



# A Guide to getting involved

The Committee of the Regions of the European Union

## *In brief*

This briefing paper explores the relationship between the European Union and the local and regional levels of government closest to European citizens, and considers how citizens can engage with the EU on regional issues. EU policies can have a considerable impact on the regions, so it is important for citizens to know how to engage with the European institutions from a regional perspective, through the Committee of the Regions, which is the main link between these levels of government. The structure and role of the Committee are explained, along with its relations with other European Union institutions. The paper then explores the connection between the Committee of the Regions and citizens and EU regional schemes. How to engage, with whom to engage, and when to engage are also explained to help citizens increase their involvement. Although the Committee is not the most powerful institution, it has an important role in representing the regional perspective, and in providing a forum for local and regional politicians from across Europe.



## Introduction - Europe and the local level

Although the European Union is often perceived as distant and impenetrable, it can have a considerable effect on the levels of government closest to citizens; the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) estimates that 70 per cent of European Union policies have a direct regional or local impact. Meanwhile, 50 per cent of EU citizens believe that their locally and regionally elected representatives are better able to represent them at the European level. Thus the links between the European level and local and regional authorities, and the people in those areas, are of considerable importance. This paper aims to help you find and make use of that representation.

The EU is often accused of being too bureaucratic for most European citizens to engage meaningfully, but knowledge is your best tool in this case - the more you know, the less impenetrable and distant the EU will seem, and the better you can go about influencing it. If there is a European policy that has a particular impact on your area, it might be appropriate to try to affect European policy through your local representatives and the Committee of the Regions. It may also be relevant to contact the Commissioner for Regional Policy, the Directorate-General for regional policy, or any MEPs on the Regional Development committee. See our previous two papers for details on how to contact, and get involved with, the [Commission](#) or [MEPs](#). It is important for citizens to understand how they can communicate effectively, and at the right time, with the appropriate decision-makers on the issues they care about. This paper therefore tries to answer the question: How can I engage with the EU on local or regional issues?

## The Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a consultative institution of the European Union. That means that the three main institutions (the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union) have to consult the Committee of the Regions at all stages of the legislative process. The Committee of the Regions is a political assembly, which means it is composed of local, district, and regional elected officials who have been nominated to the Committee in Brussels.

The Committee has 353 members who meet for five or six [plenary sessions](#) per year. Its “driving force” is the [Bureau](#), which draws up the political programme for each term, oversees its implementation, and coordinates the work of the plenary sessions and commissions (see below). Every Member State has at least one representative on the Bureau - more populous countries have up to three each.

## The Role of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee not only adopts recommendations on draft legislation, but can also propose new policies and prepare impact assessments for each level of government, providing expertise and materials where required. The Committee also acts as an intermediary between the institutions and local and regional authorities.

In 2009 the Committee of the Regions was strengthened by the [Lisbon Treaty](#) which altered the [treaties of the EU](#) to acknowledge the principle of regional and local self-government explicitly for the first time. The Lisbon Treaty also gave the CoR the power to refer a European Union institution to the [Court of Justice](#) of the European Union. The Court could then take legal action against the institution, if the Court agrees with the Committee's assessment that they have infringed the principle of subsidiarity (the idea that a decision should be taken at the

## Contents

Introduction	2
The Committee of the Regions	2
How does the Committee of the Regions relate to citizens?	4
With whom to engage	5
When to engage	8
Conclusion	9
Annex 1	10

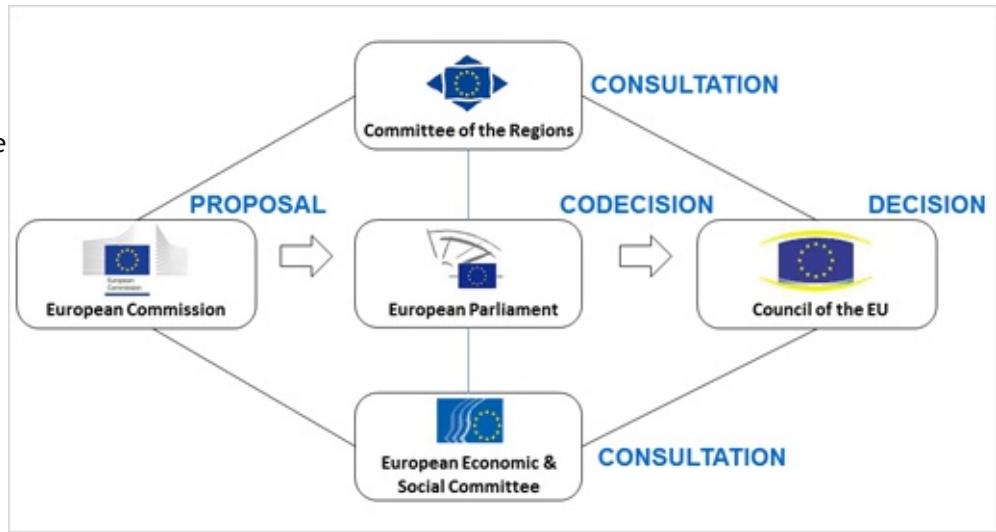


most effective/most local level of government possible, whether that be the European, national, regional, or local level) or failed to consult the Committee when it should have done. The Bureau has responsibility for the final decision to bring an action to the Court.

## Significance

How the European level of policy-making relates to local and regional governments, and the citizens, is important. The Committee of the Regions is the formal mechanism for connecting European governance with the regional and local levels.

However, it is hard to gauge how much influence the Committee has. The Committee itself is unsurprisingly at pains to emphasise its importance, but since its role is a consultative one, it exercises only soft power, as its influence depends on the view of the institutions that have to consult the CoR. There is no reason for any of the other institutions not to consult the CoR, in order to avoid the potential legal consequence. But the advice or opinion provided may be disregarded, especially if it does not suit the consulting institution.



A diagram explaining the passage of EU legislation and the role of the CoR.

Credit: CoR website

The value attached to the Committee's opinion varies according to a number of factors: the relevance to the regional level, the quality of the opinion, and the view of the institution they are consulting with. It is reasonable to assume that the CoR's opinion will be valued more highly if it harmonises with that of the other institution, if the arguments are strong, or if the regional perspective is particularly relevant. Often, these factors will be inter-linked: the more relevant to the regions the policy is, the better and more useful the arguments are likely to be, and a more relevant opinion will be considered more valuable.

Although it is empowered to do so, the Committee of the Regions has never referred an institution to the Court of Justice of the European Union. This could indicate that the system works fairly harmoniously, or that the Committee of the Regions would only feel able to use that power infrequently. It does also mean that it is hard to tell how effective this would be in altering the behaviour of the Commission, Parliament, or Council.

The Committee of the Regions' value lies more in its function as a forum, bringing together local and regional politicians from across the 28 European Union Member States to where they can exchange knowledge and best practice on a range of different issues. This is undoubtedly useful in permitting local authorities to learn from each other's experiences. It can also act as a forum for local and regional politicians to learn about the European institutions, make useful connections, and better understand how the European Union might benefit their area. This works in reverse too; the European Union institutions can learn how their policies affect lower levels of government, and use that wealth of expertise to improve and adjust their policy-making. This multi-level governance model allows a more integrated picture of the impacts of European policies, and more information is always helpful in facilitating better decisions.



Thus the Committee is useful as a forum where your representative can share information, gain expertise from other local representatives, and apply this knowledge to your region. They can find out about approaches to particular issues on your behalf, if you ask them to do so. The Committee certainly does not have as much direct power as other European institutions, but as a forum for working on regional issues, and using EU mechanisms (or funding) to that end, it can be invaluable.

### Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity that the CoR is given power to protect, is a central principle of the EU, defined in article 5 of the treaty of the Union. Subsidiarity means aiming to ensure that decisions are taken as close to the citizen as possible, and checks are made to verify that action at Union level is justified in light of the possibilities at other levels. The principle is certainly important, and it is significant that the Committee has a role in safeguarding the principle. However, the Member States' national governments will themselves often object to a proposal to defend their own competences, on the grounds that it breaches the principle of subsidiarity. So this role of the CoR must be seen in the wider context, of many actors taking responsibility for subsidiarity.

## *How does the Committee of the Regions and its representatives relate to citizens?*

As the Committee of the Regions is a political assembly of local, district, and regional politicians from all the 28 Member states, all its members are politicians. They have been directly elected to one local or regional body or another.

Local and regional representatives are more likely to live and work in the regions where they have been elected, and thus be generally more accessible. One or two individuals may have a large influence on their thinking. However, they may not be used to being contacted in relation to their role on the Committee of the Regions. This could easily work to your advantage, as they may be interested in speaking to an engaged and informed individual.

## *Regions/constituencies*

The Committee of the Regions is organised by EU Member States. Most are divided into regions, although some smaller countries (such as Cyprus or Malta) are too small to be divided. Some larger Member States, such as Ireland, are divided only into one or two areas. In some countries the division into regions is the same as the [European Parliament constituencies](#) - in the UK and Ireland, for example - but it varies elsewhere. This variation is most notable in Member States which conduct European Parliament elections on a basis of nationwide proportional representation. They are obliged to divide the country into smaller regions for CoR purposes. The number of representatives depends on the population of the country. In total, there are 353 members of the Committee of the Regions (and an equal number of alternates). [Annex 1](#) details the structure of each Member States' national delegation.

The system of appointing the delegations differs between EU Member States. This variation in methods makes it more difficult to advise you as to whom you should contact as your representative. Some delegations' method of nominating representatives is not disclosed, raising issues of transparency. Even more transparent groups often do not manage to have a direct representative for every region. For example, [Yorkshire and the Humber](#) in the UK, and many Dutch areas, do not have any members of the Committee of the Regions, only alternates. All delegations attempt to achieve geographical balance, so it must be hoped that this lack of representation is not widespread.



## How to engage

Your first port of call should be a representative from your Committee region. You can follow these steps to find your closest geographical representative:

- 1) Visit this [page](#),
- 2) Select your country, and then the most appropriate region,
- 3) Representatives of that area will be displayed - pick the one most appropriate to you.

It may of course be true that even within your region there is a large geographical separation between you and your representatives. For example the [Southern and Eastern Region of Ireland](#) has members of Dublin and Limerick City Councils and Kildare and Limerick County Councils, which means that the distribution of members is not very representative geographically.

It should be your priority to contact a representative from your CoR constituency even if they are still geographically distant from you. However, even a representative who is not from your precise Committee of the Regions constituency could act as your representative, and gain knowledge from the Committee, using it as a Europe-wide regional issues forum, as mentioned above.

## With whom to engage

Commission information - How to find what they are working on

Another method for identifying a person to contact in the Committee of the Regions, is to focus on a policy area and find members of the Committee of the Regions interested in that subject. In some cases it may be appropriate to contact someone who is not geographically representative of you but who may be sympathetic to your issue or situation. Their interests can be discovered by finding:

- which Commissions they are on (Commissions are sub-committees which give opinions on European
- Commission proposals in certain policy areas. See the list below.),
- which Commissions they chair or have another official position in (if any),
- which opinions they are the rapporteur for, and,
- whether they are on the Bureau for the Committee.

All of this information can be found on Members' individual pages. You can search for opinions [here](#), and view adopted opinions [here](#).

The Committee has six distinct [Commissions](#) with particular competences. They are:

- [Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs](#)
- [Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget](#)
- [Economic Policy](#)
- [Environment, Climate Change and Energy](#)
- [Natural Resources](#)
- [Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture](#)

So, for example, if you want Europe to help your region improve recycling, you can look at the Committee's Commission on the Environment, Climate Change and Energy, or the Commission on Natural Resources. The full membership of both Commissions is easily accessible, under "Composition" or by going directly to the [Members](#) page, selecting "Body/organisation", and then the appropriate Commission.

Once there you may find an appropriate representative with influence over the area you are interested in.



If you click each person's name, a display is shown (as below on the right) with:

- their name,
- country,
- picture,
- local position,
- address,
- telephone number,
- email address,
- political group,
- the bodies (including Bureau, Commissions, interregional groups and monitoring groups) for which they are president,
- the vice-presidencies they hold,
- the bodies they serve as rapporteurs, and
- the bodies of which they are members.

On this page it is also possible to view opinions they have authored as rapporteurs - by clicking on the “view opinions” button on the right.

It may be possible to find more details on the issues they are interested in and their personal positions on the website of their regional/local body, or in some cases, their own website (not the page hosted on the Committee of Regions website), Twitter feed or Facebook account. This varies between members.

For example, if I were interested in an environmental subject, I might look at Paula Baker's profile as she is on both the Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE) Commission and the Bureau, meaning she might have significant influence. She has also been a rapporteur for the ENVE Commission.

### Paula BAKER

Member of the Committee of the Regions since 26 January 2006

[Declaration of interest](#)

Councillor, Basingstoke and Deane Council

Representation:	United Kingdom
Languages:	English
Address:	59 Winchester Street RG25 3HT Overton Basingstoke Royaume-Uni
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Email address:	• <a href="mailto:cllr.paula.baker@basingstoke.gov.uk">cllr.paula.baker@basingstoke.gov.uk</a>
Group:	GROUP OF THE ALLIANCE OF LIBERALS AND DEMOCRATS FOR EUROPE
Commission:	Vth term of office - ECOS Commission (ECOS-V) Vth term of office - ENVE Commission (ENVE-V)



#### Rapporteur of

Vth term of office - ENVE Commission	<a href="#">View opinions</a>
<a href="#">more...</a> IV-Commission for Sustainable Development (13/02/2006-25/01/2010)	<a href="#">View opinions</a>

#### Member of

CoR Bureau
ALDE ECOS prep meeting
Interregional Group North Sea-Channel



If I wanted to find more details about Paula Baker's views and where or how she might be contacted, I would explore her local authority's website ([Basingstoke and Deane Council](#)), which has a handy way to search borough councillors.

Through the Basingstoke website, I can navigate to [her personal profile](#), which provides similar details to her Committee of the Regions profile and also includes her own website and names of the Borough Committees of which she is a member - including the Climate Change panel.

## Borough Councillors

Name  [show all](#)

Ward  [show all](#)

Group  [show all](#)

## Borough Councillors

### Councillor Paula Baker

Ward	Overton, Laverstoke & Steventon
Group	Liberal Democrat
Retirement Date	2015
Address	59 Winchester Street, Overton Basingstoke, Hampshire RG25 3HT
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Website	<a href="#">Click here for Member's own website</a>
Register of interests	<a href="#">Register of Interests for Councillor Paula Baker</a>



#### Committees

Manydown Overview Committee	Chairman	since 06/03/2014
Climate Change Panel	Member	since 16/06/2008
Manydown	Member	since 22/10/2013

Her [website](#) then includes details of her politics, her council work, and events and surgery times that are not available elsewhere.

[↑ Councillors Websites](#)

### Cllr. Paula Baker

#### Homepage

[News](#)

[My Politics\\*](#)

[Links in my ward](#)

[My Council Work](#)

[Events and Surgery Times](#)

[Contact Me](#)

### Overton, Laverstoke & Steventon



### Councillor Paula Baker

Hello. This website is provided by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council. It has to conform to what is called "an acceptable user policy" which is five pages long and means, among other things, that it can't be used to promote my political views.

However, I am a Liberal Democrat and if you want to know anything about the Liberal Democrats please follow the links in the [My Politics](#) section.

I was first elected to the Council in 1987 and am also an Overton Parish Councillor. Over the years I have served on just about every Committee the Council has! I was Leader of the Councillor from 1995-1998, then Chaired the Planning & Transportation Committee. When the Council changed to its new cabinet style of working I became the Portfolio Holder for Forward Planning until June 2004. I then stood down from the Cabinet to became the Deputy Mayor and the following year, had the great privilege of being Mayor of Basingstoke & Deane.



**Cllr. Paula Baker**  
Liberal Democrat

[Overton, Laverstoke & Steventon](#)



This is a way to find the means of getting in touch with Paula Baker, including visiting her in person during her surgery hours. The information provided on these websites would also give an indication of her views. It would be useful to research the work she has done, and her political views, in preparation for contacting or meeting her. On her website, she also mentions her work with the Committee of the Regions, which indicates she is willing to talk about it. It is likely that not all websites will be as informative. However, the Committee of the Regions website will certainly provide at least contact details and some basic descriptive information for members.

It is worth noting that representatives to the Committee of the Regions may be working on different topics at the Committee and at a local level. For this reason, examining their interests through non-Committee of the Regions sources may be useful to get to know the person, but we advise using the Committee website as a starting point.

## ***When to engage: Committee of the Regions opinions***

One of the times when your influence might be greatest is during the process of drafting an opinion. The Committee of the Regions can adopt opinions on current or future EU legislative proposals. The process is that, first of all, a rapporteur from a relevant Commission is appointed. The rapporteur drafts the report before presenting it for discussion, amendment, and adoption by the Commission. The draft opinion is then submitted to the next plenary session; if it is adopted, the opinion is sent to the European Commission, Parliament, Council of the EU, the European Court of Justice, the European Central Bank and the Court of Auditors.

Depending on the timing of the plenary sessions this process can take several months: from the Bureau of the CoR approving the opinion, to it being discussed, and eventually adopted in the appropriate Commission and finally adopted by the plenary session. Around 6 months is a good rule of thumb, but the speed at which opinions progress will vary, according to how controversial they prove to be in Commission meetings, and later the plenary sessions. It is important to be aware of the stage at which the opinion is; this will give you the best chance to influence it effectively.

There are multiple opportunities to influence an opinion: through the rapporteur themselves, through someone on the same Commission, or at a later stage through any member at the plenary. One particular opportunity comes during the consultation held by the rapporteur as part of the drafting process. These consultations take place face-to-face, often in Brussels. A list of recent and forthcoming consultations can be found [here](#). Even if you are not able to attend the consultation yourself, you could certainly ask an appropriate member of the Committee to go on your behalf and represent your opinion as a stakeholder. This would be particularly valuable if an issue from your region or local area is related to the content of the opinion.

## ***Encouraging local government engagement with European Union regional schemes***

In addition to the Committee of the Regions, the European Union funds and supports schemes that work with the local and regional level. Many are facilitated through the European Commission's [Directorate General for Regional Policy](#) (REGIO). Local and regional politicians may benefit from being made aware of EU schemes.

A good example of such a regional scheme, supported by the Committee of the Regions, the European Parliament, and the Commission, is the [Covenant of Mayors](#). The Covenant is a scheme that gets local and regional authorities to pledge to reduce their carbon emissions by at least 20 per cent by 2020. You can find a draft letter encouraging your local authority to sign up to the scheme, as a pdf [here](#), and as a text document [here](#). (which offers more detail on the scheme. See also the article in [Around Europe 360](#)).



## Other channels

The Committee has a number of interregional groups, which may be relevant to you due to their geographic focus (the Danube interregional group for example) or due to policy focus (such as the Health group). These nine interregional groups can be found [here](#), and each lists the groups aims, and how to contact them.

Another route is through the political groups in the Committee of the Regions, which more or less reflect those in the European Parliament (see part one of this series), though there are only five groups in the Committee:

- European People's Party (EPP),
- Party of European Socialists (PES),
- Group of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE),
- European Alliance Group, and,
- European Conservatives and Reformists Group.

Each group has its own secretariat, meets before each plenary session, and holds two extraordinary meetings each year. Profiles of each group's secretariat can be found on their own websites. It may be possible to influence them, as they have considerable influence over the members of their group in the Committee. Also, if you are unable to find much information on a particular representative, then their political group (which is listed on their Committee of the Regions profile) may provide a general idea of their political views

### *Is it all worth it?*

Engaging with politics to this extent may seem like a lot of effort. But we cannot have an influence if we do not engage, and that requires effort. Britain Yearly Meeting's Advices and Queries offer this:

*34. Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.*

Our representatives can only represent us if they know how we would like them to do so. They are people too, with their own concerns, motivations and aspirations, along with a considerable workload. The most fruitful way of working with your representative is to build a relationship, through meetings and correspondence. Understanding the work they do, and the procedures they have to follow will facilitate better cooperation between you. The key to having an influence is to connect with them as a human being, displaying sensitivity to their position and objectives, while advancing your own.

See our previous Guides to getting involved on the European Parliament, European Commission and the Council of the European Union for more.

### **Conclusion: Connecting with the Committee of the Regions**

The value of connecting with the Committee of the Regions in particular lies in its power to bring local government officials from across 28 European Union Member States to discuss issues that many of them have in common, along with their citizens. Their micro or regional perspective can be particularly valuable at the transnational level of the European Union institutions. The members of the Committee of the Regions are also closer to you, allowing them to better understand local issues affecting your daily life. Their relative obscurity will also most likely make them keener to engage with those who do take the time to engage with them.

Ultimately, the Committee of the Regions helps facilitate the relationship between the smallest level of government and the largest, ensuring that local issues are not lost in the bigger picture. By engaging with it, you can help to make sure that is the case.

**Annex 1: (see [here](#) for more detail)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of members</b>	<b>Division of members</b>
Austria	12 (+12 alternates)	9 members, one from each of the 9 provinces + three members from local authorities.
Belgium	12 (+12 alternates)	No specific numbers provided. An agreement is reached on the number of members/alternates to be allocated to each region - Flanders, Brussels, Wallonia and German region. At the moment 4,2,3 and 1 respectively.
Bulgaria	12 (+12 alternates)	No details given.
Croatia	9 (+9 alternates)	Croatian County Association nominates 4 members, Association of Cities nominates 3 members and the Association of Municipalities nominates 2.
Cyprus	6 (+6 alternates)	Appointed by the Council of Ministers.
Czech Republic	12 (+12 alternates)	List of nominees is composed by various local government associations before coming to national government. The aim is political, geographical and gender balance.
Denmark	9 (+9 alternates)	No details given.
Estonia	7 (+7 alternates)	All appointed on recommendation of the Estonian Government. Before that 4 (+3 alternates) nominated by Association of Estonian cities, and 3 (+4 alternates) by Association of Rural Municipalities of Estonia
Finland	9 (+9 alternates)	Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities nominate an unspecified number, and the Åland Islands nominate one member.
France	24 (+24 alternates)	12 represent the regions, 6 represent the departments and 6 the municipalities.
Germany	24 (+24 alternates)	21 members (+21 alternates) represent the 16 federal state governments. 5 seats rotate between the states on the basis of population size. 3 members represent the three local authority organisations.
Greece	12 (+12 alternates)	Members come from the two tiers of local government, from a list drawn up by the Greek Ministry of the Interior, designed to give balance to geographical criteria, as well as between the two tiers.
Hungary	12 (+12 alternates)	No details provided.
Ireland	9 (+9 alternates)	Nominated by the Irish Government, which aims to reflect gender and geographical balances.
Italy	20 (+20 alternates)	No details provided.
Latvia	7 (+7 alternates)	2 representatives from city councils, three from municipal councils, one from Riga City Council and the Chairman of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments.



Lithuania	9 (+9 alternates)	Regional development councils propose three times more candidates than seats allocated to the region. All these proposals are then sent to the Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania, which selects the final list.
Luxembourg	6 (+6 alternates)	All members are nominated by the Luxembourg Government acting on proposals from the Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities.
Malta	6 (+6 alternates)	All members appointed by Minister responsible for local government on the advice of the Maltese Local Councils' Association.
The Netherlands	12 (+12 alternates)	No details provided.
Poland	21 (+21 alternates)	10 members from the association of Polish Voivodeship, 3 each from the association of Polish counties and the association of Polish cities, 2 each from the Union of Polish metropolis and the association of rural communes, and 1 member from the Union of small Polish towns.
Portugal	12 (+12 alternates)	No details provided.
Romania	15 (+15 alternates)	Composed of presidents of county councils, and mayors.
Slovakia	9 (+9 alternates)	No details provided.
Slovenia	5 (+5 alternates)	No details provided.
Spain	21 (+21 alternates)	Each of the 17 regions with one member, the remaining 4 reserved for local representatives.
Sweden	12 (+12 alternates)	No fixed arrangements for handling nomination, working through cooperation and common acceptance of criteria.
United Kingdom	24 (+24 alternates)	Nominated by the UK government, based on names proposed by the Local Government Association of England and Wales, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly, and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

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