

## BRISTOL CITY CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION

### INSPECTOR'S NOTE ON THE PROPOSED ABOLITION OF REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGIES

#### Background

The Government has clearly signalled its intention to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). This intention is specifically included in the outline of the *Decentralisation and Localism Bill* listed in the recent Queen's Speech. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has written to local authorities highlighting the intended abolition of RSSs. He states that he expects local planning authorities and the Planning Inspectorate to have regard to his letter as a material consideration (<http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/index.htm>).

The City Council (letter 28 May 2010 to be available on the Examination webpage) has indicated that, in its view, the emerging RSS should not be given any significant weight in the Examination of the Core Strategy. A number of participants have sought advice via the Programme Officer on how the implications of the Government's announcement should be handled during the course of the Examination.

This note sets out how I intend to deal with this new matter.

#### The Way Forward

The significance of the emerging RSS for the South West is clearly a matter which is central to a number of the questions I have already set out (13 May 2010), especially in relation to housing delivery (Issue 2). The proposed abolition of the RSS raises the question: *what would be the appropriate scale of housing provision over the plan period if there were to be no requirement set at regional level?* However, my current view is that there is little purpose in debating this question in relation to housing until the Government has published policy guidance on the implications of the intended abolition of RSSs and the transitional arrangements which should apply. (I assume that this would be part of what the Secretary of State refers to as *a formal announcement on this matter soon*). But I do not know when any such announcement will be made or its likely content. It would seem unlikely to be made in time for its implications to be properly discussed at the hearing session on Issue 2 on 22 June.

I therefore intend to provisionally schedule a hearing session on the implications of the proposed abolition of the RSS for housing delivery on **Wednesday 21 July 2010** - which is one of the reserve days in the current hearing programme. This would be for participants on Issue 2. I would hold this session if there had been a policy announcement on this matter by the end of June, enabling written responses to any questions I posed to participants to be submitted about one week before the new hearing session. If there had been no such announcement by the end of June, I would postpone this new session and a new date for this matter would need to be fixed at that time. I will confirm how matters are to proceed and, if appropriate, set out questions and a timetable by the 2 July.

Accordingly, the discussion of the relationship of the Core Strategy to the emerging RSS under Issue 2 on Tuesday 22 June will be truncated. I will indicate on my agenda for that hearing session if there are any aspects I still wish to explore. If there has been a policy announcement before that session, I will explore at the hearing on 22 June the appropriate scope for the new session on

the matter on 21 July. Representors relying on written representations will have the same opportunity as hearing participants to make further comments in response to my new questions arising from any further policy announcement.

I do not wish to postpone the entire debate on the housing issue to a later date as I consider that informed discussion can still take place on the detailed delivery matters which are the focus of many of my questions under Issue 2.

Given that the deadline for responses to my questions is this Thursday (3 June) I do not expect participants to change what they have already prepared. Responses relating to the RSS can be carried forward to any new hearing session, with the opportunity to update matters in the light of any policy announcement.

On other issues, the abolition of the RSS may not have such potentially significant consequences as it might have for housing. At each of the scheduled hearing sessions on other issues, I will put on my agenda the question: *would the abolition of the RSS undermine the justification for, or effectiveness of, policy XX* If major and unexpected implications are revealed, I would consider how best they might be addressed (ie further submissions or another hearing session). Representors relying on written representations can make a further response to this general question on non-housing matters (where relevant to their original representation) by 18 June if they wish.

#### Possible Further Changes by the Council

I am unclear as to the implication of the last paragraph of the Council's letter of 28 May 2010 concerning further changes that the Council might contemplate. There is no formal opportunity for the Council to put forward further significant (as opposed to minor) changes after the hearing sessions, unless specifically requested by me to do so. As previously explained, the possible changes that I have suggested might need to be consulted on after the hearing sessions would be changes that I put forward in the light of all the evidence were I to find any part of the Core Strategy unsound.

It is essential that any possible changes the Council consider might be required if the RSS were to be abolished are at least outlined in principle at the hearing sessions. I appreciate the potential significance in relation to housing, which is why I will hold a new hearing session on this matter after any policy announcement has been made. However, on other issues I would expect the Council to be able to address at the planned sessions the general question: *would the abolition of the RSS undermine the justification for, or effectiveness of, policy XX* and outline what changes might need to be made. If the Council considers that on any non-housing matter the implications could require extensive changes, please alert me urgently so I can consider whether that hearing topic should also be postponed.

**Simon Emerson**  
**Inspector**  
**1 June 2010**