

SNR "Prosperous Places" consultation. Draft key messages for NE responseGeneral

1. Welcome publication of the con doc as a key stage on the path to putting the SNR conclusions into practice.
2. The partners in the NE see the SNR reforms announced in July as an important way of enabling the public sector to play its part - alongside the private sector – in driving economic growth.
3. There is agreement on the key strategic themes set out in the consultation document:
 - o Stronger partnerships for economic growth
 - o Integrating strategies to promote regional growth
 - o Strengthening sub-regional economies and the role of local authorities

[DN: these messages do not cover proposals for statutory sub-regional arrangements – assuming this should be for individual responses?]

4. Welcome overall approach of national framework/ regional flexibility – especially in how the Leaders' Forum is constituted and developing the regional strategy. Also welcome the concept of things being done at the right spatial level - national, regional, city/sub-regional, local.
5. Partners' ambition is to make progress on implementation as fast as possible and make the region an SNR exemplar. They will do what they can to take all of this forward in advance of the legislation, but urge the Government (a) to provide clarity on how far they can go before then (and before other requirements apply such as the appropriate assessment under the EC Habitats Directives) and (b) to bring forward the legislation as soon as possible. The region is offering to work with CLG & BERR to work up (a) in more detail.
6. This response to the consultation i) sets out NE views on the consultation document, and ii) places these in the context of an emerging delivery plan for the region. We have highlighted issues that we feel are critical to the successful implementation of this delivery plan in the North East and would welcome further discussion with Government about how these issues might be addressed.
7. It is crucial that partners work together to achieve the intended aims of the SNR, especially during the transition. NE partners are committed to making these reforms work. Already collaborating on preparing for implementation:
 - o Regional Implementation Group
 - o Workstreams
 - o Stakeholder engagement – eg through interim regional strategy advisory group
 - o Consultation event
 - o ANEC and the NEA are forming a closer working relationship to support the transition

8. It will be crucial to effectively manage the transition from the current arrangements, ensuring both that the new ones are fit for purpose and that the current ones can continue to deliver. In particular this means delivery of any RSS partial review by the NE Assembly and economic regeneration by One NE. Government has an important role in ensuring this by providing as much clarity as possible about what is expected. Partners will be working with each other to develop and carry out a change management programme.

Stronger partnerships for economic growth

9. One NE already working with LAs on how investment can be delegated to the sub-regional and local level to meet agreed outcomes.

10. This is being tested through the Tees Valley MAA, centred on an 'investment planning' approach. The investment planning model the region wishes to adopt is characterised by the following:

- We recognise that a range of activities will be managed at a range of levels (e.g. business support, innovation and responding to economic shocks - regional; programmes of transport and physical regeneration activity - sub regional; worklessness and neighbourhood renewal – local).
- However, our aim is to ensure effective integration of all interventions in 'places' in the context of regional and local priorities. These priorities will be articulated in the regional strategy and in sub regional and local strategies.
- The RDA will explore ways of supporting sub regions and localities to achieve this integration, including through the delegation of programme resources.
- It is essential that other funding streams apart from Single Programme are also part of this 'investment planning approach' (e.g DfT, HCA, DWP, adult skills).

[DN: Paragraph 10 will need particular discussion]

11. Need to ensure clarity about how the different accountability/scrutiny arrangements – Leaders Forum/BERR/Parliamentary regional committees - will interact. Important to have clear lines of accountability, avoid duplication and ensure that accountability and scrutiny helps improve policy and performance. Regional scrutiny, through the Leaders' Forum should be effectively resourced. National scrutiny is another key component in the regional/national relationship and Parliamentary committees should be clearly focussed on scrutinising the contribution of national agencies and departments to regional growth.

12. Welcome the emphasis on the engagement of social, economic and environmental partners. Want to continue to derive these benefits when the formal Assembly arrangements end. Already beginning to engage them, through advisory and working groups starting preparatory work on the new regional strategy. A balance needs to be struck between formalising the role of such partners and

ensuring that the complexity and length of the process to develop and agree the regional strategy is minimised – both in the national framework and regionally.

13. Announcement of new expanded round of RFA advice very positive. NE view is that RFA1 was a good opportunity for the region to collectively review its priorities. Government needs to recognise that, although this will take place before the changes in responsibilities and development of the new strategy, it will have to reflect those. Look forward to the guidance and place significant weight on Government's response, which will be seen as Government's part of the devolutionary deal which SNR describes.

14. Greater clarity over the role of skills is needed. In fact we would strongly urge for skills to be fully integrated into RFA – the current ambiguous position is unhelpful. However given their importance in economic growth, this is a wider issue than just RFA. The Government's proposals for the delivery of education and skills and the SNR must be properly integrated to truly deliver, with appropriate regional, sub-regional and local flexibility

Integrating strategies to promote regional growth

15. Welcome the continuing approach on integrating regional strategies and the emphasis given to sustainable economic growth – primary issue for a region like the NE.

16. The RDA will lead the development of the RS, working closely with LAs, as well as other stakeholders, such as business, to ensure a collaborative and inclusive process which takes account of priorities across sectors and places. As the consultation document says, the LA Leaders' Forum will have a role in the full life cycle of the strategy, working with the RDA, not just signing it off at the end. Already taking this approach in the NE.

17. A key question raised in the consultation document is that the regional strategy will influence the policies/plans/investment of central govt depts and public agencies. NE partners welcome this but to make it a reality requires buy in at the strategic level in these depts and agencies – by senior management and ministers. More clarity is needed on how this will happen, especially in relation to developing arrangements for the Homes and Communities Agency and the new skills agencies. The RFA and RS should form dual components of a regional investment plan, to which central departments and agencies set out their commitment. National scrutiny has a key role here.

18. Welcome the focus on regional strategies being succinct and setting out the regional vision – the Government can help here in emphasising that these need to be focused on key objectives and not 'catch-all' strategies. Aligning them with other strategies will be important but they cannot and should not attempt to cover every issue of importance in a region. The Government setting out some priority outcomes will help here.

19. Within such an overarching framework, regions should be given the flexibility to decide themselves the balance between social, economic and environmental priorities.

20. Reference to cross-regional cooperation are helpful – NE will do this through the Northern Way.

21. NE partners agree with the principles that underpin the process for developing the regional strategy. A robust evidence base is particularly important. One NE has already started scoping, with stakeholders through its interim regional strategy advisory group, the evidential work needed. It will be commencing policy and evidence reviews around these themes: economic/business, social/people, built environment/place and the environment.

22. Agree with Government's approach to giving regions flexibility to determine their own working arrangements for developing the regional strategy and welcome the intention of simplifying the process. While the revised process is an improvement, a realistic approach needs to be reflected in the timescale to achieve this.

23. There will have to be a delivery plan for the regional strategy. Regardless of any national requirements, NE partners see it as essential that the delivery plan has the same degree of buy-in as the strategy itself.

[DQ: any views on whether the govt should require one and the accountability arrangements]

24. The proposal to develop with RDAs and LAs a single national core sustainability framework (against which regional strategies would be appraised) is sensible. However this needs to be in place asap if it is to be a useful tool for developing the strategies. Any framework should be developed taking into account the good practice built up in regions.

Strengthening sub-regional economies – the role of local authorities

25. Enhanced role for local authorities in economic development, working collaboratively with each other and the RDA is a positive development, welcomed in the NE. Should help enable interventions at the right spatial level.

26. LAs in the NE and One NE are already working closely together. They will be looking at how sub-regional strategies, and particularly the development of MAAs in Tyne & Wear and Tees Valley (with the appropriate involvement of Northumberland and Durham) can feed into work on the new regional strategy. Welcome the new economic assessment duty as a vehicle for taking this forward. Partners will have individual views on the form this takes but are looking at how they can be done collaboratively, based on functional economic areas.