



The abolition of regional government

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The Labour Party established a considerable network of organisations, offices and policy-making responsibilities at a regional level in England between 1997 and 2010. The definition of the standard regions was set in statute in the [Regional Development Agencies Act 1998](#), schedule 1, and this pattern was followed by regional policy thereafter.

This Standard Note sets out the changes and closures that have taken place to the machinery of regional government that existed at the General Election of 7 May 2010. The vast majority of the landscape of regional institutions will no longer exist by 1 April 2012, and very many of the related funding streams will also have been closed down. Funding to local authority leaders' boards has ceased; the Regional Development Agencies are to be closed by April 2012; and the regional planning regime established by the 1997-2010 Labour government has been repealed.

Library standard note SN/PC/5817, [The Greater London Authority](#), gives details of how the changes and decisions set out in this note affect the governance of London and the Greater London Authority, including the Mayor of London's recent request for additional devolution of powers to the GLA. [Library Research Paper 11/02 on the Localism Bill](#) may also be of interest.

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1 Incoming government commitments

The Conservative Party brought to Government a commitment to remove the regional tier of government from England. This was expressed in their 2009 paper *Control Shift*.

A Conservative government will therefore abolish regional planning, revoke all regional spatial strategies (including regional building targets), and repeal the national planning guidance that relates to regional planning. However, the democratically elected Mayor of London and GLA will still publish the London Plan, which is necessary to provide strategic planning guidance to the London Boroughs.¹

The Paper also stated that a Conservative government would:

abolish the Government Office for London and transfer its functions either to the Greater London Authority or to London boroughs²

There was also a commitment to:

refocus the Regional Development Agencies on economic development, stripping them of their powers over planning; and give local governments the power to establish their own local enterprise partnerships³

The Conservative Party manifesto for the 2010 General Election repeated this commitment:

We will give councils and businesses the power to form their own business-led local enterprise partnerships instead of RDAs. Where local councils and businesses want to maintain regionally-based enterprise partnerships, they will be able to.⁴

We will abolish the entire bureaucratic and undemocratic tier of regional planning, including the Regional Spatial Strategies and building targets.⁵

The Liberal Democrat manifesto was more circumspect, with no mention of Regional Assemblies and spatial strategies:

[We will] reform Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to focus solely on economic development, removing duplication with other parts of government and allowing substantial budget reductions. We will give responsibility for economic development to local authorities. Where existing RDAs have strong local support, they may continue with refocused economic development objectives. Where they do not, they will be scrapped and their functions taken over by local authorities.⁶

It also stated:

[We will] scrap the Government Offices for the Regions and regional ministers.⁷

The Coalition Programme for Government stated:

We will support the creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships – joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities themselves to promote local

¹ Conservative Party, *Control shift: returning power to local communities*, 2009, p.27

² Ibid., p.4

³ Ibid., p.26

⁴ Conservative Party, *An invitation to join the government of Britain*, 2010, p24-5

⁵ Ibid., p.74

⁶ Liberal Democrat manifesto 2010, p.26

⁷ Ibid., p.92

economic development – to replace Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). These may take the form of the existing RDAs in areas where they are popular.⁸

2 Regional Assemblies / Leaders' Boards

2.1 Regional Chambers / Assemblies

The Labour Government had set up Regional Assemblies (also known as Regional Chambers) in the eight English standard regions outside London. These were set up as voluntary bodies in 1998-99. Throughout the following decade they acquired a number of responsibilities and funding streams from Government, mostly related to strategic policy development and land-use planning. In many regions they merged with, or shared a secretariat with, the regional Local Government Association.

The Assemblies carried out strategic functions in the fields of housing, planning, and wider policy development, including producing a Regional Spatial Strategy (a statutory responsibility under the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004*). They were also charged with scrutinising the RDAs' Regional Economic Strategies, under the *Regional Development Agencies Act 1998*. They benefited from a £500,000 per annum administration grant from 2002 onwards. There was a joint association, the English Regions Network, which co-ordinated policy development and lobbying efforts on behalf of the assemblies.

Regional Assemblies contained representatives from local authorities in the region, together with representatives of 'social and economic partners'. The latter were drawn from business, environmental, and voluntary organisations across the region: in most cases, they formed one-third of the assembly membership. Most assemblies had substantial memberships (over 100 in some cases), and key decisions were made by a much smaller executive board.

2.2 The move to Local Authority Leaders' Boards

In 2007, following the *Sub-National Review of local economic development*,⁹ the decision was made to cease funding the Regional Assemblies in favour of new Local Authority Leaders' Boards. Additionally, the Regional Spatial Strategies and Regional Economic Strategies were merged into a single strategic document in each region, which was also to include provisions for housing. The Leaders' Boards were to have joint rights, with the RDAs, to sign off the completed strategy, and the organisations were jointly required to produce an implementation plan and to monitor it. The proposals were produced in the Sub-National Review, consulted upon via the document *Prosperous Places*, and passed into law in the *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009*.

Most assemblies reconstituted themselves as leaders' boards in advance of April 2010 (the date set by the Act for the formal change). Notably, there was no place for social and economic partners on the leaders' boards.

The secretariats of the Assemblies became the secretariats of the Leaders' Boards in each region. Those secretariats ceased to exist during mid-2010. Six months' funding, to September 2010, was provided to enable closure. In some regions, such as the North-East, the regional local government organisation continues in existence, funded by member subscriptions: in others, such as the South-East, the administration disappeared entirely.¹⁰

⁸ Cabinet Office, *The Coalition: our programme for government*, 2010, p.10

⁹ HM Treasury, *Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration*, July 2007

¹⁰ See for instance <http://www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk/>

The funding of leaders' boards was ended in June 2010:¹¹

Baroness Scott: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the funding allocated to regional development agencies for the provision of leaders' boards under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 will continue until legislation repealing the leaders' boards has been enacted.

Baroness Hanham: The Secretary of State has announced that government funding for regional local authority leaders' boards—which took over most of the functions and staff of the old regional assemblies—has been ended. This does not need to await the repeal of Section 5 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and will produce an annual saving of £16 million. The dismantling of these boards will remove a needlessly complex bureaucracy and see local authorities put firmly back in control of planning in their areas. This will ensure local people can hold their leaders to account.¹²

Section 109 of the *Localism Act 2011* repeals the Part of the *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009* concerned with leaders' boards and regional strategies.¹³

3 Regional spatial strategies

On 6 July 2010, the Coalition Government revoked all regional spatial strategies (RSSs) under section 79(6) of the *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009*. This action was challenged in the High Court by developer CALA Homes, leading to several months of legal debate (for further details see [Library Standard Note SN/SE/3741](#)). The Court of Appeal's final judgment, on 27 May 2011, gave succour to both sides.¹⁴

The Communities and Local Government Committee produced a [report](#) on 17 March 2011, criticising the abandonment of regional spatial strategies without a clear vision of what to put in their place. The Committee recommended that ways be found of maintaining the beneficial aspects of RSSs, including retaining some form of "larger-than-local" level of planning at which more strategic aspects of planning could be addressed. Similar criticisms were made by the Transport Select Committee in their report [Transport and the economy](#), published on 15 February 2011.

Regional plans were formally abolished for the East Midlands and North-East on 18 March 2013,¹⁵ for the South-East on 14 February 2013,¹⁶ Yorkshire & Humber (29 January 2013),¹⁷ and the East of England on 11 December 2012.¹⁸

A number of other regional strategy documents associated with the RSSs were produced by the Assemblies: Regional Housing Strategies, Regional Waste Strategies, and Regional Transport Strategies. Other strategy documents, on matters such as culture, the environment, minerals, and skills, were produced in some regions only. These strategy

¹¹ See also the Department for Communities and Local Government's notice on 17 June 2010: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1617912>

¹² HL Deb 21 June 2010 c155WA

¹³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/126/part1/11126part1.pdf>

¹⁴ DCLG press release, "Government wins second legal challenge on Regional Strategies", 27 May 2011, accessed 9 June 2011

¹⁵ See [HCDeb 18 Mar 2013](#) c35WS

¹⁶ See [HCDeb 14 February 2013](#) c59WS

¹⁷ See [HCDeb 29 January 2013](#) c33WS

¹⁸ See [HCDeb 11 December 2012](#) c22WS

documents ceased to have any effect with the abolition of the RSSs and the ending of the RDAs' Regional Economic Strategies.

4 Regional Development Agencies

Before the election both coalition parties had been circumspect about their intentions towards the RDAs. A letter from DCLG and BIS on 29 June 2010 stated that the Coalition intended to close down all of the Regional Development Agencies, and invited local councils to begin forming Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in their place (see [Library Standard Note SN/EP/5651, Local Enterprise Partnerships](#)).¹⁹

Some press coverage suggested that the new Local Enterprise Partnerships might take on the “form” of RDAs, as implied in the coalition agreement, but it soon became clear that this was not the case.²⁰ All of the RDAs are to be closed by 1 April 2012. This decision caused some disquiet in business circles: although many business leaders shared the Government's scepticism of the efficacy of the RDAs, there was concern that no alternative strategy had been put in place.²¹

The RDAs are abolished by section 30 of the *Public Bodies Act 2011*. The London Development Agency was abolished via section 191 of the *Localism Act 2011* (see [Library standard note SN/PC/5817](#) for more details on developments in Greater London).

4.1 RDAs: transfer of functions

The White Paper *Local growth: realising every place's potential* gives details of the intended destinations of the current functions of the RDAs. Venture capital and loans schemes, international trade development, policies towards sectors of ‘national importance’, and support for inward investment will pass to central government.²² The [Technology Strategy Board](#) has taken on the RDAs' responsibilities for innovation.²³ The Government will also be beginning “a programme of economic intelligence and analysis”.²⁴ All skills funding will now be routed through the Skills Funding Agency.²⁵ The economic and social aspects of the Rural Development Programme for England will be returned to central management by DEFRA, which previously passed it to the RDAs in 2005 – although the teams of officials will remain in their current physical locations for now.²⁶ New [Destination Management Organisations](#) are being piloted to bring a sub-regional focus to the tourism industry, replacing the RDAs' previous role.²⁷

A [Regional Growth Fund](#) (see [Library Standard Note SN/EP/5874](#)) of £1.4bn, for 2011-14, has been established; this compares to planned total spending of £1.4bn for all nine RDAs in 2010-11 (itself down from £2.25bn in 2009-10). LEPs are able to bid to this fund, but it will also be open to other organisations.

¹⁹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1626854.pdf>

²⁰ “Development agencies in south face cuts”, *Financial Times*, 21/5/10, p2

²¹ Robert Watts, “Demise of the local quangos leaves void; What exactly will replace the scorned regional development agencies”, *Sunday Times*, 15 Aug 2010, p7

²² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *Local growth: realising every place's potential*, 2010, p45-47.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.43

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p47

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p18

²⁶ See [HC Deb 28 Feb 2011, col 6WS](#)

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p45. London will have distinct arrangements – see [Library standard note SN/PC/5817, The Greater London Authority](#)

Funding for the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund was administered, within England, by the Regional Development Agencies. The Government announced new arrangements for the management of the ERDF in a written statement on 3 February 2011:

ERDF is currently delivered by teams in the regional development agencies. Following our decision to abolish these agencies and encourage local communities to come together to form economic partnerships that make sense for them, I have concluded that in order to maintain compliance with the regulations and spending momentum, we should transfer the existing ERDF staff and functions into my Department by the beginning of July.

These transfers were completed by 1 July 2011. The ERDF management teams will remain located in the relevant regions.²⁸ In London, the ERDF staff have transferred to the GLA.

4.2 RDAs: transfer of assets and liabilities

It was revealed in September 2010 that the RDAs held some £1.5 billion in liabilities, principally in ongoing contractual liabilities. Their ongoing commitments, some of which lasted several years, were the subject of an audit by KPMG.²⁹ Examples of these are regeneration of coalfield sites and public-private partnership agreements. The RDAs also held some £400 million in assets in May 2010, mainly land and property. The liabilities will return to Whitehall under the 1998 RDA Act: the destination of the assets is uncertain. Some details of the proposed process are available in the White Paper, with the key criterion set as “achiev[ing] the best possible outcome for the region consistent with achieving value for the public purse”.³⁰

During early 2011 the individual RDAs drew up plans for the disposal of their assets and liabilities. The plans typically combine packages of assets being transferred to local authorities, with others sold on the open market: however, it was not possible to transfer assets to local authorities at zero cost.³¹ There are variations in the plans: for instance, One North-East has proposed the transfer of two public-private property vehicles to the North-East Economic Partnership (the LEP covering the standard region, excluding Teesside). On the other hand, the North-West Development Agency suggested deferring sale of some assets until after its closure, to achieve the best possible price: they suggested passing others to the Homes and Communities Agency.³²

5 LAAs, MAAs and LSPs

Local Area Agreements no longer exist. A letter from the Secretary of State on 12 October 2010, followed by a written statement,³³ informed councils that they would now be free to maintain targets set under LAAs or not, as they saw fit. The current round of agreements expired in March 2011, and the government has no plans to run further rounds.

²⁸ Allister Hayman, “DCLG to take control of EU regeneration funding”, Local Government Chronicle, 13 January 2011

²⁹ Local Government Chronicle, “Cost of scrapping RDAs opens £1.5bn black hole”, 22 September 2010

³⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *Local growth: realising every place's potential*, 2010, p.20

³¹ Local Government Chronicle, “Ministers block release of RDA asset plans”, 3 March 2011

³² A list of assets agreed for disposal in April 2011 is available from [DEP2011-0664](#).

³³ [HC Deb 13 Oct 2010, c.21WS](#)

There have been no specific announcements about the role of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), but there has been no further mention of them following the introduction of Local Enterprise Partnerships. LSPs were:

...a non-statutory body that brings together the different parts of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, to work at a local level. The lead role in the LSP is taken by the local council. Other major players could include the local police and the primary care trust (PCT). The LSP helps different organisations work together to improve the quality of life in an area and deliver public services more effectively.³⁴

13 Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs) were signed in the final two years of the Labour government. Like LAAs, they no longer have any official recognition. In some cases, their aims and commitments were subsumed into LEPs. The same is true of the two city-region pilots established by the Labour government, in Greater Manchester and Leeds. LEPs have been approved on the same boundaries as those covered by these two city-regions, and absorbed the city-region plans and commitments.

6 Government Offices for the Regions

Government Offices were set up by the last Conservative government in 1994. In May 2010 they had a total of 1700 staff. In 2006-07 they delivered some £7.7 billion on behalf of central government departments. Administration costs in 2009-10 were £118 million.³⁵

The Conservative manifesto stated that it would close the Government Office for London and review the case for the existence of the Government Offices for the Regions, covering the eight standard English regions. On 22 July, Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, announced a decision “in principle” to abolish the Government Offices, “subject to the satisfactory resolution of consequential issues through the Spending Review”. This was presented as part of the Government’s localism programme, as “the Government offices are not voices of the region in Whitehall. They have become agents of Whitehall to intervene and interfere in localities, and are a fundamental part of the ‘command and control’ apparatus of England’s over-centralised state.”³⁶

The review process has identified a number of functions that will continue to be handled in the regions. These include national functions being undertaken in a number of regions, with a small team in each. It seems likely, though it is not confirmed, that officials from the same department in the same city will be co-located, but departments will not necessarily co-locate with one another – the list below demonstrates much variation away from the ‘standard regions’. Examples of these are as follows:

- Resilience – ensuring local and regional partners are ready to respond to large-scale emergencies (Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, London – the latter within GLA)
- Regional officials for the counter-terrorism strategy **CONTEST**, co-located with Resilience teams (Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol)
- Statutory planning casework functions (Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol)

³⁴ See <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=1115932>

³⁵ Further details of the Government Office network just before the announcement of its closure can be found in this document: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/1700065.pdf>

³⁶ HC Deb 22 July 2010 c28WS

- ERDF 2000-06 closure (managed in London: regional presence in North-West, East Midlands, West Midlands, and East of England); also the management of the ERDF 2007-13 programme, to be maintained in the current locations.³⁷
- ESF 2007-13 programme (Newcastle, Leeds, Nottingham, Birmingham, Guildford, Bristol)
- 'BIS Local' – six regional offices operated by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, facilitating communication with LEPs
- UK Trade & Investment – engaging with stakeholders and managing the trade delivery business (teams in each standard region)
- Big Society – one outreach post (in each standard region)
- Cabinet Office regional researchers (Bristol, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Cambridge)
- Department for Transport local intelligence: facilitating local sustainable transport (Leeds, Birmingham, London)
- Civil Service in the English Regions – an internal networking programme, also including a strand of 'estates rationalisation' (North-West, North-East/Yorkshire & Humber, Midlands, South-West, South-East/East of England)

There are also a small number of national functions which are being located in a single regional office (possibly to reduce the level of staff relocation):

- Housing rent charges – administration of applications of redemption and apportionment of rent charges under the Rentcharges Act 1997 – team based in Manchester.
- Transport: processing of statutory order and consents – team based in Newcastle
- Rights of way casework: owned by DEFRA, transferring from Government Office North-East to the Planning Inspectorate (Bristol)

Finally, some functions are being brought back to headquarters in London:

- Closure of the New Deal for Communities (to be completed by 30 September 2011)
- Gathering information on serious child care incidents: returning to Department for Education central offices

All other Government Office programmes were closed by 31 March 2011. However, it was reported in October that the Department for Communities and Local Government had created a structure of 14 regions, which are to be used internally as a basis for developing 'better links' between the Department and local government. These regions' boundaries are not contiguous either with LEPs, the Homes and Communities Agency's regions, or with the six regions established in mid-2010 by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.³⁸

³⁷ See [HC Deb, 3 Feb 2011, col 48WS](#)

³⁸ Allister Hayman, "Structure set up to strengthen local links", *Local Government Chronicle*, 17 October 2011, p.4-5.

7 Regional Funding Allocations

Regional Funding Allocations were multi-year allocations of funding to regional bodies covering economic development, transport, planning and housing. They were introduced in 2004 as a means of allowing greater flexibility between regional bodies, and greater flexibility (particularly in capital spending) across financial years.

Two rounds of Regional Funding Allocation bids took place under the 1997-2010 Labour government, covering the years 2005-08 and 2008-11. Representative regional bodies – in practice, the RDA and Regional Assembly / Leaders Board – were required to submit bids every three years, with suggested allocations of public spending under the headings above. With indicative in-year and in-organisation funding levels provided by the Treasury, they were permitted to propose transfers of funds between years and between organisations, with justifications based on current spending priorities within the region. Guidance documents were provided by the Treasury.

The second round of Regional Funding Allocations was initially announced by the Government as part of the *Sub-National Review of Economic Development* in June 2007. Bids were invited from regions by February 2009.³⁹ The funding allocations covered major transport schemes, regional housing and housing market renewal funding, and RDA funding. The scheme did not cover London, which enjoyed separate relationships with the Treasury via the Mayor and Assembly.

A written statement on 10 June 2010, with regard to transport projects, stated that local authorities “should not assume that schemes prioritised under the previous Government’s Regional Funding Allocations (RFA) process will be funded to the previous published levels.”⁴⁰

We will also be looking to develop less bureaucratic successor arrangements to the previous Government’s Regional Funding Allocations for transport that, over time, give a proper voice in scheme prioritisation to elected local authorities and business interests. We hope that Local Enterprise Partnerships will have an important role in this.⁴¹

However, the scheme will not be revisited by the current Government, as the majority of the budget lines covered by it have been substantially reduced or abolished.

8. Regional committees in the House of Commons

8.1 The appointment of regional ministers

On 29 June 2007 nine regional ministers were appointed by the Prime Minister. The *Governance of Britain Green Paper*, published in July 2007, set out their role.⁴² They did not replace ‘departmental’ Government ministers, but provided a means of scrutiny of Government policy in their region. Additionally, the Modernisation Committee published a report entitled *Regional Accountability* on 10 July 2008. The Committee recommended the creation of eight regional select committees and eight regional grand committees (with no committees for London).

³⁹ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/regional_funding_advice300708.pdf, July 2008, page 3

⁴⁰ See DEP 2010/1285

⁴¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transport-spending-review-2010> – Transport Spending Review press notice, 20/10/10

⁴² Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain*, Cm 7170, July 2007, paras 115-118

8.2 Regional Select Committees and Regional Grand Committees

A debate on the establishment of eight Regional Select Committees – one for each region of England outside London – was held on 12 November 2008. The motion in favour of establishing them was agreed to by the House.⁴³ The intention was that the committees would look at the “development or implementation of policies where there is a regional aspect to decision-taking and delivery, and would not be focused on the purely local impact of nationally set policies”.⁴⁴

At the same time, the House agreed to an amendment to the Government’s motion, proposing that regional select committee chairs should not be paid, by 239 votes to 237. Standing Order 117, which requires the establishment of a Regional Affairs Committee, was suspended. An amendment removing the proposed power for regional select committees to invite councillors to attend at meetings was agreed to without a division. A ninth Regional Select Committee, for London, was agreed to on 25 June 2009, and the membership was nominated on 14 December 2009.

Eight regional grand committees, consisting of all of the Members of Parliament for each region, were also established. These grand committees held only a small number of meetings, mostly in the relevant region. They required specific Government motions to trigger a meeting. A batch of motions were debated on 25 June 2009: the House agreed to the motions for seven of the eight regional grand committee meetings, but voted against the meeting of the East Midlands Regional Grand Committee by 104 to 98.⁴⁵

The regional select committees had equivalent powers to “send for papers, persons and records” to those enjoyed by departmental select committees. They could also invite Members from the relevant region to participate, but not to move motions, vote, or participate in the quorum.

The Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, in opposition at the time, refused to nominate members to the regional select committees. As a result, they consisted only of Labour members and a small number of independents.

The regional committees were not re-appointed after the 2010 General Election, and no regional ministers have been appointed by the coalition government.

⁴³ “Remaining Orders and Notices”, *Order Paper*, 6 November 2008

⁴⁴ Explanatory Memorandum on the Motions in the Name of the Leader of the House relating to (1) Regional Accountability (2) Regional Select Committees (3) Regional Grand Committees (4) Pay for Chairmen of Select Committees (2 Motions), para 3

⁴⁵ HC Deb 25 June 2009 c1022