

YOUR REGION, YOUR CHOICE WHITE PAPER**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Cabinet at their meeting on 4 September 2002 gave initial consideration to the White Paper 'Your Region, Your Choice' which set out a new regional policy for England.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Cabinet were of the opinion that, in view of the importance of the issues raised in the White Paper, the matter should be referred to the full meeting of the Council to give all members an opportunity to make their views known to the Cabinet.
- 2.2 There were a number of common points of view amongst members and it was agreed that the Political Group leaders would meet prior to the Council meeting to discuss an appropriate way forward.
- 2.3 A cross party motion was agreed by the Council at their meeting on 14 October, 2002. A copy of the Council minute detailing the motion is attached at appendix 1.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct environmental implications.

5. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

6. PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S COMMENTS

- 6.1 The Portfolio Holder supports the recommendations in this report.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The Cabinet is asked to agree a formal response to the Government.

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Background Papers:

**EXTRACT FROM THE COUNCIL MINUTES
14 OCTOBER 2002**

32. CABINET.

(a) Your Region Your Choice White Paper (4 September 2002)

The Chairman of the Cabinet moved the following motion:

“NFDC does not believe the purported attempt in the White Paper ‘Your Region Your Choice – Revitalising the English Regions’ to decentralise power from central government, will deliver the vision of devolved decision making shared by many local authorities.

In particular we believe the size of the proposed assemblies is too small and will not deliver a reasonable level of democratic accountability. We also believe that the requirement to reorganise local government is totally unnecessary and will result in additional costs to the taxpayer.

Furthermore the White Paper provides little or no evidence that regionalisation as proposed would improve governance for the general public, nor does it address running costs or precept powers for the assemblies.

We regret that the proposed form of regional government would draw powers from local government rather than them being devolved down from central government”

The Chairman said that the Cabinet had felt that it was important to seek the views of the full Council on the White Paper. He hoped that the Council would agree the Motion, which had cross party support. The Cabinet would consider the Council’s views before agreeing a formal response to the White Paper.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Robinson. She endorsed the Chairman’s views and hoped that all members would agree that the proposals in the White Paper were not ones that this Council would accept. She hoped that all members would support the motion.

Members then spoke for and against the motion.

A number of members commented on the size of the proposed assemblies. If the White Paper were adopted as drafted it was estimated that the cost of the regional assemblies could be £200m p.a. That was funding that could better be spent on services at a local level. Each proposed region would only have 2.2 representatives for every one thousand people. Some members said that they could not support any motion that supported an assembly of any size. The aim should be to bring democracy closer to the people and regional government would not do this. Some members felt that the Motion proposed should have made it clear that no forms of regional assembly would be acceptable.

There already existed a number of regional bodies such as South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and the Government Office for the South East (GOSE). Regional government could be an advantage as long as there was democratic accountability. Regional Government powers should not be at the expense of local government but should instead be based on powers devolved direct from central government. In order for Regional assemblies to be effective they needed to be democratically elected and not as proposed in the White Paper.

A number of members felt that the proposals were yet a further undermining of local democracy. The Assembly proposed for the south east bore no relevance to the local area.

The White Paper proposed that Regional Assemblies would not take on responsibility for Education and Social Care. Concern was expressed that some districts would be too small in their current format to take on these two areas. They formed the largest part of a Council's budget and economies of scale in small council's would be lost. This could mean that larger unitary authorities could subsume smaller district council's.

It was proposed and seconded that the first sentence of the second paragraph of the motion should be deleted.

The proposer said that the debate had polarised the different views of the Council. The motion should be amended as in its original form it implied that the Council would support regional assemblies if they were larger.

The Chairman said that he had hoped that the motion that he had proposed was one that the whole Council could support.

A member commented that the proposals for regional government would be subject to a referendum. He did not think that the motion implied support for regional assemblies.

Other members commented that views should be fed up through local M.P's. There had been a progressive loss of power in local democracy over the past 50 years and people now needed to be encouraged to take part in local council's.

Upon a vote the amendment was lost.

The substantive motion was then put and, upon a vote, was agreed.