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CLES bulletin is a topical summary of articles which have appeared in the professional press. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of a subject area, drawing out the specific and common issues raised in the individual articles.

CLES Bulletin No. 1

The Regional White Paper

Recent press coverage of the Regional White Paper has provided us with a look at the Government's proposals for the English regions from a number of perspectives, including regeneration, planning, housing, local government and rural areas.

Regeneration and Renewal¹ looks at what the White Paper is likely to mean for regeneration, providing us with some informed guesses about the prospects for regional renewal based on the Paper's proposals and knowledge of what has happened elsewhere.

It considers the impact of regional government on local government, which currently consists of two layers, County Councils and District Councils. A vote in favour of Regional Assemblies will mean that one of these layers has to go. *Regeneration and Renewal* asks whether or not this level of disruption is justified, given that local government is not directly affected by the English form of devolution and no other European countries who

have gone down the regional government road have insisted upon this course of action.

Regeneration and Renewal suggests that the Paper is a good starting point as it could lead to more powers and resources being transferred to the regions once the Assemblies are established. However, they argue that there is much debate, variation in influence and strategising expected and not a great deal of power to deliver and *Regeneration and Renewal* point out that there is a real issue about what happens to regional policy under devolution, concluding that this question is not even posed, let alone answered in the White Paper.

New Start² also looks at the impact of the White Paper on regional regeneration, considering that if the proposals in the Paper come to fruition then Regional Assemblies are going to be at the heart of economic development and regeneration in the regions that have them. It is believed that to address the issues of the time, will take time and that there will be an effect on regional inequalities as some regions will not proceed and those that do will take years. *New Start* argues that eight regions heading for different structures with different timescales, heralds the prospects of upheaval and confusion and greater imbalance between regions. It also claims that the White Paper has avoided the issue of the distribution of funding and looking at the patterns of deprivation and disadvantage.

It concludes that regeneration could work just as well or as badly under a devolved structure as it does under a more traditional set-up, but what matters now is that it is seen as an important ingredient to those in the regions making the choices, and paying the bill.

Inside Housing³ looked at the implications for the housing sector, voicing concerns, based on the Scottish experience, that housing may not be given a high enough priority. It suggests that the proposals in the White Paper should provide the opportunity for the further development of existing regional housing arrangements, and that housing interests need to wield influence at the regional level in order to have an input into national policy.

Inside Housing informs us that Regional Assemblies will produce a regional housing

¹ Harding, Alan Your choice on English devolution *Regeneration and Renewal* 24 May 2002 p.12

² West, Tim A taste of things to come *New Start* 31 May 2002 pp.12-13

³ Slocombe, Louise Regional responsibilities *Inside Housing* 31 May 2002 pp.20-21

strategy, which will look at all aspects of the housing market and social housing, providing the opportunity for strategies which are tailored to regional housing issues. Also it will allow for greater strategy co-ordination between housing and other areas of assembly responsibility such as planning and economic development.

Inside Housing discusses the implications of the Paper on local authorities, pointing out that there is no mention of the local authority strategic role, begging the question of whether local authorities will still be required to produce local housing strategies.

It indicates that on the whole the White Paper provides positive opportunities for housing interests to respond to regional and sub-regional housing market variations, improve accountability at regional level and better integrate housing with other sectors.

*Planning*⁴ magazine raises concerns over the vacuum between local and regional planning tiers, the drawing of regional boundaries and the weaker demand for regional government in regions outside the North East and North West.

Planning says that the White Paper's recognition of the fundamental role of regional planning and the responsibilities for the new regional spatial strategies to be conferred upon the new assemblies, is a considerable improvement on the current arrangements for drawing up regional planning guidance.

It highlights the issue of the removal of local government and the amount of time it will take to set up regional government, arguing that the government has not thought the issues through enough, but that the paper provides a good starting point.

*Municipal Journal*⁵ examines the impact the White Paper will have on local authorities, asking can counties survive under assemblies? It delves into the increasing frustration in local authorities, amongst councillors that they no longer have any input into decisions and claims that this very model that is exasperating them has been chosen for the elected English Regional Assemblies, in that, while they will have 35 members, actual power will lie with the Leader and Cabinet.

⁴ Winkley, Rob Beliefs in powerful visions *Planning* 17 May 2002 p.8

⁵ Can counties survive under assemblies? *Municipal Journal* 17 May 2002 p.13

Where elected assemblies are established local government will be reduced to a single tier, perhaps signalling the end of County Councils, which has raised fears regarding divisions in local government.

*Municipal Journal*⁶ also looked at the implications for rural areas, voicing concerns that the drive towards regionalism will consume the energy of all levels of government, which would be better devoted to addressing the needs of countryside communities. *MJ* looks at the Government's claims that it has taken account of the rural dimension through the Rural White Paper and argues that while this was a fine document, it brought little in the shape of new resources to rural England.

MJ looks at fears that the new tier of government will inevitably be based in a regions city, and will have a predominantly urban perspective. It argues that from a rural standpoint, these new, large authorities will seem daunting and remote from the interests of the villages and dispersed communities of rural England. It concludes that too much effort is going into structures when really, services should come first.

The White Paper has been generally well received as a good foundation, which if built upon will successfully support areas such as regeneration, housing and planning, however there is a consensus that there is more work to be done. All disciplines are concerned with the issue of local government and the implications this will have for each area. We are provided with some valuable speculations but only time will tell whether or not the proposals in the White Paper will work in reality.

Siân Thomas
Information & Policy Researcher, CLES

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CLES
Express Networks
1 George Leigh Street
Manchester
M4 5DL
Tel 0161 236 7036
Fax 0161 236 1891
<http://www.cles.org.uk>

⁶ Pugsley, Steven Avoiding the funny farm *Municipal Journal* 14 June 2002 p.11