

# NEWS RELEASE

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## KEEP REGIONS DEMOCRATIC

Major regional decisions on jobs, housing, transport and the environment should be made by elected council leaders not undemocratic quangos, says the body representing England's Regional Assemblies.

The English Regions Network (ERN) warns of a 'democratic deficit' in Government proposals to shift Assemblies' regional planning powers to unelected Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). Government's 'Prosperous Places' consultation, which closed on 20 June, proposes that RDAs take responsibility for a new Single Regional Strategy which would combine existing planning and economic strategies.

The ERN supports the idea of a new Single Regional Strategy linking housing, transport, environment and economic needs but argues strongly that work should be led by a forum of council leaders.

Cllr David S Smith, chairman, West Midlands Regional Assembly said: "For many years, democratically elected members in the West Midlands have coordinated regional housing, transport and planning. These services have been continuously delivered with the West Midlands Local Government Association team working together with all 38 councils in the Region and more recently the same team delivering with our partners in the Assembly.

"It is in fact local government that delivers the services that matter most to our communities. We are responsible for the planning that will generate the jobs growth, housing, leisure and transport that make our communities the places people wish to live. That is why we were elected. That is why we must develop and deliver the prosperity that must come from within, but also with support from national government."

The Government plans to take forward changes to regional decision-making in the Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill announced in the draft legislative programme for 2008/9.

**ENDS**

## **Notes to Editors:**

The ERN submission to the 'Prosperous Places' consultation is available at [www.ern.gov.uk](http://www.ern.gov.uk). It includes the following ERN Position Statement:

The ERN:

- (a) supports a single regional strategy based on the principles of sustainable development;
- (b) recognises that the single regional strategy needs regional buy-in if it is to be credible and effective;
- (c) opposes the democratic deficit implied in the proposed transfer of planning, housing and transport powers to an unelected government agency<sup>1</sup>;
- (d) proposes that the forum of council leaders (or regional equivalent) be responsible for development and submission of the single regional strategy;
- (e) recognises that each region needs the freedom to develop its own governance arrangements including an appropriate future role for stakeholder representatives.

The Government consultation document *Prosperous Places: Taking forward the review of sub-national economic development and regeneration* is available at [www.berr.gov.uk/files/file45468.pdf](http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file45468.pdf)

**The English Regions Network** is the umbrella organisation for England's eight regions and works to:

- represent the collective views of Regions to Government and other key national and European institutions
- encourage new thinking and research on the regional agenda
- sharing best practice and facilitating interregional networking amongst Regions.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the position ERN has adopted on this issue is not at this time supported by the North West Regional Assembly.

**Regional Assemblies are** partnership bodies which bring together representatives from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Regional Assemblies perform four core activities:

- Regional Planning
- Regional Housing
- Advocacy and Policy Development
- Scrutiny and Accountability

For more information visit [www.ern.gov.uk](http://www.ern.gov.uk)