

The five counties of Cumbria, Lancashire, Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire make up the North West region, one of nine English regions. With a population of 7 million the North West is larger than Scotland (5m), Wales (3m) and Northern Ireland (1.6m). It is larger than four European nations (Denmark, Ireland, Luxemburg and Finland) and the same size as Switzerland and London (7m)

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The Faith in partnership series is:

- *an information resource for people of faith as they engage with their local communities in the new partnership agenda*
- *a joint enterprise, between The Partnership for Theological Education, Manchester various ecumenical partners from the North West*

Whilst we currently provide this resource for the Christian Community we welcome contributions from other faith traditions.

**For copies of the FIP leaflets and further information please contact
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*An information resource for people of faith
as they engage with their local communities*

No 9 Regional Government in the North West

An Introduction to the Plans for Directly-Elected Regional Government

This leaflet contains

- Some indication on why the churches are interested in regional government
- Statistics about the population of the North West
- An overview of structures of government which already exist in the Northwest
- Reference to regional government in other parts of the western world

Choice, proposed a referendum in each of those English regions which showed sufficient interest, to determine the level of support for an Elected Assembly. The Queen's speech on 13th November 2002 announced legislation to allow referenda to proceed.

The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill had its second reading on 26, November 2002. It is expected to receive royal assent in April 2003.

Currently it is envisaged that referenda will take place in the North East and the North West.

Why are the Churches interested in elected Regional Assemblies?

- Many Church leaders are disturbed by voter apathy. It has contributed to some disturbing election results in recent times.
- A referendum in the North West will allow an informed debate on the place of democracy in individual people's lives.
- Elections to Regional Assemblies will be conducted according to the principles of proportional representation. This will encourage a less confrontational and more consensual style of debate.
- Current proposals for Regional Assemblies allow for participation by other 'stakeholders' along side elected members. Representatives from Faith Communities will be included.

We have Regional Government already

Steps towards Regional Government in England were taken by the Conservative administration in 1994 with the establishment of regional government offices. **Government Office for the North West** is based in Manchester and Liverpool. It is responsible for implementing the work of Whitehall departments throughout the five counties.

In 1999 regional development agencies were established. They are responsible for the economic development and regeneration of each region through the promotion of business competitiveness, efficiency, investment, employment and skills development. The **Northwest**

Development Agency has its headquarters in Warrington
Government offices and regional development agencies are not accountable to the people of the North West so a DIRECTLY-ELECTED Assembly is proposed.

Is an elected regional assembly just yet another layer of bureaucracy?

England for the size of its population has the most centralised government in the Western world. All the countries in the EU are divided into regions with elected assemblies. This is seen as a healthy counter-balance to Brussels centralisation. The United States, with a population less than five times the size of Britain, has 50 states, each with its own legislature and judiciary. For example, some states have the death penalty while others do not and each state has its own way of electing the President.

Will Regional Government take power away from the people?

On the contrary elected regional assemblies will draw power **down** from central government rather than **away** from local authorities. The *principle of subsidiarity* suggests that decisions be taken at the appropriate level. Foreign affairs belong to Westminster. Decisions concerning planning and transport are best located in the region. Decisions concerning public services are best determined by local government. No powers currently held by local government will be surrendered to an elected regional assembly.

Changes to local government boundaries?

At present some local authorities are 'two tier'. Others are 'unitary'. For example, the people of West Lancashire derive some services from West Lancashire District Council (refuse collection etc) and others from Lancashire County Council (e.g. education) while the unitary authorities of Blackpool and Blackburn are responsible for all services. An elected Regional Assembly would add a third tier of government in 'two tier' authorities. The creation of more unitary authorities would avoid this.

Further information on faith communities and the regional agenda please contact

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