas. Assemblies have participated, contributed and endorsed a wide range of policy initiatives and documents taken forward by other bodies or groupings in the region.

What is clear is that outside this work within the core areas of Assembly activity, Assemblies have undertaken and published very little policy work in their own right. This is in contrast to the previous situation (identified in the first Annual Interim Report) of some Assemblies pursuing a very wide range of policy work, with insufficient focus on the added-value to existing initiatives in the region, which was leading to organisational overstretch.

There are a number of reasons for this change:

- Pressure from Assembly Members in all regions for the Assembly to adopt a more focused policy development role, particularly in the Assemblies in the North of England (see section 3.4.2);
- Greater recognition by Assemblies of their limitations in terms of resources and direct powers, bringing a greater focus on ensuring Assembly policy initiatives really add value to, and do not duplicate, the policy work of others in the region;
- A more strategic and wide ranging "spatial planning" approach has been adopted to RSS production and planning and transport work more generally, resulting in a more integrated approach to policy development, and a broader range of policy initiatives falling under the category of planning and transport; and
- Increased resources are being devoted to scrutiny work, and several Assemblies are adopting a wider remit for scrutiny activity

Where Assemblies do undertake wider policy work in their own right, they are being increasingly selective in identifying areas where there is a particular need for the Assembly to take a lead. Relevant examples are the work on health in the East of England, or the Regional Energy partnership in the West Midlands.

Assemblies typically respond to several Government consultations a year. There is evidence that Assemblies are responding to fewer consultations. They are considering responses in more depth than previously, and working closely with members to submitting higher quality consultation responses.

4.4.2 The Evidence Base for Policy

Assemblies have strengthened the evidence base for their policy work; however, this is an area where there is scope for further progress in some regions. Some Assemblies have worked very closely with the RDA and other partners to develop an increasingly extensive shared regional evidence base for regional policy making. This has included a common set of assumptions, scenario planning and economic and population forecasts to underpin the RES and RSS. However in other regions, joint-working on the evidence base has been less well developed, and this has resulted in inconsistencies in relation to the regional evidence base.

One area where there is scope for improvement in many regions is the quality of the *economic* evidence base brought together by Assemblies. There is a tendency in some Assemblies for the RDA to be perceived as responsible for economic evidence and economic policy with the role of the Assembly to counter-balance this by giving prominence to social and environmental issues. This can however result in Assembly policy making being driven by pre-determined policy positions as opposed to robust evidence, and there is a danger that economic drivers and economic realities are not reflected sufficiently strongly.

4.5 The impact of Regional Assemblies on policy development, delivery and effectiveness: influencing higher-level policy

4.5.1 Europe

The role and structure of Assemblies' presence in Brussels was assessed in a case study, which is summarised in box 4.2 overleaf. A main finding is that the positive impact of Assemblies is greater within the region than in it is in influencing policy and funding decisions in Brussels.

Common approach to European issues across main regional organisations has been forged through the regional European strategies and joint-funding of Brussels offices. There is evidence of greater awareness of European issues in various regional strategies and policy documents as a result of the European activities of Assemblies and their main regional partners. Regional Assemblies provide information and updates on European issues to local authorities and other organisations in the region – a service that is generally considered valuable.

It is difficult to identify a significant impact on policy of European institutions stemming from Assemblies' presence and activity in Brussels. Assemblies identify the Structural Funds as an important issue. But in this area the Assemblies' scope of influence is fairly limited.

Several Assemblies point to the importance of a presence in Brussels in raising the profile of the region, for engaging with the Committee of the Regions, and as a focus for engaging regional delegations and events, and in facilitating networking and knowledge transfer with other regions from across Europe. However these benefits are fairly intangible, and difficult to measure.

Box 4.2. Case Study on Regional Assemblies' European Activity and Work of Brussels Offices

This case study was based on a factual overview of the European activity and structures of all Assemblies, and interviews with key officers in selected Assemblies.

All Assemblies undertake activity in relation to Europe. All either have an office in Brussels or support jointly with other regional partners a regional office in Brussels. The two main functions of Assemblies within Europe have been:

- representing the region, and raising its profile within Europe; and
- providing information in relation to European institutions, policy and funding to interested bodies within the region (particularly members of the Assembly), and seeking to ensure policy making in the region reflects European considerations.

Most regions have developed a European strategy which reflects regional objectives and acts as a framework for activity of regional bodies. There is some desire to see European issues mainstreamed through regional strategies. In some regions a partnership body has been formed to oversee the production of a European strategy and oversee European activity.

The scale of the regional Brussels offices varies, as does the level of financial commitment from Assemblies. Typically, the regional Brussels office has 2 – 4 staff, although there is a larger presence staff from the East Midlands and South West (each with circa 6 staff), and the West Midlands (12 – 15 staff). In most regions, the Brussels office is funded jointly between the Assembly and other regional bodies, including the RDA.

During the UK's presidency of the EU in late 2005 the ERN, in association with all the RDAs and London, published a report highlighting best practice in promoting the Lisbon agenda through projects in the UK.

4.5.2 National Policy

Whilst Assemblies are funded and “sponsored” by DCLG, they are involved in policy development work in policy areas that fall within the direct remit of many different Government Departments and their agencies.

In the area of planning and transport, Assemblies are exerting a significant influence on national policy, through regular liaison with senior DCLG and DfT officials. Assemblies have been commissioning important research that is helping shape the national policy agenda, for example the work on off-shoring commissioned in the South East, work on the links between housing and economic competitiveness led from the West Midlands, or the Regional Futures work commissioned by the Assembly planning leads under the ERN banner.

In areas other than planning and transport the Assemblies' approach to influencing national policy has generally been reactive, focused mainly on responding to policy consultations or specific requests from the centre for policy input, with little pro-active policy development work undertaken to seek to set the agenda in Whitehall. The Assemblies have often sought to influence Whitehall by working collectively under the auspices of the English Regions Network (ERN). In contrast to some of its early research and policy output, the ERN is increasingly undertaking some useful and well-regarded policy work.

In areas other than planning and transport, only limited Assembly staff time appears to be dedicated to influencing Whitehall, in contrast to Assemblies' strategic work and funding to support regional offices and staff teams in Brussels.

4.6 The extent to which Regional Assemblies have had a positive or negative impact on regional and sub-regional coordination and cooperation

4.6.1 Partnership Working at Regional Level

Over the evaluation period Regional Assemblies have generally helped strengthen regional partnership working. Assemblies have increasingly been pursuing policy, strategy and planning and transport initiatives by working closely with different organisations. This has resulted in enhanced shared regional understanding of issues, better integration between partners in different policy areas, and greater consensus on regional policy priorities.

This consensus has, in many regions been based around a fairly high-level shared vision for regional development. The process of producing Integrated Regional Strategy documents has been positive in engaging a wide range of partners and building trust and consensus on main regional issues. Whilst the documents themselves can be fairly high-level, arguably only adding modest value to national policy, the process of partnership working that has led to them has been clearly valuable.

In many cases however, regional consensus and partnership has been at the expense of taking difficult decisions on regional priorities, main economic accelerators and investment priorities. This has been reflected in policies and strategies that have sought to spread economic and housing growth and public investment across the region. To some extent this reflects the Realpolitik that it is genuinely difficult for voluntary bodies such as Regional Assemblies to take decisions that do not command wide support of their membership. As set out in section 4.3, the RFA process has been positive in requiring partners to give greater recognition of the limitations in Government spending available to the region.

In all regions, significant progress has been made in enhancing the engagement in regional activity of business, community, cultural and environmental sector partners. These sectors are generally well-represented in Assembly decision making. There is however scope to enhance the positive contribution these partners can make in terms of expertise, resources and influence. This is a particular issue in relation to the private sector (see case study in box 4.3).

Assemblies have sought to enhance the engagement of local authority members (see case study summary in box 6.2 at section 6.4.2). Section 3.4.2 of this report has set out how in the North of England it has been necessary to restructure Assemblies to rebuild local authority engagement and support for the Assemblies. Outside the areas of planning, transport and housing, the expertise of senior local authority officers is being under-utilised by Assemblies. There is scope to achieve benefits by enhancing engagement of officers in areas such as economic development or social services in specific policy and scrutiny exercises.

Box 4.3. Case Study on the Engagement of the Private Sector by Regional Assemblies

This case study looked at the approaches to engaging the private sector in the work of Assemblies.

The quality and extent of business engagement by Regional Assemblies is variable. In some regions representatives of the business community hold senior roles as Assembly Members, but in general there is scope for Assemblies to lever greater 'added value' from private sector engagement. This is partly due to a lack of enthusiasm amongst business. The general view amongst the business community is that RDAs are the principle regional partners for the private sector. However this view is changing as business becomes increasingly aware of the limitations in RDAs' powers and resources. Business does have a strong interest in policy areas where Assemblies have an important role, particularly transport and planning, although these roles are not understood widely amongst the business community.

It is important that the engagement of business in the work of Regional Assemblies is based on maximising the potential mutual benefits.

The potential benefits to Assemblies of engaging business are wide-ranging:

- **expertise and evidence** – leveraging in private sector expertise in key policy areas, and strengthening the regional evidence base through an enhanced market perspective;
- **focus on action** – business leaders can bring a useful focus on action, combining independence from public funding with leadership and drive to help cut through institutional inertia and get things done;
- **resources** – there may be potential to secure funding or contributions of staff time from business, and whilst this is unlikely to form a substantial part of core Assembly funding, it could help resource specific areas of policy or technical work;
- **role in RDA scrutiny** – as a main partner for the RDA (which are intended to be business-led bodies), and important participants in and beneficiaries from RDA initiatives, business can therefore bring a useful "end-user" perspective to inform Assembly scrutiny of RDA work; and
- **influence and clout** – business leaders can play useful role in championing specific areas of work or campaigns. Senior business people can have a significant influence, and a wide range of contacts, in Whitehall, and could act as ambassadors for the region.

Box 4.3. Case Study on the Engagement of the Private Sector by Regional Assemblies (continued)

The potential benefits to business of getting involved in the work of Regional Assemblies include:

- **influencing regional transport, planning and housing policy**, including strengthening the evidence base for policy;
- **influencing the work of the RDA**, through involvement in Assembly scrutiny work;
- **strengthening networks with senior public sector decision makers**, by working alongside leaders and senior members of local authorities as well as senior individuals from a wide range of government agencies; and
- **helping provide a strategic framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** activities – involvement in regional policy making can strengthen corporate understanding of how policies and projects (in areas such as communities, education, or the environment) at an individual company level relate to wider strategic issues and challenges for the region.

4.6.2 Partnership Working at Sub-Regional Level

Assemblies have faced challenges in building sub-regional partnership working. Section 4.2.3 describes how Assemblies are forging new sub-regional approaches for planning and transport policy making. The other main challenge has been the emergence of the city regions agenda.

There is significant uncertainty and concern amongst the Assemblies regarding the implications of the city regions agenda. Much of the concern is driven by a perception that city regions may emerge as new units of governance – or even government – that could undermine structures and regional level. Assembly members from outside the city regions have expressed concerns that their areas may lose out in terms of investment.

In the North of England, there has been particular momentum around the development of the City Region Development Plans under the Northern Way initiative. Whilst the Assemblies have been very active in relation to the pan-regional Northern Way workstreams, there has been only limited engagement in relation to the CRDPs. There is therefore a danger of disconnect between the RFA submissions and the CRDPs. It will also be important to ensure that there is integration between CRDPs and the sub-area components of RSS.

In other regions the Assemblies have been active in developing policy in relation to cities. In the South West, the Assembly has brought an increased focus on the region's cities as drivers for economic growth. In the East of England, the Assembly has helped develop the *Regional Cities East* initiative. In the East Midlands, the Assembly has taken forward important work around the tri-polar *three cities* sub-region that includes Nottingham, Leicester and Derby.

5 The Different Approaches to Scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Assemblies and Their Effectiveness

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers:

- The scrutiny remit of Regional Assemblies;
- The different approaches Regional Assemblies have adopted to scrutiny of RDAs;
- The impact of scrutiny;
- Main issues and developments in relation to scrutiny over the evaluation period; and
- The main factors that underpin successful scrutiny.

Annex 2 provides a summary of the approaches to scrutiny undertaken in each region.

5.2 Scrutiny remit of Regional Assemblies

Whilst the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) are accountable directly to Ministers and Parliament, the task of ensuring that their “*strategies and activities fit in with the wider framework of strategies across the region*”³ (DETR 2001) rests with the respective Regional Assemblies.

The scrutiny arrangements with Regional Assemblies are in place to ensure that the RDAs are responsive to regional views and that they give an account of themselves to those with an interest in their work. The scrutiny remit for Regional Chambers (now known as Regional Assemblies) as set out in statute and Government Guidance, is defined loosely. Section 8(2) of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 requires each RDA to:

have regard, in the exercise of its functions under section 7(1)(a) [to formulate, and keep under review, a strategy in relation to its purposes], to any views expressed by the chamber, and...to consult the chamber in relation to the exercise of such of its functions as may be specified in the directions.

The importance of the scrutiny role was emphasised in the 2001 ODPM Consultation Paper, *Strengthening Regional Accountability*, which set out proposals for supporting chambers in developing their scrutiny work, alongside the strengthened funding framework for RDAs.

³ *Strengthening Regional Accountability*, DETR Consultation Paper, 2001

The Act only requires RDAs to “*have regard to*” the views of the Chamber, and does not necessarily require them to agree with or act on these views. Scrutiny by the Chamber should not be confused with the issue of democratic accountability of the RDA. The formal position is that the democratic accountability of RDAs is to Parliament via Ministers.

It is also relevant to consider scrutiny in relation to Assemblies’ roles in achieving policy integration, and the development of a consistent approach and robust shared evidence across the RES and RSS. Chapter Two of the 2002 White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, provides scope for Chambers (as currently constituted) to adopt a strengthened role in seeking to integrate and coordinate the various regional strategies and policies.

Guidance on RDA Regional Strategies (generally known as Regional Economic Strategies), and Regional Spatial Strategies, specifies the need for a consistent and non-hierarchical relationship between the two strategies. Advice was published in 2005 on strengthening the shared evidence base that underpins the RSS and RES.⁴

5.3 General approaches to scrutiny

5.3.1 Introduction

The main approaches to scrutiny (some Assemblies combine approaches) are as follows:

- Most Assemblies have adopted a “select committee” model of scrutiny with topic specific scrutiny inquiries and scrutiny hearings involving the RDA, and in some cases, other partners, leading to publication of a scrutiny report;
- “Liaison panel” mechanisms to provide a framework for Assembly-RDA liaison and comment, with a flexible approach to discussing relevant issues; and
- In one region, “Accountability meetings” convened by the Assembly, enable stakeholders to question the RDA and other main regional organisations.

⁴ *Strengthening the Evidence Base Supporting Regional Planning Policies*, 2005, ODPM.

The main features and pros and cons of the different approaches are summarised in table 5 below.

Table 5.1. Pros and Cons of the Main Approaches to Scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Assemblies			
Approach	Description	Pros	Cons
“Select committee” model	Topic specific scrutiny inquiries and scrutiny hearings involving the RDA, and in some cases, other partners, leading to publication of a scrutiny report.	Enables specific topics to be investigated in-depth, drawing on range of stakeholder and expert views. In theory provides scope for scrutiny reports that can strengthen the shared evidence base underpinning policy in the region.	Fairly inflexible approach, long lead-in times and timescale for a scrutiny exercise, and a resource-intensive process. The hearings can be adversarial. Tendency for scrutiny reports and monitoring frameworks to focus on points of minor detail.
“Liaison panel” model	Joint panel to provide framework for liaison and comment between the two organisations, with a flexible approach to addressing specific issues on more of an ad-hoc basis, with the meeting minutes providing a record of the discussion, and basis for reporting back on progress.	Generally less adversarial, and more of a two-way process. More flexible and timely approach, enabling issues to be addressed at an earlier stage, and is less resource intensive. Provides clear and transparent framework for ad-hoc comment and feedback from Assembly to RDA.	Does not address points in as much detail (but scope to draw on research and evidence collected through wider Assembly and other technical and policy work).
“Accountability Meetings”	Meetings open to range of stakeholders, providing opportunity for questioning of RDA, and other regional organisations. Held in East of England on sub-regional basis, with the Assembly and GO also involved. In other regions the RDA and Assembly participate jointly in public meetings.	Transparent and participative approach. Enables a focus on sub-regional dimension. Involvement of Assembly and GO brings broader focus on the work of all the main regional organisations.	Not the best forum for examining issues in depth, or moving forward shared understanding of specific issues, or the regional evidence base.

5.3.2 Select Committee Model

The general approach to scrutiny adopted by Regional Assemblies has been to conduct topic specific scrutiny inquiries, involving collecting evidence on the topic, culminating in a select-committee style hearing. The general approach is set out below.

- A specific topic is selected, following discussions with the RDA.
- The Assembly staff team, sometimes supported by consultants, collect evidence using a range of techniques, including literature and data review, interviews with relevant bodies, and by seeking written evidence from stakeholder organisations.
- This information is used to identify lines of questioning/discussion for the scrutiny hearing, and to brief the Assembly members that will lead the hearing.
- A scrutiny hearing is held where a panel of Assembly members question the RDA, and in some cases, also question a range of other organisations.
- A draft report of the scrutiny inquiry is produced by the Assembly, which is generally sent to the RDA for comment and/or a check for factual accuracy.
- The report is published.
- In some regions, the Assembly requests that the RDA provides a written response to the report recommendations, and reports back at set intervals (in some cases in writing) on progress against recommendations.

The scrutiny inquiry is generally led by a scrutiny panel of Assembly members. In some regions a different group of members comes together for each scrutiny exercise. This general approach has a range of benefits. It is transparent. It provides scope for an in-depth investigation of the issues, to lever in expertise, and to shape regional thinking on and understanding in key policy areas.

It can however be a lengthy, resource intensive and inflexible process with long lead-in times. This makes it difficult to respond to changing circumstances in a timely manner, and to consider and influence issues at an early stage of the policy development and delivery cycle. Mechanisms need to be put in place to monitor progress once the scrutiny inquiry is completed (see section 5.5.).

Whilst issues can be examined in depth through topic specific scrutiny inquiries, there can be a tendency to focus significant attention on points of minor detail, and to produce overly onerous and lengthy sets of recommendations. There is a risk of losing sight of the bigger picture in terms of the full range of aims, objectives and activities of the RDA. General Assembly-RDA liaison and discussions generally continue in parallel, but not always as a particularly structured or transparent process, and not always linked closely to scrutiny work.

The primary focus of the select committee approach to scrutiny is on the scrutiny hearings. These can be adversarial in nature, and there is a danger that member inputs and questioning is not linked sufficiently closely to the evidence base. Because the scrutiny process and structures develop a dynamic of their own, there is a danger that scrutiny work is not integrated closely with wider Assembly technical and policy making work.

5.3.3 Liaison Panel

An alternative model for scrutiny is that of a standing Assembly – RDA liaison panel that meets regularly (i.e. quarterly) to discuss issues of joint concern. This approach is not widespread. It provides the basis for scrutiny in the East of England. In some other regions, this approach is combined with topic specific scrutiny hearings (select committee model) also undertaken by the standing scrutiny panel.

The liaison panel model has important advantages over the select committee approach. It is a more flexible mechanism, without the long lead-in times of topic specific scrutiny hearings. This provides for more timely discussion of the issues that are particularly pertinent at the time, enabling RDA policy and strategy to be influenced at an early stage of its development. The approach is generally less adversarial in nature, and can be a two-way process enabling the RDA to raise issues concerning Assembly policy. The liaison panel provides clear and transparent framework for ad-hoc comment and feedback from Assembly to RDA and vice versa, a process that occurs largely “behind the scenes” in most regions.

The disadvantage of the liaison panel model is that it is difficult for the panel itself to examine issues in depth. This places an onus on drawing on wider Assembly policy and technical work to provide a robust evidence base.

5.3.4 Accountability Meetings

In some regions, the RDA and Assembly are involved in open meetings, which provide an opportunity for partners to pose questions and raise issues. In the East of England, the Assembly convenes a series of sub-regional accountability meetings, which also involve the Government Office. In other regions, the RDA holds public meetings, and specific events (i.e. to launch consultation on the RES) which involve the Assembly. These mechanisms are useful in providing a transparent and open opportunity for feedback and discussion, but do not provide a good forum for examining issues in depth based on a robust evidence base.

5.4 The impact of scrutiny

The impact of scrutiny on RDA policy, strategy and implementation has been variable.

In most regions, there is evidence that scrutiny is having a subtle influence on RDA policy. This is most significant in prompting RDAs to take into account additional factors or stakeholders when developing policy, and to emphasise policy themes such as sustainable development, the environment, social inclusion and equal opportunities. These are common themes raised in scrutiny reports, to some extent reflecting the view of many Assembly members and officers that an important role of scrutiny should be to seek to counter balance a perceived predominantly business-orientated approach of RDAs.

In most regions the process of scrutiny has helped build a wider regional understanding of and support for the work of the RDA. There are some examples where Assembly scrutiny work has prompted the RDA to reconsider and revise its approaches to delivery. In several regions Assembly scrutiny and policy work has influenced positively the way the RDA has developed frameworks for sub-regional investment planning.

There are a few examples where RDAs and others point to particular scrutiny exercises as highly valuable in strengthening the evidence base, and shaping RDA and wider regional thinking on a particular issue. In general, the most positive contributions have been in policy areas where RDAs have only limited powers and resources for direct delivery, for example skills. In some of these cases, the scrutiny process has proved valuable in the bringing together stakeholders and relevant expertise, and fostering a strategic dialogue between relevant regional organisations.

However in many cases scrutiny work has only had a modest impact given the time and resources devoted to it.

In some regions there have been tensions between the RDA and Assembly on how scrutiny should be undertaken, and this has undermined the scrutiny process (see section 5.5.1 below), as well as the priority the RDA places on acting on recommendations. Some RDAs do not appear to have clear management systems in place to consider, report on, and act on scrutiny reports. In contrast, others RDAs have put in place formal mechanisms for discussing internally and reporting to the Board on scrutiny findings.

In several cases, problems with particular scrutiny inquiries can be traced back to the terms of reference. Some scrutiny topics have been extremely complex and wide ranging where there is only a limited RDA remit. This has meant that the Assembly has found it difficult to add value to national level policy debates and to enhance policy thinking and the evidence base at regional level. There are several examples where the approach to scrutiny has not been framed according to at which stage in the policy development–delivery–review cycle the exercise is taking place. For example, in several regions tourism was identified as a topic for scrutiny at the time when the regional institutional arrangements for tourism were still in transition. Interviewees commented that this was not recognised sufficiently in the expectations of the Assembly, or in the scrutiny reports.

Other problems have resulted from the way evidence has been used. In several cases the Assemblies have brought together a very useful body of evidence and expert opinion during the evidence gathering stage of the scrutiny process, but this resource has not been fully exploited. Some interviewees commented that the questioning in scrutiny hearings has not been sufficiently underpinned by evidence. There is evidence that in some regions the primary focus of the scrutiny reports are the recommendations and the links to the evidence base are unclear.

Some of these problems result from confusion regarding the role of scrutiny. Several Assembly members consider the primary role of scrutiny to be to “hold the RDA to account”, and this limits its positive impact.

5.5 Main issues and developments over the evaluation period

5.5.1 Assembly – RDA consensus on the approach to scrutiny

For the positive impact of scrutiny to be maximised there needs to be clarity and consensus between the Assembly and RDA on the general remit and approach to scrutiny work.

In some regions there was a breakdown in this consensus. In these regions the RDA has considered that the Assembly has been overly adversarial in its approach to scrutiny. RDAs have become concerned that the recommendations of scrutiny reports can be fairly lengthy and address points of minor detail, leading to perceptions of the Assembly seeking to “micro-manage” the RDA. Some RDAs question the value of the significant time and resources they are required to devote to scrutiny work. In the regions where these issues have been most serious, a degree of consensus has been re-built, in some cases requiring the involvement of the Government Office. This has pointed to the value of scrutiny protocols.

In the regions where there is a strong consensus on the approach to scrutiny, and scrutiny is working well, this has a positive impact in terms of enhancing the wider understanding of – and support for – the RDA’s work in the region. In the South East, the Director of Strategy at the RDA commented that the Assembly’s scrutiny work had been very important in enhancing the standing of the RDA in the region.

5.5.2 The role of protocols

In most regions, scrutiny protocols are now in place. These are agreed between the Assembly and RDA. They set out the general approach and remit for scrutiny, providing clarity on the scrutiny process. The process of putting protocols in place and in some regions reviewing protocols has helped avoid or overcome Assembly–RDA tensions, and has helped secure the commitment of both organisations to make scrutiny work effectively.

5.5.3 Monitoring and follow-up

Over the past year to 18 months, several Assemblies have introduced formal frameworks and mechanisms for monitoring the impact of scrutiny and following up recommendations. There has been criticism that in some regions the framework that has been put in place is overly onerous. In particular, RDAs question the necessity and value of being required to provide written reports at regular intervals. In contrast, there is evidence in some regions of a more effective and resource efficient approach, based on verbal reports and discussions at liaison meetings between senior staff of the Assembly and RDA.

5.5.4 Aspirations to broaden the role of scrutiny

In several regions, there have been aspirations to broaden the role and remit of scrutiny to a wide range of other organisations. This has proved helpful, where it is focused on understanding the context within which the RDA operates and the organisational framework through which it implements policies and programmes. Some Assemblies have, through scrutiny work, forged a useful strategic dialogue with organisations such as the Environment Agency and Strategic Health Authority.

However, widening the focus of scrutiny can lead to the identification of scrutiny topics that are very broad in scope and it is difficult to focus on the specific points of influence within the region. Some Assembly members consider broadening the focus of scrutiny as positive in “holding a wider range of unelected regional agencies to account.” This creates the risk that these agencies will question the legitimacy of the Assemblies scrutiny remit over them, damaging confidence and participation in scrutiny work.

5.5.5 The role of Assembly members

The role of Assembly members is critical to achieving successful scrutiny work. It is vital that the Chair of the scrutiny panel is widely respected and trusted, and plays a proactive role in maintaining a good relationship with the RDA, and in ensuring a constructive discussion at scrutiny hearings. It is vital that members understand the role and remit of scrutiny work, are well briefed, and base their input on evidence, adopting a strategic regional perspective. Some Assemblies have undertaken member training in relation to scrutiny.

5.5.6 Scrutiny in context of other performance management frameworks

Scrutiny should not be confused with the sponsorship and performance management of the RDA. RDAs share with Government every six months their regular performance reports to their Board on progress in delivering their Corporate Plans.

In addition, the National Audit Office (NAO) are undertaking a programme of Independent Performance Assessment (IPA) of RDAs. The first stage of the process is a self-assessment by each RDA against the NAO’s key lines of enquiry. The first round of assessments of the eight RDAs outside London are due to be completed by March 2007.

The RDA performance monitoring framework comprises:

- In-year performance reporting by each RDA Chief Executive to their Board on progress in delivering the commitments set out in RDA Corporate Plans for 2005/08, which are shared with Govt on a six monthly basis; and
- Periodic independent assessment by the NAO of RDA performance and capacity.

These arrangements replaced the framework in place since the introduction of the Single Programme budget in April 2002, whereby RDA performance was monitored and reported on by the Government Offices on behalf of DTI and other departments.

Although Government Offices are no longer required to prepare reports on RDA performance, they will continue to work alongside RDAs to ensure departments understand and have an accurate picture of RDA performance and delivery. This will include a watching brief for Government Offices on how the RDA is implementing the improvement plan after the NAO's assessment.

The DTI, as the RDA sponsor department, and the NAO are keen that scrutiny and the IPA process should complement and reinforce one another. As a key RDA stakeholder, Regional Assemblies are consulted by the NAO during the assessment process and scrutiny reports form part of the evidence base considered by the NAO.

It will be important that the scrutiny work led by Regional Assemblies is differentiated clearly from the role and coverage of the IPA for RDAs. This means that scrutiny should not be focused on matters of RDA performance management. For instance, matters such as project appraisal, analysis of outputs, performance indicators, and detailed internal RDA management are covered by other processes.

It will also be vital to recognise the resource pressures the IPA will place on RDAs, and to ensure scrutiny work is not overly resource intensive, in line with the Government's commitment in the March 2005 Budget for a net reduction of the audit burden on the RDAs.

5.6 Conclusions

For its positive contribution to be maximised, regional scrutiny needs to be approached and managed in the right way.

Of vital importance is the question of what is scrutiny for? Many Assembly members consider it should be a process of "holding the RDA to account", whilst others adopt a broader definition of scrutiny; one with a focus on developing the regional evidence base, enhancing shared understanding of key issues, and joining up policy and informing an integrated approach to delivery. Whilst Assemblies should reserve the right to offer constructive, evidence-based criticism of the RDA, there are limits to the "holding to account" approach. It can lead to an approach to scrutiny that is adversarial and questioning and recommendations based on anecdote and opinion rather than robust evidence. It can lead to confusion with and duplication of other mechanisms for external monitoring of RDA performance. It often fails to recognise that RDAs' primary accountability is to parliament via ministers.

Some factors for success are set out below.

- There needs to be clarity and consensus on the general remit and approach to scrutiny (scrutiny protocols are useful in this respect).
- Scrutiny work should be based on good technical understanding of both officers and members, and be based on robust evidence, not anecdotes and opinion.
- It is important that scrutiny is pitched at the right level, maintaining a strategic approach, avoiding the tendency to address points of minor detail, or to seek to micro-manage the work of the RDA (thereby duplicating performance management/reporting undertaken by the GO, and the IPA).
- Scrutiny works best when it is timely; when it can influence the formation of policy and delivery initiatives. There should be clarity as to what stage in the policy development and implementation cycle scrutiny is being undertaken, and the approach should be framed accordingly.
- Scrutiny work and scrutiny reports should be focused on contributing to a more robust and wide-ranging shared evidence base and understanding of the issues underpinning regional policy making. It is important to strike an appropriate balance between general Assembly-RDA liaison and investigating particular issues in greater depth.
- The nature and scale of scrutiny activity should be commensurate with the Assembly and RDA resources that are available/appropriate.
- The principle focus of scrutiny should be the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), and the strategic role of the RDA in working with other organisations to delivery of the RES. An overly wide-ranging approach covering other regional topics has the risk of going beyond the formal scrutiny remit for Assemblies, and overstressing Assembly resources and expertise.
- There should be a flexible “light touch” approach to follow-up/monitoring of scrutiny recommendations, avoiding creating onerous and bureaucratic systems of written progress reports.
- Personalities are important. The chair of the scrutiny panel needs to be firm, constructive and trusted by all sides. It is important there is a good working relationship between relevant Assembly and RDA officers.
- Ultimately, for the positive impact of scrutiny to be maximised, the scrutiny process and outputs need to be valued by the RDA.

6 Financial and Organisational Issues

6.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the main financial and organisational issues for Regional Assemblies over the evaluation period. It also addresses one of the main evaluation themes:

The effectiveness of the Regional Chambers Fund in enhancing and developing the scrutiny and strategic roles of Regional Assemblies.

For Assemblies to be effective organisations, it is essential that the right resourcing and corporate planning frameworks are in place, and that staff and decision making structures are fit for purpose. Assemblies need to be efficient organisations and demonstrate value for money to funding providers.

The first Annual Interim Report for this study identified the need for some Assemblies to be more focused in their range of work, and to be more efficient and streamlined in terms of decision making structures and processes. Over the evaluation period, several Assemblies have considered their organisational structures in light of changing roles, policy priorities and pressure from members. In most regions financial and political pressures have been for the Assembly to focus closely on core areas of responsibility of scrutiny, planning, and regional coordination undertaking wider policy work only where there is a clear rationale for doing so. As a result, some Assemblies have undergone significant organisational and financial restructuring, as described in section 3.4.2 of this report.

This chapter considers:

- Financial issues;
- The approach to corporate planning by Assemblies; and
- Decision-making structures.

6.2 Financial Issues

Regional Assemblies have become increasingly dependent on funding from central Government.

Some (although not all) Assemblies levy a subscription from local authorities. In some regions the Assembly and regional local government body is a combined organisation (East of England, East Midlands, South West, and West Midlands). In these cases, the majority of the funding raised from local authority subscriptions is earmarked for the local government association/employers' body functions, rather than the scrutiny, planning and policy functions of the Assembly. However the core Assembly functions can benefit because organisational efficiencies and flexibilities can be achieved through the combined organisation and to some extent there is a sharing of staff capability and resources.

However, as described in section 3.4.2 in some regions the Assembly and regional local government body have split into two separate organisations. Whilst a modest level of local authority subscriptions to the Assembly has been maintained, the split between the two organisations has resulted in funding constraints for the core Assembly functions.

As well as the financial benefits, the levying of subscriptions, even where the financial contribution is fairly small, helps secure the commitment of local authorities to the Assembly, and in turn requires the Assembly to demonstrate value for money to its members.

Some Assemblies seek opportunities for leveraging in additional resources (cash or in-kind) to support specific projects. However, the sums raised are only a small proportion of Assemblies' overall budgets, and there remains scope for Assemblies to investigate wider funding sources.

6.3 Corporate Planning

The first Annual Interim Report for this study identified several issues in relation to how some Assemblies prioritise their activity and use of resources. In contrast to some Assemblies that had clearly focused agendas, other Assemblies were seeking to work across a very wide range of issues, resulting in organisational overstretch, impairing their effectiveness, and also their flexibility to respond quickly to changing circumstances.

Over the evaluation period, all the Assemblies have sought to focus clearly on core areas of responsibility, and to ensure resources are aligned accordingly. This places increased importance on Assemblies undertaking robust corporate planning.

Each Assembly must complete a business plan in order to set out its work programme, and to secure funding from Government. Most Assemblies have produced business plans that meet the Government's requirements in terms of output. The challenge is to develop the use the process to realise its potential as a strategic management and corporate planning tool. A case study was undertaken on Assembly business planning, and the main findings are set out in the box below.

Box 6.1. Main points from case study on Business Planning by Regional Assemblies

This case study assessed the approaches adopted by Regional Assemblies to producing their business plans, and considered the benefits of a strategic approach to business planning. A strategic approach to business planning process can deliver a range of benefits in terms of:

- Clarifying and prioritising organisational aims and objectives;
- Focusing on the process for delivery (working with and through other organisations);
- Providing a framework for managing and monitoring performance;
- Identifying and managing risk and uncertainty;
- Building staff and member commitment, and managing expectations; and
- Guiding and prioritising use of resources.

It is important that production of the business plan does not become an overly onerous task. It has been demonstrated how the business plan can act as a framework for corporate planning and performance management, fulfilling a number of functions (which in some Assemblies are currently fulfilled by a number of different documents and systems):

- An internal management tool, identifying actions, deliverables, key performance indicators, risks and contingencies;
- A framework for monitoring organisational progress and output, including reporting to the Government Office etc;
- A strategic “corporate plan”, based on staff, member and partner input, communicating internally and externally the Assembly’s achievements and strategic priorities; and
- A mechanism for securing funding from DCLG, and a framework for identifying where and how financial and in-kind support can be levered in from other partners.

To be an effective document, accessible to both an internal and external audience, the document must be brief, clear and strategic. It should identify the main issues for the region, recent progress and achievements of the Assembly. It should set out the main priorities and the broad “direction of travel” for the year ahead. It should avoid including too much detail on specific actions, without setting out a clear strategic direction for the organisation.

6.4 Decision Making Structures

6.4.1 Overview of Decision Making Structures

An overview of Assemblies’ main decision making structures is set out in Annex 3. The general structure in most regions is described below.

Full Assembly

The full Assembly generally has a large membership with the range across the regions of between 72 and 117 members, with the exception of Yorkshire and Humber which only has 37 members by virtue of the region largely comprising of large unitary authorities. Between two-thirds to 70% of the full Assembly is comprised of local authority members, with the remaining 30% to one-third comprising non-local authority partners.

There are a number of different formulae relating to the balance of local authority members. In some regions all local authorities are represented, with this representation reflecting the predominant political control of the Local Authority. In some regions, representation is from each local authority, supplemented by a top-up system of additional members based on proportional representation. In other regions, the whole system is based on proportional representation, and not all local authorities have a member who sits as part of the Regional Assembly. In some regions, such as the North West, County Councils have more than one representative.

Non-local authority partners (often referred to as Social and Economic Partners), are chosen from a range of business, voluntary and environmental sector bodies.

In each region the full Assembly generally meets at a frequency between twice-yearly and quarterly.

Executive Boards

Most Assemblies have created smaller Executive Boards. These have between 15 and 35 members, generally selected on a basis of the same proportion of local authority/non-local authority split as the full Assembly, with the make up of local authority membership of the Executive Board reflecting the proportion of political make-up of the full Assembly. In the North West, local authority representation on the Executive Board is structured by sub-region.

The general frequency of Executive Board meetings is between 4 and 6 meetings a year. The role of the Board is to oversee and help coordinate the work of different topic groups. The Board generally has decision making powers delegated from the full Assembly with constitutional safeguards to ensure where necessary matters are referred to the full Assembly. Most Executive Boards also oversee “pay and rations” matters such as staffing, pay, financial management etc.

There are several benefits of a strategic role for the Board. It brings together senior members – the political leadership of the Assembly – who are required to adopt a regional perspective (rather than solely represent their local authority area interests) when making decisions. It provides a link between the work of the Assembly Executive and full Assembly. A Board can meet more frequently and at shorter notice than the full Assembly. In several regions, The Assembly Board provided the means of achieving Assembly approval of the Regional Funding Allocations Advice.

Working Groups

Under the full Assembly and the Executive Board, a series of topic specific working groups or sub-boards operate.

A finding in the first Annual Interim report for this study was that Assembly working group structures had developed incrementally as Assemblies’ roles and responsibilities had broadened over time. During the evaluation period, most Assemblies have moved to review their working group structures, and where necessary to rationalise the number of groups, and to clarify their remit and links to the Executive Board and full Assembly, and restructure their membership. This has resulted in membership of working groups that is predominantly comprised by Assembly members, as opposed to the previous situation in several regions of predominantly officer-led groups.

Typically, the planning and transport group has wide-ranging decision making powers, with decisions only referred to the full Assembly in exceptional circumstances. In some regions officer advisory sub-groups also exist to inform planning work.

In most regions scrutiny is now overseen by a standing panel of Assembly members (see section 5.3 for further details).

Most Assemblies have a working group that oversees (non planning and transport) policy. However, in the South East and East of England most policy work falls under the planning and transport remit. The other Assemblies are also increasingly adopting a wide ranging “spatial planning” approach to RSS Assemblies are bringing planning and transport and wider policy work closer together, with an integrated approach to commissioning research, and deployment of staff. This is a positive development with the previous situation in some regions where RPG/RSS production was approached as very much a separate activity.

Regional Boards

In several regions, new decision making structures were set up to oversee and approve the advice on Regional Funding Allocations. These generally took the form of a “Regional Board” separate from the Assembly, with membership from the Assembly, RDA, Government Office, Regional Housing Board, and representatives from local authorities and other partners. In several regions, membership was at officer level as opposed to member level. In addition to the approval of the Regional Board, in most regions the RFA was endorsed at a meeting of the full Assembly, or its executive committee.

There were a number of reasons why it was necessary to set up new decision making structures. The Government Office, RDA and Regional Housing Board needed to be part of the formal decision making process. The challenging timescale for producing the RFA advice meant there was a need for a small, flexible decision making structure that could meet at short notice.

6.4.2 The involvement of Assembly members

A main issue that led to the strategic reviews of the Assemblies in the North of England was that the Assembly membership was not sufficiently involved in the day-to-day work of the Assembly. This was in sharp contrast with other regions where the Assembly executive worked far more closely with Members to secure member support and buy-in for decisions and the broad “direction of travel” for the Assembly.

The need to ensure member support can limit Assemblies scope to take bold or difficult decisions on issues where there is not consensus amongst the membership. Whilst this is to some extent inevitable, it highlights the importance of strong political leadership of the Assembly, and the need to ensure decision making structures are fit for purpose.

A case study was undertaken on the involvement of local authority members, and the main findings are set out in box 6.2 below.

Box 6.2. Case Study on the Engagement of Local Authority Members

This case study considered issues in relation to the engagement of local authority Regional Assembly members in the decision making and work of the Assemblies. It was based on discussions in all regions with Assembly officers and/or members.

The importance of effective engagement of local authority members

Strong and successful engagement of Local Authority members is vital for Assemblies to be effective organisations, and in particular to build and ensure:

- Political support in the region for the broad “direction of travel” for the Assembly;
- Political leadership to tackle challenging issues, and to broker deals and consensus on relevant policy issues and decisions;
- Political accountability of the Assembly executive;
- Building the involvement, the leveraging in of policy expertise, ownership, and broad corporate commitment of individual local authorities in and to the work of the Assembly;
- Engagement of local authority members with real influence and political clout in acting as an ambassadors for the region, and making the region’s case to Government; and
- A framework for leveraging-in local authority resources to support the Assembly, ensuring local authorities receive value-for-money.

Issues and good practice pointers for engaging local authority members

- **Integration of decision making structures** – to ensure close links between technical work and policy making and to integrate different areas of work, there needs to be the right linkages, communication, and shared membership between the full Assembly, the Assembly Board, working/decision-making groups in different policy areas.
- **Encouraging members to think regionally** – an important challenge is to encourage Assembly members to think regionally and take decisions on the basis of regional interests rather than their local authority interests. Strong senior-level political leadership of the Assembly is vital in setting the tone for Assembly business and decision making.
- **Developing streamlined decision-making mechanisms** – there are limitations as to what can be achieved by meetings of the full Assembly, and there are benefits to streamlined structures such as Assembly Boards.
- **Senior-level engagement** – senior local authority members are more likely to adopt a strategic perspective, and have the influence, profile and clout to help broker agreement on difficult issues, and to make the region’s case to government.
- **Using members to secure the wider support and engagement of local authorities** – it is important that local authority Assembly members seek to “lock-in” into the Assembly the support and engagement of their wider local authority organisation. They need to ensure information and technical and policy inputs flow between the two bodies.
- **Engagement of members in business planning process** helps achieve political input to and support of the strategic direction and priorities for the Assembly.
- **Continuity of member involvement** – successful engagement of local authority members requires continuity of engagement, and can be impaired by regular non attendance of meetings, or frequent use of substitutes; and
- **Training** – there would be merit in Assemblies undertaking member training, in particular emphasising the differences between Assembly and local authority business.

It is also vital that the involvement of non-local authority members is managed carefully. There needs to be clarity as to who non-local authority members are representing. Some interviewees remarked that it sometimes appeared that non-local authority members were representing their own specific organisation (their employers) as opposed to the wider sector (i.e. business, environment, culture) that they were supposed to represent. It is important that there are robust mechanisms in place for these members to report back to and to elicit views from other organisations in their sector.

6.4.3 The challenge to further streamline decision making structures?

In regions with a large number of small local authorities, a system whereby each authority has equal representation on the Assembly means that patterns of representation on the Assembly are disproportionate to patterns of population in the region. A small rural district can have the same level of representation as a large metropolitan authority. Because, in some regions, small districts are far more numerous than large urban authorities, the balance of representation and influence is skewed away from the areas of most significance in terms of population and the economy. This has important implications for policy, particularly in respect of planning and transport, and the city regions agenda. It can lead to a tendency to deal with difficult decisions on investment priorities in areas such as transport and housing by proposing to spread resources very thinly across the region.

There are clear limitations as to what can be achieved by meetings of the full Assembly, due to the size of the full Assembly, and the nature and frequency of meetings. There would appear to be merit in Assemblies considering how the membership of the full Assembly might be streamlined and better reflect sub-regional (as opposed to local) interests and patterns of population (see above). However, several Assembly Chief Executives believe that it would be politically untenable for the Assembly to break the direct link between each local authority and the full Assembly.

These issues highlight the benefits of an Executive Board with strategic decision making responsibilities, reflecting the right balance of regional interests.

Appendix A

Status of Regional Spatial Strategy Process in Each Region*

Region and Document	Current Status	Estimated Likely Issue Date
East of Engand <i>RPG6/RPG9/MKSM SRS.</i> <i>RSS: 'East of England Plan'</i>	Issued Nov 2000/Dec 2000/Mar 2005 respectively. EiP Nov 2005 to Mar 2006.	Issue in early 2007.
East Midlands <i>RPG8 partial review including relevant parts of MKSM SRS.</i> <i>Full RSS revision.</i>	Issued in March 2005 as RSS8. Issues Papers 'Options for Change' published in Oct 2005.	Was subject to minor change to housing numbers as result of a legal challenge. Submit to GO in Sept 2006, EiP April/May 2007, with issue in March 2008.
North East <i>RPG1.</i> <i>RSS: 'View: Shaping the North East'.</i>	Issued Nov 2001. EiP March/April 2006.	Issue early 2007.
North West <i>RPG13 partial review.</i> <i>RSS: 'The North West Plan'.</i>	Issued March 2003. Submitted to GO Jan 2006.	EiP Nov 2006, with issue late 2007.
South West <i>RPG10.</i> <i>RSS for the South West 2006–2026.</i>	Issued Sept 2001. Submitted to GO March 2006.	EiP Feb/Mar 2007, with issue in 2008.
South East <i>RPG9 including partial reviews/MKSM SRS.</i> <i>RSS: 'The South East Plan'.</i>	Issued March 2001 with partial reviews Issued July (Ashford & RTS) and Nov 2004 (renewable energy & rec & sport), MKSM SRS Issued Mar 2005. Submitted to GO March 2006.	EiP Nov 2006 to March 2007, with issue Feb 2008.
Yorkshire & Humber <i>RPG12 partial review.</i> <i>RSS: 'The Yorkshire and Humber Plan'.</i>	Issued as RSS in December 2004. Submitted to GO in Dec 2005.	EiP Sept/Oct 2006, with issue in autumn 2007.
West Midlands <i>RPG11 complete review.</i> <i>RSS phased reviews:</i> <i>Phase 1 Black Country</i> <i>Phase 2 housing figures, employment land, transport & waste</i> <i>Phase 3 rural, recreation, environment, Gypsies & Travellers</i>	Issued June 2004. Options Nov 2005. 'Launched' Nov 2005. Work to start winter 2006.	Submission to GO May 2006. EiP Jan 2007, issue end 2007. Options Sept 2006 for submission to GO June 2007, EiP in early 2008 and issue in autumn 2008. Options summer 2007 for submission to GO in summer 2008.

* correct at time of writing

Appendix B

Summary of Regional Assemblies' Approach to Scrutiny of RDAs

Region	nature of scrutiny	scrutiny process	scrutiny topics	monitoring/feedback structures	Scrutiny protocol?
East of England	not topic specific: EERA-EEDA Liaison Panel.	EEDA produces papers which are presented to and examined by the Panel, which draws on wider research and policy development. Liaison Panel also gets to see EEDA's quarterly reports to GO, and has been conduit for EERA engagement in the review of the RES 7 sub-regional accountability hearings are held annually. Reps from EEDA, EERA, GO and the sub-regional partnership attend and answer questions from the floor.	2003-04: Regional Economic Strategy; 2004-05: EEDA's Corporate Plan; current: implementation of specific EEDA programmes.	No formal scrutiny reports are prepared by EERA; minutes of Liaison Panel meetings are available to public. EEDA provide updates on actions at future meetings.	Yes
East Midlands	Topic specific, led by 'task and finish'-type Scrutiny Panels.	A Regional Scrutiny Board (RSB): ongoing general scrutiny of emda – a relatively informal process – recommendations are drawn up, implementations are discussed and follow up meetings convened. RSB also oversees the work of the Scrutiny Panels: identifies key issues in the region and selects topics for scrutiny. Relevant experts are invited to join Scrutiny Panels. Results in an evidence based report, leading to an action plan and monitoring framework.	2004-05: Operation and Effectiveness of Sub-Regional Strategic Partnerships; Improving Business Birth Rate and Survival Performance. 2005-06: delivery of Regional Tourism Strategy; Foreign Direct Investment; sustainability of emda's work in implementing RES. Recent follow-up review was undertaken of the panel's scrutiny of emda and Strategic Sub-Regional Partnerships (SSPs).	All Scrutiny Panel reports set out the expected benefits of any recommendations; in future emda will provide feedback on the effectiveness of these Panel reports.	Yes (includes GO-EM)
North East	Topic specific, formerly 'task and finish' panels, now to be led by Scrutiny and Policy Development Board (Assembly Members).	Initially: topics selected in discussion between Assembly Scrutiny Panel (chaired by the Chief Exec of a local authority) and ONE; collaborative meetings between Assembly and ONE are followed by identification of questions for ONE at formal scrutiny hearing (public); Panel prepares post-hearing report with recommendations, issues this to ONE. Now: similar process but led by single Scrutiny and Policy Development Board, chaired by a non-local authority Member (24 Members altogether).	1st round: SME creation support services; inward investment and marketing; job creation in deprived communities; ICT and e-commerce. 2nd round: skills and training; business survival; tourism and business sites and premises. 3rd round: rural issues, ONE's 'Strategy for Success'. NEXT: Leadership (a topic in the RES, but a broader remit than traditional scrutiny); impact of previous recommendations on draft RES.	Scrutiny Monitoring Report published by RANE in 2005, seeking to identify impact of scrutiny on latest RES. But RES requires input from more than ONE.	Yes

Region	nature of scrutiny	scrutiny process	scrutiny topics	monitoring/feedback structures	Scrutiny protocol?
North West	Regional Review Group (own identity and annual report, included NWRA's regional partners) looked at other regional bodies in addition to NWDA.	PREVIOUSLY: Regional Review Group hold select committee-style hearings on policy development across wide range of organisations including NWDA, with wide ranging recommendations (i.e. to Government) set out in reports. NEW: More focused approach on work of NWDA, taking 'critical friend' approach.	Previously very broad (skills, transport, waste, housing, tourism, rural affairs); now narrowing to focus on NWDA's corporate plan, performance and outputs (e.g. the new sub-regional partnerships). There is a proposal to review all 5 themes of the RES during 2006.	NWDA asked to report back on recommendations.	Yes
South East	Topic specific, led by a 'time-limited' scrutiny panel.	Select committee style (10-Member committee, Chaired by one of the Executive Committee, not often LA): gather research prior to a 1-day hearing, and potentially follow-up meeting to agree recommendations. Committee is then dissolved. SEEDA-SEERA Liaison Board meets three times per year to discuss issues of mutual interest.	2004-05: enterprise hubs & gateways; urban renaissance; regeneration & AIFs. 2005: manufacturing; poverty & inclusion; business engagement & CSR. 2006: sustainable use of natural resources; social enterprise; business support & business links. Scrutiny Annual Report published in 2005 on main points from scrutiny undertaken over previous year.	Scrutiny reports are followed-up by meetings of senior SEEDA and SEERA staff to discuss next steps.	No: terms of reference are tailored for each scrutiny committee
South West	Topic specific, led by standing panel of Assembly Members.	Topic selected, and evidence collected. Workshop, involving range of experts and stakeholders to discuss issues. Bilateral hearing (SWRDA reps – Scrutiny Panel). Report outlines the findings and opinions of the panel, based principally on the bilateral Scrutiny Panel-SWRDA discussions. Includes high-level recommendations for SWRDA.	Tourism, broadband, business development, urban renaissance, renewable energy.	SWRDA submits response to recommendations at a later Scrutiny Panel meeting.	Yes

Region	nature of scrutiny	scrutiny process	scrutiny topics	monitoring/feedback structures	Scrutiny protocol?
West Midlands	Topic specific, separate panel per topic. Led by Strategy Review Group (SRG) chaired by Assembly Vice-Chair for 'Other Stakeholders'.	SRG (WMIRA officers and members) manages the strategic review and scrutiny process. Round 1: 4 panels set up, one for each pillar of RES, chose a specific issue within each pillar. Round 2: SRG offered long-list of topics, discussed with AWM and agreed a short list. Regeneration Zones scrutiny took following route: panel briefing session to set terms; receipt of written evidence; 'partner evidence days' held in public around the region, panel meeting based on questions sent to AWM 2 wks in advance; written panel report including recommendations, drafted by officers on basis of written evidence and panel meeting.	Initial round: pillars of RES (business base, learning & skills, conditions for growth, regenerated communities). Next – Regeneration Zones (2004-05); Rural Technology Corridors (2005); Rural Renaissance (2005-06). Proposed for 2006: RZs Revisited; Clusters; AWM support for Skills Agenda; Strategic Review of WM's relationship with Europe.	AWM prepares written response to recommendations (e.g. as a matrix).	Yes
Yorkshire & Humber	Previously: topic specific, with Scrutiny Panels appointed for each topic. New: Scrutiny Board, chaired by Assembly Deputy Chair. A maximum of 8 Assembly members (60:40), none of whom are on the Regional Exec Board – i.e. separate from other Assembly functions.	PREVIOUSLY: Whole process takes about 6 months per topic. Panel made up of 2 Assembly members and up to 4 from relevant Commissions. Exec Board of YHA sets terms of reference for each Scrutiny Panel. Topics identified. Once Panel established, consultants prepare scoping report which helps the Panel identify main issues. Panel meets with stakeholders before finalising list of questions for YF. Public meeting (select committee style) is held, at which RDA is questioned. Consultants write up meeting, proposing recommendations; Panel finalises recommendations. NEW: led by Deputy Assembly Chair, with standing committee of Members; based on 'Question Time' style Q&A public sessions of experts and stakeholders.	old?: business birth rate strategy; impact of the RES on social inclusion; public sector investment and the achievement of RES objectives; cities as drivers of economic growth; Renaissance Market Towns initiative. Scrutiny 7: Marketing & Investment (2005); Scrutiny 8: Skills policy (2005). Next (new format): Opportunities in the Region due to the Northern Way Strategy.	YF prepares an Action Plan in response to the recommendations.	Yes

Appendix C

Summary of Main Assembly Decision Making Structures

Region	total Members	LA Members	SEP/ESP Members	Notes/Other Members	Freq of Full Assembly meetings	Chair	Vice-Chairs (no., status)	Executive Committee size and structure	Exec Cttee freq	Exec Cttee powers
East of England	102	70 (from 54 LAs) (69%)	31 (30%)	1 Broads Authority (1%)	twice yearly	Cllr Sue Sida-Lockett (Con)	3 in total: 1 voluntary sector; 1 Lab, 1 Lib Dem	40 members in total 28 LA members (70%); 12 voluntary sector (30%)	5-6 times per year	oversees work of constituent Panels and Committees; prepares Assembly budget and business plan; responds on Assembly's behalf to consultations when appropriate
East Midlands	111	70 (from 46 LAs) (63%)	35 (31%)	6 MEPs (5%)	quarterly	Cllr David Parsons (Con)	1: Graham Bennett (voluntary sector)	19 members in total Assembly Board: 12 LA Members (inc Chair), 7 ESEP Members (inc Vice-Chair)	every two months (in principle)	manages the work of the full Assembly; oversees other Board work
North East	72	49 (68%)	23 (32%)	0 (0%)	twice yearly with Special Plenary (on e.g. RSS) as required	Cllr Alex Watson (Lab)	3 in total: 1 majority party; 1 minority party (since summer '05); 1 SEP	15 members in total 60:40% split between LA and SEP Members		
North West	80	56 (46 LAs, plus 3 from Counties and 7 others determined by NWRA incl Nat Pk and Assoc of Parish Councils)	24 (13 private sector; 11 others)	Members represent a sub-region rather than a particular LA	3-4 times a year	Cllr John Joyce (Lab)	2 Deputy Chairs: 1 from SEP sector; 1 from LA	21 members in total 5 LA Members (3 from each of 5 sub-regions) and 6 ESP Members	quarterly	responsibility includes Scrutiny; Assembly policy

Region	total Members	LA Members	SEP/ESP Members	Notes/Other Members	Freq of Full Assembly meetings	Chair	Vice-Chairs (no., status)	Executive Committee size and structure	Exec Cttee freq	Exec Cttee powers
South East	111	74 (66%)	17 Soc/Env (15%)	17 Econ (15%); 3 town/parish councils (2.7%)	three times a year	Cllr Nick Skellett (Con)	5 in total; one is also Deputy Chair	27 members in total 66:33% split between LAs and other Members (same proportion as full Assembly)	6 times per year	
South West	117	70 (from 51 LAs) (60%) PROPOSED: 1 per LA	34 SEEPs (29%)	2 National Parks (1.5%); 2 Assoc of Local Councils (1.5%)	four times a year	Jackie Longworth (SEEP – Trade Union)	Deputy Chair (Lib Dem) plus 3 Vice Chairs (one Cllr each from Lab, Con and Ind)	121 members in total 5 LAs (70%), 6 SEEPs (30%), including all Vice-Chairs, Deputy Chair and Chair	4-6 times per year	oversees work of constituent Panels and Committees; manages day-to-day work of Assembly
West Midlands	100	68	32 (16 Business sector; 16 other)		quarterly	Cllr David Smith (Con)	3 (LA, business, other)	21 on the Board of Directors split 13:4:4 between LAs, business, other	B of D meets quarterly (1 month before full Assembly)	
Yorkshire & Humber	37	22 (60%)	15 (40%)	Assembly to act as the merged regional housing and planning body	quarterly (approx)	Cllr Peter Box (Lab)	1 (Deputy Chair), represents the Social Econ Env partners	Regional Executive Board, which will include Chairs of three sub-Boards on Housing, Planning and Transport. This will maintain the 60:40 split. The LA reps on the REB will include one from each sub-reg, one from each city-region and one 'rural'	meets in the months when there is no full Assembly session, or as required	Proposed: REB to oversee work of three topic-boards (planning, transport, housing) – 'regional strategic overview'