

Government response to the Communities and Local Government Committee's report on Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies published

Government published its official response to the Communities and Local Government Committee's report on Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies on 23 June 2011. Regen SW has summarised the key points that could relate to planning for sustainable energy. Read the full document here: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/responseabolitionregional

Cross-boundary issues

There will be no rigid centrally directed system for planning on cross-boundary issues. It's up to local authorities to work on addressing strategic issues locally, working with adjoining authorities and other bodies as needed.

The duty to co-operate (to be set out within the National Planning Policy Framework) will be the key instrument for ensuring local authorities work together on issues such as economic development, housing supply, strategic infrastructure provision and environmental management. Government will consider need for supplementary advice and best practice guidance on the duty to co-operate. The intention is for a strong duty that "will be effective in driving a culture change in the behaviour of local planning authorities and other key public bodies".

Transitional arrangements

There will be no transitional arrangements from the Regional Spatial Strategy to the new Framework and no interim guidance for the period before the Localism Bill is enacted.

Local planning authorities should "press ahead without delay in preparing up-to-date development plans", and should "use the opportunity to be proactive in driving and supporting the growth that this country needs".

As a result of the judgment in the CALA Homes Ltd. case Regional Strategies have been reinstated as part of the statutory 'development plan'. Decisions on planning applications and appeals must be made in accordance with the 'development plan' unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Government's intention to abolish Regional Strategies is a material consideration – the weight to be given to it will be a matter for the decision maker.

Renewable energy targets and environmental concerns

The Committee's report suggested that national renewable energy targets "need to be distributed to each local authority preparing a local development framework, following a period of consultation and engagement with interested parties." Government's response was that it will consider this recommendation "as [it] draws up [its] own priorities and policies for the Framework, reflecting the intentions that [it has] already set out."

As part of the Government's commitment to protecting the environment, it has decided to carry out an environmental assessment of the revocation of the existing Regional Strategies on a voluntary basis, to assess whether or not there are any significant environmental effects of revoking each regional strategy.

Summary: Regen SW opinion on the government's response

The main thing that is clear from this response is that government is pushing for local authorities to press on with their local plans and not to consider the situation with the Regional Spatial Strategy as a planning vacuum. Government is placing responsibility for joint working on strategic issues on local authorities themselves and is holding to the view that a local-led approach to planning will lead to increased levels of delivery of housing and other development. However, in opposition to this bottom-up approach, the response states that government is willing to consider distributing national renewable energy targets to the local level.