



Evaluation of the Role and Impact of Regional Assemblies

Final Report



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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, and not necessarily of the Department for Communities and Local Government

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

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Section 1: Introduction

1.1 This project

1.1.1 Overview

This is the final report of an evaluation of the roles and impacts of the eight Regional Assemblies in England outside London.

Regional Assemblies have important roles to develop strategic policy and partnerships at regional level in England (excluding London where different governance arrangements apply). These roles include scrutinising the work of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), acting as the Regional Planning Body (RPB), and seeking to coordinate and integrate policy development and delivery at regional level. Several of these roles are specified in legislation, Government policy, and Guidance (see section 1.3 of this report).

Regional Assemblies are voluntary bodies. All the Assemblies are designated as Regional Chambers under the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) Act 1998, which sets out a requirement for RDAs to have regard to the Chamber's views. Assemblies' membership is drawn from local authorities (generally around two thirds of their membership) and a range of other regional organisations representing business, environment, community and other interests (generally around one third of their membership).

1.1.2 Aims and Objectives of Research

The brief was prepared in 2003. The main **aims** of the study, stated in the project brief, are to undertake:

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

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

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

1. *Deliver a feasibility study which has developed a framework within which the impact of Regional Chambers can be analysed and assessed over time.*
2. *Evaluate the extent to which Regional Chambers have met their (implicit and explicit) aim and objectives, including:*
 - *The impact of Regional Chambers on policy development, delivery and effectiveness... with a view to drawing out general and specific lessons;*
 - *The extent to which Regional Chambers have had a positive or negative impact on regional and sub-regional co-ordination and co-operation.*

3. *Assess the effectiveness of the Regional Chambers' Fund in enhancing and developing the scrutiny and strategic roles of Regional Chambers.*
4. *Learn about the different approaches to scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Chambers and assess their effectiveness within regional contexts with a view to drawing out general and specific lessons."*

The study intends to evaluate the collective role and impact of the Regional Assemblies, identifying good practice and transferable lessons. The focus of the study is on the role and impact of Regional Assemblies as constituted as voluntary unelected bodies. The study does not include consideration of the prospect of elected regional assemblies.

A feasibility study was undertaken in late 2003 to establish the approach to the research, and the evaluation criteria. The evaluation period lasted from spring 2004 until the end of 2005, enabling a longitudinal assessment. The research involved an initial evaluation, comprising desk-based research, interviews, and seminars over the study period. Further details of the study method are set out in Chapter 2 of this report.

1.1.3 Timing of the Research

The research for this project was undertaken over the period from early 2004 to early 2006 (referred to in this report as the "evaluation period"). Details of the various stages of the research and their timing are set out in Chapter 2.

In producing this report the study team have considered main developments and progress made by Assemblies since the detailed research work was completed. A seminar was held in December 2006 to discuss main findings from the research. Participants in the seminar included the study team, the Regional Assemblies and Government Office (GO) and Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) officials. The seminar provided an opportunity to discuss recent developments and progress made by the Assemblies and various comments have been considered as part of the process of producing this report. As a result, the study team is confident that this report provides an accurate and reasonably up-to-date assessment of the role and impact of Regional Assemblies.

1.2 The main roles for Regional Assemblies

The roles and responsibilities of Regional Assemblies have evolved over time. They are based on a range of legislation, Government policy and Guidance documents, as well as established practice across the Assemblies. Through the feasibility study for this research, the following main roles for Regional Assemblies were identified:

- scrutiny;
- regional planning and transport;
- policy development and regional co-ordination;
- partnership working; and
- Voice of the Region.

In addition Assemblies “Corporate Affairs” activities (decision making, financial and organisational structures and processes) were identified as a relevant topic for the evaluation. Details of these roles and the main sources of relevant government advice and Guidance are set out in Table 1.1 overleaf.

There have been differences in the way Assemblies have interpreted and specified their own roles. Some have adopted a more ambitious and wide-ranging policy development remit than others, and several have widened or narrowed their remit over time.

The Assemblies are designated as Regional Chambers under the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) Act 1998. This sets out a statutory requirement for RDAs to have regard to the views of Regional Chambers when preparing Regional Economic Strategies (RESs). Most Assemblies have interpreted this requirement as a wider “scrutiny” remit in relation to work of the RDA. The Government’s 2001 Strengthening Regional Accountability paper outlined the importance of Assemblies’ scrutiny role in the context of new funding arrangements for RDAs¹.

All Assemblies are designated under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and associated regulations and Guidance as the Regional Planning Body (RPB), responsible for leading regional spatial planning work. This includes the production of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), which incorporates the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), as well as a role in coordinating and advising on the implementation of RSS.

Chapter 2 of the Regions White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, published in May 2002, also set out a wide range of policy development and coordination roles for Regional Assemblies.

Assemblies are funded by a combination of central Government funding and subscriptions from their member organisations. Initially, most of the Assemblies relied upon subscriptions from members for their funding, and on upper tier authorities providing funding for regional planning work. However, the balance of funding has now shifted to central Government. Government provides Assemblies with funding to undertake their planning and scrutiny functions. Some, but by no means all, Assemblies continue to raise modest funding from subscriptions from local authorities in the region.

¹ The “accountability” framework for RDAs has changed with the introduction in April 2006 of a new Independent Performance Assessment (IPA) regime for RDAs, with IPA undertaken by the National Audit Office. Whilst this was introduced after the completion of the research for this project, the implications for Assemblies’ scrutiny role have been considered (see chapter 3).

Table 1.1: Main Roles of Regional Assemblies and the Main Sources of Relevant Government Guidance and Advice		
Regional Assemblies' role	Brief description	Principal sources of guidance and advice
Scrutiny	Statutory requirement for RDAs to have regard to the views of the Chamber in preparing and delivering their Regional Strategies. In practice, Chambers have adopted more formal scrutiny roles.	1998 RDA Act (clause 18(1)) and Guidance to RDAs Strengthening Regional Accountability Paper (DETR 2001) Guidance on Regional Chambers Fund
Regional Planning and Transport	All Regional Chambers have been designated as the Regional Planning Body (RPB), responsible for preparing draft RPG, and now RSS (incorporating a Regional Transport Strategy). Other regional planning roles include overseeing RSS delivery, monitoring LDFs and strategic applications for conformity with RSS, and contributing to technical studies.	Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (including regulations) PPS11, Regional Planning, and previously, PPG11, Regional Planning Performance management framework for Planning Delivery Grant ODPM Regional Spatial Strategies Supplementary Guidance (April 2003) DfT and ODPM Guide to Producing Regional Transport Strategies (2002)
Policy Development and Regional Coordination	The White Paper, <i>Your Region, Your Choice</i> , gave Chambers an enhanced remit to strengthen policy development and coordination at regional level. Most Chambers have undertaken work to help join-up policies and strategies, as well as new policy development to fill gaps.	Your Region, Your Choice (ODPM, Cabinet Office May 2002) Guidance on Regional Chambers Fund Chambers' own corporate plans, strategies etc.
Partnership Working	Most Chambers have undertaken work to strengthen regional-level partnership relationships and structures, and to strengthen and widen stakeholder involvement in regional initiatives.	Ministerial Guidance on Regional Chambers Your Region, Your Choice (ODPM, Cabinet Office May 2002) Chambers' own corporate plans, strategies etc.

Table 1.1: Main Roles of Regional Assemblies and the Main Sources of Relevant Government Guidance and Advice (continued)

Voice of the Region	There is no formal Guidance to Chambers in this regard; most have developed a communications function to raise the profile of their work and to influence policy development in the region, in Whitehall and in Brussels.	Chambers' own corporate plans, strategies etc.
Corporate Affairs	Not a 'role' as such, but the growth in Chambers' resources, staff and workloads has meant that financial and organisational management issues have become increasingly important	ODPM Guidance on Chamber two-year business plans (2004) Guidance on Regional Chambers Fund Chambers' own corporate plans, strategies etc.

1.3 Developments Over the Study Period

1.3.1 Introduction

The evaluation period, from early 2004 to the end of 2005, was a period of significant change for Regional Assemblies. This impacted significantly on their roles and activities and the policy and political context in which they operate. This section summarises the main developments over this period. These developments and changes are set out in more detail in the *Second Annual Interim Report* for this study.

1.3.2 No Vote in Referendum on Elected Regional Assembly for the North East

The 'no' vote in the November 2004 referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North East undoubtedly had an impact on all the Assemblies (to varying degrees). It prompted debate over the optimum remit for Assemblies, and was an important factor in leading several Assemblies to review their roles and structure. Different positions on regional governance were taken by the main parties during the 2005 General Election campaign.

1.3.3 Strategic Reviews of Assemblies in the North of England

Partly as a result of the North East "no" vote, but also reflecting concerns amongst their membership, the three Assemblies in the North of England (North East, North West, and Yorkshire and Humber) underwent a process of strategic review during financial year 2005 and 2006. This involved a wholesale review of the Assemblies' roles, organisational and funding structures.

In all three regions, the Assembly has emerged with a more focused policy remit, and streamlined staff and decision-making structures. In the North East and Yorkshire and Humber, the Assemblies have de-merged from the regional local government associations. In all three regions the reviews coincided with the departure (for various reasons) of the Chief Executive of the Assembly. In all three regions, the review process was a difficult and protracted process, lasting many months, leading to a real sense of hiatus, loss of momentum, and damage to the standing of these Assemblies. The three assemblies are now moving forward with new structures in place.

1.3.4 New Planning System

The new planning system introduced in 2004, enhanced the Assemblies' roles as the Regional Planning Body, responsible for leading regional spatial planning work. A main component of the new system was the introduction of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs), which are intended to be more strategic and wide-ranging with a stronger focus on implementation than the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) documents they replaced.

1.3.5 City-Regions

National policy, and inter-regional initiatives such as the Northern Way, have led to increased recognition of the importance of city regions as drivers for economic growth. New forms of city region cooperation and policy making are emerging. This has had implications for regional policy making, particularly in planning and transport. There is also a degree of confusion and uncertainty regarding the future development of the city regions agenda, and how this is related to the roles of Regional Assemblies and other regional bodies.

1.3.6 Housing

In all regions, the work of the Regional Housing Board (RHB) has been brought progressively closer to that of the Assembly over the evaluation period, culminating in merger of the housing and planning functions. The Barker Review of Housing has led to increased emphasis on the importance of housing markets and housing choice in relation to regional economic and spatial development.

1.3.7 Regional Funding Allocations

The *Devolving Decision Making* paper published in 2004 by HM Treasury, DTI, DfT and ODPM, invited each Region to provide advice on how funding across three existing funding streams in the region should be better spent to help meet regional priorities. The Regional Funding Allocation comprises three existing funding streams in the areas of transport, housing and economic development.

Funding was based on current spending review period allocations, with a uniform uplift beyond these to 2016 (2% pa) and a new regional allocation for transport. Regions had to submit regionally-agreed proposals, coordinated by the Government Office (GO) in a document no longer than 30 pages by the end of January 2006. In all regions, the Regional Assembly worked with the GO, RDA and other partners to draft the advice. The advice was generally endorsed by the Assembly, as well as by the Board of the RDA. Government is currently considering the future scope of RFA exercises.

1.4 This report

1.4.1 Role of This Report

This is the Final Report of the study. This report is not intended to provide a comprehensive description of the work and achievements of the Assemblies over the study period. It is intended to provide a summary of the main findings from the research, including a summative assessment in relation to the evaluation questions set out in the study brief and the evaluation criteria identified through the feasibility study. It is not the role of this report to set out specific examples of good practice or the individual “achievements” of Assemblies. Whilst not an independent assessment, the report commissioned by the English Regions Network² to support their input to the Comprehensive Spending Review, sets out an interesting range of examples of Assembly work.

1.4.2 Other Reports Produced and Published for This Project

Further detail and context is provided in the reports already produced as part of this project:

- The *Feasibility Study Report* that was completed in early 2004, which sets out the baseline and method for the research, including the evaluation criteria;
- The *First Annual Interim Report*, published in July 2005, which sets out the findings of the initial evaluation undertaken in Spring and Summer 2004, which comprised desk-based research, interviews, and assessment of Assemblies’ position against the evaluation criteria; and
- The *Second Annual Interim Report*; published in October 2006, which sets out the findings of the final evaluation undertaken in late 2005, which was also based on desk-based research and interviews to assess developments and Assemblies’ progress over the evaluation period.

1.4.3 Structure of This Report

Chapter 2 of this report provides a brief overview of the study method.

Chapters 3 to 5 are structured around the main questions posed in the study brief. These questions can be linked to the main roles identified for Regional Assemblies and the structure for the evaluation criteria:

- Chapter 3, Scrutiny, considers the role and impact of Regional Assemblies in undertaking scrutiny of RDAs;
- Chapter 4, Policy Development and Partnership Working, considers the extent to which Assemblies have met their objectives, their impact on policy development, delivery and effectiveness (including their regional planning role), and their impact on regional and sub-regional coordination and cooperation; and

² Adding Value to the Regions, Regional Assemblies and the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007, English Regions Network 2006.

- Chapter 5, Corporate Affairs, considers the effectiveness of Assemblies decision-making, financial and organisational structures and processes, and addresses the questions posed in the study brief in relation to the Regional Chambers Fund.

Chapter 6 sets out the conclusions from the evaluation.

Section 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

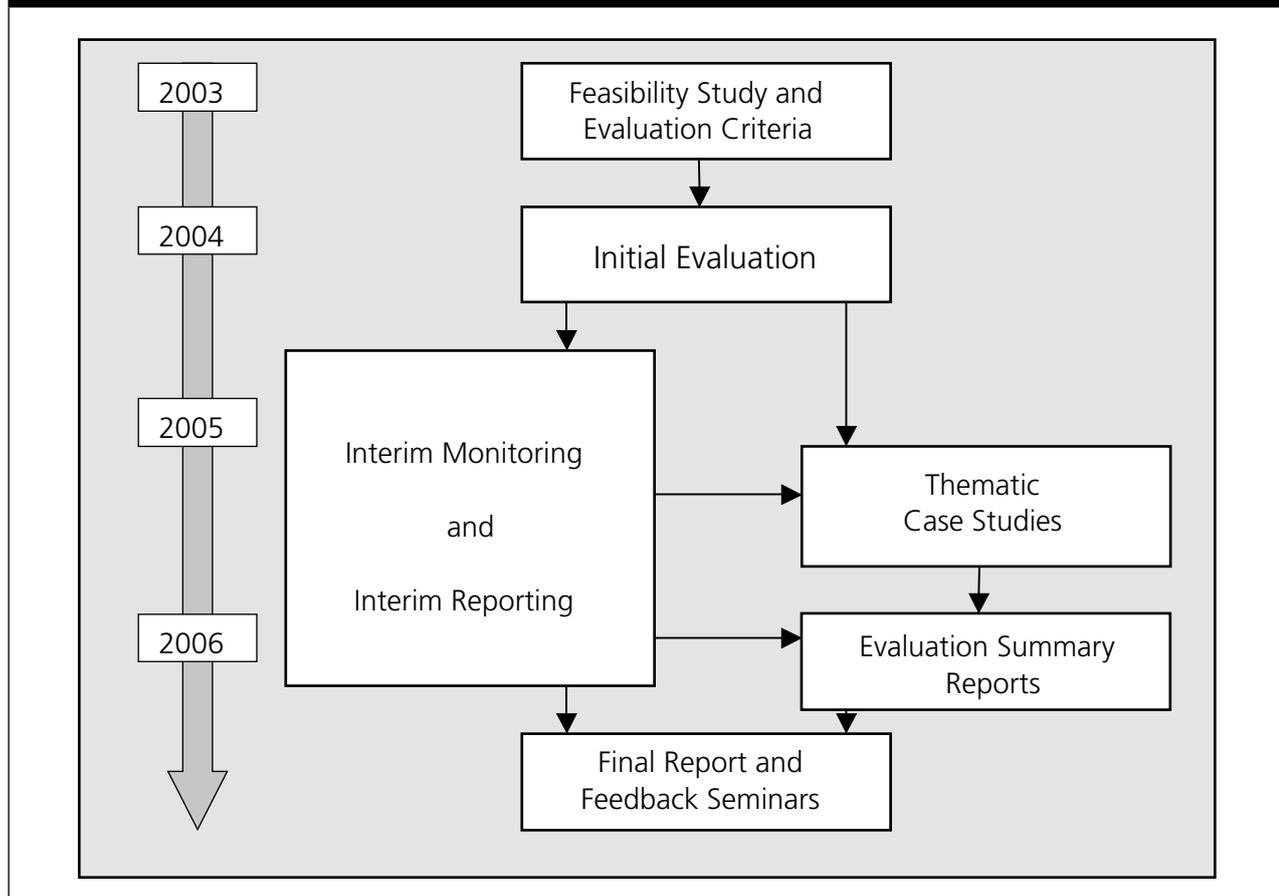
This chapter sets out briefly the methodology for this study. The detailed methodology and the evaluation criteria are set out in full in the report of the Feasibility Study.

Longitudinal studies such as this are intended to record and analyse changes over time. This one has sought to apply consistent assessment criteria in a range of regional development contexts, across eight organisations which were not on the same footing at the beginning of the study period. Consequently, the issues were complex from the outset. In reporting such an exercise, a balance must be found between drawing out the broad themes which characterise the collective progress of the Assemblies over the evaluation period and including sufficient detail to explain specific issues.

The years covered by this study have seen considerable change in the regional governance landscape, in particular the impacts of the referendum in the North East and the increasing importance ascribed to planning at the regional level. The methodology evolved in a pragmatic manner to accommodate these changes, consequently falling behind the original timetable.

The main elements of the evolved methodology are shown in Figure 2.1 below, and explained in the following paragraphs.

Figure 2.1: Main Elements of the Final Methodology



2.2 Feasibility Study

2.2.1 Aims and method

An initial **Feasibility Study** was undertaken during 2003 and the Feasibility Study Report produced in January 2004. The aims of the Feasibility Study were to:

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

During the feasibility study, the team interviewed the Chief Executive of each Regional Chamber and other senior staff, typically including Directors of Policy and Strategy; Directors of Communications; Directors of External Affairs and Directors of Business Strategy. A review of the contemporary policy framework was also undertaken at this time.

Academic literature, principally relating to Chambers' scrutiny and regional co-ordination roles, was also reviewed. Many authors at this time were viewing Regional Chambers as an intermediate stage before the introduction of elected regional assemblies, rather than important bodies in their own right.

A series of factual profiles of the Chambers was prepared. These outlined the contemporary position, aims and objectives of the Chambers and described their principal work streams, existing and future priorities, organisational, management, financial and constitutional structures. This enabled the study team to identify a series of evaluation criteria to be used in the main research. The study team identified six main roles and activities undertaken by Chambers at this time, which became the six main themes for the assessment. These are explained in section 1.3.

2.2.2 Evaluation criteria

In defining the evaluation criteria, the team took the following factors into account:

- the different starting points in each region in terms of previous regional institutions and partnership structures;
- the differing implicit and explicit aims and objectives of each Assembly;
- the varying extent and specificity of guidance to Assemblies on their main roles;
- accepted good practice; and
- the need to develop criteria on which information can be collected realistically and assessed reasonably within the context and timescale for this study.

The aim was to facilitate the identification of good practice and transferable lessons, and assist in analysing the progress made by Chambers over the course of the longitudinal evaluation. The criteria were intended to provide a guide, establishing the type of practice and evidence that the research team would seek to identify.

A detailed set of matrices were prepared, setting out possible 'inputs' and 'impacts' of Chamber activity under each of the six main roles identified (scrutiny; regional planning and transport; policy development and regional co-ordination; partnership working; voice of the region; and organisational and decision-making structures).

2.3 Initial Evaluation

An **Initial Evaluation** was undertaken in spring 2004. This involved desk-based research and in-depth interviews in each region with the Assembly, Government Office, RDA and regional partners. Where possible, Chamber activities were assessed against the evaluation criteria matrices. This was a complicated process although it yielded a lot of data which enabled the team to record the situation in each region.

The evaluation criteria provided a clear and structured framework for undertaking the research, interviews and analysis. However the number of criteria and their level of detail meant that the analysis was very time consuming. For some evaluation themes, most Chambers met the majority of the evaluation criteria, but the success of their roles and the extent of positive impacts varied. The challenge in undertaking the analysis was in considering not only what approaches Chambers adopt in different areas of their work, but how they take forward their work, how they respond to different priorities and circumstances, and with what degree of success.

There was also a requirement to consider the *counterfactual* – comparing the impacts attributable to the work of the Chamber with an assessment of what would have been likely to occur had the Chamber not existed.

The *First Annual Interim Report* (published in June 2005) set out the emerging findings from the Initial Evaluation.

2.4 Interim Monitoring, Feedback Seminars and Case Studies

Monitoring of Assembly activity and output was undertaken in the period from spring 2004 to the end of 2005. This predominantly desk-based research enabled the progress of all Assemblies to be tracked over time, and viewed in the light of the evolving policy and funding context. Meetings were held with each Assembly to discuss the work and progress of the Assembly.

Interim feedback seminars were held in summer 2005. A seminar was held in each region to discuss emerging findings from the research, specific issues for each region, and future challenges. Each seminar involved a wide range of senior level local authority and non-local authority stakeholders, including senior Assembly members, the Government Office, the RDA, and ODPM.

Six **case studies** were undertaken in late 2005 to examine specific issues in more depth. These were identified in discussions between ODPM and the project team. Each of these involved desk-based research and interviews in several regions. The main findings were summarised in the Second Annual Interim report, and have informed this report. Case studies were undertaken on the following topics:

- Scrutiny – the approaches to scrutiny and choice of scrutiny topics;
- Engagement of the private sector by Regional Assemblies;
- Business planning by Regional Assemblies;
- Regional Assemblies' activity in relation to European institutions;
- The involvement of Upper Tier Authorities in regional planning; and
- The engagement of local authority members.

2.5 Final Evaluation

The interviews undertaken for the second evaluation were focused mainly on the Assembly, RDA and Government Office in each region. The interviewees included several senior officers from the Assembly (generally the Chief Executive, and the lead officers), the RDA (generally the head of Strategy, and the head of planning), and the Government Office (generally the lead on RDA sponsorship, and the lead on regional planning). These interviews were supplemented with a range of other discussions with stakeholders, including information from the interim seminars in each region.

The Second Interim Report described the main changes and developments over the evaluation period, as well as the emerging findings from the research.

Section 3: Scrutiny

3.1 Main Findings

3.1.1 Main achievements of the Regional Assemblies:

- Regional Assemblies have developed structured and transparent approaches to scrutiny. There is generally consensus with RDAs on the remit and process for scrutiny, and in many regions scrutiny protocols are in place. A range of models of scrutiny have been used. The dominant approach is use of topic-specific, parliamentary select committee style, scrutiny inquiries.
- Most Assemblies have forged constructive and positive relationships with RDAs, providing valuable policy advice and input through scrutiny activity, as well as less formal joint-working and liaison. Assemblies have generally approached scrutiny work from the perspective of a “critical friend”.
- Assembly scrutiny activity has had a positive, if generally subtle, influence on RDA strategy, with a particularly strong influence from a social and environmental perspective.
- Most Assemblies have made a significant input into the development of Regional Economic Strategies and Action Plans, and some RDAs consider this involvement of the Assembly in the process has added real value and helped achieve widespread shared ownership of and a commitment to deliver the RES.
- In some cases scrutiny is being used to consider the role of various organisations in the region in relation to delivery of the RES. This demonstrates the value of scrutiny as a tool in Assemblies fulfilling a “regional strategic partnership role”.
- In some cases Assembly scrutiny work has been regarded highly by the RDA and others, and is genuinely strengthening the shared evidence base and understanding around important issues for the region. Some Assemblies are informing scrutiny work by drawing successfully on the range of relevant expertise from member and partner organisations.

3.1.2 Current and Future Challenges

- Scrutiny would have greater impact if some Assemblies adopted a less adversarial approach to scrutiny work, moving towards an approach that, whilst offering constructive criticism of RDAs where appropriate, has as its primary aim strengthening shared understanding of the issues, as opposed to an aim of holding the RDA to account. RDAs need to ensure they have structured and transparent arrangements in place to demonstrate how they have regard to scrutiny recommendations.
- Assemblies need to ensure scrutiny does not overlap with Independent Performance Assessment of RDAs undertaken by the National Audit Office. Assemblies need to avoid seeking to manage RDA performance, and to develop overly detailed and bureaucratic frameworks for monitoring and follow-up of scrutiny recommendations.

- In some regions there is scope for more flexible approaches to scrutiny, employing different techniques to enable issues to be addressed in a more timely and appropriate manner. Whilst there are benefits of a parliamentary select committee style approach it is resource intensive, with long lead in times, and it can be adversarial in nature.
- Assemblies need to strike the right balance in using scrutiny to consider the roles of a wide range of organisations in supporting the RDA in the delivery of the RES, whilst not seeking to “hold to account” these organisations, over which Assemblies have no clear accountability remit.
- Scrutiny could be strengthened through more widespread training of Assembly members.

3.2 Introduction

3.2.1 Context

Scrutiny is a core role for Regional Assemblies, one that has a statutory basis. Whilst the RDAs are accountable directly to Ministers and Parliament, the task of ensuring that their “*strategies and activities fit in with the wider framework of strategies across the region*”² rests with the respective Regional Assemblies. The GOs are the sponsor bodies for their RDAs. The National Audit Office assess the performance of the RDAs (see section 3.4.3).

Scrutiny arrangements are in place to ensure that the RDAs are responsive to regional views. This remit as set out in statute and Government Guidance is defined loosely. Each Regional Assembly has been designated as the “Regional Chamber” for the purposes of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. Section 8(2) of the Act requires each RDA to:

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

It is important to stress that the statutory requirements on RDAs are only to “have regard to” the views of the Assembly, not necessarily to agree with or act on those views. The importance of the scrutiny role was emphasised in the 2001 ODPM Consultation Paper, Strengthening Regional Accountability, which set out proposals for supporting chambers in developing their scrutiny work, alongside the strengthened funding framework for RDAs.

3.2.2 Main Questions Set Out in the Study Brief

- How has the process of scrutiny of RDAs bedded in across the different regions?
- What does ‘good scrutiny’ look like, and does it differ from region to region? Can a model of good practice be developed?

² *Strengthening Regional Accountability*, DETR Consultation Paper, 2001.

- Is scrutiny by the chambers effective and meaningful? What makes it so?
- Have regional chambers built a positive relationship with RDAs which facilitates open and transparent scrutiny?

3.2.3 Points From the Evaluation Criteria

The Evaluation Criteria developed for the research focused on whether structured and transparent processes for scrutiny were in place, and what discernable impact scrutiny was having on RDA strategy development and delivery.

3.3 General Approaches to Scrutiny by Regional Assemblies

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

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

The main features and pros and cons of the different approaches are summarised in table 3.1. Further details are set out in the Second Annual Interim Report.

Table 3.1. Pros and Cons of the Main Approaches to Scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Assemblies

Approach	Description	Pros	Cons
‘Select committee’ model	Parliamentary style of scrutiny. Topic specific scrutiny inquiries and scrutiny hearings involving the RDA, and in some cases, other partners, leading to publication of a scrutiny report	Enables specific topics to be investigated in-depth, drawing on range of stakeholder and expert views. In theory provides scope for scrutiny reports that can strengthen the shared evidence base underpinning policy in the region	Fairly inflexible approach, long lead-in times and timescale for a scrutiny exercise, and a resource-intensive process. The hearings can be adversarial. Some examples where scrutiny reports and monitoring frameworks focus on points of minor detail.

Table 3.1. Pros and Cons of the Main Approaches to Scrutiny of RDAs by Regional Assemblies (continued)

'Liaison panel' model	Joint panel to provide framework for liaison and comment between the two organisations, with a flexible approach to addressing specific issues on more of an ad-hoc basis, with the meeting minutes providing a record of the discussion, and basis for reporting back on progress.	Generally less adversarial, and more of a two-way process. More flexible and timely approach, enabling issues to be addressed at an earlier stage, and is less resource intensive. Provides clear and transparent framework for ad-hoc comment and feedback from Assembly to RDA.	Does not address points in as much detail (but scope to draw on research and evidence collected through wider Assembly and other technical and policy work).
'Accountability Meetings'	Meetings open to range of stakeholders, providing opportunity for questioning of RDA, and other regional organisations. Held in East of England on sub-regional basis, with the Assembly and GO also involved. In other regions the RDA and Assembly participate jointly in public meetings	Transparent and participative approach. Enables a focus on sub-regional dimension. Involvement of Assembly and GO brings broader focus on the work of all the main regional organisations.	Not the best forum for examining issues in depth, or moving forward shared understanding of specific issues, or the regional evidence base.

3.4 Main Issues and Developments Over the Study Period

3.4.1 Issues in Assemblies Seeking to Hold to Account RDAs

Many Assembly Members and staff consider scrutiny should be a process of “holding the RDA to account”, addressing a perceived “democratic deficit” in relation to RDAs. The formal position is that RDA’s democratic accountability is to parliament via ministers. More importantly an approach to scrutiny with a primary focus on accountability can be adversarial in nature, with a primary focus on the cross examination of the RDA through a scrutiny hearing. This can generate more heat than light and underplay the value of the evidence gathered through scrutiny work, impairing the scope of scrutiny to really develop a strengthened shared understanding on the important issues facing the region.

Assemblies have a unique position in bringing together a wide range of local authorities and other organisations, whose support, commitment and involvement is important to the successful development and delivery of RDA policy and strategy. Scrutiny is a means of

strengthening this support and commitment of stakeholders to the RDA's work, but to do so, it needs to be undertaken constructively, with a focus on drawing on the views and expertise of these organisations to influence positively the RDA.

3.4.2 The Role of Assembly Members

A main finding from the research is that the success of Assemblies scrutiny work depends heavily on the quality of leadership from relevant Assembly members.

It is vital that Assembly members that undertake scrutiny (particularly the Chair of the scrutiny panel) has good relationships with, and is well respected by, senior RDA officials and Board members. It is also important that members are well-briefed to ensure that their contributions through scrutiny hearings are evidence based. Some Assemblies have undertaken training for members engaged in scrutiny work, but this practice has not been widespread.

3.4.3 Introduction of Independent Performance Assessment (IPA) of RDAs

In 2006 a new programme of Independent Performance Assessment (IPA) of RDAs was introduced, led by the National Audit Office (NAO). The first stage of the process is a self-assessment by each RDA against the NAO's key lines of enquiry. The first round of assessments of the eight RDAs outside London is due to be completed by March 2007.

These arrangements replaced the framework in place since April 2002, whereby RDA performance was monitored and reported on by the Government Offices on behalf of DTI and other departments. Although Government Offices are no longer required to prepare reports on RDA performance, they will continue to work alongside RDAs to ensure Central Government departments have an accurate picture of RDA performance and delivery. This will include a watching brief for Government Offices on how the RDA is implementing the improvement plan after the NAO's assessment.

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

It will be important that the scrutiny work led by Regional Assemblies is differentiated clearly from the role and coverage of the IPA for RDAs. This means that scrutiny should not be focused on matters of RDA performance management. For instance, matters such as project appraisal, analysis of outputs, performance indicators, and detailed internal RDA management are covered by other processes. It will also be vital to recognise the resource pressures the IPA will place on RDAs, and to ensure scrutiny work is not overly resource intensive, in line with the Government's commitment in the March 2005 Budget for a net reduction of the audit burden on the RDAs.

3.4.4 Changes in Organisational Structures and Approaches to Scrutiny

Several Assemblies have also revised their organisational structures with regard to scrutiny. For example, one Assembly has replaced the previous 'task and finish' topic groups with a standing committee of Assembly members who will attend 'Question Time'-style public sessions with experts and stakeholders. Another has made a similar change, from

a series of ‘task and finish’ panels to a single Scrutiny and Policy Development Board. This is expected to facilitate a more consistent approach to scrutiny, and may also enable individual members to build up scrutiny expertise. One Assembly is enabling regional stakeholders to participate in an open question and answer session with the RDA, as part of topic specific scrutiny inquiries.

3.4.5 Scrutiny protocols

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

3.4.6 Assembly-RDA Consensus on the Remit for and Approach to Scrutiny

In most regions, there is clarity and consensus between the Assembly and RDA on the general remit and approach to scrutiny work, and a wider context of good working relationships between the Assembly and RDA. Where scrutiny is working well, this has a positive impact in terms of enhancing the wider understanding of, and support for, the RDA’s work in the region.

However in a limited number of cases, there has been breakdown in the consensus on the approach to scrutiny. RDAs have taken the view that scrutiny has become overly adversarial, time intensive and addressing points of minor detail. Some RDAs question the value of the significant time and resources they are required to devote to scrutiny work. In the regions where these issues have been most serious, a degree of consensus has been re-built.

3.4.7 Evidence base

Whilst most Assemblies draw on a wide range of evidence and stakeholder views in the scrutiny process, there are differences in the extent to which this range of input influences the scrutiny hearing discussions or is reflected in the scrutiny reports. By bringing together a range of senior local authority decision makers with those in a wide range of other organisations, Assemblies have the potential to draw on a wide range of expertise within the region through which to influence RDA policy.

Regional understanding of the issues would be deepened if there was a greater emphasis on the evidence base. Many Assemblies are not fully utilising the quality and range of evidence they gather as part of the scrutiny process.

There are examples where Assemblies undertake extensive work to gather evidence, but then in the hearings often adopt a more adversarial questioning style which is not grounded in evidence. Closer emphasis on the evidence already gathered would add value to the scrutiny process, and could create an opportunity to bring in more expert views to inform the hearing. This could be facilitated through use of round-table hearings. Scrutiny Reports tend to be based on the scrutiny hearing and the recommendations of the scrutiny panel or committee, rather than directly related to the evidence base. They do not

generally bring all the information collected during the scrutiny process into one place, or refer to it in relation to the recommendations.

3.4.8 Monitoring and follow-up

Several Assemblies have introduced formal frameworks and mechanisms for monitoring the impact of scrutiny and following up recommendations. There has been criticism that in some regions the framework that has been put in place is overly onerous. In particular, RDAs question the necessity and value of being required to provide written reports at regular intervals. In contrast, there is evidence in some regions of a more effective and resource efficient approach, based on verbal reports and discussions at liaison meetings between senior staff of the Assembly and RDA. The need for detailed monitoring frameworks is reduced in regions where the RDA has put in place clear and transparent arrangements for ensuring and demonstrating that it has regard to scrutiny recommendations (see section 3.5.5).

3.4.9 Links between scrutiny and wider regional policy frameworks

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

However, widening the focus of scrutiny can lead to the identification of scrutiny topics that are very broad in scope, making it difficult to focus on the specific points of influence within the region. Some Assembly members consider broadening the focus of scrutiny as positive in “holding a wider range of unelected regional agencies to account.” However Assemblies have no formal accountability remit over these organisations. This creates the risk that these agencies will question the legitimacy of Assemblies’ scrutiny work. Equally, some regional agencies see benefits in securing widespread partner commitment to their work through such public dialogue with Assemblies.

3.5 Conclusions

3.5.1 Introduction

The main conclusions are set out below in response to the questions posed in the study brief.

3.5.2 How has the process of scrutiny of RDAs bedded in across the different regions?

Scrutiny activity led by Regional Assemblies has bedded in well, and scrutiny is firmly established as an important and high profile core role of the Assemblies. In all regions, structured and transparent approaches to scrutiny have been put in place. Whilst Assemblies have used a range of models of scrutiny, the most widespread model is topic-specific, parliamentary select committee style, scrutiny inquiries. However, whilst there are

some strengths of this approach, there are also weaknesses, and it does not necessarily constitute the best approach in all circumstances.

3.5.3 What does 'good scrutiny' look like, and does it differ from region to region? Can a model of good practice be developed?

There is no fixed "off-the-shelf" optimal model for scrutiny. There are however some common characteristics to good scrutiny. It is timely and pertinent, focused on issues where there is a genuine regional dimension and a lead role for RDAs. Good scrutiny does not seek to be adversarial, or to hold to account the RDA as its primary aim; it is focused mainly on improving shared understanding of the issues facing the region. It is underpinned by strong evidence, leverage of expert opinion, and good technical understanding of the issues by Assembly officers and members. Good scrutiny is dependent on, and reinforces, strong, constructive and mature joint-working and partner relationships between Assemblies and RDAs.

3.5.4 Is scrutiny by the Assemblies effective and meaningful? What makes it so?

It is clear that scrutiny is meaningful. Structured and clear processes for scrutiny are in place in all regions, and RDAs generally engage in scrutiny work constructively. But scrutiny is undertaken with varying degrees of effectiveness.

In most regions, there is evidence that scrutiny is having a subtle influence on RDA policy. This is most significant in prompting RDAs to take into account additional factors or stakeholders when developing policy, and to emphasise policy themes such as sustainable development, the environment, social inclusion and equal opportunities. In most regions the *process* of scrutiny has helped build a wider regional understanding of and support for the work of the RDA.

Assemblies are also having a positive influence in influencing how RDA policies are implemented, often helping make the linkages between RDA initiatives and funding and the roles, actions and programmes of other bodies. There are some examples where Assembly scrutiny work has prompted the RDA to reconsider and revise its approaches to delivery. In several regions Assembly scrutiny work has influenced the way RDAs have managed a transition to single programme funding.

Some RDAs expressed the view that scrutiny is important in facilitating stakeholder input into and commitment to the development and delivery of the Regional Economic Strategy. However other RDAs are of the view that the value of scrutiny work undertaken by the Assembly is not commensurate with the substantial resources devoted to it.

There are a few examples where RDAs and others point to particular scrutiny exercises as highly valuable in strengthening the evidence base, and shaping RDA and wider regional thinking on a particular issue. Where scrutiny is most effective, it has been focused on strengthening regional evidence and understanding in relation to difficult issues. In particular, some Assemblies have demonstrated the value of the scrutiny process in bringing together stakeholders and relevant expertise, and fostering a strategic dialogue between relevant regional organisations. Scrutiny also has the scope to inform consideration of areas for further joint-working by the Assembly and RDA.

3.5.5 Have regional chambers built a positive relationship with RDAs which facilitates open and transparent scrutiny?

Most Regional Assemblies have forged positive and constructive relationships with RDAs. In most regions protocols have been agreed between the two organisations setting out the remit and approach to scrutiny. These have proved useful in providing clarity and transparency on the approach to be followed. In some regions the Assembly has worked with the RDA to review and refine the approach to scrutiny.

In most regions members of the public are able to observe scrutiny hearings, and scrutiny outputs are published by the Assembly.

A clear finding from the research is the importance of consensus between the RDA and Assembly on the approach to scrutiny. It is vital that scrutiny takes place in the context of, and contributes to, good partner relationships more generally between the two organisations.

Most RDAs participate in scrutiny work openly and constructively, although with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Some RDAs have put in place formal internal processes for reporting on (i.e. to the RDA Board), communicating, and acting on scrutiny recommendations, and this makes the scrutiny process more meaningful and transparent. In other regions where such arrangements are not in place, it is not always clear how RDAs have regard to scrutiny recommendations. This might explain why some Assemblies have developed detailed approaches to monitoring implementation of scrutiny recommendations (see section 3.4.8).

However, in a limited number of cases there have been tensions between the RDAs and Assemblies on how scrutiny should be undertaken, and this has undermined the scrutiny process, as well as the priority the RDA places on acting on recommendations.

Problems with particular scrutiny inquiries can be traced back to the identification of scrutiny topic and the terms of reference. Some scrutiny topics have been extremely complex and wide ranging in policy areas where there is only a limited RDA remit. There are several examples where the approach to scrutiny has not been framed according to at which stage in the policy development – delivery – review cycle the exercise is taking place.

3.6 Good Practice Pointers

Of vital importance is the question of “*what is scrutiny for?*” Some consider it should be a process of “holding the RDA to account”, whilst others adopt a broader definition of scrutiny; one with a focus on developing the regional evidence base, enhancing shared understanding of key issues, and joining up policy and informing an integrated approach to delivery. Whilst Assemblies should reserve the right to offer constructive, evidence-based criticism of the RDA, there are limits to the “holding to account” approach, and there is merit in a more collaborative approach focused on interrogating the issues, not the RDA.

For its positive contribution to be maximised, regional scrutiny needs to be approached and managed in the right way. Some factors for success are set out below.

1. There needs to be clarity and consensus on the general remit and approach to scrutiny (scrutiny protocols are useful in this respect).
2. The approach to scrutiny should be collaborative, not adversarial, focused on strengthening shared understanding of the issues, not seeking to “hold to account” the RDA or others.
3. The role of Assembly members is critical to achieving successful scrutiny work. It is vital that the Chair of the scrutiny panel is widely respected and trusted, and plays a proactive role in maintaining a good relationship with the RDA, and in ensuring a constructive discussion at scrutiny hearings. It is vital that members understand the role and remit of scrutiny work, are well briefed, and base their input on evidence, adopting a strategic regional perspective. Some Assemblies have undertaken member training in relation to scrutiny.
4. Scrutiny work should be based on good technical understanding of both officers and members, and be based on robust evidence, not anecdotes and opinion. Good scrutiny draws on the expertise of Assembly member organisations and other regional stakeholders, in order to strengthen the evidence base.
5. It is important that scrutiny is pitched at the right level, maintaining a strategic approach, avoiding addressing points of minor detail, or to seek to micro-manage the work of the RDA (thereby duplicating the Independent Performance Assessment process overseen by the National Audit Office).
6. Scrutiny works best when it is timely; when it can influence the formation of policy and delivery initiatives. There should be clarity as to what stage in the policy development and implementation cycle scrutiny is being undertaken, and the approach should be framed accordingly.
7. Identifying the right topics and terms of reference are critical to the success of scrutiny. It is important to strike the right balance between identifying scrutiny topics that are not too broad, whilst avoiding topics that are too narrowly focused. There should be a clear regional policy dimension, avoiding topics where it is difficult to add to national debates, and there should be a clear remit in relation to the RDA and RES.
8. Scrutiny work and scrutiny reports should be focused on contributing to a more robust and wide-ranging shared evidence base and understanding of the issues underpinning regional policy making.
9. The nature and scale of scrutiny activity should be commensurate with the Assembly and RDA resources that are available/appropriate.
10. Assemblies should ensure flexible “light touch” approaches to follow-up/monitoring of scrutiny recommendations, avoiding creating onerous and bureaucratic systems of written progress reports (see also point 3 above). RDAs should put in place formal and transparent mechanisms for reporting internally (i.e. to the RDA Board) and acting on scrutiny reports. This will help ensure RDAs have regard to scrutiny recommendations and are seen to do so.

11. The principle focus of scrutiny should be the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), and the strategic role of the RDA in working with other organisations to deliver the RES. This should not be confused with issues of accountability of this wider range of organisations, over whom Assemblies have no clear accountability remit.

Section 4: Policy Development Regional Co-ordination and Partnership Working

4.1 Main Findings

4.1.1 Main Achievements of Regional Assemblies over the Study Period

- Over the study period, most Assemblies have adopted a sharper focus to their policy development activity, working more strategically and selectively than previously.
- Significant advances have been made in developing more strategic approaches to spatial planning. Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) production is now positioned as the principal policy making exercise for Assemblies. The RSSs are more regionally and sub-regionally distinctive, wide-ranging in scope, with a more robust evidence base compared to the previous RPGs, and are informed by wider stakeholder involvement.
- Good progress is being made in overseeing implementation of RSS through developing a planning “conformity” function, as well as addressing the challenge of delivery through mechanisms outside the traditional scope of the land-use planning system.
- Beyond spatial planning, Assemblies are acting increasingly as “regional strategic partnerships” focusing on strengthening regional cooperation and policy integration, as opposed to Assemblies undertaking wide ranging policy development in their own right.
- Assemblies played an important role in working with regional partners to formulate advice to Government in relation to the Regional Funding Allocations, beginning to adopt a more robust and realistic approach to identifying investment priorities than previously. Some Assemblies have been at the forefront in creating new decision making structures to coordinate and endorse advice to Government from “the region”.
- Some Assemblies have helped forge new approaches to sub-regional policy development and partnership working, based on functional relationships between areas.
- Assemblies have forged strong relationships with regional partners, and have engaged a wide range of stakeholders, some of which were not involved previously in regional policy work. Whilst relationships with local authorities have been at times problematic, relevant Assemblies have taken action to re-align and strengthen these relationships.

4.1.2 Current and Future Challenges

- Dealing with housing and economic growth pressures, producing realistic strategies for accommodating and supporting growth, and reconciling advice and policy input from central Government with regional and local sensitivities.

- Taking bold and difficult decisions on investment priorities, particularly if the devolving decision making agenda is to be extended.
- Strengthening policy making in relation to the regional economy (ensuring the economy has sufficient prominence alongside social and environmental policies), including strengthening the use of the economic evidence base, and working with RDAs to achieve better integration of economic development and spatial planning policies.
- Further improving integration across different areas of Assembly policy work.
- Engaging positively and proactively with sub-regional or city region policy making and partnership working, strengthening integration with policy development at regional level.
- Achieving a stronger influence on policy development in Whitehall, and ensuring European policy work represents value for money.

4.2 Introduction

4.2.1 Context

The feasibility study completed in January 2004 set out the following main policy and partnership roles and activities of the Regional Chambers:

- **Spatial Planning** (Planning and Transport), including RSS production. More recently, Assemblies have taken on the strategic regional housing role as part of their spatial planning responsibilities;
- **Policy Development and Regional Coordination** – a wider policy role (beyond spatial planning) to strengthen policy development and coordination at regional level – most Assemblies have undertaken work to help join-up policies and strategies, as well as new policy development to fill gaps; and
- **Partnership Working** – Assemblies have undertaken work to strengthen regional-level partnership relationships and structures, and to strengthen and widen stakeholder involvement in regional initiatives.

Regional Assemblies act as the Regional Planning Bodies, receiving funding from Government to fulfil this role. The new planning system introduced through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and associated regulations and Guidance³ strengthened the spatial planning roles of Regional Assemblies. Assemblies are responsible for producing draft Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs), which incorporate Regional Transport Strategies. The RSSs are intended to be based on a “spatial planning” approach, taking a wider-ranging and more strategic perspective than traditional land-use plans and strategies. Under the new system, County Structure Plans were abolished, and scope was introduced for a stronger sub-regional dimension to RSSs compared to the old system of RPG. Assemblies were also encouraged to develop a “conformity role” to advise on the conformity of local planning documents and planning applications with the RSS.

³ Planning Policy Statement 11, Regional Planning, sets out Guidance on the production of Regional Spatial Strategies.

The wider policy development, regional co-ordination and partnership working role of the Assemblies was set out in chapter 2 of the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice* in May 2002. Assemblies were identified as having the potential to act as strategic focal points in the regions. Government were mindful of the varying structures across regions and were not prescriptive in setting out the approach Assemblies should take to policymaking and regional co-ordination (although the value of Integrated Regional Strategies was emphasised).

4.2.2 Main Questions Set Out in the Study Brief

- What do regional chambers add to their local regions, which could not have been done via pre-existing structures and institutions?
- What are the views of stakeholders on the role and impact of regional chambers?
- How successful have regional chambers been as strategic players for their regions?
- What level of influence have they had on policy making and strategies at a regional level?
- What have regional chambers done to promote equality and diversity?

4.2.3 Evaluation Criteria

The feasibility study set out a series of evaluation criteria to address the questions posed in the brief. The criteria identified focussed on the work of the Assembly in generating strategies (including regional plans and scrutiny reports) and the involvement of officers in policymaking partnerships and initiatives. In terms of partnership working, the criteria focussed on Economic and Social partner engagement, member involvement and relationships with key partners such as the RDA and GO.

These criteria have provided a useful framework in which to conduct the evaluation. However, due to the evolving role of the Assemblies and the growing knowledge base of the consultant and Communities and Local Government team, a number of questions have emerged to guide the evaluation process.

The evaluation criteria proved a useful guide during the first stage of the research. As set out in chapter 2, this was based on desk based research and a series of interviews with Assembly officers, members and other key partners such as the GO and RDA. Evaluating progress was challenging, partly because of the difficulties in interpreting stakeholder views and partly due to the subtle, and often delayed, nature of impacts. The feedback seminars and refined interview process during the second interim evaluation (supported by desk based research) strengthened the evaluation process.

4.3 Developments in Assemblies Overall Policy Role and Remit

4.3.1 Adoption of a More Focused Policy Remit With Greater Emphasis on Spatial Planning as A Primary Policy Making Activity

The Assemblies in the South East and East of England have always had a highly focused policy role, based mainly on taking a strategic approach to regional spatial planning. In the other regions, two main trends were identified in relation to the development of the Assemblies policy role:

- Adoption of a more strategic, prominent and better resourced approach to spatial planning work, with RSS production emerging as the principal policy making exercise for Assemblies; and
- Development of a more focused approach to policy work outside the planning and transport remit, with Assemblies adopting a primary focus on strategic coordination, as opposed to acting as policy making bodies in their own right.

An analysis of Assemblies policy output was undertaken throughout the course of the evaluation. During the later period of the evaluation the vast majority of Assemblies policy work and output has been focused on spatial planning, scrutiny, and the RFA process. Whilst Assemblies have participated in, contributed to and endorsed a wide range of policy initiatives and documents taken forward by other bodies or groupings in the region, they now undertake and publish very little policy work in their own right outside their core areas of responsibility. This is in contrast to the situation early in the study when some Assemblies pursued a very wide range of policy work, with insufficient focus on the added-value to existing initiatives in the region, and which led to organisational overstretch.

There are a number of reasons for this change. There has been pressure from Assembly Members in all regions for the Assembly to adopt a more focused policy development role, particularly in the Assemblies in the North of England. There has been greater recognition by Assemblies of their limitations in terms of resources and direct powers, bringing a greater focus on ensuring Assembly policy initiatives really add value to, and do not duplicate, the policy work of others in the region. Assemblies are adopting a more strategic and wide ranging “spatial planning” approach to RSS production with a broader range of policy initiatives falling under the category of planning and transport. Increased resources are being devoted to scrutiny work, and several Assemblies are adopting a wider remit for scrutiny activity, and there is clearly scope for scrutiny to have greater influence on policy.

4.3.2 Increasing Prominence of Policy Making and Partnerships at Sub-Regional or City Region Level

There has been an increased focus in national policy, and through inter-regional initiatives such as the Northern Way, on the importance of city regions as drivers for economic growth. New forms of city region cooperation and policy making are emerging. The new planning system offers increased scope for upper tier local authorities to lead work to develop sub-regional inputs into RSS.

Regional Assemblies have engaged in sub-regional working with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Some Assemblies have been at the forefront in encouraging new forms of sub-regional partnership and policy work. This has helped develop a stronger sub-regional dimension to regional policy and strategy, based on sub-regions that reflect functional geographical linkages, not administrative boundaries. In some regions representation on Assembly decision making structures, such as Executive Boards, has been to some extent linked to sub-regions (see section 4.6 of this report).

However, there have also been examples where Assemblies have not engaged particularly proactively or enthusiastically in sub-regional work. For instance, there was only limited Assembly engagement in relation to the production of City Region Development Programmes as part of the Northern Way initiative.

The debate around city regions as potential units of governance has led to confusion and uncertainty regarding the roles of Assemblies. There is widely held perception that city regions could be a threat to existing regional governance arrangements.

In all regions, there is a challenge in ensuring sub-regional policy development work is coordinated and integrated across different areas, and ensuring consistency with regional policy. There is a challenge for Assemblies to work with RDAs and local authorities to clarify approaches to sub-regional policy development, to provide clear terms of reference for sub-regional work commissioned by regional organisations, and to ensure there are consistent assumptions and evidence underpinning policy development in different sub-regions and at regional level.

4.3.3 Evidence Base for Regional Policy Making

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

One area where there is scope for improvement in many regions is the quality of the economic evidence base brought together by Assemblies. In order to avoid duplication, some Assemblies look to the RDA to bring together economic evidence and economic policy with the role of the Assembly to counter-balance this by giving prominence to social and environmental issues.

This can however result in Assembly policy making being driven by pre-determined policy positions as opposed to robust evidence, and there is a danger that economic drivers and economic realities are not reflected sufficiently strongly. There is also scope for Assemblies to improve the quality of engagement with private sector stakeholders, better utilising their expertise to inform policy.

4.4 Planning, Housing and Transport

4.4.1 Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs)

Assemblies have made good progress in producing draft RSSs. Whilst there have been some delays in timetables for producing RSSs, the content of the draft RSSs is more wide-ranging in scope and strategic in nature compared to the old RPG documents, and demonstrates a greater degree of regional and sub-regional distinctiveness. Good progress has been made in integrating within RSSs transport, housing, environment and land-use policies. There is however scope in some regions for better integration within the RSS of wider regional economic development policies for the region, and greater consistency with the RES in relation to policy assumptions (i.e. economic forecasts) and emphasis.

In general, Assemblies have engaged a wide range of stakeholders in work to produce RSS, and spatial planning activity by Assemblies has become more prominent. Assemblies have broadened the range of stakeholder involvement in regional planning. They have brought together a range of non-local authority stakeholders to work with local authorities, involving planning professionals as well as those not from a traditional planning policy background.

The most challenging aspect of RSS production has been resolving difficult issues regarding planning for housing growth. In the context of the Sustainable Communities Plan, and also the Barker Review of housing supply, Government has sought to provide a steer to Assemblies on the levels of housing growth that need to be delivered. This has led to tensions between Government and the Assemblies. Some Assemblies have produced strong technical work to inform constructively consideration of these issues. At a political level, Assembly Members in some regions have taken informed and brave decisions to plan for high levels of housing growth, particularly in areas identified for regeneration. However in other regions, Members have been less supportive of higher levels of proposed growth, and this has caused policy differences with the relevant RDAs, who have emphasised the importance of housing growth to regional economic competitiveness.

4.4.2 Sub-Regional Inputs to RSS

A common feature of the RSS documents is a strong sub-regional dimension, meaning they take into account differences within regions far more so than the old RPG documents. Some Assemblies have taken the lead in commissioning sub-regional studies, and encouraging upper tier local authorities to take a lead role in developing sub-regional inputs into RSS. This has yielded positive results, and some useful lessons for the future can be identified. In particular, the Assemblies need to manage carefully the process of generating sub-region inputs, making sure roles and terms of reference are clear, and there is a consistent set of assumptions across various sub-regional and regional spatial planning work.

4.4.3 Conformity

Assemblies have developed frameworks and processes for advising on the conformity with the RSS of Development Plan Documents at local authority level and strategic planning applications. In most regions criteria have been developed for referral of planning applications to the Assembly for advice. In general, Assembly officers draft advice, which is reported to, or endorsed by Assembly members through the Assembly Planning Board.

Resource constraints mean that Assemblies are only able to fulfil the conformity role by operating at a very strategic level, and by reacting to draft planning documents, not taking a more proactive role to work with local planning authorities to advise in advance on planning policy work needed to take forward implementation of the RSS.

4.4.4 Transport

Assemblies have developed successfully a strategic transport policy role. In addition to producing Regional Transport Strategies (the transport component of RSSs) Assemblies have played a lead role in relation to the transport elements of the Regional Funding Allocation process (see section 4.5.1) and have coordinated regional input into strategic transport studies and consultations.

4.4.5 Housing

Regional Assemblies have incorporated the strategic regional housing role (previously held by the Regional Housing Board) as part of their spatial planning function. This transition has been fairly recent, and the new arrangements are still bedding down. There is evidence in some regions of a more integrated approach between housing and spatial planning, but there is a challenge in all regions to improve the evidence base and understanding of linkages between housing policy, spatial development and economic competitiveness.

4.5 Other Policy Development and Regional Coordination

4.5.1 Regional Funding Allocations

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

Regions were required to submit advice to Government on spending priorities for transport (Local Transport Plan major schemes and selected highways schemes), economic development (the RDA single budget) and housing (the regional housing pot) budgets. Funding allocations were set by Government. Regions had to produce proposals in a document no longer than 30 pages by the end of January 2006.

All regions met the challenging timetable for producing submissions, demonstrating an ability to work and take decisions quickly. In several regions new structures, such as “Regional Boards” were put in place (and have been maintained since) to coordinate and endorse the region’s submission. The Government Offices took a co-ordinating role in all of the regions, with varying degrees of contribution from the RDAs and Assemblies. In some regions the Assembly was lead author. The Assembly led on the technical transport element in most regions (see section 4.5).

There have been a range of positive impacts of Assemblies’ involvement in the process of developing RFA advice. Whilst the investment priorities identified were not particularly bold, the process brought greater realism in policy on investment priorities, with the finite allocations requiring regions to avoid a “shopping list” approach. The process resulted in greater understanding of the importance of a robust evidence base to underpin investment decisions. In most regions a productive dialogue and joint-working and a greater consensus was forged between senior decision makers in the region on shared regional investment

priorities. The RFA process enhanced integrated working between bodies responsible for housing, transport, economic development and spatial planning.

There were also limitations to the process. There was little evidence of Assemblies and their partners engaging on fresh thinking or analytical work on housing and economic development investment priorities, where the advice tended to reflect positions set out previously in RDA corporate plans, and in relation to the Regional Housing pot.

4.5.2 Influence on European Policy

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

The regional presence in Brussels has the benefit of enabling European institutions to work with sub-national representatives from England in a more strategic and efficient manner than the alternative of dealing with a large number of sub-regional representatives. However, it is difficult to identify a significant impact on policy of European institutions stemming from Assemblies' presence and activity in Brussels. It is therefore important that Assembly resources devoted to European work are not disproportionate to the value obtained.

4.5.3 Influencing Whitehall

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

4.5.4 Regional Coordination and Integrated Regional Strategies

Assemblies are increasingly acting as "Regional Strategic Partnerships" helping make the linkages, and address the gaps between different regional policy making exercises. Over the study period Regional Assemblies have generally helped strengthen regional partnership working and integration between different regional policies and strategies. Assemblies have increasingly been focusing their policy activity away from producing in their own right a wide range of policy documents, to a role more focused on facilitating, coordinating and supporting policy development led by others. This has resulted in enhanced shared regional understanding of issues, better integration between partners in different policy areas, and greater consensus on regional policy priorities.

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

working that has led to them has been clearly valuable. The process helped build relationships and define organisational roles and responsibilities within regions.

4.5.5 Issues in Building Regional Consensus

In many cases however regional consensus and partnership has been at the expense of taking difficult decisions on regional priorities, main economic accelerators and investment priorities. This has been reflected in policies and strategies that have sought to spread economic and housing growth and public investment across the region. To some extent this reflects the *Realpolitik* that it is genuinely difficult for voluntary bodies such as Regional Assemblies to take decisions that do not command wide support of their membership. It is clear that a degree of (constructive) politics in regional debates is necessary and can be helpful in identifying difficult issues and helpful in brokering agreements. A political dimension can enhance the regional distinctiveness of policy debates and positions. In discussions on regional issues, politics are inescapable, and it is often better that they feature as part of the Assemblies' discussions and work. Otherwise political debates and deals will be conducted through other mechanisms, to the detriment of the relevance of the Assemblies.

4.6 Partnership Working

4.6.1 Engagement of Local Authorities

It is vital that Assembly executive teams work closely with local authority members of the Assembly to secure support and buy-in for decisions and the broad "direction of travel" for the organisation.

In some regions there has been strong engagement of, and leadership by local authority members in the work of the Assembly. This has helped ensure political support in the region for the broad "direction of travel" for the Assembly, political accountability of the Assembly executive, and has created the conditions for political leadership to tackle challenging policy issues.

The "no" vote in the referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North East, damaged political support for the Assemblies, and all have worked hard to maintain and rebuild commitment from local authorities. These issues were most acute in the North of England, where there was a need to re-align the way in which the Assembly executive worked with the Membership, to improve the level and quality of Member involvement in the work of the Assembly (see section 5 of this report).

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

The challenge for Assemblies is to strengthen further the engagement of local authorities. A more structured approach to managing relationships with member organisations would help strengthen local authorities involvement in, ownership of, and broad corporate commitment to the work of Assemblies. This would assist in leveraging-in local authority resources and expertise to support the Assembly. There are opportunities for Assemblies to engage local authority figures with real influence and political clout in acting as ambassadors for the region, and making the region's case to Government.

Members could also be useful in encouraging greater working relationships between the Assembly and local authority officers. Outside the areas of planning, transport and housing, the expertise of senior local authority officers is being under-utilised by Assemblies. There is scope to achieve benefits by enhancing engagement of officers in areas such as economic development or social services in specific policy and scrutiny exercises. Their involvement will not only provide knowledge of what is happening on the ground, but will also ensure that any recommendations are workable – and are likely to be taken forward.

If local authority members are to play an enhanced role, they will need much support (including training) and encouragement from Assembly officers.

4.6.2 Engagement of Economic and Social Partners

In all regions, significant progress has been made in enhancing the engagement in regional activity of business, community, cultural and environmental sector partners. These sectors are generally well-represented in Assembly decision making. Assemblies have engaged a range of stakeholders that did not have a strong previous track-record of partnership working. Assemblies have made significant efforts to engage organisations working in areas such as health, community development, crime reduction, arts and culture, Further and Higher Education. There has been a particular focus in securing engagement of regional faith, and Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

There is scope to enhance the positive contribution these partners can make in terms of expertise, resources and influence, through more proactive management of engagement with these bodies (see section 5.6 of this report).

In particular there is scope for Assemblies to lever greater value from private sector engagement, maximising mutual benefits. Assemblies can benefit from engaging business in terms of gaining in expertise and evidence, clarity in focus, resources, influence and clout and better scrutiny processes. The private sector can benefit by influencing regional transport, planning and housing policy, influencing the work of the RDA, strengthening networks with senior decision makers and gaining a framework for their Corporate Social Responsibility activities.

It is also vital that the involvement of non-local authority members is managed carefully. There needs to be clarity as to who non-local authority members are representing. Some interviewees remarked that it sometimes appeared that non-local authority members were representing their own specific organisation as opposed to the wider sector (i.e. business, environment, culture) that they were supposed to represent.

4.6.3 The Challenge of Strengthening the Engagement of Member and Partner Organisations

There is scope in several regions for the Assembly to build on the good engagement of Members, to take a more proactive approach to strengthen and deepen the engagement of member partner organisations (rather than Members *per se*). There may be scope for members to help lever in the wider involvement of their organisation.

This will require a shift in perceptions (of members and officers) of the role of members. Several Assemblies are seeking to move towards a role of a “Regional Strategic Partnership”, implying a need for more active engagement with member and partner

organisations than that associated with a predominantly representative role. If Assemblies are to act as a regional strategic partnerships, there will need to be an emphasis on delivering with and through member bodies.

4.7 Conclusions

4.7.1 Introduction

Assembly policy making activity is increasingly being driven by spatial planning work, and the adoption of a “regional strategic partnership” approach. As set out in the previous chapter, Assembly scrutiny work has the potential to make a valuable contribution to shared evidence and understanding in relation to important policy issues at regional level. Assemblies have also been successful in broadening participation in regional policymaking. Social, economic and environmental partners are well represented and active. The quality of participation by local authority members is improving and provides potential to enhance further joint working with between Assemblies and local authorities. Assemblies play a vital function in bringing together this range of partner interests.

The remainder of this section considers the main questions posed in the study brief.

4.7.2 What do Regional Assemblies add to their local regions, which could not have been done via pre-existing structures and institutions?

Regional Assemblies play a vital role in leading regional spatial planning work. They have made a significant contribution in adopting a more strategic, prominent, wide-ranging and joined-up approach to spatial planning than that of their predecessor regional planning bodies.

Assemblies play a unique role in encouraging joined up policymaking in the region, acting increasingly as “regional strategic partnerships”. They have helped bring together different organisations and stakeholders, and coordinate policy development work. They have encouraged a wider remit in regional policy making than that adopted by the RDAs or by the old style RPBs. At the same time they have been instrumental in developing consensus around a number of issues. With political consensus has come additional legitimacy of decisions reached.

Assemblies have also engaged a wide range of partners in policymaking and have raised awareness of the need for prioritisation of, and investment in, strategic regional projects. Although Assemblies’ actual capacity or political ability to make difficult decisions can be limited, their involvement in the Regional Funding Allocation process raised awareness of the need to address affordability issues, as well as delivering commitment and endorsement of local authorities to the RFA advice submitted to Government.

4.7.3 What are the views of stakeholders on the role and impact of Regional Assemblies?

Stakeholder views on the role and impact of Assemblies have been variable.

In the early period of the evaluation, stakeholders in some regions considered that Assemblies were spreading their effort and resources too thinly across an overly wide-range of policy development work, adding insufficient value to existing initiatives. There were clear problems in some (although by no means all) regions of local authority members not being engaged closely enough in the work of the Assemblies.

The Assemblies have made significant progress in addressing these points. Some stakeholders are of the view that the Assembly is undertaking important and high quality policy work in their region, adding real value to the work of their own organisation. Progress, in sometimes difficult political circumstances, is acknowledged by stakeholders in all regions. Assemblies are now well-placed to strengthen further the engagement of stakeholders. The challenge is to instil a sense amongst stakeholders that it is “their Assembly” whose work and activities they have scope to lead through their representatives that are Assembly members

4.7.4 How successful have regional chambers been as strategic players for their regions?

All Chambers have established themselves as an important regional body. They have all participated in policy making, strategic decision making and development of stronger regional networks. In some regions, particularly through RSS production, Assemblies have been instrumental, working alongside RDAs, in defining the regional agenda.

In terms of influencing Brussels or Whitehall, the impact of Assemblies individually and combined has been limited. The exception to this is the areas of planning and transport policy, where Assemblies are exerting a significant influence.

4.7.5 What level of influence have they had on policy making and strategies at a regional level?

Influence over spatial planning has clearly been considerable through development of RSSs. Influence on Regional Economic Strategies has been mainly through scrutiny work (see previous chapter). Assemblies played an important role in producing the advice to Government on Regional Funding Allocations, which helped strengthen regional policy positions and evidence in relation to investment priorities.

Outside their core areas of responsibility, Assemblies have become increasingly selective in undertaking primary policy development activity. Assemblies are achieving influence by working with and through others to help coordinate and integrate policy work at regional level, a role that is valuable. A challenge for Assemblies is to influence and help coordinate policy development and strategies at sub-regional or city region level, ensuring this activity is integrated across the region, and with policy making at regional level.

4.7.6 What have regional chambers done to promote equality and diversity?

Some Assemblies have promoted equality and diversity by appointing an officer to lead on this issue or by developing equality and diversity strategies for the region. These specific activities no longer feature in the portfolios of Assemblies as a result of efforts to focus on core activities. However, it is fair to say that equality and diversity issues are considered in

polymaking initiatives and Assemblies remain committed to these principles. Assemblies have also been successful in promoting equality and diversity by including social and economic partners representative of excluded groups in society, or campaigning on their behalf, in regional policy making and decision making.

4.8 Good Practice Pointers

1. Assemblies should continue to strengthen their spatial planning role, taking forward RSS production as their principal policy making exercise, one that results in a strategy with statutory weight. The challenge will be to further strengthen the evidence base for RSS work, and to deal with difficult issues in relation to planning for growth.
2. Assemblies should develop their role as the “Regional Strategic Partnership”, continuing to be selective in direct policy development work, and instead focusing on achieving an influence on the policy development work of others.
3. There is a need for Assemblies to take a strategic, positive and proactive approach to managing policy interfaces between regional and sub-regional (including city regions) level, and helping coordinate sub-regional policy inputs.
4. Assemblies need to work with RDAs to continue to strengthen the evidence base, particularly the economic evidence base, to inform policy making in the region, including their own spatial planning and scrutiny work.
5. There is scope for Assemblies to build on recent progress to strengthen further the engagement of stakeholders, particularly local authorities.

Section 5: Financial and Organisational Structures

5.1 Main Findings

5.1.1 Main Achievements of the Assemblies Over the Study Period

- Assemblies operate as lean organisations, and are operating increasingly efficiently with a clear focus on core areas of responsibility in order to fulfil their strategic remit in the context of limited resources. Assemblies have used funding from central Government to enhance their roles in relation to regional planning and scrutiny.
- All Assemblies produce and publish business plans setting out their priority areas for work and how they intend to allocate resources
- Over the course of the study period most Assemblies have reorganised and rationalised their decision making and staff structures. These are now generally based clearly around the core areas of responsibility for Assemblies.
- An important feature of the new structures in several regions is an enhanced role for Assembly Executive Boards, as well as clear powers and responsibilities devolved from the full Assembly down to specific Boards in areas such as scrutiny, or regional planning. This is enabling Assembly decision-making to operate more quickly, efficiently and strategically than previously.
- Some Assemblies have put in place systems of representation that require members to think and act more strategically than if they were representing the interests of a single local authority. Some Assemblies are linking representation on the Assembly or Executive Board to sub-regions and/or city regions. Others identify a portion of their membership on a proportional representation basis.
- In all regions changes in organisational structures and ways of working have resulted in much closer working relationships between Assembly members and senior staff.
- The process of review and restructuring the three Assemblies in the north of England throughout much of financial year 2005-06, whilst a difficult and protracted process, has now placed these Assemblies on a firmer footing, with a clearer focus on core areas of responsibility, and closer joint working between officers and members.

5.1.2 Current and Future Challenges

- Assemblies are continuing to come under pressure from some partners to get involved in new areas of work, beyond their core responsibilities and identified priorities. It is important Assemblies manage expectations, and maintain a clear focus in their work and avoid spreading their effort and resources too thinly.
- There is scope in several regions for the Assembly business planning process to become a more strategic and prominent exercise, through which Assembly staff, members and partners should be involved in a discussion around the identification and resourcing of priority activities for the Assembly.

- There is scope for Assemblies to work more smartly in leveraging in the expertise and resources of member and partner organisations, and to manage more proactively relationships with member organisations focusing on strengthening their engagement in and contribution to the work of the Assembly.
- Some Assemblies need to consider new forms of representation on the Assembly, particularly in those regions where every local authority has the same level of representation on the Assembly regardless of population – this constrains the Assembly’s ability to act strategically and take bold decisions.

5.2 Introduction

5.2.1 Context

This study has considered the effectiveness of the financial and organisational structures of Regional Assemblies. For Assemblies to be effective bodies and deliver positive policy impacts it is important that their financial, staff and decision making structures, and their allocation of resources are fit for purpose.

The study brief set out a series of questions in relation to the use of the Regional Chambers Fund, provided by Government. This funding is intended to support Assemblies in their scrutiny and policy coordination work. In addition Assemblies have also received funding from Government to support their spatial planning work, although the use of this funding was not a specific issue for this evaluation. Some Assemblies also raise a subscription from local authorities in the region. However this is generally only a small proportion of their overall income, and one that has declined in several regions over the course of the evaluation. Some Regional Assemblies are entirely reliant on funding from Central government.

5.2.2 Main Questions Posed in the Study Brief

The main questions set out in the study brief were related to the role of the Regional Chambers Fund in supporting the work of the Assemblies:

- What kinds of projects were applied for? How did these relate to Assemblies’ strategic function and role?
- Which projects were successful in their applications to the Fund, and why were they successful? What differentiates them from unsuccessful bids?
- What are the outcomes of these projects? Did they achieve what they set out to do, i.e. did they meet their aims and objectives?
- What are the views of Regional Assemblies on the Fund and its operation?
- What recommendations, if any, can be offered for the future management of the Fund?

In reality, Assemblies have had significant flexibility in how they have used the Fund. The funding has been provided in annual blocks, not on a project by project basis. To secure Government funding, Assemblies are required to produce satisfactory three year business plans (reviewed on a rolling annual basis) which they submit to Government.

It is therefore difficult to answer directly some of the questions set out above. However it is possible to offer some wider observations in relation to them.

5.2.3 The Evaluation Criteria

The main relevant points from the evaluation criteria can be summarised as follows:

- Organisational structures for Assembly staff and decision making should be clear and fit-for-purpose;
- Organisational and decision-making structures should facilitate endorsement of, commitment to and involvement in the Assembly's work from Members and member and partner organisations; and
- Assemblies' work and allocation should be in accordance with their business plans.

5.3 Overview of Funding and Organisational Structures

5.3.1 Decision-making structures

In most Assemblies, decision-making mechanisms are structured on the basis of a full Assembly, a smaller executive board, and a series of subsidiary boards dealing with specific issues such as scrutiny or planning.

The full Assembly generally has a large membership, and meets at a frequency between twice-yearly and quarterly. Between two-thirds to 70% of the full Assembly is comprised of local authority members, with the remaining 30% to one-third comprising non-local authority partners. There are a number of different formulae relating to the balance of local authority members. In some regions all local authorities are represented, with this representation reflecting the predominant political control of the local authority. In some regions, representation is from each local authority, supplemented by a top-up system of additional members based on proportional representation. In other regions, the whole system is based on proportional representation. Non-local authority partners are chosen from a range of business, voluntary and environmental sector bodies.

Most Assemblies have created smaller Executive Boards that meet more frequently than the full Assembly. These have between 15 and 35 members, generally selected on a basis of the same proportion of political and local authority/non-local authority representation on the full Assembly. In some cases, an element of representation on the Executive Board is structured by sub-region.

Under the full Assembly and the Executive Board, a series of topic specific working groups or sub-boards operate. There is generally a planning board with wide-ranging decision making powers. In some regions the remit for this group covers transport and housing, in other regions separate boards exist for these functions. In most regions scrutiny is now overseen by a dedicated board or a standing panel of Assembly members. Most Assemblies have a working group that oversees (non planning and transport) policy.

5.3.2 Staff Structures

In most Assemblies the staff team is structured along similar lines as the decision making structures. In practice there is a degree of flexibility in the way resources are deployed across the various teams. The Assembly Chief Executives and senior staff generally work closely with the chairs and vice chairs of the Assembly.

5.3.3 Financial Structures

Over the evaluation period Regional Assemblies have become increasingly dependent on funding from central Government, which is comprised of the Regional Chambers Fund, and funding to support Assemblies' planning functions. Some (although not all) Assemblies levy a modest subscription from local authorities.

In some regions the Assembly and regional local government body is a combined organisation, and the majority of the funding raised from local authority subscriptions is earmarked for the local government association/employers' body functions, rather than the scrutiny, planning and policy functions of the Assembly. However the core Assembly functions can benefit because organisational efficiencies and flexibilities can be achieved through the combined organisation, and to some extent there is a sharing of staff capability and resources. In some regions the Assembly and regional local government body have split into two separate organisations. Whilst a modest level of local authority subscriptions to the Assembly has been maintained, the split between the two organisations has resulted in funding constraints for the core Assembly functions.

Assemblies also continue to receive funding in kind, mainly through staff inputs. Specific pieces of work are often co-funded with other regional agencies, or receive ring fenced funding from central government.

5.4 Main Developments Over the Study Period

5.4.1 Changes in Assembly Organisational and Decision Making Structures

Assemblies' organisational structures developed incrementally as Assemblies' roles and responsibilities broadened over time.

During the evaluation period, most Assemblies have moved to review their staff and decision making structures, and where necessary to rationalise the number of decision making groups and staff teams. There have been a number of reasons for these changes. In some cases a need was identified for structures that had developed incrementally to be organised on a more logical basis. In some regions the reorganisation of the Assembly was prompted by calls from members for a sharper focus on core areas of Assembly

responsibility, and a need for closer involvement of Members. The introduction of new policy roles such as the increased responsibilities in relation to planning, housing and transport has required the Assemblies to reassess their structures, processes and resource allocations. The process of producing advice to Government on the Regional Funding Allocations tested Assembly internal structures and forced an evaluation of ways decisions are reached within Assemblies, and between the main regional organisations.

5.4.2 Increased Importance of Assembly Executive Boards

Executive Boards have been formed in all regions, and have been given increasingly strategic powers and roles. The membership of decision making groups has been restructured, and now is comprised predominantly by Assembly members, as opposed to the previous situation in several regions of predominantly officer-led groups. These changes have improved levels of member involvement and accountability, as well as integration between the various decision making groups of the Assembly.

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

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

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

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

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

In all three regions, the review process was lengthy, lasting between six and nine months. This led to uncertainty, a diversion of effort from day-to-day work, and damage to staff morale and partners’ confidence in the Assembly. The review process led to real financial pressures, in some cases with a freeze on staff recruitment, which hindered core areas of work. There was churn in the senior staff teams. In all three regions, for various reasons, new interim Chief Executives were appointed to lead the review process.

The three Assemblies have developed new structures, in place since the start of financial year 2006-07. The Assemblies also have new permanent Chief Executives. All three of the Assemblies are benefiting from stronger support and involvement from senior local authority and other influential figures. The new decision-making and staff structures reflect the more focused role and remit of the Assemblies. Enhanced roles for the Executive Boards have assisted senior members to work more closely with senior staff of the Assemblies.

5.4.4 Business planning

To secure funding from Government most Assemblies have produced business plans that meet the Government's requirements in terms of output. Guidance on Assembly business plans has been issued by Communities and Local Government. Some Assemblies have already demonstrated how developing the business plan can act as a framework for corporate planning and performance management, fulfilling a number of functions which have often be fulfilled by a range of other documents and systems.

There is scope for Assemblies to adopt a more participative approach to the business planning process, using it as a basis for discussions with staff, members and partners on main priorities for the Assembly. This would help manage partner expectations about what the Assembly can achieve realistically.

5.4.5 Management of relationships with member and partner organisations

Assemblies have become increasingly responsive to the needs and views of their member organisations. Senior Assembly staff spend a significant proportion of their time liaising with members, and helping build consensus and establishing trade-offs around important and difficult policy issues.

However there is potential for Assemblies to get more out of their member organisations. Assemblies do not generally employ structured relationship management techniques in relation to member organisations. Assembly members tend to act in the work of the Assembly in primarily a representative capacity. The extent to which they report back to and gather views from their own organisations is variable. What is clear is the members do not generally act as brokers in facilitating a wider relationship between their organisation and the Assembly. This means that Assemblies are potentially missing out on useful expertise, support and involvement that exists within local authorities and other organisations. It also impairs the ability of the Assembly to help integrate and influence policy across various partner organisations.

5.5 Conclusions

5.5.1 Questions in relation to the Regional Chambers Fund

What kinds of projects were applied for? How did these relate to Assemblies' strategic function and role?

In practice, Assemblies have not been required to apply for funding for specific projects. Instead, funding has been produced in annual blocks, linked to the Assemblies' business plans.

In the early period of the evaluation, some Assemblies used this funding to adopt ambitious wide-ranging policy roles. This resulted in problems, as staff and financial resources became overstretched, in some cases to the detriment of core areas of responsibility such as scrutiny and spatial planning. In contrast, other Assemblies adopted a more clearly focused role, and used the funding more selectively in order to strengthen capabilities in core areas of responsibility.

As set out in the previous chapters, Assemblies have increasingly adopted a more focused policy role, and Government funding is now mainly used to fulfil the spatial planning and scrutiny roles, to assist in regional coordination activity, and to support Assemblies' involvement in providing advice to Government on behalf of the region (for example, through the Regional Funding Allocations process).

Which projects were successful in their applications to the Fund, and why were they successful? What differentiates them from unsuccessful bids?

Because funding has not been allocated on a project by project basis, it has not been possible to answer this question. Despite differences in the quality of Assembly business plans, and the processes for their production, Government has not generally withheld funding from Assemblies or reallocated funding between them.

What are the outcomes of these projects? Did they achieve what they set out to do, ie. did they meet their aims and objectives?

Whilst it is not possible to consider the outcomes of specific projects, it is possible to make two important observations about the use by Assemblies of funding from Government.

First, Government funding, through the Regional Chambers Fund and planning funding, is essential for Assemblies to operate effectively. Government funding has enabled Assemblies to develop a critical mass in terms of their staff teams, develop their roles and profiles as strategic regional bodies, and to fulfil their core functions with increasing effectiveness. Assemblies are not in a position where they could raise sufficient funding from voluntary subscriptions to enable them to continue operating in the same way that they do currently.

Second, Assemblies have increasingly made better use of their resources, adopting more focused roles, setting clearer priorities, and working more efficiently. Those Assemblies that originally pursued wide-ranging ambitious policy roles have scaled back their ambitions, focusing more clearly on their core areas of responsibility. They are seeking to do less than previously, and they are increasingly doing it better and more efficiently.

What are the views of Regional Assemblies on the Fund and its operation?

Assemblies are generally of the view that their current funding is inadequate for them to fulfil adequately their roles that have been specified by Government. The conclusions from this research project is that by working efficiently and by focusing their work on core functions, Assemblies can generally fulfil their scrutiny, spatial planning and regional coordination roles within the current funding framework. This does require Assemblies to adopt a relatively “light touch” approach to some functions, such as planning conformity, or funding sub-regional studies and policy development exercises. There is scope for Assemblies to lever-in greater levels of additional resources from partners (including expertise and in-kind support) to support specific policy and research exercises. Clearly, any significant additional roles that are specified for Assemblies may require commensurate increases in resources.

Assemblies’ views are mixed on the value of the business planning process. Some see the production of business plans as an important corporate planning function, involving Assembly staff and members in discussions about the future priorities and direction of travel for the Assembly. In contrast other Assemblies approach business planning as a low profile exercise, for which the primary rationale is to secure funding from Government.

Assemblies would generally be opposed to the introduction of any form of competitive bidding for funding from Government, and they would not be supportive of a more onerous system of performance monitoring. The current funding regime is not performance related. However, it is recognised that levels of performance and effectiveness have varied between Assemblies, and there are some concerns that the better performing Assemblies could be held back in terms of resources because of this.

What recommendations, if any, can be offered for the future management of the Fund?

The current approach whereby Assemblies receive funding in blocks, linked to their business plans should generally be maintained. This approach, as opposed to a project specific funding regime, is appropriate for Regional Assemblies. It is important to recognise, that as lean, strategic organisations with modest budgets, Assemblies need a funding regime that allows them a reasonable degree of flexibility, and one with minimal levels of bureaucracy.

This approach does place particular emphasis on the need for robust business plans. It is important that Communities and Local Government continue to work with Assemblies to stress the importance of business planning as a strategic role, and to continue to review and clarify what is required in business plans, and to ensure that funding is conditional on production and delivery of adequate business plans. Good practice would point to the benefits of Assemblies involving members, and other regional partners, including the RDA and Government Office, in developing their business plans.

There may be scope for limited use of Government funding to support or commission specific policy or research projects in particular regions, particularly those with the better performing Assemblies. This could strengthen the ability of Assemblies to help deliver and inform important policy agendas, or tackle difficult policy issues.

5.5.2 Main Points in Relation to the Evaluation Criteria

Organisational structures for Assembly staff and decision making should be clear and fit-for-purpose

Organisational and decision making structures are clear in all Assemblies and are based on core areas of work for the Assembly. The reorganisation of decision making structures in several Assemblies has clarified arrangements, and led to the Assembly operating more efficiently.

Because Assemblies are voluntary bodies, they can struggle to take difficult strategic decisions, a situation that is compounded by the way some Assemblies link representation to local authority area. In regions with a large number of small local authorities, a system whereby each authority has equal representation on the Assembly means that patterns of representation on the Assembly are disproportionate to patterns of population in the region. Because, in some regions, small districts are far more numerous than large urban authorities and where some areas might be represented by members from county as well as district authorities, the balance of representation and influence is skewed away from the areas of most significance in terms of population and the economy. This can lead to a tendency deal with difficult decisions on investment priorities in areas such as transport and housing by proposing to spread resources very thinly across the region.

There would appear to be merit in Assemblies considering how the membership of the full Assembly might be streamlined and better reflect sub-regional or city-region interests and patterns of population. This issue also highlights the benefits of an Executive Board with strategic decision making responsibilities, reflecting the right balance of regional interests.

Organisational and decision-making structures should facilitate endorsement of, commitment to and involvement in the Assembly's work from Members and member and partner organisations

Assembly organisational and decision making structures are generally successful in ensuring the adequate involvement in and oversight of Assembly work by members. The changes in organisational and decision-making structures that have been put in place in several regions have strengthened Assemblies' ability to engage, and be accountable to their members. The enhanced roles for Assembly executive boards has helped bring Assembly members closer to the day-to-day work of the organisation.

In particular, the new structures for the Assemblies in the three north of England regions have helped improve significantly joint-working between Assembly members and the Assembly executives.

However, there is potential for Assemblies to strengthen further their engagement with member organisations (as opposed to Assembly members *per se*). By instigating a structured dialogue and relationship management with member organisations, Assemblies could strengthen relationships, and improve their responsiveness to the needs of their member organisations. Assemblies could also investigate scope for strengthening their capability by leveraging in additional expertise and resources from member and partner organisations.

Assemblies' work and allocation should be in accordance with their business plans

Assemblies' work is generally in accordance with their business plans. However there are significant variations in the quality of Assembly business plans, and their role and importance in providing the overarching framework for setting out the priorities for work of the Assembly and providing a framework for monitoring progress and performance.

5.6 Good Practice Pointers

1. Assemblies should review periodically their decision making and organisational structures to ensure that they remain fit-for-purpose and efficient. However it should be recognised that the new structures put in place in some regions are still bedding down and generally are working well, and a period of organisational stability is now needed.
2. Assemblies should continue to ensure decision making structures are linked to their core areas of activity. They should seek to avoid any unnecessary proliferation in working group or decision making structures.
3. Assemblies should continue to develop the strategic roles of Executive Boards as a important decision making mechanism. This will enable decisions to be taken more quickly and strategically than by the full Assembly.
4. Assemblies should investigate how different ways of linking representation to local authority areas might assist them in taking decisions more strategically and in a way that reflects more accurately the pattern of population and different interests in the region.
5. Assemblies and Communities and Local Government should work together to strengthen the role of business planning as a process and output that provides a clear framework for identifying Assemblies' areas of work and monitoring performance.
6. Assemblies should consider how they can manage relationships with member and partner bodies in a more structured and proactive manner.

Section 6: Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This section brings together the conclusions from the research, and addresses the main overarching evaluation questions set out in the study brief.

6.2 The extent to which regional assemblies have met their (implicit and explicit) aim and objectives

6.2.1 Introduction

It is clear that Assemblies' implicit and explicit aims and objectives have changed and developed over the study period. Whilst some Assemblies have always had a highly focused set of objectives, in the early period of this study several Assemblies had pursued a wide-ranging set of policy objectives, and had ambitious aims to fulfil a lead policy role in a number of areas.

During the course of the study, most of these Assemblies have reviewed their role, aims and structures, refocusing effort and resources on core areas of responsibility. There are a number of reasons for this change. The “no” vote in the November 2004 referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North East, prompted a reassessment of the current and future strategic role of several Assemblies. In some regions the Assembly membership expressed concern about the wide remit the Assembly was adopting and the value for money it was delivering.

The work of Regional Assemblies is now generally focused in three main areas:

- Spatial planning;
- Scrutiny of the RDA; and
- Regional policy coordination, increasingly involving helping to provide advice to Government on regional policy and investment priorities.

6.2.2 The impact of regional chambers on policy development, delivery and effectiveness

In the early stages of the evaluation the policy impact and effectiveness of some Assemblies was impaired because they had become involved in too wide a range of policy activities, and had spread their resources too thinly. This has changed over the course of the evaluation, and by focusing more clearly on their core areas of responsibility (and those for which they receive funding for Government) Assemblies are operating as more effective and influential organisations.

Spatial Planning

Assemblies have made significant progress in developing their spatial planning role. They have adopted a spatial planning approach to RSS production that is more wide-ranging, integrated and regionally and sub-regionally specific than the more narrow land-use planning approach to the production of old-style RPG. Most Assemblies now approach RSS production as their principal policy making exercise, in contrast to a previous, more technocratic approach. In most regions RSS has been underpinned by the production of a more wide-ranging and robust evidence base than existed previously, although there is scope to strengthen the economic evidence base.

In several regions, planning for significant housing and employment growth has proved challenging. In general, Assembly planners have sought to address these issues constructively, through the development of a wide-ranging evidence base. Despite positive engagement of Assembly members in some regions, in some cases decisions on rates and distribution of growth appear to have been taken on a political basis. In these regions, there has been increasing central Government involvement in the process of producing RSS.

Good progress has been made by the Assemblies in integrating transport and housing policy work within their spatial planning remit. However, the merging of the strategic regional housing role within the Assemblies is relatively recent in several regions, and there is scope for Assemblies to strengthen the evidence base and policies on the supply of housing.

Scrutiny

Conclusions on Assemblies' scrutiny role are set out in section 6.4 below. The main conclusion in relation to Assemblies' policy impact is that several Assemblies, by approaching scrutiny with the primary aim of holding the RDA to account, are not maximising the potential positive contribution of scrutiny to policy.

6.2.3 The extent to which regional chambers have had a positive or negative impact on regional and sub-regional co-ordination and co-operation

Overview

Regional Assemblies bring together a wide range of stakeholders. They have a unique and vital role in engaging local authorities in regional policy work, in combination with facilitating the involvement and input of a wide range of other stakeholder groups. Assemblies have forged strong working relationships with other principal regional organisations, including RDAs and Government Offices.

Regional Coordination

Assemblies are playing a strategic role in helping coordinate regional policy across a range of different organisations and policy areas. They are increasingly thinking and acting as "Regional Strategic Partnerships", with a primary focus (outside the area of spatial planning) not on direct development of policy and strategy, but on acting as a catalyst for and helping integrate the work of others.

Many Assemblies have led on the process of producing Integrated Regional Strategies, to provide an over-arching policy framework for the region. The process of producing these documents has been positive in helping strengthen partnership between different regional organisations, and mutual understanding of main roles and priorities. However, the content of the strategies tends to be very generic, adding little to accepted principles for national policy.

Assemblies are playing an increasing role in working with other regional partners to provide advice to Government on behalf of the region on regional policy and investment priorities. Assemblies made a positive contribution to the development of advice to Government on the Regional Funding Allocations. Through this work there is an improved understanding of the need for a robust evidence base and processes to inform difficult decisions on investment priorities. In several regions new decision-making structures have been put in place to enable the region to respond to future requests from Government for policy and funding advice. This provides scope for Assemblies to strengthen their “Regional Strategic Partnership” role in facilitating discussion and understanding of the issues amongst stakeholders to inform and resolve difficult decisions. As voluntary bodies, Assemblies also face challenges in addressing contentious issues in a bold and strategic manner, whilst maintaining consensus amongst their wide-ranging membership.

With Assemblies taking an increasingly wide-ranging approach to spatial planning work, the process for developing and overseeing implementation of RSS has scope to be a major means of achieving regional and sub-regional policy integration. Also, scrutiny work, where it is focused on strengthening shared understanding of policy issues (see section 6.4 below) also has scope to inform shared and joined-up policy approaches between stakeholders.

Sub-regional Coordination

In several regions, the Regional Assembly has demonstrated real leadership in encouraging and supporting new forms of sub-regional cooperation and policy development. This has helped develop partnership at sub-regional level enhancing understanding of, and joint-working in relation to, functional links between areas. Developing sub-regional inputs in RSSs has provided a major focus for new forms of sub-regional working under the leadership of Assemblies. However, some Assemblies have not engaged as enthusiastically or as proactively as others in sub-regional partnership and policy development. Despite these variations in engagement in sub-regional working, the general trend is of increased prominence and effectiveness of Assemblies’ policy development in relation to main urban areas such as city regions as well as other polycentric urban areas.

A challenge in all regions is the need to ensure sub-regional policy development exercises are coordinated, based on common assumptions, and are consistent and complementary with policy development undertaken at regional level. In some regions there has been a need for specific work to be undertaken to understand and help resolve differences in assumptions and policy positions between different sub-regional studies and policies. In several cases sub-regional strategies and policies have been produced that are rather aspirational. The emerging city region agenda has posed challenges and uncertainties for Assemblies. There has been only limited Assembly engagement in and positive support for the production of City Region Development Programmes in the North of England. These issues point to the need for Assemblies to take a proactive leadership and coordination role to support, steer, and help integrate policy development at sub-regional level.

6.3 The effectiveness of the Regional Chambers' Fund in enhancing and developing the scrutiny and strategic roles of regional assemblies

The Regional Chambers Fund has been instrumental in enabling Assemblies to develop the organisational capacity and capability to be able to take forward their scrutiny and strategic roles in a meaningful way. Assemblies are heavily reliant on funding from Government, including funding earmarked for regional planning work.

In the early part of the evaluation period some Assemblies, in seeking to pursue an ambitious and wide-ranging policy remit, spread their resources too thinly. This impaired their ability to deliver their core functions – those which Government funding was intended to support. These Assemblies have since refocused their activities and structures, which are now aligned more closely with the main roles Government has specified for Assemblies. Organisational and decision making structures have evolved, and are generally more fit-for-purpose than previously and enable closer engagement of and accountability to Assembly members.

To secure funding from Government, Assemblies are required to produce business plans. The quality of these business plans and the processes for their production is variable. Some Assemblies take a strategic approach to business planning, using the process to involve Assembly members, partners and staff in discussion around priorities for the organisation, and producing business plan documents that provide a clear framework for guiding and monitoring the activities of the Assembly. There is a need for all Assemblies to move to such approach.

Most Assemblies are operating as efficient, strategic organisations, fulfilling their core strategic roles with modest levels of funding. All Assemblies have improved the way in which they engage their members. There is potential for them to build on these foundations to put in place more proactive and structured mechanisms for managing relationships and engagement with member bodies, with a view to leveraging in additional expertise and resources.

6.4 The different approaches to scrutiny of RDAs by regional assemblies and their effectiveness

6.4.1 Approaches to Scrutiny

Assemblies have adopted a range of different approaches to scrutiny. In all regions, scrutiny is established as a core Assembly function, and structured and transparent mechanisms for undertaking scrutiny have been put in place.

The dominant approach is that of parliamentary select committee style inquiries and hearings into specific issues. Most Assemblies produce scrutiny reports setting out recommendations to the RDA, against which they seek to monitor progress. In addition Assemblies provide policy input into RDA strategy development work, and more generally, in some cases through formal mechanisms, in some cases on more of an ad hoc basis. The select committee style of scrutiny has some strengths, including the scope it offers to lever in expertise and evidence, and to probe the issues in some depth. However it is also a fairly inflexible and resource intensive approach, through which it is difficult to address issues in a timely manner, and it can lead to an adversarial approach.

Many Assembly staff and members consider that the primary role for scrutiny is to hold to account RDAs, helping address a perceived democratic deficit. This can lead to a somewhat adversarial approach to scrutiny. This is re-inforced by the predominant use of the select committee model, which places emphasis on the questioning by Assembly members of RDA staff and Board members, which can be to the detriment of influencing positively regional thinking and understanding of the issues.

In most regions, positive and constructive relationships have been forged between the Assembly and RDA. Scrutiny protocols have proved useful in setting out the remit and approach to scrutiny. Most RDAs participate in scrutiny work openly and constructively. Some RDAs have put in place formal internal processes for dealing with scrutiny recommendations, and this makes scrutiny more meaningful.

6.4.2 Effectiveness of Scrutiny

Scrutiny is undertaken with varying degrees of effectiveness. In most regions, scrutiny is having a subtle influence on policy, prompting RDAs to take into account additional factors when developing policy, and to emphasise policy themes such as sustainable development, the environment, social inclusion and equal opportunities. There are some examples where, as a result of scrutiny, the RDA had revised its approach to policy or delivery.

The *process* of scrutiny has helped build a wider regional understanding of and support for the work of the RDAs. In particular, scrutiny can facilitate stakeholder input into and commitment to the development and delivery of Regional Economic Strategies.

There are a few examples where scrutiny exercises have made a significant positive contribution to strengthening the regional thinking and policy perspectives on a particular issue. Where scrutiny is most effective it has been when it has been focused on strengthening regional evidence and understanding in relation to difficult issues, and has brought together stakeholders and levered-in relevant expertise from within the region. An important feature of these examples of successful scrutiny is that the primary focus has been investigation of the issues, not interrogation of the RDA.

In contrast, scrutiny has been less effective where an overly adversarial approach to has been adopted, or where Assemblies have failed to significantly advance regional understanding and thinking on the relevant policy issues.

Successful scrutiny requires consensus between the RDA and Assembly. In most regions, scrutiny work has benefited from and contributed to good partnership relationships between the two organisations. However, in a limited number of cases there have been tensions between the RDAs and Assemblies on how scrutiny should be undertaken, and this has undermined the scrutiny process, as well as the priority the RDA places on acting on recommendations. Problems have been caused by Assemblies adopting overly adversarial approaches to scrutiny, poor terms of reference for scrutiny inquiries, and the development of mechanisms for reporting on and monitoring of progress against scrutiny recommendations that have been considered by RDAs to be overly detailed and onerous.