

<h1>REPORT TO EXECUTIVE</h1>			
PORTFOLIO AREA: POLICY & PERFORMANCE			
Date of Meeting:	27 JANUARY 2003		
Public	Yes		
Key Decision:	No	Recorded in Forward Plan:	No
Inside Policy Framework No			

Title: REGIONAL GOVERNMENT: GUIDANCE ON SEEKING SOUNDINGS

Report of: TOWN CLERK AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Report reference: CE.1/03

Summary: The Government has launched its consultation on the level of interest in holding referendums on elected regional assemblies. The Government has also published draft guidance on local government reorganisation in areas, which have referenda. Both consultations end on 03 March 2003.

Recommendations:

The Executive is requested to:

1. Refer the report to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment.
2. Indicate whether local consultation should be carried out.
3. Advise the Council of the views of the Executive on:
 - a. The draft guidance by the Boundary Committee
 - b. Whether or not a referendum should be held in the North West of England.

Contact Officer: Peter Stybelski

Ext: 7001

1. THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES (PREPARATIONS) BILL

1. Following publication of the White Paper, 'Your Region, Your Choice' previously reported to the Council (TC.133/02) the Government has now introduced the Regional Assemblies (Preparation) Bill to provide the opportunity for English region(s) to hold a referendum about establishing elected regional assembly/assemblies during this Parliament.

2. The decision as to which region(s) should be invited to hold a referendum rests with the Secretary of State. Ministerial soundings are currently underway and the soundings exercise is inviting views, information and evidence from Councils, regional chambers, MP's, MEP's and others on the level of interest in each region in holding a referendum. There is no element of compulsion as it is up to each region to demonstrate that there is sufficient support for Regional Government and for a referendum to be held.
3. The full consultation paper is Appended (Appendix A). The Executive is asked to recommend a response to the Council in time for the end of the consultation period of 3 March 2003, and to seek the views of Overview and Scrutiny and local organisations, partnerships etc, if it so wishes. It is important to note that the consultation at this stage is on the level of interest in having a referendum, not on whether the organisation or person supports regional government or otherwise.
4. The Bill requires that any region permitted to progress to a referendum will be subject to a review of local government in that region to establish a wholly Unitary pattern of local government. Therefore, if the Secretary of State decides to call a referendum in a region, The Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission will review the current two-tier areas (Counties and Districts) of that region and recommend the pattern of unitary local government. Existing Unitary authorities would not be affected.
5. The Government has published draft policy and procedure guidance to the Boundary Committee for England for this task. This is available on the ODPM web site via www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/conindex.htm and a copy is attached (Appendix B). This guidance is that which the Government intends to issue to the Committee before it begins a review of local government in any region under the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill.
6. Subject to the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill gaining Royal Assent in say April 2003, the work of the Electoral Commission Boundary Committee could start early in 2003, in those regions anticipated to move forward to a Referendum. Thereafter, the Minister may be in a position to announce in June 2003 which if any region (s) are to proceed to a referendum. Regions that do not go ahead with a referendum initially will have the chance at a later date.
7. The Government has made it clear that the Boundary Committee review is independent and can recommend any form of wholly unitary authorities appropriate in a region.
8. Representatives from the Electoral Commission and the Commission's Boundary Committee gave a presentation to elected members of the North West Regional Assembly and Economic and Social Partners in January 2003 and made the following points:
 - The Electoral Commission and Boundary Committee are independent of Government and 'non – political'
 - The process would include four stages
 - I. Submissions
 - II. Consideration of draft recommendations
 - III. Consultation
 - IV. Consideration of consultation responses and reports to Government.
 - The Committee anticipate that review of local government will take approximately 12 months with a report to Government in Spring 2004. Local authorities and localities will have 12 weeks to present their initial views.
 - The Committee would welcome propositions with evidenced support.

Cross party agreement between local government and its partners will be a powerful influence. Alignment of council boundaries with partnerships and other major agencies is significant.

- The Commission is asked to consider not only communities of place but to give weight to 'wider patterns of community within an area and the economic links between communities'. Consideration is also to be given to traditional patterns of attachment and established place names including country identities. Objective criteria are encouraged e.g. travel to work areas, shopping patterns etc.
 - No criteria have been established for minimum or maximum population size.
 - The Committee will not take sole account of public opinions as this is to be balanced with what's best for local government and the region.
 - Account will be taken of the levels of achievement of and performance of existing authorities. New authorities will be expected to be highly performing.
 - Issues of costs and savings must be identified and audited and will come into play in weighing finely judged proposals.
 - Revised electoral arrangements will only be considered for new authorities on new boundaries (combinations of existing districts will not trigger an electoral review)
 - New authorities can cross-district and county boundaries within a region. Existing unitary authority boundaries and regional boundaries may not be changed.
 - Town and parish councils will not be affected (but have an important influencing role)
 - More than one option may be identified for further consultation.
1. Overall the Boundary Committee will be seeking improved outcomes in local government through better quality decision making, use and allocation of resources, improved strategic direction and integration and engagement with key stakeholders.

It may be noted that in the guidance the Boundary Committee is asked to consider:

- Existing district council services being carried out by larger units, up to the size of the county council.
- County functions being carried out 'by smaller units but at least of a size that, on the basis of current experience of English local government, would have the capacity to carry out the full range of county functions.
- Any increase in the joint arrangements which, would be needed by the area.

2. CONSULTATION

The Executive is requested to refer this report to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to indicate the consultation to be carried out prior to any response by the full Council.

3. STAFFING/RESOURCES COMMENTS

None at this stage.

4. CITY TREASURER'S COMMENTS

None

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

None

6. CORPORATE COMMENTS

N/A

7. RISK MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT

N/A

8. EQUALITY ISSUES

N/A

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

10. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

N/A

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

As front sheet

12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To allow the Council to respond to the Government consultation papers by 03 March 2003.



OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill

Soundings exercise on the level of interest in
each English region in holding a referendum
about establishing an elected regional assembly

December 2002

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

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December 2002

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Introduction

1. This paper seeks views, information and evidence on the level of interest in each English region in holding a referendum about whether to establish an elected regional assembly. (This is distinct from the level of interest in each region in an elected regional assembly).
2. It is the Government's intention, by introducing the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, to provide the opportunity for at least one region to hold a referendum about establishing an elected assembly during this Parliament. Your response will contribute to the Government's decision on which region(s) should be the first ones in which a review of local government should be carried out, with a view to holding a referendum in that/those region(s) about establishing an elected assembly. *However, the possible consequences of this soundings exercise are subject to Parliament enacting the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 14 November 2002.*

Sending your responses

3. Please use the pro-forma attached at Annex A to provide your response. This pro-forma is also available on the web site of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister via www.regions.odpm.gov.uk/governance/prepbill/index.htm. It would be particularly helpful if you could respond by e-mail to referenduminterest@odpm.gov.uk if possible.
4. Alternatively, please send your completed pro-forma (or other responses) together with any supporting evidence to:

Regional Policy Unit (regions soundings exercise)
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 1/A6
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
5. We invite responses by 3 March 2003. It would be helpful if responses from representative groups could give evidence of and a summary of the people and organisations they represent, and how they have assessed their views.
6. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister may wish to make responses to this soundings exercise available to Parliament and for public inspection in the Office's library. We will assume that you do not object to this unless you specify otherwise. Responses that are submitted on a confidential basis will, nevertheless, be included in any numerical analysis of responses.
7. Any questions, comments or complaints about this exercise should be sent to:

Ian Scotter
Regional Policy Unit (regions soundings exercise)
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 1/B6
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Background

8. On 9 May 2002 the Government published the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions*. This White Paper set out the Government's proposals for establishing elected regional assemblies in regions where people vote for them in a referendum. As the current level of interest appears to vary across England, it is likely that referendums will not be held in all English regions at the same time.
9. A "region" is one of the eight regions in England, but not including London, which is listed in Schedule 1 to the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. Each has its own Government Office and Regional Development Agency. (The regions are: East Midlands, East of England, North East, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire & the Humber – see the map at Annex B.)
10. As set out in the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice*, it is intended that elected regional assemblies would develop a strategic vision for improving the quality of life in their region, in particular improving economic performance. They would be responsible for setting priorities, delivering regional strategies and allocating funding. They would have powers to make a difference in key areas such as jobs, transport, housing, culture and environment. In addition, they would have a significant influencing role, including scrutiny powers and making appointments to regional public bodies. The White Paper, available at www.regions.odpm.gov.uk/governance/whitepaper/index.htm, contains more information about the proposed functions and constitution of an elected regional assembly. A summary of the White Paper is also available at this site. The establishment of elected regional assemblies will require primary legislation. This will be introduced, when Parliamentary time allows, following at least one 'yes' vote at a referendum.
11. The functions of an elected regional assembly will be taken from central government and its agencies, or existing regional organisations, not from local authorities. Nevertheless, in areas that currently have both a district and county council, a regional assembly would add a third tier of elected government below the national level. The Government believes that moving to a single tier of local government in regions that opt for a regional assembly would simplify relationships for both local authorities and regional assemblies. So before a referendum on establishing an elected assembly can be held in any region, the Boundary Committee for England must have first made recommendations on the best unitary structure for those parts of the region that currently have 'two-tiers' (both a county and district council). There will be no change to existing unitary authorities. Any reorganisation of local government will only go ahead where the Secretary of State proposes that an elected regional assembly should be established following a referendum.
12. Draft guidance to the Boundary Committee was published for consultation on 2 December 2002. Copies of this guidance and the accompanying consultation paper are available from the ODPM web site via www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/coindex.htm or alternatively from:

Sam Caughey
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 5/B1
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Tel: 020 7944 8153

Choosing the region(s) to hold a referendum

13. The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill currently before Parliament makes provision for the Secretary of State to order referendums to be held in any of the English regions outside London and to direct the Boundary Committee for England to conduct a local government review. A copy of the Bill can be obtained from <http://www.regions.odpm.gov.uk/governance/prepbill/index.htm>.
14. *Parliament will consider the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill carefully and may amend it. This soundings exercise is being conducted on the assumption that the relevant provisions in the Bill will remain substantially unchanged. However, the possibility that some things will change whilst the Bill is before Parliament cannot be ruled out.*
15. Under the Bill, before a referendum can be ordered by the Secretary of State, the Boundary Committee must have made its recommendations regarding its review of the local government structure in the region (see paragraph 11 above). It is intended by the Government that the primary factor in determining which region(s) will undergo a review will be the level of interest in holding a referendum in each region. So, subject to what is said below in paragraphs 16 to 18, where the Secretary of State is satisfied that there is sufficient interest, it is intended that he will direct the Boundary Committee to conduct a review (with a view to subsequently holding a referendum). Where the level of interest appears to be insufficient in a region, it is not intended to require a local government review there.
16. In some cases, the level of interest in a region may be inconclusive. Or it may be that so many regions have a high level of interest that we need to look at whether it is appropriate to direct reviews in all those regions. In such circumstances, we may look at a range of other factors, which are set out in the Bill, in order to choose which regions are to have a local government review. These may include the potential effects on the two-tier (county and district) local authorities in a region of conducting a local government review and the differences between regions of those effects.
17. A review will inevitably have some effect on the local authorities in two-tier areas. Where the level of interest in a referendum is not clear-cut, there would be a stronger case for having an early review and referendum if the effects on local government in the region would be relatively minor. The effects of a review on the two-tier local authorities in the region (taken as a whole) are likely to vary between regions, for example, because of differences in the number and population of such authorities in each region.
18. Before making a direction, the Secretary of State may also consider the implications for the Boundary Committee of conducting reviews in two or more regions simultaneously or close together, and/or the resources needed for the Boundary Committee to carry out reviews.
19. However, this soundings exercise is not seeking your comments on these other matters (which are currently set out in clause 12(5) of the Bill).

Soundings

20. Rather, this paper seeks views, evidence and information on the level of interest in each region in *holding a referendum* on establishing an elected regional assembly. Please note that this is distinct from the level of interest in each region in an elected regional assembly. The Secretary of State cannot take account of the level of interest in having an elected regional assembly when deciding which region(s) should undergo local government reviews (and, subsequently, referendums). If you have any views, backed up by evidence or information, on differences in the levels of interest in holding a referendum between the different regions, you may also wish to provide this to the Secretary of State.
21. Your views and the evidence and information you provide will help the Secretary of State decide which region(s) should be the first to be subject to a review of local government, with a view to holding a referendum. The Secretary of State will also take account of such published information as he thinks appropriate. You are invited to draw our attention to any published material which you think is relevant to the Secretary of State's decision.
22. The Secretary of State will take account of relevant letters and petitions from members of the public and organisations that are provided to him. Petitions and letters should show that those signing them have a connection with the region such as, for example, being a resident in the region, or otherwise display how those expressing a view are qualified to do so. Similarly, the Secretary of State will take account of opinion polls, to the extent he considers that they are relevant to the decision and have been conducted in a way likely to generate a fair and representative outcome. One condition a poll must meet in order to be relevant to the Secretary of State's decision is that it must relate to the level of interest in holding a referendum, as opposed to the level of interest in having an elected assembly.
23. We are also writing to regional chambers, local authorities and others such as MPs and MEPs in the English regions (excluding London) to inform them of this exercise and to ask them to respond, giving views, evidence and information. What they provide will be strengthened if it is clear that they have consulted widely.
24. The Secretary of State will be taking account of a very wide range of views, information and evidence in reaching his decision. It is not practicable to set a "pass mark" above which a region would automatically hold a referendum and below which it automatically would not. In some cases the Secretary of State may have to balance several factors. Ultimately, these must be matters for the Secretary of State's judgement.
25. These soundings are initially to inform the Secretary of State's decision on which region(s) should be subject to a local government review. The Boundary Committee will need to have carried out a review of the region before the Secretary of State can order a referendum there. However, the Bill will not require the Secretary of State to reconsider the level of interest in a region in holding a referendum before doing this, unless either more than two years have passed between first directing a review and making an order for a referendum, or the Secretary of State has cause to think that there has been a significant reduction in the level of interest in holding a referendum, to the extent that he thinks that he would not have made a direction in the first place. So this sort of soundings exercise may not be repeated before an order is made holding a referendum. However, if, once directions have been made, you wish to make any representations that the level of interest in a referendum has changed in any of the regions for which a direction has been made, you will be welcome to do so. However, no specific invitation to do so will be issued.

Timetable

26. The soundings period ends on 3 March 2003. We request that all responses are sent to us by this date.
27. The Government intends to take its decision on which region(s) should be subject to a review of local government shortly after the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill receives Royal Assent. The relevant provisions of the Bill would be commenced on Royal Assent so as to allow for this. The Boundary Committee, as a consequence of a direction, may therefore start a local government review of the chosen region(s) within around 2 months of Royal Assent. A review must be carried out in a region before a referendum about establishing an elected regional assembly can be held.
28. The Government proposes to explain its choice of region(s) to Parliament, and to publish a summary of the views received during the soundings.
29. Regions that do not go ahead with a referendum initially will have a chance at a later date.

ANNEX A

PRO-FORMA FOR RESPONSES TO THE SOUNDINGS EXERCISE ON THE LEVEL OF INTEREST IN EACH REGION IN HOLDING A REFERENDUM ABOUT ESTABLISHING AN ELECTED REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

1. Your name, or that of the organisation on whose behalf you are responding (if you are responding on behalf of a representative group, please list the people/organisations you represent):
2. Please indicate the region that your comments relate to (Please tick one box. Please complete a separate pro forma if you wish to respond in relation to more than one region):

- ☐ East Midlands
☐ North East
☐ South East
☐ West Midlands

- ☐ East of England
☐ North West
☐ South West
☐ Yorkshire & The Humber

3. What is your connection to the region for which you are responding (e.g. resident in region, work in region, business in region)?

4. Postal address:

5. E-mail address:

6. Do you want a referendum in your region? Yes ☐ No ☐

7. What is your view on the level of interest in holding a referendum about establishing an elected regional assembly in the region for which you are responding? Please tick the box you believe best represents the overall level of interest:

Very Strong

☐

Strong

☐

Neither strong nor weak

☐

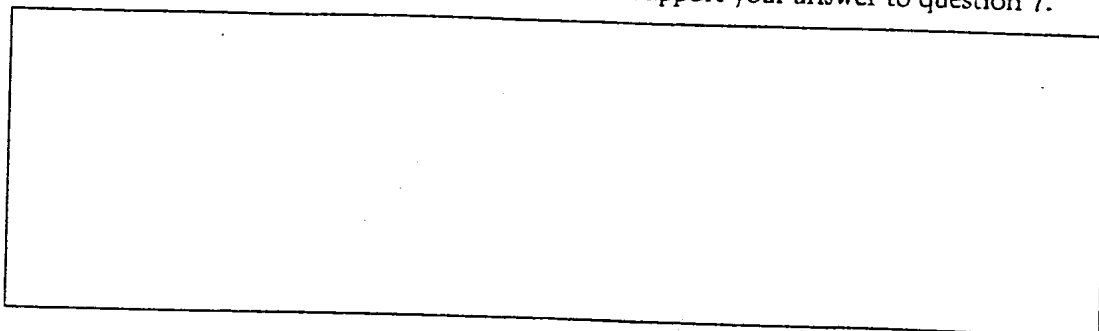
Weak

☐

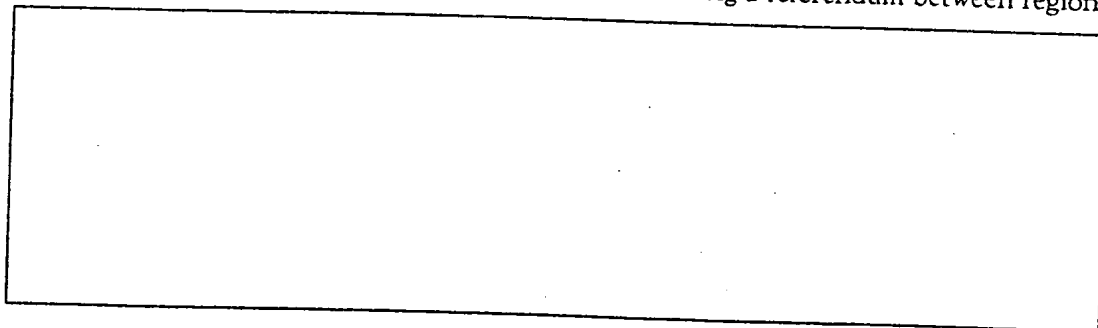
Very weak

☐

8. Please give reasoning, evidence and information to support your answer to question 7.



9. Please use this space to inform us of any information or evidence you have (if any) regarding the differences in the levels of interest in holding a referendum between regions.



Responses are requested by 3 March 2003.

Please send to: referenduminterest@odpm.gov.uk

If not sending via e-mail, please send your completed response to:

Regional Policy Unit (regions soundings exercise)
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 1/A6
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister may wish to make responses to this soundings exercise available to Parliament and for public inspection in the Office's library. We will assume that you do not object to this unless you specify otherwise. Responses that are submitted on a confidential basis will, nevertheless, be included in any numerical analysis of responses.

Thank you for responding.

ANNEX B

MAP OF THE ENGLISH REGIONS



List of recipients

Constitutional Conventions
English Regions Network
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Principal local authorities in English regions outside London
Regional Chambers/Assemblies
Regional Chambers of Commerce
Regional Confederation of British Industry
Regional Consortium
Regional Local Government Associations
Regional Institute of Directors
Regional TUC
Sustainable Development Roundtables

B



OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill

Local Government Reviews

Consultation on Proposed Statutory
Guidance to be issued by the
Secretary of State

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 3000
Website: www.odpm.gov.uk

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December 2002

About this Consultation Exercise

- 1 The Regional Assemblies (Preparation) Bill ("the Bill") currently before Parliament makes provision for the Secretary of State to direct the Boundary Committee for England to undertake a review of local government structure in any of the English regions in advance of a referendum on establishing an elected assembly.
- 2 The Bill further provides that in undertaking a review, the Boundary Committee shall have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. A draft of the guidance that the Secretary of State is minded to issue if the Bill is enacted is set out in the appendix to this Paper.
- 3 The Government invites comments on this draft and in particular seeks views on the content of the guidance – its scope and the range of issues that are seen as being material for the Boundary Committee's consideration of local government structures.
- 4 The draft guidance will be of particular interest to members and senior officers of local authorities. Copies of the consultation paper are being sent to the Boundary Committee, all principal local authorities, regional chambers and other key stakeholders in a region, to the various representative bodies of principal and parish councils and to a range of bodies, including academic institutions, which have an interest in the issues.
- 5 Your response will contribute to the Government's thinking on how best to provide advice and guidance to the Boundary Committee. This consultation is subject to Parliament enacting the Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 14 November.

Sending your responses

- 6 We invite responses by 3 March 2003. If possible, please send your responses via e-mail to: steve.a'court@odpm.gsi.gov.uk.

- 7 Alternatively, please send your comments to:

Steve A'Court
Democracy and Local Governance Division
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 5/B1
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Telephone: 020 7944 4256
Fax: 020 7944 4109

- 8 It would be helpful if responses from representative groups could give a summary of the people and organisations they represent.

- 9 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) may wish to make responses to these proposals available to Parliament and to public inspection in the ODPM's library. We will assume that you do not object to this unless you specify otherwise. Responses that are submitted on a confidential basis will, nevertheless, be included in any numerical analysis of responses.
- 10 Any questions, comments or complaints about this consultation exercise should be sent to:

Mrs M A Crosby
Democracy and Local Governance Division
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 5/B1
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Background

- 11 On 9 May 2002 the Government published a White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions*. This White Paper set out the Government's proposals for establishing elected regional assemblies in regions where people vote for them in a referendum. As interest varies across England, referendums will not be held in all English regions at the same time.
- 12 Elected regional assemblies will develop a strategic vision for improving the quality of life in their region, in particular improving economic performance. They will be responsible for setting priorities, delivering regional strategies and allocating funding. They will have powers to make a difference in key areas such as jobs, transport, housing, culture and environment. In addition, they will have a significant influencing role, including scrutiny powers and making appointments to regional public bodies. The White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice*, available on the Internet at www.regions.odpm.gov.uk/governance/whitepaper/index.htm contains more information about the proposed functions and constitution of an elected regional assembly.
- 13 Almost all of the functions of an elected regional assembly will be taken from central government and its agencies, not from local authorities. Nevertheless, in areas that currently have a district and county council, a regional assembly would add a third tier of elected government below the national level. The Government believes that moving to a single tier of local government in regions that opt for a regional assembly would simplify relationships for both local authorities and regional assemblies and make it much clearer to the public who does what. So in any region where a referendum on establishing an elected assembly is to be held, there will first be an independent review of local government with a view to recommending the best unitary structure for the 'two-tier' areas in that region. Existing unitary authorities will not be subject to the review. Any reorganisation of local government can only go ahead where the Secretary of State proposes that an elected regional assembly is to be established following a referendum.

Directing the Boundary Committee

- 14 The Bill currently before Parliament makes provision for the Secretary of State to direct the Boundary Committee to undertake local government reviews. It also sets out the review procedure. A copy of the Bill is available on the Internet at www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200203/cmbills/003/2003003.htm. Chapter 9 of the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice* also provides further background on this process.
- 15 Parliament is considering the Bill and may amend it. This consultation is being conducted on the assumption that the relevant provisions in the Bill will remain unchanged. However, the possibility that some things will change whilst the Bill is before Parliament cannot be ruled out.
- 16 The draft Guidance in the appendix reflects the provisions on the Bill as introduced in the House of Commons on 14 November.
- 17 The Government's priority for local councils is for them to be strong community leaders and to deliver quality local services. In general, the Government believes that this priority can equally well be achieved by unitary or two-tier councils. The need for the proposed reviews leading to unitary local government throughout certain regions is to avoid the situation whereby, in a region with a directly elected assembly, there would be three principal tiers of sub-national government.
- 18 The Bill makes provision for the criteria which is to apply to local government reviews. The Boundary Committee is to be required to conduct reviews with regard to the need to:
 - (a) assume that there is an elected assembly for the region;
 - (b) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - (d) secure effective and convenient local government;
 - (e) have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 19 The Bill also provides that these local government reviews are not to affect the boundaries or structure of existing unitary authorities in the region concerned.

Timetable

- 20 If the Bill receives Royal Assent, the Government intends to take its decision on which regions should be subject to a review of local government, with a view to holding a referendum in this Parliament on establishing an elected assembly, shortly thereafter. The relevant provisions of the Bill will be commenced on Royal Assent so as to allow for this. The Boundary Committee, as a consequence, may be directed to start a local government review of the chosen region(s) within 1-2 months of Royal Assent. The Government proposes to explain its choice of regions to Parliament, and to publish a summary of the views received during the consultation.

Appendix

This is a draft of the guidance which the Secretary of State is minded to issue to the Boundary Committee for England if the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill receives Royal Assent

DRAFT

POLICY AND PROCEDURE GUIDANCE TO THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Contents		Page
Chapter 1	The Statutory Framework	4
Chapter 2	The Context of the Review	5
Chapter 3	The Approach to the Review	9
Chapter 4	Community Interests and Identity	11
Chapter 5	Effective and Convenient Local Government	13
Chapter 6	The Review Process	17
Annex A	Progress on proposals in the White Paper “Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services”	20
Annex B	Priorities for local services	24
B1	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	
B2	Department for Culture, Media and Sport	
B3	Department for Education and Skills	
B4	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	
B5	Department of Health	
B6	Department of Trade and Industry	
B7	Department for Transport	
B8	Department for Work and Pensions	
B9	The Home Office	
B10	The Lord Chancellors Department	
Annex C	Organisations the Boundary Committee should consult	58

Chapter 1: The Statutory Framework

- 1.1 This Guidance on matters of policy and procedure in connection with the conduct of local government reviews and the making of recommendations under the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) [Act] ("the Act") is issued by the Secretary of State.
- 1.2 Section [13(8)] of the Act requires the Boundary Committee for England ("the Boundary Committee") to have regard to this Guidance when carrying out their functions under Part 2 of the Act.
- 1.3 Section [12(1)] of the Act provides that where the Secretary of State is considering whether to cause a referendum to be held in a region about the establishment of an elected regional assembly, he may direct the Boundary Committee to carry out a local government review of that region, and to make recommendations.
- 1.4 Under sections [12 and 13] of the Act recommendations are to be made as to what structural change is most appropriate for the region, and as to any boundary change that should be made in the region in connection with or to facilitate the carrying out of the structural change. The section requires structural change to be recommended for all those areas in the region which presently have two tiers of local government, but the Boundary Committee is prohibited by section [13(5)] from considering any boundary changes outside those areas or to the boundaries of existing unitary authorities.
- 1.5 In carrying out a local government review the Boundary Committee is required by section [13(8)] of the Act to:
 - a) assume that there is an elected assembly for the region;
 - b) have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - c) have regard to the need to secure effective and convenient local government;
 - d) have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 1.6 Section [14] of the Act makes further provision as to the procedures for a local government review by applying in relation to such a review certain provisions (with modifications) of the Local Government Act 1992. These 1992 provisions include the definition of structural change as the replacement, in any non-metropolitan area, of the two principal tiers of local government with a single tier.
- 1.7 Section [15] of the Act makes provision for the implementation of recommendations from a local government review. Section [16] makes further provisions on implementation by applying in relation to such implementation certain provisions (with modifications) of the Local Government Act 1992.

Chapter 2: The Context of the Review

- 2.1 To improve the quality of life of people everywhere in the country is a central aim for the Government. It has thus put in place programmes and policies to modernise the country's constitution, to devolve and decentralise power, to reinvigorate democracy, and to underpin all with sound and prudent finances delivering that essential sustainable economic growth. The Scottish Parliament and Elected Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland have been established. In England, the Government has established the Greater London Authority and is pursuing a range of integrated policies and programmes for maintaining and improving the quality of life centered around the interconnected agendas for sustainable communities, modernising local government, and for the Regions.

Local Government

- 2.2 As the tier of democratic government that can respond most directly to local needs and circumstances, local authorities in England have a vital role to play in maintaining and improving the quality of life in local communities. Through the effective delivery of a wide range of local services, councils can improve and help deliver the outcomes that matter most to local people – in education, health, housing, social care, transport and in the creation of clean and safe local environments.
- 2.3 Local people rightly expect council services to be of a high quality. They also want a voice in the decisions that councils make about the services that affect them, and somebody to speak up for their interests and aspirations.
- 2.4 Since 1997, the Government has worked with local government to create the conditions under which councils can deliver high quality and improving local services and provide strong and confident local leadership that inspires the trust of individuals and local communities. A range of measures have been introduced in the 1999 and 2000 Local Government Acts. These have:
- a) introduced requirements on local authorities to secure continuous improvement in the delivery of local services through Best Value;
 - b) established new political management structures to improve the efficiency, transparency and accountability of local leadership and decision-making;
 - c) introduced community strategies and the broad new power of well-being to enable authorities to work with local people, and public, private and voluntary sector partners to identify, develop and deliver communities' vision for their area; and
 - d) introduced new codes of conduct for elected councillors to ensure a high level of trust between councillors and those they represent.

- 2.5 The recent White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services", sets out a programme for building on these reforms to strengthen democratic accountability, support community engagement and partnership working and provide councils with greater freedom and more powers to meet people's needs and aspirations. The aim is to ensure that:
- a) local communities have access to good quality local services;
 - b) that local people have the information they need in order to hold elected representatives to account for their council's performance; and
 - c) that councils can enjoy the confidence of the public, private and voluntary sector partners with whom they work, and of the people and businesses they serve.
- 2.6 Central to this agenda is the need for strong and accountable local political leadership. Leading and empowering communities is a key role for local authorities, which they, unlike any other local organisation, are designed specifically to fulfil. It is their task to provide the strong democratic leadership that goes hand-in-hand with thriving communities, and helps to enhance the quality of life of individuals and communities, boosts the local economy, improves the environment and contributes to the achievement of wider regional and national policy goals. It is democratically elected local authorities that provide the means, within communities, for making choices, setting priorities and articulating and resolving the inevitable conflicts and difficult choices that will arise.
- 2.7 Effective community leadership also means providing the necessary economic infrastructure, developing social capital by supporting civic engagement and enhancing environmental quality. Community leaders recognise that actions at sub-regional and regional levels affect the development of local areas and that local activity contributes to the achievement of wider goals. Local authorities are well placed to champion their communities' interests, join with neighbouring areas to identify and achieve common goals and take local action which promotes the wider interests of the region and beyond.
- 2.8 The other key role that local authorities play is in delivering many of the high quality public services that people are entitled to expect. Democratically accountable authorities are ideally placed to ensure that services (such as health, social services, planning, transport and leisure) are tailored to reflect local circumstances and the particular needs of the locality and individual service users.

2.9 Key proposals in the White Paper are:

- a) regular comprehensive performance assessments (CPAs) of all councils, identifying how they are performing against clearly defined and exacting performance standards;
- b) from those assessments, clear and concise public information about councils' performance to enable people to hold their democratically elected leaders to account;
- c) additional freedoms, powers and flexibilities for councils with the track record and capacity to use them; and
- d) the removal of unnecessary bureaucracy, red-tape and regulation.

2.10 Implementation of these proposals is well under way – Annex A. In particular, the first results of the CPAs will be published in December for county and unitary councils with district councils to follow; some of the additional freedoms will be introduced from November 2002 and the Government has already announced plans to de-regulate 84 consent regime powers and more will follow.

The Regional Agenda

2.11 The White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions" sets out the Government's plans to strengthen regional government to reflect the different opportunities and challenges faced in individual regions and to ensure that functions are carried out at an appropriate level in England.

2.12 The Government's proposals for directly elected regional assemblies, where people want them, will provide regions with the opportunity to take control of the strategic priorities and decisions that affect them by:

- a) decentralising power from central government; and
- b) increasing accountability to people in the region.

2.13 The role and functions of regional assemblies will not duplicate those of local authorities. As described in Chapters 3 and 4 of the Regional Governance White Paper the functions of regional assemblies will be those which would otherwise be largely carried out by central government, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, or existing regional chambers. The functions and responsibilities of local government will not be affected by implementation of the new regional tier in regions that opt for directly elected regional assemblies. Accordingly, the local government agenda described above, is as relevant to authorities in regions with elected assemblies, as to those without.

- 2.14 However, where people in a region opt for directly elected assemblies, this would add a third principal tier of elected government in some areas – regional, county and district. The Government believes that this would be one tier too many.
- 2.15 Therefore, before any referendum is held about the establishment of an elected assembly in a region, the Boundary Committee will have been directed to carry out, and completed, a review of two-tier local government in that region and recommending the best wholly-unitary structure.

Chapter 3: The Approach to the Review

- 3.1 As outlined in Chapter 1 of the Guidance, the aim of a local government review in a region is to make recommendations as to what structural change is most appropriate for that Region. The judgement as to what is the most appropriate structural change must be made by the Boundary Committee having regard both to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government, and to Guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 3.2 In today's context, as described in Chapter 2, the Government considers the role of local authorities is to deliver high quality public services and to lead and empower local communities through an effective process of preparing and implementing community strategies and working with partner organisations to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas. Central and local government share a commitment to the delivery of sustainable improvements to local quality of life – indeed, this commitment underpins the new agenda for Sustainable Communities (the Deputy Prime Minister's Parliamentary Statement of 18th July) which sets out a new vision for building sustainable, thriving communities.
- 3.3 The Government believes that in considering the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities, the Boundary Committee will want to give most weight to those aspects of community identities and interests that have the greatest relevance for the role of local authorities today. Likewise, the Government considers that the Boundary Committee will want to reach an understanding of effectiveness and convenience by giving most weight to local authorities' current role of delivering quality services and effective community leadership. Accordingly the Government believes that the most appropriate structural change for an area will be the one resulting in those unitary local authorities that are best able to deliver the modernisation agenda for quality services and community leadership and to take forward the agenda for sustainable communities.
- 3.4 Some of the most significant factors that determine the ability of authorities to deliver this agenda have little direct relation to the geography, structure or size of the authority itself. There is some evidence to suggest that the quality of political management, a willingness to innovate, and a sound corporate structure and capacity, are the most significant determinants of high-performing councils. Nevertheless, the ability of authorities to develop, or sustain, those attributes may be affected by their geography, structure and size. With this in mind, the Government believes the Boundary Committee will need to consider the impact on the organisational and managerial capacity of authorities of:

- a) existing district council functions being carried out by larger local government units including as appropriate a unit of a size comparable to the existing county council;
- b) county functions being undertaken by smaller units but at least of a size that, on the basis of current experience of English local government, would have the capacity to deliver the full range of county functions; and
- c) any increase in joint arrangements that exist in the area concerned at present.

3.5 In order to do this, the Government believes that the Committee will want to look at:

- a) the track record of existing two-tier local authorities as evidenced by published best value and comprehensive performance assessment data (see paragraph 5.3);
- b) the nature and effectiveness of community engagement and existing partnership arrangements (see paragraphs 4.5 – 4.10); and
- c) the view it reaches of the capacity and resources likely to be available to the new unitary authorities (see paragraphs 5.9 – 5.10).

3.6 In the Government's view, the purpose of this consideration is to help identify the unitary structure which, in the Boundary Committee's view, is most likely to support high-performing councils capable of delivering the modernisation agenda for quality services and community leadership.

3.7 In so doing, however, the Committee should be aware of the significant progress that existing authorities may be making in developing their leadership role and improving the delivery of local services. The Boundary Committee, therefore, should be mindful of the impact of their recommendations on, for example, existing partnership arrangements in the region, and should consider how best to build on the progress that has already been made.

3.8 In carrying out such a review, the Committee is required by section [13(8)(a)] to assume there is an elected regional assembly. The Government has clearly indicated the role that an assembly will play in Chapters 3 and 4 of the Regional Governance White Paper. The Government advises the Boundary Committee that there is no intention to have Regional Assemblies take on local government functions.

Chapter 4: Community Identity and Interests

- 4.1 Chapter 3 explained that part of the modernising agenda is about effective community leadership and reflecting the wishes of local people. The Government considers that it is important to work within this agenda, so would suggest, in the consideration of community identities and interests, that the Boundary Committee may want to give weight to those aspects that have the greatest relevance for local authorities' present role.
- 4.2 Within any area there are a large number of different communities. There are communities of place, e.g. those which stem from allegiance to a particular area, village, or town; and communities of interest, those which result from shared identities and activities i.e. the interests of parents with small children in local schooling or play facilities, or people who work in a particular industry. Communities of place and interest often overlap, and individuals are usually part of many different "communities", depending on the issues at stake.
- 4.3 Despite research, which suggests that, when asked, people most frequently identify with the local town or village in which they live, the Government does not believe that affinity solely to communities of place is a good basis for drawing-up the administrative boundaries of local authorities. While such feelings can be very strong, the patterns of people's working and social lives and the complex patterns of community that they engender, require a local authority structure that can recognise and respond to the various "communities" that use local services.
- 4.4 Clearly, it would seem most unlikely that the Committee would want to recommend structures or boundaries that might cut across the natural residential communities to which people feel affinity. The Government is aware that many people attach importance to long-established connections and fully understands the affection in which, in particular, traditional counties are widely held. The Government would therefore hope that the Boundary Committee, when recommending change, would endeavour to reflect tradition where possible and suggest names for the new authorities that reflect local people's feelings about historic and county connections. Equally, these considerations should not be seen as preventing recommendations for new unitary authorities that would cross existing county boundaries.

- 4.5 In the Government's view however, the Committee should give greater weight to the wider patterns of community within an area and to the economic links between communities. This would ensure that the geographical reach of the new authorities would allow the communities of place and interest who use local authority services to have a say in the decisions which councils take about those services. The White Paper – Local Leadership, Local Choice - emphasises the role of community leadership in responding to communities' needs and aspirations and the importance of ensuring that councils are properly accountable to all those to whom they provide services.
- 4.6 Community leadership, effective engagement with local communities and partnership working with public and private sector agencies and with the wider community are central to the efforts of authorities to respond to the needs and aspirations of the various communities of place and interest that exist in an area. Through the preparation and implementation of community strategies, authorities are able to identify the concerns which communities have and, with partner organisations, deliver improvements to local quality of life.
- 4.7 In the Government's view therefore, any consideration of community interests and identities might best begin with an examination of the extent to which the structure, geography and size of an authority might influence its ability to exercise community leadership, engage with local communities and work effectively with partner organisations.
- 4.8 In general, there has been very little research about the impact of the structure, geography and size of authorities on their ability to work in partnership with other agencies and bodies.
- 4.9 The Committee however, will want to look at the impact of these issues, not only on the authority, but on partner organisations, including the business, voluntary and community sector, where having to deal with a multiplicity of smaller local authorities can impose significant costs and lead to "partnership fatigue".
- 4.10 The Committee may also want to consider whether the alignment of local authority boundaries with those of other significant partners might be helpful in creating the climate for effective partnership and inter-agency working. Effective cross-cutting service and delivery demands integrated record-keeping, the establishment of one-stop service points, a single focus for interdepartmental officer working and an easily comprehensible framework for local people to understand what is going on in their areas. Where the boundaries of authorities and other key agencies are coterminous, it becomes easier to establish these conditions.

Chapter 5: Effective and Convenient Local Government

- 5.1 Chapter 3 explained the importance to Government of the modernising agenda and so would suggest that the Boundary Committee may want to give most weight to an understanding of effectiveness and convenience formed by reference to and compatible with local authorities' present role of delivering quality public services and community leadership. On this basis the Government believes that the effectiveness and convenience of local government is best understood in the context of a local authorities' ability to:
- a) deliver quality local services economically, efficiently and effectively; and
 - b) give the users of services a democratic voice in the decisions that affect them.

Quality Public Services

- 5.2 As paragraph 3.3 explained, high performing authorities appear to have a number of factors in common – high quality political leadership, good managerial skills, adequate corporate capacity, a willingness to innovate and good relationships with external organisations. Whilst not directly linked to the structure, geography and size of an authority, the latter may have a bearing on the ability of an authority to develop, or sustain, such factors.
- 5.3 In the Government's view, the Committee should consider carefully the extent to which structure, geography and size of the new unitaries might assist the creation of high-performing authorities. To do this, the Committee may want to consider the track-record of existing authorities in the region and consider whether their structure, geography and size has contributed to their performance in particular services. In this regard the Boundary Committee may find the outline of current national and shared priorities for local services - see Annex B - useful. This Annex sets out the Governments view of the context within which local authorities are providing services and the links with central Government Departments. For some services it also outlines the Governments view on matters such as the size of local authorities and other considerations the Boundary Committee may find it useful to be aware of.

Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

- 5.4 Conceptually, it has been argued that larger units of government should deliver efficiency gains and cost savings through:
- a) The removal of duplication;
 - b) More streamlined and integrated decision-making and resource allocation;
 - c) Reductions in overall management and support services; and
 - d) Increases in purchasing power.
- 5.5 Against this, the counter-argument has been advanced that smaller units of government will improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness through their capacity to:
- a) be more responsive to the needs of local people;
 - b) lead to improved democratic scrutiny by local service users and taxpayers and, hence:
 - c) Inspire greater public confidence in local government.
- 5.6 In practice, there seems to be little hard evidence to support either of these propositions.
- 5.7 However, any re-arrangement of boundaries and functions will necessarily have an impact on the resources available to authorities through alterations to council tax bases, non-domestic rate income and Revenue Support Grant from Government. Similarly the costs that authorities incur will be affected by the move to unitary status and the re-configuration of services. Ultimately, the relationship of revenues and costs will result in changes to service levels and/or council taxes.
- 5.8 Attempts to quantify the costs and savings of structural change are notoriously difficult, not least because actual costs are driven by decisions that can only be taken by the new authorities. Since these cannot be predicted in advance of the creation of the new authorities, all estimates of the costs and savings of structural change must be imperfect.
- 5.9 Nevertheless, the Committee will want to attempt to quantify the potential cost of the various options that it considers. [For this purpose, the Government proposes to prepare a cost model which the Boundary Committee, or those making proposals to the Committee, can use to assess the relative cost differentials between different unitary structures. It is the Government's intention to consult those interested before completing this work].

- 5.10 In the final analysis, however, the capacity of authorities to deliver strong local leadership and quality public services may be seen as more important than a necessarily imperfect assessment of costs. The evidence of the cost model might only be a determining factor, where the Committee is judging between options which in all other respects appear to deliver equal advantages in terms of the modernisation agenda.

Democratic Accountability

- 5.11 The delivery of quality public services is one key element of any consideration of effective and convenient local government. Another is the extent to which the structure, geography and size of an authority lend themselves to democratic self-government and the ability of service users to influence the provision of those services that affect them.
- 5.12 Given the wide range of services which local authorities deliver, it is inevitable that some have a strictly "local" focus. Others have to be looked at in terms of their impact over wider areas and their strategic effect on a larger number of communities. Moreover, the funding of services and decisions about the allocation of scarce resources inevitably mean that decisions about even the most "local" services will be of interest to wider communities.
- 5.13 It has been suggested that smaller units of government deliver advantages in terms of responsiveness, democratic scrutiny and public confidence, by ensuring that decisions are taken by the elected representatives of the areas most closely affected by the decision.
- 5.14 In the Government's view, this underestimates the potential for larger authorities to deliver effective democratic scrutiny through devolved arrangements, effective working with parish councils and improved democratic representation.
- 5.15 As explained in Chapter 4, the Government sees the development of community strategies as the primary way in which community views can be represented in the decision-making process, and through which conflicting priorities can be resolved.
- 5.16 The Government's plans for "Quality Parishes" are another way in which local communities can make their voices heard. The Government intends to strengthen the most local tier of administration, the town or parish council, and give it a bigger role. *Quality* town and parish councils, which meet certain criteria including being well managed and good at representing local views, will be able to work closely with partner authorities to take more responsibility for shaping their area's development and running its services.

- 5.17 The Government's Quality Parish Initiative will see parish and principal authorities enter into "charters" that should ensure that parishes become an integral part of all the consultation and co-ordination arrangements set-up by principal authorities. There will also be scope for quality parishes to take on the running of the more local functions, thereby ensuring greater responsiveness to local circumstances and needs. The Committee, therefore, might want to look at the relationship of existing authorities with their parishes in assessing the structure, geography and size of the new authorities.
- 5.18 Another important aspect of democratic accountability is the transparency of the arrangements. In the Government's view, the Committee should consider the evidence that smaller authorities rely more heavily on joint arrangements to deliver quality public services and that these serve to confuse lines of accountability.

Chapter 6: The Review Process

Statutory Requirements

- 6.1 Section [14] of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) [Act] applies, with suitable modifications, the same basic procedure for reviews as set out in Part 2 of the Local Government Act 1992. Within the framework of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) [Act] and this guidance, it will be for the Committee itself to devise detailed arrangements for the conduct of the review, including how it will organise itself so as to manage the process effectively.

General Considerations

- 6.2 Under section [12(8) of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act] the Government, after consultation with the Committee, has directed the Committee to make its recommendations no later than []. The Committee should use all reasonable endeavours to comply with this direction, and should notify the Secretary of State immediately if it appears to the Committee that this deadline will not be met.
- 6.3 The Committee has powers [under section [13(6)] of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act,] to request a public body to supply information which the Committee reasonably requires in connection with a local government review and the body concerned is under a duty to supply that information. The Committee should use this power as necessary to ascertain such matters as the pattern of service delivery, and the costs of services delivered by the authorities in the region's two-tier areas. It should seek only information that it needs for the purpose of carrying out the review. The Committee may well also want to meet representatives of the local authorities under review and others in the region, rather than relying solely on written representations.
- 6.4 As far as is practicable, the Committee should use the internet and e-mail as one means of publishing material and notifying and consulting interested parties.
- 6.5 The Committee is also reminded that the Government's Code of Practice on consultation recommends that public consultations should generally allow twelve weeks for responses.

Stage 1: Announcement of the review and period for initial representations

- 6.6 At the outset of the review, the Committee is required by section 15(1) of the 1992 Act to take such steps as it considers sufficient to secure that persons who may be interested in the review are informed of it, and of the period within which representations may be made. In fulfilling this requirement, the Committee should:

- a) write to all the principal local authorities and all Members of Parliament in the region;
 - b) write to such other representative organisations as it seems appropriate to notify, including those listed at Annex C;
 - c) publish advertisements in one or more local newspapers circulating in the region; and
 - d) take such other steps as seem necessary to provide suitable publicity, including encouraging and participating in local press, radio and television coverage of the review.
- 6.7 In taking these steps, the Committee should also seek to ensure that those who may be interested in the review are aware of the framework, within which it is required to operate, including this guidance. To help achieve this, the Committee may wish to prepare and make available material describing the scope and purpose of the review and the sort of material relevant to the Committee's considerations.
- 6.8 The Committee should also use this period to review existing literature and data relevant to the review and to commission any further research or surveys it considers necessary or desirable. It may also wish to begin working with the Audit Commission on the gathering of information on the costs and benefits of new structures and how these will be analysed.
- 6.9 At the end of this stage the Committee should make all representations available for inspection and supply a list of respondents on request. The Committee may need to make clear to potential respondents that their views will be made public in this way.

Stage 2: Drafting of Recommendations

- 6.10 The second stage of the review will be the preparation by the Committee of draft recommendations. During this stage the Committee should consider the views put forward at the first stage of the review, analyse the information it has collected itself and hold such discussions as seem appropriate with the local authorities affected and other representative local organisations in those areas. It may also wish to arrange or attend informal public meetings in the area.
- 6.11 In considering the views and/or proposals that it has received, the Boundary Committee may wish to test them against the need for the newly-created unitary authorities to be best placed to lead and empower communities and deliver quality public services. Where, in the view of the Committee such views and proposals fail to demonstrate that they would achieve this objective, the Committee might consider bringing forward its own proposals.

- 6.12 The Committee may also ask the Audit Commission to provide it with a written opinion on the likely impact of any proposed changes on the economy, efficiency or effectiveness with which local authority services are provided.

Stage 3: Consultation on Draft Recommendations

- 6.13 The Committee should publicise its draft recommendations by:

- a) writing to all the principal local authorities and all Members of Parliament in the region;
- b) writing to such other representative organisations as it seems appropriate to consult, including those listed at Annex C;
- c) publishing advertisements in one or more local newspapers circulating in the region; and
- d) taking such other steps as seem necessary to provide suitable publicity, including encouraging and participating in local press, radio and television coverage of the review.

- 6.14 The Committee may also wish to prepare, and make available to members of the public, leaflets setting out its draft recommendations. It may also wish to set up or attend informal public meetings, or provide material on the recommendations that could be displayed at, for example, public libraries and council offices in the region.

Stage 4: Preparation of Final Report

- 6.15 In the light of responses to the draft recommendations and other evidence available to it, the Committee should prepare and submit to the Secretary of State a report on the region under review, setting out its findings and recommendations.

- 6.16 At the same time as it submits its recommendations to the Secretary of State, the Committee should also send copies to:

- a) all the principal local authorities and all Members of Parliament in the region;
- b) such other representative organisations as it seems appropriate to notify, including those listed at Annex C.

- 6.17 The Committee should also publish advertisements in one or more local newspapers circulating in the region; and take such other steps as seem necessary to provide suitable publicity, including encouraging and participating in local press, radio and television coverage of the review.

Annex A

Local Government White Paper Achievements Strong Local Leadership - Quality Public Services

Following publication of the White Paper, the Secretary of State made a commitment to place an implementation timetable on the DTLR (now ODPM) web-site. The plan is on the departmental web-site and sets out 121 key, observable milestones and identifies named officials across Whitehall who have primary responsibility for delivering tasks identified in the plan.

National Priorities for local government and National Public Service Agreement (PSA) for Local Government

Central and local government have produced the first jointly agreed list of key priorities for local government to focus improvements in public services: covering education, care for the elderly, the protection of vulnerable children, narrowing health inequalities, crime and disorder, the local environment, local transport and local economic development.

A National PSA for local government was first published at the conclusion of the local services review 2000. It was established to bring together key departmental PSA targets.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Comprehensive Performance Assessments will soon be published for unitary and county councils in England, and will be undertaken for district councils next year. These assessments will be the cornerstone of the performance management framework for driving up the quality of local services, and will be the basis for giving councils the tools for taking responsibility for their own improvement. This will include greater freedoms and flexibilities for those councils with a proven capacity to deliver high quality services, enabling them to achieve more by expanding or changing the way they work or to develop innovative practices.

The Local Government Bill

The Local Government Bill was introduced in November 2002 and contains provisions to accelerate the procedures by which freedoms and flexibilities can be provided for local authorities. The Bill also makes provision for revaluation of council tax; provides powers for local authorities to charge and trade and offers rate relief for small businesses and will also scrap the existing system of credit approvals for borrowing in favour of the freedom to borrow for capital investment without consent provided they can afford to service the debt.

Freedoms & Flexibilities

Since publishing the report into reducing red tape and bureaucracy for local government, the Government has announced plans to de-regulate 84 consent regime powers. The Government has also announced the abolition of 'receipts taken into account' and local authorities will be offered access to commercial Money Market funds and a Government-run deposit facility from 1 April. Authorities will be able to use the Money Market Funds much earlier than first thought possible.

The Government has announced a significant devolution of power to local government. This includes the steps that the Government intends to take to follow up the results of the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) of county and unitary authorities that the Audit Commission is due to publish in December.

As a result the Government will:

- secure co-ordinated and risk-based inspection and audit arrangements (which are the responsibility of the relevant inspectorates, auditors and regulatory bodies) reflecting a council's strengths, weaknesses and needs;
- provide freedoms to reduce the bureaucratic burden for all authorities and additional flexibilities for the best to give them scope to innovate and improve further ;
- introduce capacity building measures to help improve performance and develop more effective use of resources; and
- constructively engage early with the poorest authorities, and use statutory intervention where necessary

After a year long review, the Government has announced measures aimed at streamlining programmes aimed at tackling deprivation around the country and simplified access to funding them.

Improving Capacity and Tackling Poor Performance

The Government is developing a strategy for supporting work on corporate development and service improvement. There will be a joint fund with the LGA to pay for the development and expansion of agreed national capacity building projects. Authorities will generally meet the costs of their own capacity building activities but there will be the possibility of some initial support for the weakest authorities.

Further rounds of the Beacons Councils schemes have been announced, and the Advisory Panel for Round Four of the Beacon Council Scheme met in September 2002. The Government has re-affirmed long term commitment to the scheme by announcing that the Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils has become an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body.

The Government and the LGA have published a joint report in response to the review of local government procurement undertaken by Sir Ian Byatt. The report endorses a series of recommendations to help ensure that councils are equipped to negotiate the best deals with contractors for the delivery of public services. The review of capacity building and support announced in the White Paper commenced in September 2002. The findings will inform the development of a strategy to assist local authorities.

The principles for tackling poor performance in the weakest authorities remain those currently in the protocol of intervention agreed with the LGA and confirmed in the consultation paper that the Government issued in August 2002. The Government will engage directly with all those in the poor category and those categorised as weak with the lowest capacity to improve. This engagement will start at an early stage and will be undertaken through a specified liaison manager appointed by Government. A priority will be to assess the authority's willingness and capacity to improve and to put in place a recovery plan with key milestones.

Streamlining Best Value

Orders have been laid amending the completion date for Best Value Performance Plans to 30 June, and also the cycle of Best Value Reviews. In addition, the review of Best Value and labour force matters, and the consultation on the revised ODPM circular on Best Value and performance labour force issues is now complete. Consultation on the revised Best Value guidance to parishes has taken place and was published 24 July 2002.

The Best Value Performance Indicators for 2001/02 were published on 6th February 2002 and those for 2002/03, together with guidance, were published on 28th February 2002. Proposals for changes to the Best Value Performance Indicators for 2003/04 were published on 17th September 2002. Consultation on these proposals ended on 29th October 2002.

E-Government

The Government has announced the national strategy for local e-government.

Improving local governance

The Government piloted electoral innovations including e-voting at the local elections in May 2002 and has since announced an invitation to Councils throughout England to submit bids to run innovative voting pilots in the 2003 elections.

Consultation is currently under way on views on the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in local government that provides the public with a general right of access to information held by public authorities.

Proposals to move the 2004 English local elections and greater London Authority elections to the same time as the European Parliamentary elections in 2004 have been published. These changes will be subject to consultation and reflect the Government's commitment to modernise the electoral system.

Other Measures to increase council tax flexibility, accountability and transparency

Council tax billing regulations have been changed to make bills more meaningful and transparent and to ensure that the percentage change in council tax appears on the bill.

Regulations and directions have come into force to abolish Council Tax Benefit Subsidy Limitation Scheme and the Government has announced the way forward on the CT Bill information and e-billing.

The Government has announced changes that will give councils the choice to apply council discounts of between 10 per cent and 50 per cent for second homes. Councils will also be able to end discounts for long term empty property completely. The changes announced on 19th November 2002 could raise an estimated extra £65 million nationally for councils to invest directly in local services.

Priorities for Local Services

In undertaking any local government reviews the Government believes that the Boundary Committee will want to be aware of and consider current priorities for local services and that the Government's view of those priorities will be of interest and may aid the Boundary Committee in its considerations. So this Annex first sets out the shared priorities agreed by both central Government and by the Local Government Association on behalf of local government. It then sets out the Department's objectives for those priorities and responsibilities, issues arising from these which may be relevant for local government reviews, and current initiatives that impact particularly on local government.

Statement on Shared Priorities

Central and local government share a strong commitment to improving local services through investment and reform. Local councils have a key contribution to make as a result of their local democratic accountability and their ability to integrate the work of different agencies and organisations at a local level.

By working together to improve delivery, it is possible to ensure:

- we achieve faster progress towards ambitious targets
- services reflect the different needs and aspirations of local communities and contribute to tackling deprivation
- the right technology and support are put in place to underpin successful delivery.

Both central and local government are agreed that across the board improvement is essential but for the present there is a need to focus efforts on a number of key priorities:

- **raising standards across our schools:** by helping all schools match the excellence of the best, sustaining improvement in primary schools, transforming secondary schools and ensuring that the school workforce has the capacity to support this;
- **improving the quality of life:**
 - **of children, young people and families at risk:** by tackling child poverty, maximising the life chances of children in care or in need and strengthening protection for children at risk of abuse;
 - **of older people** by enabling them to live as independent lives as possible and avoid unnecessary periods in hospital;

- **promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities** by: targeting key local services - such as health, education, housing, crime and accident prevention - to match need; and the encouragement of healthy lifestyles;
- **creating safer and stronger communities** by working with the police and other local agencies to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, strengthen community cohesion and tackle drug abuse;
- **transforming our local environment** by improving the quality, cleanliness and safety of our public space;
- **meeting local transport needs more effectively** by improving bus services and other forms of local transport and securing better access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need;
- **promoting the economic vitality of localities** by supporting business improvement, providing positive conditions for growth and employment, improving adult skills, helping the hardest to reach into work, and extending quality and choice in the housing market.

An effective and inclusive local government structure is essential and the Boundary Committee is asked to consider, as part of its work in considering the best unitary structure for local government, how a change in structure can facilitate local government in meeting this shared agenda for reform.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Main Objectives

One of the main aims of the ODPM is to ensure thriving, inclusive and sustainable communities in all regions. It works with other Government Departments and policies to raise the levels of social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and regional prosperity.

For local government in particular it aims to improve delivery and value for money of local services by:

- introducing comprehensive performance assessments and action plans, and securing a progressive improvement in authorities' scores;
- overall annual improvements in cost effectiveness of 2% or more; and
- assisting local government to achieve 100% capability in electronic delivery of priority services by 2005, in ways that customers will use.

Other related objectives include delivering effective programmes to help raise the quality of life for all in urban areas and other communities - by achieving a better balance between housing availability and the demand for housing in all English regions while protecting valuable countryside around our towns, cities and in the greenbelt.

Health and Safety objectives, which are a priority theme across the whole range of ODPM functions, include reducing accidental fire deaths in the home and increasing fire safety awareness.

Issues for Local Government reviews

The Department's top priority is the Communities Plan, so the Commission will wish to consider the most effective local structures to deliver policy on such matters as housing, regeneration, sustainable development etc.

The importance of planning as a key tool for local authorities in terms of taking forward the Communities Plan agenda is stressed. In this respect, a consideration in determining boundaries must be what makes sense as a unit for effective spatial planning. The legislation will allow districts to work together to produce joint plans. Also, regional plans will have sub regional elements. So in that respect, the size of the administrative unit may not be critical. But it is an important consideration.

District and unitary authorities will be responsible for preparing local plans. The Committee should take into account the need for effective local spatial planning and for authorities to deal with the issues arising from the Government's agenda for sustainable communities when considering boundaries. Achievement of housing, regeneration and sustainable development outcomes will be a key part of the agenda for delivery by local authorities. The model for the most appropriate planning area will not be similar across the country, and the Committee will need to take into account the need for flexibility. In this respect, the Committee should bear in mind that the changes proposed to the planning system will allow authorities to work together in preparing local plans (i.e. a local plan could cover more than one district). The reforms will also enable a sub regional element to be incorporated in regional plans.

One of the key aims of the planning reform process also is more effective community engagement. In order to ensure that the community is more effectively engaged in the planning process, local plans will contain a Statement of Community Involvement which will set out benchmarks for community participation in the preparation of LDF documents and significant planning applications. This suggests a sophisticated analysis of 'communities'.

One area of planning that would benefit by having larger scale unitary authorities is minerals and waste planning. Experience has shown that shire districts or the unitary successors to these are generally too small to do this work effectively. That is why under the planning reform agenda no change is proposed to the existing minerals and waste planning function of county councils.

Where a county minerals and waste team is split essential economies of scale in organisations that are already under pressure of resources are lost for good. Only relatively large unitary successors can mitigate that damage.

Current Initiatives that impact particularly on local government

The Communities Plan

On 18 July 2002 the Deputy Prime Minister set out his approach to achieve a step change in the way we deliver sustainable communities. There will be [has been] a further statement with a comprehensive long-term programme of action to tackle the housing shortage, address low demand, reform the planning system and improve housing conditions, all within the context of creating sustainable communities. This agenda cuts across the whole of ODPM and other departments, and much of what follows will be part of this agenda.

ODPM will be working with other Departments to ensure that the right framework is put in place to achieve the outcomes, notably through:

- Active engagement with key players in growth areas, low demand pathfinder areas, and with all key agencies with a role in delivery
- Modifying the legal and wider regulatory framework (especially planning reforms)
- Ensuring new and revitalised communities have the right transport infrastructure, planned in from the start
- Ensuring that key public services (especially health, education, policing), essential to sustainable communities, are provided at the right time
- Taking action to ensure the right skills base to take forward the new agenda

The Communities Plan will address national, regional and sub-regional problems, notably imbalances in housing markets. But the solutions will be delivered at a local level. It may bring into sharper focus the need for:

- Partnership working: Local authorities are already engaging in partnerships, e.g. to progress the Thames Gateway, or the low demand pathfinders.
- Raising performance: this applies especially to planning. Government is backing the drive with significant resources.
- Integrating policy making: there is a need for better integration of housing, planning and economic strategies and plans at all levels of Government. But thinking must continue to be brought together locally, building on the work to develop housing strategies covering the whole of local housing markets.

At Regional level the Plan will set out how the development of the regional spatial strategy, economic strategy and housing strategy will be brought together. Regions opting for elected regional assemblies will take responsibility for housing investment decisions. In advance of this the intention is to create single regional housing pots and allow greater discretion regionally for strategic allocation of resources.

Planning

Government policy for reform of the land use planning system is set out in the policy paper *Sustainable Communities – Delivering through Planning* (July 2002), the follow up to the Green Paper *Planning – Delivering a Fundamental Change* (December 2001). This set out a two-tier approach to plan making: strategic planning at the regional level and local planning at the district/unitary level.

Legislation is to be introduced to put in place regional spatial strategies (RSS), including sub regional issues. The local tier of plan making will be known as Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). Preparation of these, and most development control decision making, will be at the local (district) level. County structure plans will be abolished. Counties will retain responsibility for minerals, waste and local transport plans and will be enabled to have a role in supporting the development of the RSS, and, with the agreement of relevant districts, the LDF. So, rather than perpetuate a separate tier of sub-regional planning outside the metropolitan areas, the Government considers that sub-regional issues should be fully integrated into the regional strategy making process. The counties will act as agents of the regional planning bodies in providing technical expertise on issues and/or leading on sub regional parts of the strategy (distribution of housing etc) for example.

The new system will provide the flexibility for districts to work together to produce joint LDFs where these reflect "sensible" planning areas.

Local Strategic Partnerships

A LSP is a single body that brings together at local level the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to help identify the needs of communities and to work with local people to address them. LSPs are non-statutory, non-executive organisations, but they have a number of specific functions. These include supporting local authorities in the development of community strategies; helping to develop and deliver the local neighbourhood renewal strategies; rationalising and simplifying other local partnerships and plans; and piloting local agreements between central and local government to tackle key national priorities on health, education, community safety and other quality of life issues.

Most LSPs have been established by local authorities at district level, although some county-wide LSPs also exist. Following their establishment, LSPs are encouraged to develop their leadership from within. Although in many areas partnership working has been well established, LSPs are relatively new bodies (the Government guidance was published in March 2001) and are at varying stages of development.

Government is increasingly looking to successful LSPs to lead at the local level in implementing new initiatives that depend on local partnerships for their successful delivery

For new LSPs, the normal presumption will be that local authorities will lead in establishing, bringing together and encouraging participants. It will be down to the partners on each LSP to decide who should take the lead after that.

Housing

Local government's key responsibilities in housing are to:

- secure accommodation, as required under the law, for those homeless in priority need; and
- to ensure any social housing that they own and manage is run properly, and in particular is brought up to set standards of decency by 2010. This may be by means of transferring stock to housing associations, although other options (such as the creation of arms length management organisations) exist.

These reflect the traditional role of local authorities. Government is now asking local government to look beyond their social housing role to take a strategic view of the housing needs of their area, covering all tenures. Local authorities' responsibilities have, in any case, been extending beyond housing management in recent years and now cover:

- private sector renewal - local authorities manage programmes of grants to improve private sector properties;
- enforcement against unacceptable housing conditions through environmental health departments;
- funding of additional social housing, to complement that provided through the Housing Corporation; and
- ensuring complementary housing related support services to ensure sustainable tenancies for the most vulnerable households, including elderly people in need of support to remain in their own homes (including through Home Improvement Agencies).

The Communities Plan will stress the need for much greater integration, at regional, and local level, of economic, spatial and housing strategies to ensure a better balance in housing markets and achieve other housing objectives. The DPM has announced strong regional bodies and regional housing pots to facilitate this more strategic overview - the details of how these will operate will be [have been] announced in the Communities Plan.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Main Objectives

Policy responsibility for museums, galleries and libraries, the built heritage, the arts, sport, education, broadcasting and the media and tourism, as well as the creative industries, the Millennium and the National Lottery. Culture and creativity are vital to our national life. DCMS aims to improve the quality of life for all through increased access to and participation in all its areas of responsibility

DCMS is responsible for conserving historic collections for future generations. DCMS sponsors 17 national museums and galleries and is responsible for museum policy in England. In addition, DCMS has statutory responsibility to superintend the delivery of the English public library service by local authorities and promote its development. The DCMS provides funding and support for the arts, media and creative industries.

DCMS helps to deliver Government's 'sport for all' policy and realise its ambitions for sporting success at the highest levels. The Department oversees the work of Sport England and UK Sport and helps set the Government strategy for a whole range of sporting issues, from sport in schools to international sports policy.

Issues for Local Government reviews

The Department feel that one of the factors that affect both "community identity" and "effective service delivery" is the coterminousity of boundaries which it believes help to enhance quality cultural services, partnership working and community leadership.

Current Initiatives that impact on local government

There are four main Sporting areas: Coaching, New Opportunities Fund, Sport England Schemes and PE School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL).

Coaching

In July 2002 the DCMS announced over £25 million of new funding over the next three years to implement a series of new initiatives on coaching. Among the programmes to be developed is a scheme to create 3,000 full time, qualified Community Coaches to help develop sports skills across the country by 2006. For the first time, nationally recognised qualifications will be established, in partnership with sport, to give coaches a professional career structure. The Community Coaches will be deployed locally following a community-based assessment of the local need for coaching expertise.

The full details of these coaching initiatives are still under consideration. However, it is likely that local authorities will have an interest in the Community Coaches scheme, either as potential employers or as potential clients of the new Coaches.

New Opportunities Fund For PE and Sport

£750 million from NOF Round 3 is being invested across the UK, split as follows:

England: £581 million
Wales: £48.75 million
N Ireland: £33.75 million
Scotland: £86.25 million

The new opportunities for PE and sport programme were launched in England and Wales in November 2001. This funding will be used to support projects designed to bring about a step-change in the provision of sporting facilities for young people and for the community, generally by:

- modernising existing, and building new, indoor and outdoor sports facilities for school and community use;
- providing initial revenue funding to support the development and promotion of these sporting facilities for wider community use (up to 20 per cent of the funding available);
- modernising existing, or building new, outdoor adventure facilities. This should benefit young people who do not currently have ready access to these facilities (between five and ten per cent of the funding available).

There are two ring-fenced elements within this funding:

- £25 million plus admin costs towards the £130 million Space for Sport and Arts programme: funded by DCMS, Arts Council, Sport England and NOF to provide new and improved sports and arts facilities based in primary schools for local communities in 65 of the most deprived LEAs in England;
- £30 million for funding football specific projects for school and community use.

Funding will be allocated to LEAs to distribute.

Sport England

Sport Action Zones - this is a Lottery funded programme under which 12 areas of social and sporting deprivation have been designated as SAZs. The aim is, through partnership of all local interests, including local and education authorities, to improve sporting provision in these areas. Needs assessments and action plans for all 12 Zones have been drawn up. A further 18 Zones are to be designated in 2003.

Active sports partnerships - a Lottery funded programme in which partnerships have been set up in 45 counties between local authorities, local education agencies, governing bodies of sport and other local sports agencies. The aim is to provide structures opportunities for young people who want to improve their skills and progress further in their sport. It makes the connection between sport and school by offering access to local clubs, coaching, talent camps and organised sport.

Positive futures - a partnership between Sport England, the Youth Justice Board and the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit. The aim of the initiative is to use sport to reduce anti-social behaviour, crime and drug use among 10-16 year olds within local neighbourhoods. The intended outcomes are:

- reduction in youth offending in the locality of a project;
- a reduction in drug misuse among 10-16 year olds participating on the schemes; and
- an increase in regular participation in sport and physical activity by 10-16 year olds.

Positive Futures is being delivered in 24 locations spread around England through a combination of youth offending teams, Sport England regional officers, local authorities, sporting and non sporting organisations working together. The initiative will include a number of different activities aimed at engaging young people at risk in sport and leisure activities:

The joint DCMS/DfES PE, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) project is implementing a national strategy for PE and school sport. The departments share a PSA target to enhance the take-up of sporting opportunities by 5- to 16-year-olds by increasing the percentage of school children who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high-quality P.E. and school sport within and beyond the curriculum from 25% in 2002 to 75% by 2006. The Government aims to reach all children by 2007.

Achieving this target depends on 8 sub-delivery programmes. All impact on local government to a greater or lesser extent.

The School Sport Co-ordinator partnerships (led by DCMS) and Sports College Expansion (led by DfES) programmes are creating a national infrastructure for PE and school sport. By 2006 the infrastructure will comprise 400 school sport co-ordinator partnerships based on 400 specialist sports colleges (subject to receiving sufficient high quality bids), 2,400 secondary co-ordinators and 13,500 primary link teachers. These programmes provide essential support for other PESSCL programmes and cover all LEAs.

The Gifted and Talented (led by DfES) programme is about improving the range and quality of provision for talented sports people of school age, raising their aspirations and improving their performance, motivation and self-esteem.

The **PE and School sport (led by the QCA)** programme will investigate how PE and school sport makes a difference to young people and school improvement and will gather evidence about delivery of 2 hours of high quality PE and school sport.

The **Step into Sport (led by DCMS)** programme is training 60,000 young people to enable them to become effective volunteers in sport; and support governing bodies, county sports partnerships and local clubs to develop and implement volunteering strategies. The programme will cover all 150 local education authority areas.

The **National Training Programme (led by DfES)** is providing support to enable schools to raise the quality of teaching and learning in PE.

The **School Club links (led by DCMS)** programme will build strong links between schools and sports clubs that are providing quality opportunities for young people that are safe, effective and child friendly.

The **Swimming (led by DfES)** programme is about increasing the number of children achieving the minimum requirement of being able to swim 25m unaided by the end of KS2. It will also provide: guidance for local authorities and LEAs on swimming and water safety; and continuing professional development and training for teachers and adults other than teachers.

Space for sport and arts

There are 19,000 primary schools in England and most are conveniently located to serve the educational needs of young children in their catchment areas or communities. This makes them well placed to serve other community needs for sport, arts and social facilities, learning opportunities, access to the National Grid for Learning and childcare. Primary schools are also often seen as less threatening places than other types of local authority institution by those who are, or are at risk of being, socially excluded. "Space for Sport and Arts" is an innovative collaboration between Government – the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Employment - and three National Lottery distribution bodies - Sport England, the New Opportunities Fund and the Arts Council of England. As such, the scheme aims to bring with it flexibility to encourage creative approaches.

"Space for Sport and Arts" will improve educational facilities, build links between schools and communities, and encourage social inclusion in areas of multiple deprivation. The objectives of the scheme are to:

- secure a better balance of arts and sports provision for children in areas of the country where provision has been low in the past including areas of multiple deprivation;
- deliver improved arts and sports facilities by helping schools with the renovation, refurbishment and enhancement of their buildings and resources;
- establish spaces for developing arts and sports work by and with children and young people;
- create environments that contribute to increasing public access to arts and sports facilities.

The scheme targets areas of multiple deprivation already identified as priorities for the purposes of other programmes - Education Action Zones, Excellence in City areas, Health Action Zones, Sport Action Zones, LEAs allocated School Sport Co-ordinators, ACE priority regions, LEAs nominated by RABs as in need of arts development and areas in the top 50 of the ODPM multiple deprivation index rankings. Based on these criteria, 64 LEAs have been invited to bid for sums allocated so that areas of multiple deprivation receive most funding.

Culture and the newly introduced system for the Arts Council of England

On 1st April 2002 the 11 organisations in the arts funding system in England, consisting of the 10 Regional Arts Boards and the Arts Council of England, merged to become one legal entity. The new body has nine regional offices, matching the Government's regional boundaries, and a national office. Each region will have a Council, and the 15-strong National Council includes the chair of each of the new Regional Councils. The re-organisation gives greater regional accountability by increasing the number of local authority representatives on the regional councils from two to six.

The Arts Council has a framework for partnership working with local authorities, which enables joint planning around shared priorities at a local, regional and national level. They also collaborate to ensure synergies between data collection, evaluation and performance assessment systems - to minimise duplication and bureaucracy.

The full benefits of the new system will be considered after it has been allowed time to bed in.

Department for Education and Skills

Main Objectives

To help build a competitive economy and inclusive society by:

- Creating opportunities for everyone to develop their learning.
- Releasing potential in people to make the most of themselves.
- Achieving excellence in standards of education and levels of skills.
- Giving children an excellent start in education so that they have a better foundation for future learning.
- Enabling all young people to develop and to equip themselves with the skills, knowledge and personal qualities needed for life and work.
- Encouraging and enabling adults to learn, improve their skills and enrich their lives.

Issues for Local Government reviews

The LSC/Connexions boundaries were influenced by both travel to work / learning and local economy factors. These might usefully be included as factors that affect both “community identity” and “effective service delivery”. In looking at the quality of service delivery, a list of other sources of information such as OFSTED, social service inspectorate reports etc might also be useful to the Boundary Committee to supplement BV information.

In any consideration of size and LEA effectiveness the Boundary Committee may find it useful to be informed by OFSTED LEA Inspection findings, the outcome of the CPA, Best Value reviews as well as DfES experience of its work to date with LEAs in capacity building and intervention. DfES have increasing evidence of the inherent instability of smaller LEAs. It is true that the smaller boroughs in London and unitaries across the country can perform extremely well. But they are disproportionately dependent on factors such as a very small number of senior staff. We are becoming increasingly involved in trying to help smaller authorities overcome short term staffing difficulties as well as helping tackle entrenched poor school performance which is also related to the authority’s capacity in human resource terms.

As well as the affect on the whole service, it is suggested that it would also be necessary to look at issues around the capacity of authorities to sustain particular services effectively – for example around strategic management and leadership and school improvement where retention of appropriate specialist expertise might be an issue. A related consideration is the extent to which service decisions require a strategic input; and the ability of authorities to participate in local strategic discussions and form effective partnerships with parents, the wider community and other bodies – some of the wider strategic co-ordination will fall to the regional assembly, but not specifically with regard to education.

The Department believes that 'Convenience' in terms of proximity to the local community is not an indicator of effectiveness in this regard, and there will be issues around the critical mass necessary to sustain effective working relationships.

Current Initiatives that impact particularly on local government

Raising Standards in Education

The Government is committed to raising standards and is taking forward a radical programme of reform including reform of school leadership, school structures, teaching and learning, and partnerships beyond the classroom. Underpinned by a rigorous framework of accountability and targets, LEAs will make an important contribution to delivery of plans which will affect every part of the education and skills system. The initiatives, many of which will involve LEAs either directly or indirectly, include:

- In early years the establishment of new Children's Centres to cover up to 650,000 children by 2006 providing childcare, early years education and health and family services for deprived communities.
- Enrichment of the primary curriculum- extra PE and sporting activities, music and modern foreign languages- to provide access to a broad and varied curriculum.
- A major drive on specialisation with at least 33 new Academies, 300 advanced schools and 2000 specialist schools by 2006 taking forward the diversity programme.
- Successful schools will be encouraged to expand and take over weak or failing schools.
- Schools that are well led and well managed will win new freedoms- earned autonomy to include power to vary the national curriculum and teachers' pay and conditions.
- Our best heads leading the rest, with some acting like Chief Executives to lead school federations.
- Remodelling of the school workforce with greater numbers of support staff and professional assistants, guaranteed preparation time for every teacher- including support through an expanded School Standards Grant.
- Full-time education for every permanently excluded pupil by this September and increasingly for every temporarily excluded pupil.
- Expansion of extended schools that co-locate services for deprived communities and provide all day schooling and childcare.
- Increasing investment in schools capital to £4.5 billion each year by 2005-06 to help drive higher standards as well as continuing to reduce the backlog of repairs.

Learning and Skills Council/Connexions

There will be a need to reflect the Learning and Skills Council/Connexions tier of service planning and delivery. This tier has strong links to local authorities - particularly around delivery of services such as the Youth Service which, in the light of the impetus being given to the "Transforming Youth Work" programme, should itself be considered as one of the main local authority functions. The Youth Service links are developing in a number of different ways including in some areas being transferred into Connexions to draw on the wider structures in improving delivery.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Main Objectives

- To protect and improve the rural, urban, marine and global environment and to lead integration of these with other policies across Government and internationally.
- To enhance opportunity and tackle social exclusion in rural areas.
- To promote a sustainable, competitive and safe food supply chain which meets consumers' requirements.
- To promote sustainable, diverse, modern and adaptable farming through domestic and international actions.
- To promote sustainable management and prudent use of natural resources domestically and internationally.
- To protect the public's interest in relation to environmental impacts and health, and ensure high standards of animal health and welfare.

Issues for Local Government Reviews

Defra has a wide range of objectives, leading to different perspectives on appropriate size of unitary authority. The creation of larger mixed urban/rural unitary authorities may risk losing the voice that smaller shire districts provide for rural communities. But smaller authorities may struggle to deliver the full service agenda – there are problems dealing with smaller budgets and the loss of economies of scale, for example in service planning and commissioning, and in delivering specialist services, although this could be overcome by joint working with neighbouring authorities.

In the Department's view a unitary authority with no significant towns is undesirable. An urban centre is required, a market town as an absolute minimum, to act as the service hub for rural communities. Authorities with an urban centre and significant rural hinterlands could provide a focus and draw together dispersed rural communities, provided the distinct needs of rural areas were properly taken into account.

In some service delivery areas, in particular flood defence and coastal protection but also to a lesser extent, rights of way and countryside access and waste disposal, there are seen to be benefits to larger authorities with greater human and financial resources and better able to take a more strategic view. In the case of coastal protection and countryside access, there is a need for authorities to exercise their functions not only for the benefit of their residents but also in the

national interest and larger authorities may be more likely to do this. On the other hand, from a rural policy perspective (where local authorities have a major role in giving substance to the Government's rural objectives) district councils are generally closer to the people of their areas than county councils, and better equipped to take on the community leadership role.

Current Initiatives that impact particularly on local government

Countryside Access

Defra is working to improve enjoyment of an attractive and well-managed countryside for all, by conserving landscapes and increasing opportunities for recreation. The department has an interest in local authorities' work on countryside recreation and landscape.

The Boundary Committee should be aware of the following points:

- National Parks Authorities and the Broads Authorities whose functions have an impact on their constituent local authorities;
- The proposals to designate two new National Parks in the New Forest and South Downs;
- The existence of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), currently managed by constituent local authorities;
- The proposed establishment of AONB Conservation Boards, the first two of which are likely to be for the Chilterns and Cotswolds.

Flood Management

About 10% of the land area of England is at risk of flooding and over 30% of the coastline is vulnerable to erosion. Many areas rely on man-made defences or positive management to reduce the risks of flooding and coastal erosion. Although it does not directly promote or carry out works, Defra has policy responsibility for all matters related to flood management in England.

Government policy is to reduce the risks of flooding and coastal erosion. Local authorities (along with the Environment Agency and internal drainage boards) are flood and coastal defence operating authorities with powers to undertake measures against flooding from the sea and certain types of river, and coastal erosion.

The arrangements for delivering the flood and coastal defence service are currently under review by Defra. This may affect the future role of local authorities as operating authorities. However local authorities will still have an important role to play as planning authorities. An important part of the flood management strategy is to ensure that flood risk is an integral part of authorities' development plans, and that flood risk be taken into account when individual planning decisions are made. Recent guidance to authorities has helped ensure that this is given greater importance than hitherto. Defra is concerned that this trend should be maintained.

Waste Management

Waste collection and disposal duties are divided between the two tiers of local government, where they exist. Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) - shire districts - are responsible for collecting waste, recycling and general cleansing functions. Waste Disposal Authorities (WDAs) - shire counties - are responsible for the disposal of waste collected by WCAs, and for providing areas where the public can take their waste free of charge, commonly known as Civic Amenity Sites.

Waste planning is currently a county level function (and will remain so under the proposed planning reforms). Waste collection arrangements can advantageously be tailored to local circumstances but waste disposal operations benefit from economies of scale.

Each waste collection authority is required to prepare a recycling plan, which sets out the authority's proposals to increase recycling in its own area. In March 2001 guidance was issued on Municipal Waste Management Strategies. These should be jointly developed by WCAs and WDAs and set out the strategic framework for the management of municipal waste. They are not statutory; but many authorities have started work on them and *Waste Strategy 2000* announced the intention to make them mandatory.

The Government has set statutory performance standards for household waste recycling and composting for 2003/04 and 2005/06. Statutory Standards apply to both waste collection authorities and waste disposal authorities.

A report by the Government's Strategy Unit due to be published in November 2002 may include recommendations relevant to the structure of local government for delivering waste functions.

The consultation paper *Living Places - Powers, Rights, Responsibilities* published on 31 October describes options for reforming the legislative framework as part of the Government's strategy for improving the statutory powers, rights and responsibilities associated with achieving cleaner and safer public spaces and local environments.

Rural Affairs

With the creation of Defra in June 2001, the specific remit for rural affairs has been focused in one department – bringing together all the strands of rural policy: promoting enterprise and productivity, improving access to services, and tackling deprivation, as well as promoting a sustainable food and farming industry and protecting the countryside and ensuring access to it. Defra, supported by the Countryside Agency, is responsible for ensuring the “rural-proofing” of all government policies, from health to education, from transport to jobs and crime.

The Rural White Paper, *A Fair Deal for Rural England*, published in November 2000, explains how Government is shaping policies and investment to make the vision a reality. The vision is:

- a living countryside, with thriving rural communities and access to high quality public services;
- a working countryside, with a prosperous and diverse economy, giving high and stable levels of employment;
- a protected countryside, in which the environment is sustained and enhanced, and which all can enjoy; and
- a vibrant countryside which can shape its own future and whose voice is heard by government at all levels.

Providing services effectively to people living in small, scattered rural areas means being customer-oriented and innovative in the way services are delivered, taking account of the distances people may have to travel and what transport they have: for example, using new technology, sharing buildings between several providers, or using mobile units.

The geography and demography of rural areas varies widely. However, many rural areas have a natural focus on a “market” town, commonly in the 10-50,000 population range, where economic activity, public services, and community facilities serving the rural hinterland are concentrated.

The Government sees market towns as drivers of rural prosperity and is committed to strengthening them. It is investing an extra £37 million through the Regional Development Agencies to help create new job opportunities, restore high streets, better amenities and good transport links to their surrounding areas.

Local authorities – directly as service providers, and through their involvement in Local Strategic Partnerships – play an especially important role in rural areas as community leaders, giving people a greater say in shaping their area’s future and thus in ensuring delivery of the various strands of the rural agenda.

The Boundary Committee will wish to take into account key issues in rural areas, in particular:

- additional costs of service delivery in remote areas;
- limited access to services and poor transport infrastructure;
- pockets of rural deprivation and social exclusion often found alongside areas of affluence;
- lack of access to broadband/IT;
- widespread shortage of affordable housing.

Animal Health and Welfare

The health and welfare of animals is central to Defra's work of protecting and improving livestock, controlling and eradicating disease and promoting animal welfare. Local authorities (variously shire county and shire district councils) generally enforce animal health and welfare legislation.

A review of animal welfare legislation is currently taking place. This will present an opportunity for rethinking the involvement of local authorities, especially a clarification of the respective roles of (district) environmental health departments, and (county) trading standards departments.

The Government is developing a strategy for animal health and welfare, as recommended by the Policy Commission Report on the Future of Farming and Food and the recent foot and mouth inquiries. The strategy is currently at an early stage of development.

Department of Health

Main Objectives

The Department of Health's overall aim is to improve the health and well being of the people of England, through the resources available, by:

- Supporting activity at national level to protect, promote and improve the nation's health;
- Securing the provision of comprehensive, high quality care for all those who need it, regardless of their ability to pay or where they live or their age; and
- Securing responsive social care and child protection for those who lack the support they need.

The NHS Plan aims to deliver a health service fit for the 21st century with services designed around the needs of patients and improved health outcomes, particularly for the poorest in society. The Government has set up an independent regime of healthcare regulation, audit and inspection and a streamlined financial system of payment by results, in which cash follows the patient is being introduced. Decision-making is being devolved to local communities and will enable patients to make informed choices about where, when and how they are treated.

The aims for social care are to improve services, promote independence and well being, and protect and support the most vulnerable. Overall, the aim of the Department's Public Service Agreement is to transform the health and social care system so that it produces faster, fairer services that deliver better health and tackle inequalities.

Issues for Local Government Reviews

Primary Care Trusts are now the NHS organisation primarily responsible for liaison with local authorities at the local level, as well as for commissioning all health services for their local community. There are now 304 local Primary Care Trusts (with two of them operating as Care Trusts) and a substantial number of them have some sort of coterminousity with one or a number of local government boundaries, which the Department would wish to see retained if possible.

One other consideration the Department would wish the Boundary Committee to take into account is the overall management capacity if the equivalent of District Councils had social services responsibilities. Creating more councils which had social services responsibilities would create some stress in the system of staffing such councils at senior management levels. There may be a need to take into account the availability of staff with the capability of working as Directors and Assistant Directors of Social Services.

Current Initiatives/arrangements that impact on local government

New planning framework

Local communities will have local priorities related to their local populations and local circumstances and local government has priorities in other important areas of public services. Nationally, the NHS and social services will be supporting other areas of public services including, for example, neighbourhood renewal. Arrangements for delivery will be a matter for local determination. Local organisations and communities will set their own timescales and milestones. They will be responsible for reporting to and accounting to their local communities for improving these services where necessary.

Each NHS organisation, working with its local councils and other local partners, needs to develop underpinning plans which show the total increases in capacity in the three key areas of:

- physical facilities
- workforce
- information management and technology.

Implementing these plans will depend on taking a whole system approach with each organisation playing its part in delivery. Where the NHS is in the lead, Strategic Health Authorities are responsible for ensuring the process and outcome of planning is robust, and similarly councils will take responsibility for the social care lead area. Where the lead is joint, PCTs and councils should locally agree the lead arrangements at the beginning of the planning process.

Within the NHS, planning will be from the bottom up:

- PCTs (and relevant Care Trusts), as the lead planners, will be responsible for creating local plans which describe health and service improvement in their area. These will be developed using local clinicians' knowledge as well as patients and the public. They will address the needs of the community as a whole and incorporate the national priorities.
- Each NHS Trust will be responsible for creating its own plan which shows how it will deploy its resources to deliver on both national and local priorities and how it fits within the plans of its PCT commissioners
- Workforce Development Confederations will work with the other organisations to contribute to these plans and support Strategic Health Authorities to create the workforce plan as part of the Local Delivery Plan.
- Strategic Health Authorities will bring together those PCT plans, as described in the next section, into a comprehensive Local Delivery Plan for their area
- taken together these plans will make up a coherent national picture

Local authorities are to contribute to Local Delivery Plans as necessary. In particular, where they are leading on one of the joint priority areas, the plan they produce with the NHS should be built into the Local Delivery Plan for the area. Councils' planning for their lead priority on life chances for children should follow local government requirements taking account of any special arrangements agreed for the Local Government PSA as a whole. Both NHS organisations and Councils are to consider how joint activity will be reflected in local PSAs and contribute to meeting them.

Department of Trade and Industry

Main Objectives

Deliver prosperity for all by driving up productivity and competitiveness through world class science and innovation, successful enterprise and business, and fair, competitive markets.

Issues for Local Government Reviews

Some individual services, such as the Trading Standards service, struggle to deliver a quality service because they are too small to run effectively with a disproportionate amount of time being spent on management and planning issues.

Trading standards (TS) have a long list of functions depending on the authority. Many of these support the wider local government agenda, for example preventing under age sales of tobacco and alcohol which are seen as key to both health and crime and disorder agendas. TS enforcement responsibilities are extensive involving legislation across a wide range of Government departments. The lion's share is consumer protection legislation for which the Department takes the lead on TS enforcement. There are issues about performance and quality of service that are currently being addressed through the National Performance Framework that sets out what a modern service should be providing and which can be made available to the Boundary Committee if requested.

The framework was introduced in April 2002; it is too early for performance data but it will in time show how authorities are performing. Some of the smaller single tier authorities have found the framework difficult to implement and there is an issue that management and planning tasks take up a disproportionate amount of resource. It is also very difficult for a small service to establish the needs of its users and respond to them as it will tend to have a low profile and sparse resources, whereas more generally consumer expectations of the service are rising.

The Accounts Commission in Scotland recently audited services in Scotland and the findings were published in October. The issue of service size was found to be key to performance and delivery, and whilst the situation in England and Wales will not be the same, the recent findings from Audit Scotland could provide some helpful pointers across the board. On small services these were:

- Service expectations are broadly the same, but there is wide variation in the level of service to consumers and traders in different council areas with larger services providing higher quality services than smaller services (those with fewer than eight staff)
- There is a risk that smaller services do not have the capacity to further develop their services.

Department for Transport

Main Objectives

Transport is one of this Government's top priorities. Decades of under investment have left Britain with badly maintained transport infrastructure in urgent need of modernisation. The challenge was to improve transport services across all modes of transport to the levels the public expects.

The Department is committed to providing reliable, safe and secure transport for everyone, which respects the environment. Specific objectives include:

- Reducing congestion
- Improving public transport
- Reducing road casualties
- Reducing impacts on the environment

At the heart of the Government's strategy is the 10 Year Plan for Transport, published in July 2000. The Plan included £180 billion of public and private investment and provides a strategic framework to address the problems facing the system and to deliver real improvements by the end of the decade. It was widely welcomed as the first ever attempt to set a long-term direction, looking across all transport modes, to fix clear targets, and to commit the sustained levels of increased investment needed to deliver them.

The July 2002 spending review confirmed and in some areas increased the spending plans in the 10 Year Plan.

Immediate priorities include:

- Completing and acting upon the programme of "multi-modal studies" which are recommending long-term solutions for some of our most congested routes.
- Improving the quality of the service provided on the railways and through Network Rail, securing better management of projects and their costs.
- Better management and maintenance of the existing road network
- Delivering local improvements in congestion, safety, environmental quality and accessibility through many thousands of smaller schemes currently being funded through local authorities

The Government will be carrying out a review of the 10 Year Plan in time for the next spending review in 2004, to assess progress towards its objectives and roll the Plan forward beyond 2010.

Issues for Local Government Reviews

The tasks of local transport planning and of seeking to secure, with local transport operators, good access for local people to key services and centres of employment are easier to carry out satisfactorily if conducted at the level of broad travel-to-work areas. In the metropolitan areas, this is achieved automatically because the relevant functions are the responsibility of the area-wide Passenger Transport Authorities, working with the district councils. Elsewhere, even where local authority boundaries cross travel-to-work areas, local transport planning can in principle be secured at an appropriate scale through co-operation between neighbouring authorities. For example, some neighbouring authorities have produced a joint Local Transport Plan. However, inter-authority differences in politics, priorities and local culture can sometimes prevent such joint working arrangements from being introduced even where they would clearly be beneficial. It might be a consideration as a factor that affects both "community identity" and "effective service delivery" if the new pattern of unitary authorities reflected travel to work areas. This would also help to ensure the most effective use of the available capacity for transport planning, which is in short supply.

Experience suggests that smaller single-tier authorities may struggle to effectively deliver the Government's road safety agenda. Experience in the traffic and parking and street works fields is not conclusive as to any link between size and performance. There are possible pointers in the under-representation of single tier authorities in the professional organisations and on the Highway Authorities and Utility Committee which might suggest that they are not well integrated into the relevant networks through which experience is exchanged. Leaving London aside, single tier authorities are among the advanced guard in traffic management and control though mostly these are cities where there had been close City/County working previously. These also tend to have strong in house expertise based on the previous organisations. Smaller authorities are dependent on consultants but this is an increasing trend across the board. The quality of work depends then on the resources available to the consultants and the ability of an authority to be an intelligent client.

Experience is that the general shortage of transport professionals is affecting quality across the board, in consultants and Local Authorities and across all types of Local Authorities. Larger authorities have better buying power. But performance can be variable within as well as between any group.

There is anecdotal evidence of the particular problems smaller authorities face in recruiting in the very tight transport skills market. Joint working between authorities is one way out of this, but has not yet been much pursued outside the Metropolitan areas save for a few cities and the hinterland bits of their shires. It is probably also easier for larger authorities than for small to carry clout with their public transport operators.

Current initiatives that impact particularly on local government

Local Transport Plans

Local authorities are key delivery agents for integrated transport at the local level. The cornerstone of local integrated transport policy are five-year local transport plans (LTPs), announced in the 1998 White Paper *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone* and put on a statutory footing by the Transport Act 2000.

The LTP system is built on longer-term more comprehensive integrated transport strategies devised at the local level by authorities working in partnership with local people, transport providers and other authorities. The system provides local authorities with more flexibility and discretion on spending and more certainty over future funding levels for the plan period. It allows authorities to better tailor solutions to reflect and meet the needs of their own areas. These changes are to encourage authorities to develop strategies and programmes that are realistic, deliverable and widely supported. Authorities set their own targets and objectives in LTPs that are required to be consistent with the Government's national objectives. Collectively, these should provide the necessary contribution towards national congestion and public transport objectives.

Local transport plans cover all forms of surface transport and include strategies and policies on buses, cycling, walking, road safety, parking, public transport information and travel planning, taxi and private hire vehicles and planning and managing the highways network. Together these will provide benefits for motorists and other road users, people using public transport, vulnerable groups, commuters and visitors, cyclists and pedestrians.

Local authorities should ensure that strategies in the development plan and the LTP complement each other. In particular, LTPs should aim to complement planning policies designed to promote more sustainable travel choices and reduce the need to travel. The integration of authorities local transport planning with wider economic social and environmental policies is also a key aspect of the LTP process. In developing their LTPs, transport authorities should liaise with health and education bodies. Working closely with the education sector is important, given the contribution that school travel makes to congestion problems. Transport schemes delivered through LTPs will help to achieve a better quality of life for local communities - by encouraging neighbourhood renewal; helping to create vibrant and prosperous urban centres; promoting social inclusion and improving peoples' accessibility to essential services, such as education, employment and health services.

In both rural and urban areas, local transport authorities also need to have effective liaison arrangements with neighbouring authorities to improve transport links between their areas. Authorities need to agree a common or complementary approach on cross-boundary issues, in the context of emerging regional transport strategies. Local transport authorities also need to liaise closely with the Highways Agency, and neighbouring authorities may establish joint liaison arrangements.

In metropolitan areas, district councils, as highway authorities, should work with the Passenger Transport Authority in the production of a joint plan covering the whole area. Joint plans are required in metropolitan areas under the terms of the Transport Bill. Local highway authorities should work jointly on LTPs wherever this is likely to help integration and improve the overall quality of the plan. This does not necessarily require the production of joint LTPs, although some authorities are producing joint plans and these should improve the effectiveness of the Plans in these areas.

In two tier areas, district councils are active partners in the development of LTPs. This primarily reflects their role as the local planning authority, although they have transport related responsibilities including: control of a significant parking stock, operation of concessionary fare schemes, licensing of taxis, responsibility for developing local air quality action plans and strategies and dealing with crime and disorder issues.

Social Exclusion and Accessibility

The Government's 10 Year Plan for transport identifies the role of public transport as vital in reducing social exclusion – particularly for those who have no or limited access to a car. Transport improvements can increase people's access to employment and other key services such as education and health care. Conversely, the adverse impacts of transport, such as pollution noise and pedestrian accidents, can have a disproportionate effect on lower income groups. In rural areas, socially excluded people are not found in dense numbers like in urban areas. However, transport is a very important consideration to many rural and small-town/village dwellers, and to most of those who have no access to a car.

The Social Exclusion Unit is undertaking a study on transport and social exclusion. Its final report, due to be published later this year, will set out a cross-government strategy for improving accessibility and reducing the adverse impacts of transport. The recommendations are likely to require a significant amount of partnership working between authorities and between transport authorities and other local service deliverers and agencies.

Department for Work and Pensions

Main Objectives

DWP is responsible for delivering support and advice through a modern network of services to people of working age, employers, pensioners, families and children and disabled people.

The key objectives are to:

- sustain a higher proportion of people in work than ever before, while providing security for those who cannot work;
- halve child poverty within a decade, on the way to eliminating it in a generation;
- tackle pensioner poverty by helping ensure a decent income for all pensioners;
- modernise our services to improve access and accessibility.

Issues for Local Government Reviews

Local Authority links with DWP agencies (The Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus) are important, not least because entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit is often linked to the entitlement of social security benefits administered by these two agencies. It is necessary for both The Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus offices to exchange information with local authorities, so boundary issues have an important impact here. So the DWP view is that the issue of this consideration might usefully be included as factors that affect both “community identity” and “effective service delivery” as coterminous boundaries help provide administrative and operational advantages as well as having advantages for DWP customers.

Current initiatives that impact on local government

Welfare to Work Strategy

In conjunction with its local partners, DWP's Jobcentre Plus is providing an active and responsive, single, integrated service to help all people, including benefit claimants of working age, to find jobs, and giving advice on the full range of help and support available to them. Additionally the New Deal programmes, Action Teams, Employment Zones and Ambitions initiatives all involve local partnership working to ensure those looking for work/re-training find it as quickly as possible.

Jobcentre Plus is also providing high quality services to employers, which help them to fill job vacancies quickly and effectively with well-prepared and motivated employees, or help them to manage restructuring or redundancies.

Skills and employment are at the heart of regional economic development and recognising the valuable work already occurring to improve both in the regions, DWP has joined with DTI and DfES and a number of Key Partners, including Jobcentre Plus and Local Authorities, to create Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action. These plans will ensure a focus of what needs to happen in a region to maintain a healthy labour market. They will ensure that employers and individuals alike have as much co-ordinated help as possible to improve employment opportunities and skills levels and thereby accelerate prosperity and competitiveness.

Partnership working with Local Authorities has resulted in the agreement of over 50 Local Public Service Agreement targets which focus on increasing the number of people from disadvantaged groups and areas into work, improving the delivery of Housing Benefit, and ensuring a better take-up of benefits and pensions. Removing Barriers to Work is one of the Beacon Council themes for 2002/3.

Local authority administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are administered on behalf of DWP by local authorities. Housing Benefit is designed to help people who rent their homes meet their housing costs and Council Tax Benefit is designed to help people pay their council tax. The delivery of these benefits is an important function for Local Authorities. In 2000/01, local authorities in England were responsible for delivering Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit totalling almost £12 billion.

The Government is reforming Housing Benefit and its objectives for the benefit and its reform agenda are set down in "*Building choice and responsibility: a radical agenda for Housing Benefit*" published in October 2002. Objectives include:

- reducing the barriers to work;
- providing a better quicker service; and
- making fraud more difficult to commit.

Crucial performance areas, in relation to LAs administration of HB/CTB, are speed and accuracy of claims processing along with work to minimise benefit fraud and to recover overpaid benefit. Best Value Performance Indicators cover these areas. Other matters include, from a customer's viewpoint, the accessibility of the service.

Services for older people

DWP is also developing plans for a third age service (TAS) for older people – a single point of contact for a range of benefits and services administered by central and local government. Key stakeholders are local authorities with responsibility for Social Services departments i.e., county councils and unitary authorities. However, district councils also administer benefits and services, notably Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Efficient exchange of information with a wide range of stakeholders will be crucial to successful TAS delivery and any boundary changes that simplify contacts with local authorities will have a positive impact.

The Home Office

Main Objectives

To work with individuals and communities to build a safe, just and tolerant society enhancing opportunities for all and in which rights and responsibilities go hand in hand, and the protection and security of the public are maintained and enhanced.

To support and mobilise communities so that, through active citizenship, they are able to shape policy and improvement for their locality, overcome nuisance, anti-social behaviour, maintain and enhance social cohesion and enjoy their homes and public spaces peacefully.

To reduce the availability and abuse of dangerous drugs, building a coherent, co-ordinated drugs strategy, covering education and prevention, supply and misuse. To focus on effective intelligence and detection, preventative measures at local level, community regeneration, and – with other relevant departments and agencies – the provision of necessary treatment and rehabilitation services.

To reduce crime and the fear of crime, tackle anti-social behaviour, youth crime and violent, sexual and drug related crime, increasing safety in the home and public spaces.

Current initiatives that impact of local government

Current initiatives include:

- The Nationality Asylum Support Service: the Boundary Committee may wish to note that changes to the population of local authorities may have an impact on decisions about the settlement of asylum seekers.
- Involvement in Social inclusion issues through developing policy that encourages activity that develops active and cohesive communities. The Home Office shares a number of social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal agendas with other Government partners.
- Home Office issues in Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Development, Drugs Advisory Teams and Youth Justice activities.
- Implications for the Police Service and Local Police Authorities.
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships are a statutory responsibility placed on local authorities and the police. In two tier councils it is a three way statutory responsibility; changes would need to take account of these partnerships and police boundaries.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998

This establishes local Crime and Disorder Reduction (CDRP) partnerships led by local authorities and police (the responsible authorities) and from 1 April 2003, police authorities and fire authorities. The partnership is required to develop and implement a strategy to tackle crime and disorder problems in their area. Section 17 of the Act requires each local authorities to exercise its functions with due regard to the impact on crime and disorder in its area, and to take all reasonable preventative action. The Home Office believes that co-terminosity of boundaries is an important factor in raising the effectiveness of partnership arrangements as is alignment of planning, strategic and fiscal approaches.

Police Reform Act 2002

Under this Act CDRP areas may merge by order to operate as if they were one area, either at their own request or by direction of the Home Secretary, if he is satisfied that merger would help reduce crime and disorder, or combat the misuse of drugs.

Following the Police Reform White Paper in 2001, the Home Office has consulted stakeholders on how to bring the work of CDRP's and Drug Action Teams more closely together, to improve local delivery of the crime reduction and drugs agendas. In some cases this may involve formal merger, more likely in unitary authorities than two-tier authorities. In addition the impact on police authorities should be considered as the majority of members outside London are appointed from relevant councils under Schedule 2, paragraph two of the Police Act 1996.

The Boundary Committee will wish to consider how a change in structure can facilitate local government, in conjunction with central government, in meeting these roles and responsibilities and the impact any proposals will have.

The Lord Chancellors Department

Main Objectives

The Lord Chancellor's main departmental role is to secure the efficient administration of justice in England and Wales. He is responsible for:

- The effective management of the courts.
- The appointment of judges, magistrates and other judicial office holders.
- The administration of legal aid.
- The oversight of a wide programme of Government civil legislation and reform in such fields as human rights, freedom of information, data protection, data sharing, family law, property law, electoral & referenda law, defamation and legal

Current initiatives that impact on local government

In 2001, the Department reorganised the way that family courts receive advice on children's best interests. It created the Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), which has a regional structure based on the English regions and Wales. Previously, the work had been structured in the separate local authority and probation service areas.

In the White Paper "Justice for All", in July 2002, the Government announced its intention to legislate to establish a unified administration for the courts in England and Wales. The new agency will replace the existing Magistrates' Courts Committees, the Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority and the Court Service.

The new Agency will be wholly funded by central government. The present arrangement whereby funding for the magistrates' courts is split 80/20 between central and local government will cease; local authorities (and the GLMCA) will be released from their obligation to provide accommodation, goods, services, salaries and expenses for magistrates' courts.

The new structure will enable management decisions to be taken locally, within a strong national framework of standards. There will be a role for the magistracy, local court users and representatives of the wider community in the management of the courts through influential local boards.

Annex C

Organisations to be consulted by the Boundary Committee for England on draft recommendations for local government reviews

This Annex sets out the bodies that the Government believes the Committee should notify and consult in the course of a review, in addition to the principal authorities and MPs for the region who are mentioned in the main body of the guidance. This list is not intended to be exhaustive. The Committee may decide to notify and consult other bodies. Organisations not on the list will, of course, also be welcome to express their views, which should be taken fully into account by the Committee. The Committee should encourage consultees to provide grounds for their views and should seek substantiation for the views expressed.

1. Primary care trusts and strategic health authorities.
2. Chambers of commerce and trade organisations
3. Confederation of British Industry and other significant business organisations in the area
4. Fire and civil defence authorities.
5. Flood Defence Committees
6. Government Offices (Regions)
7. Local Government Association and National Association of Local Councils.
8. Local Strategic Partnerships
9. Lord Lieutenants in the region.
10. Magistrates' Courts' Committees.
11. National Park Authorities, if appropriate.
12. Parish and town councils in the region; charter trustees in the region.
13. Passenger transport authorities.
14. Police Authorities.
15. Port Authorities

16. Port Health Authorities
17. Primary Care Trusts.
18. Probation Committees.
19. Regional Chamber.
20. Rural Community Councils, if appropriate.
21. Sea Fisheries Committees.
22. Voluntary Sector Bodies
23. Waste disposal authorities.
24. Regional Development Agencies

