

CD11/34

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## The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP

Secretary of State

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government



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### Regional government

**Date of statement** 22 July 2010

**Type** Written

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In our first two months in government we have demonstrated our commitment to localism, decentralisation and rolling back regional government in England. We have announced the abolition of Regional Development Agencies, abolished the Regional Strategies, ended funding for the Regional Leaders' Boards (the successors to the Regional Assemblies) and are closing the Government Office for London.

We have taken these steps because they are right in principle and as part of a fundamental transfer of power from central Government down to local councils and down further to local communities. We have done so to reduce spending on bureaucracy and protect front-line services against the backdrop of an unsustainable budget deficit and national debt.

We do not believe the arbitrary government regions to be a tier of administration that is efficient, effective or popular. Citizens across England identify with their county, their city, their town, their borough and their neighbourhood. We should recognise that the case for elected regional government was overwhelmingly rejected by the people in the 2004 North East Referendum. Unelected regional government equally lacks democratic legitimacy, and its continuing existence has created a democratic deficit.

In the Coalition's *Programme for Government* we said we would consider the case for abolition of the eight remaining Government Offices.

I am announcing today the Government's intention in principle to abolish the remaining eight Government Offices, subject to the satisfactory resolution of consequential issues through the Spending Review.

The final decisions on the future of the Government Offices, including arrangements for closure and for the transfer of on-going functions, will be made at the end of the Spending Review in the autumn.

The Government Offices are not a legal entity. They act on behalf of 13 Government Departments and are staffed by Civil Servants from these Departments. Communities and Local Government is the biggest contributor to Government Offices providing 41 per cent and 33 per cent of funds and staff respectively in 2010/11. The Home Office; Departments for Education; Business, Innovation and Skills; Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Transport are also employers of Government Office staff.

We are making good progress with our programme of radical reform to reduce the burden of bureaucracy on local authorities and businesses, including removing the inflated local government performance regime and doing away with the unnecessary regional tier. Consequently many of the functions Government Offices undertook are no longer necessary. By announcing our intention in principle now, we will further progress our programme of reform, allow staff, councils and departments to take account of this, and make an earlier start in the Spending Review on securing savings for the public purse.

I believe that the original intentions behind the establishment of the Government Offices for the Regions (to join up different Departmental teams outside London into a 'one stop shop') have been lost. Such functions are no longer necessary in an internet age and given the Coalition Government's commitment to genuine decentralisation and

devolution of power.

There are, however, some Government Office functions, such as arrangements for resilience and civil contingencies, which will need to continue. The Spending Review process will be used to test which activities currently carried out by the Government Offices should continue, and to decide the most cost-effective on-going arrangements.

The Spending Review will also consider arrangements for the redeployment or release of Government Office staff, and for sharing as appropriate the savings, costs, assets and liabilities arising from the decision.

We should be clear: the Government Offices are not voices of the region in Whitehall. They have become agents of Whitehall to intervene and interfere in localities, and are a fundamental part of the 'command and control' apparatus of England's over-centralised state.

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