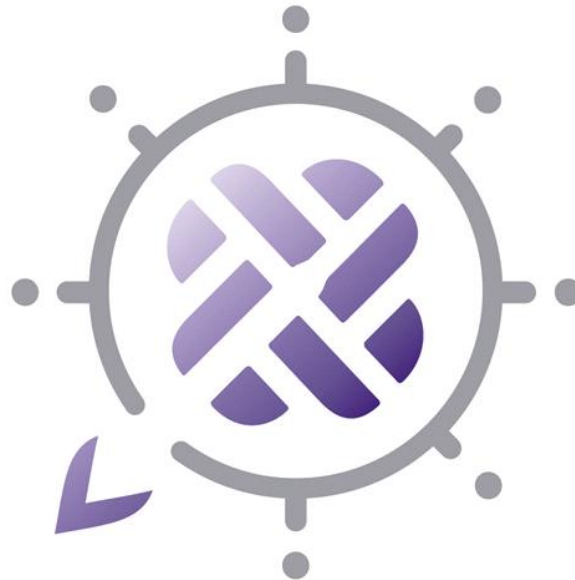


SOUTH WEST REGIONAL SECRETARIAT

Providing support for:

**SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
SOUTH WEST EMPLOYERS
SOUTH WEST COUNCILS & SOUTH WEST STRATEGIC LEADERS' BOARD**

ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09



WHAT IS THE SOUTH WEST REGIONAL SECRETARIAT?

The South West Regional Secretariat supports the work of South West Councils (and its executive arm, the South West Strategic Leaders' Board) and the South West Employers (SWE). Until 13 May 2009 it also supported the South West Regional Assembly, but from this date regional planning powers transferred to South West Councils' Strategic Leaders' Board. This followed Government changes to regional planning announced in the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) in 2007. The Secretariat is managed by the South West Regional Board. Each organisation has its own Member structures and makes its own policy decisions. The organisations are brought together by the Board. This Annual Report provides a short summary of what the three organisations have achieved with support from the Secretariat in the past year.

THE VISION

The staffing and resources of the combined Secretariat working through Members aim to:

“Help make the South West an even better place to live, work and visit”

We are committed to:

“Listening to the views of people in the region and working with partners in a way which is open and transparent and serves the needs of Members and through them the needs of the South West”

OUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

We have six overarching objectives in delivering our work:

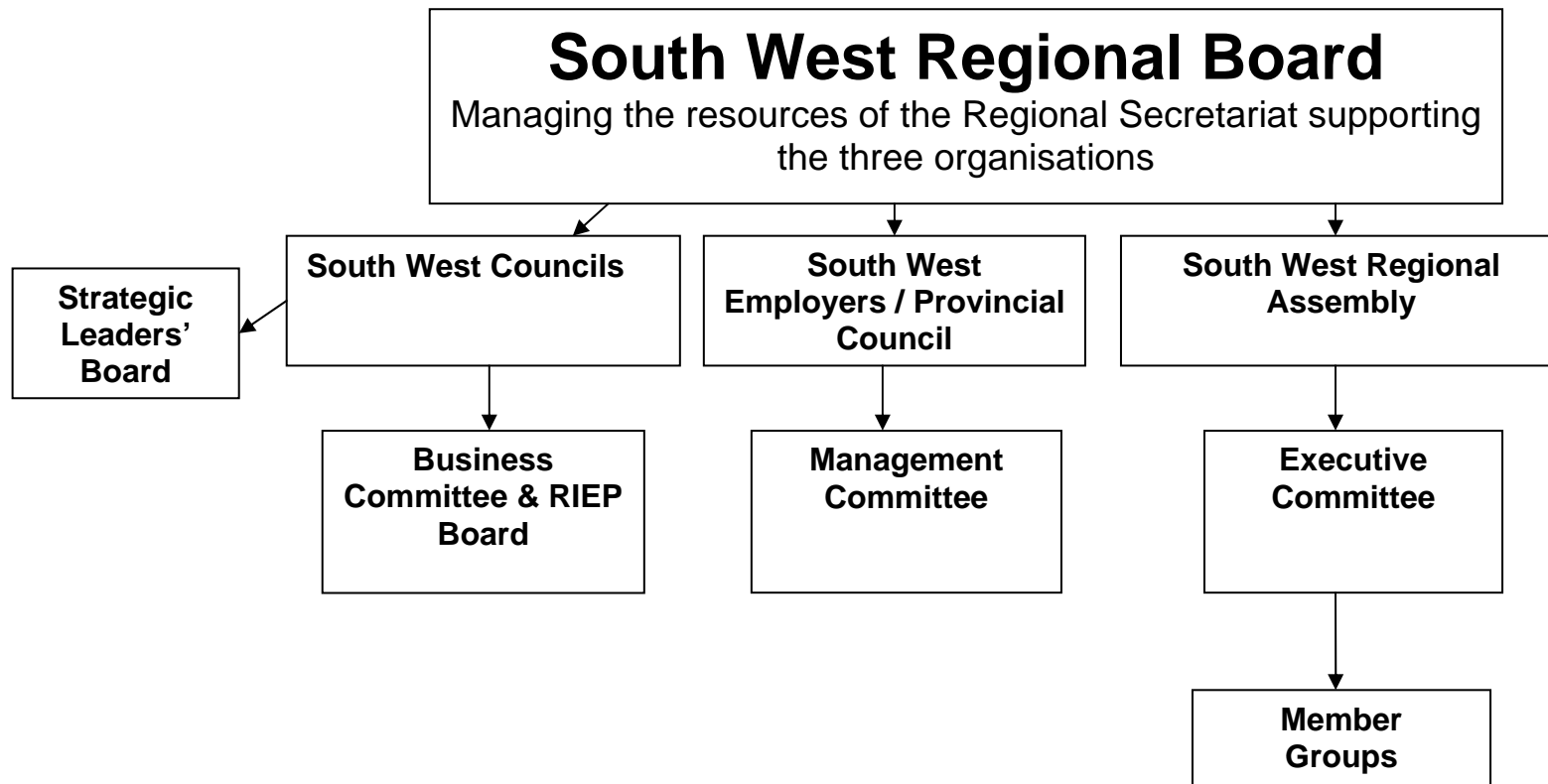
1. Integrate across the range of services and functions that we operate to deliver a streamlined and efficient service for the region and our Member organisations;
2. Assist partners to enhance capacity and service delivery through training, advice and improved performance and efficiency;
3. Working with partners to support effective and sustainable regional policy and strategy to address climate change, housing, planning, transport and economic delivery issues across the region;
4. Take a role in lobbying on key regional issues to ensure that the South West voice is heard on national policy and funding;
5. Scrutinise the work of key regional delivery agencies;
6. Ensure that all the work carried out is underpinned by the principles of equality of opportunity, sustainable development and delivery of economic prosperity.

South West Regional Assembly was formally designated as the ‘Regional Chamber’ and existed until its dissolution in May 2009, to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of all who live and work in the region. The Assembly also performed the role of Regional Planning Body and Regional Housing Body, and had a responsibility to scrutinise the work of the South West Regional Development Agency (RDA).

South West Councils brings together representatives of all of the region’s local authorities to ensure that the voice of SW local government is heard by Government and regional bodies. The Strategic Leaders’ Board is the strategic decision-making body for the South West and the executive arm of South West Councils. Upon the dissolution of the Assembly it became Regional Planning Body and took on responsibility for housing and transport functions. In September 2008, the South West Regional Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (SWRIEP) became part of South West Councils, to support continuous local authority improvement.

The South West Employers (SWE) supports local authorities, police and fire authorities and other organisations with all aspects of their employer role. In addition SWE constitute the Employers side of a regional consultative and negotiating body with the South West Trade Unions, the South West Provincial Council, and works at a regional level with the national Local Government Employers. SWE also offer a wide range of learning and development training courses to support all our Members and partners in developing a highly skilled and motivated workforce.

ORGANISATION STRUCTURE



SUMMARY ACHIEVEMENTS 2008/09

SOUTH WEST COUNCILS & THE STRATEGIC LEADERS' BOARD

Over the past year SW Councils stepped up the level of support for local authorities in delivering improvements in services and secured further efficiency savings; oversaw constitutional change to ensure South West Councils remains a responsive, Member-led, organisation; improved accountability of other regional organisations and successfully lobbied central government on a wide range of issues.

In more detail, the achievements of the South West Councils in 2008/09 include:

- making government aware of South West Councils' views on a wide range of topics such as 'free' swimming, 'free' bus travel and the response to changing economic circumstances. As a result, some changes to funding formulae have been agreed. Intelligence from South West Councils on the economic downturn has also been shared with Ministers, the Regional Economic Council and the South West Economic Task Group, as well as informing a 'Grey Skies Thinking Day' for Chief Executives on how local government should reprioritise RIEP spend. The Chief Executive has also been asked by the Regional Minister to chair a multi-agency group on the Resilience of Public Services during the recession. A large number of actions have been logged and Ministers have begun to address a number of the issues raised - such as guideline rent levels and empty property relief;
- Providing evidence to MPs on the new SW Select Committee, examining the response to economic downturn;
- submitting evidence to the House of Commons Modernisation Committee inquiry on Regional Accountability and responding to the Government consultation on SNR to ensure MPs and Ministers were aware of the views of SW Councils;
- a key achievement of all local authorities in the South West was supporting the establishment of a Strategic Leaders' Board, drawing together the Leaders of Unitary and County Councils and District Council representatives. The Board will play a key role in setting and delivering regional strategy in future. It is the executive arm of SW Councils;
- passing a package of constitutional reforms. These mean that the streamlined South West Councils will be politically representative of the region and well placed to inform the work of the new Strategic Leaders' Board, overseeing the work of the SWRIEP and the wider organisation;
- developing a core database of regional information on Members' Allowances in 2008/9, in response to a request by South West Chairs of Members' Allowance Panels. This information will be a real help to Panels in determining their recommendations to Local Authorities and help to avoid excessive alternative benchmarking;

- with support from the Regional Strategic Coordination Board for Migration, raising the profile of the difficult, complex and misunderstood issue of people trafficking in the South West which will enable key agencies to address, and take effective action, to reduce and deal with the problem;
- completing a wide ranging review on the draft Migrant Worker Action Plan for the South West which will ensure that work being carried out in different parts of the region is coordinated at a strategic level to maximise the economic benefits that Migrant Workers make in the region;
- supporting Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees in responding to the commissioning of specialised healthcare in the South West. A special preparation workshop was held in November 2008, following which South West Councils has supported the Specialised Commissioning Group in developing its understanding of how health scrutiny procedures operate across the region. South West Councils is also supporting the development of standard rules and procedures for the formation of a joint committee. This will help ensure that local authorities are well placed to influence the delivery of key services to their citizens;
- supporting workforce development of skills for local authority employees through a match funding scheme led by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The profile of the scheme was raised by a conference organised jointly with South West Employers and the LSC, the outcome of which will raise employee skill levels to at least level 2;
- integrating staff support for the SWRIEP into the Secretariat smoothly and enhancing opportunities for Member input to ensure support is responsive, targeted appropriately and well coordinated;

Comprehensive delivery plans have been developed for each of the 15 workstreams in the South West Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategy, overseen by local authority led programme boards. The programmes will improve regional performance and will support authorities to deliver up to £100m of efficiency savings. Specific achievements include:

- the 16 lead Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in the region now have a much clearer understanding of their relative strengths and areas for development as a result of self-assessments facilitated by the RIEP;

LAA Co-Ordinator Dorset said: *“As a result of RIEP-funded workshops, we are now starting to understand how to embed equality and diversity across the partnership”*.

- 1300 people from 30 authorities have attended business transformation skills development in ‘lean thinking’, managing successful programme and project management. At least 4 projects at Dorset County Council, Carrick District Council, Plymouth City Council and South Somerset District Council were to a large extent triggered by attendance on the courses;

Chief Executive of Forest of Dean District Council said: *"SW RIEP has given us supportive challenge through the development and delivery of our Improvement Plan. The attendance of RIEP representatives at our Improvement Board has helped us to move forward and provided us with clear opportunities to learn from best practice across the region."*

- there has been marked increase in council improvement with two councils moving out of the bottom 2 CPA categories; Torrington (Poor to Good) and Weymouth and Portland (Weak to Good). Both Councils have received substantial support from the SW RIEP and IDeA. Only 5 Councils now remain 'in difficulty';
- by working in partnership with South West Employers and supporting regional equality networks, equalities issues have been promoted and activity has become more integrated and 'joined up'. In March 2008, 3 authorities had achieved level 3 on the Equalities Standard, 16 are still at 1 and 29 are at level 2 and 2 are rated as zero. By January 2009, 4 additional authorities supported by the RIEP had been validated at level 3 and another 3 should progress when assessed;

Jo Hooper, Corporate Equality Officer, Devon County Council said: *"You need to demonstrate that you really understand your strengths but also our areas for improvement to achieve level 3. Undertaking the mock assessment first held up a mirror to us, so we were really clear about where we were."*

- the 'SW Contract and Opportunities Portal' now lists existing contracts and tender opportunities on a single site to allow collaboration and easier access for Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to work with local government in the South West. Launched by 4 authorities at the end of 2008, the portal already has around 500 suppliers registered, with almost 500 contracts listed;
- the Smarter Procurement programme delivered just over £4m of actual savings for authorities up to June 2008 and has delivered a further £3m of actual savings since that time. This bodes well for the next 3 years where the programme will help authorities deliver up to an £30m savings through collaborative working, the use of technology and building the capacity of officers;
- 18 public bodies in the South West have confirmed interest in the 'Construction Framework South West' with a further 9 expressing interest. In the first 3 years programmes of work being procured through the framework is expected to exceed £0.5bn;

Phil Norrey, Chief Executive for Devon County Council said: *"Construction Framework South West is an excellent example of public sector bodies working collaboratively for mutual benefit"*

- launched a multi-agency pilot backed by SW RIEP to provide job coaches for students with learning disabilities. This has achieved a 65% success rate. 20 of the original 30 students now have jobs, one of these is with a 'blue chip' retailer. 'Per student' savings of £100k over a working lifetime look likely;

Heidi, a student on the learning disability pilot said: *"There's no way I would be working without help. I knew what I wanted to do and where I wanted to work but didn't know how to go about it. This project did that for me".*

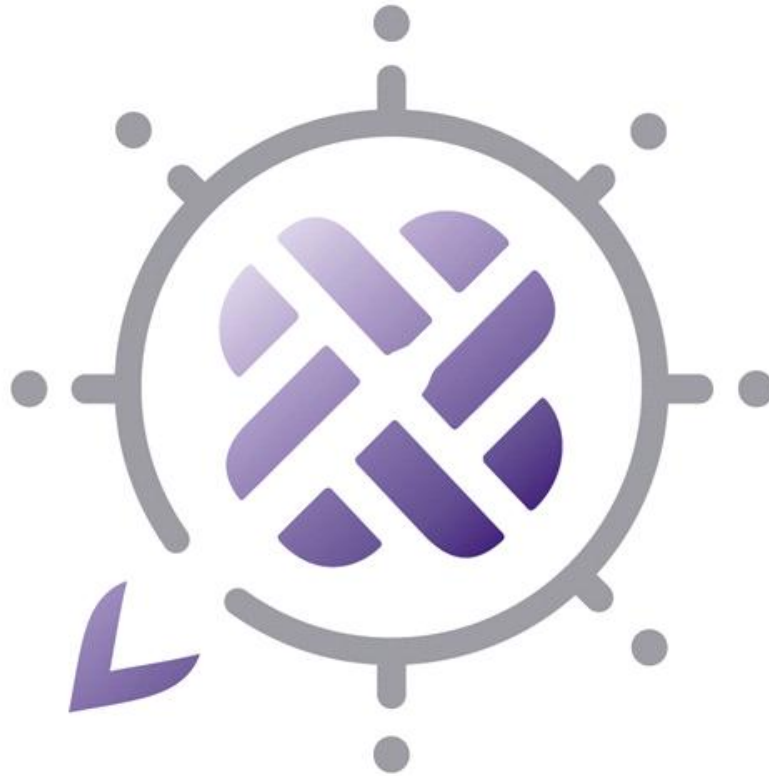
- care workers and brokerage teams are now able to challenge high-cost learning disability specialist care homes in the region using a 'Fair Pricing Tool'. The tool is used by care-teams in 8 authorities and has resulted in cost savings on placements in most cases of nearly £4m (£1.2m since June 08), with no impact on care quality.

Julia Marston Contracts Officer, Dorset County Council said: *"I think the fair pricing tool is a vital tool that aids negotiations between providers and authorities because it gives you a basis to start from. It is a very easy tool to use."*

- authorities in the South West spend over £70m each year with approximately 150 providers and 1650 out-of-authority placements for Looked-After Children or Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Around 90% of this spend in the region is now either covered by 3 collaborative framework agreements or a pre-approved provider list for 'Outcome-Based' placements, most of which have been supported by the SWRIEP over the last 2 years;

David Taylor, Somerset County Council said: *"RIEP has enabled authorities to address some of the key common issues they face in respect to commissioning services for very vulnerable young people and families. This has resulted in an improvement in the quality of provision as well as significant cost savings"*

- supported by the SWRIEP, officers in the 10 non-Peninsular authorities now work in partnership with 38 other authorities from the South of England to share the monitoring of over 400 out-of-area placement providers. This means that each authority now only has to monitor, on average, 8 providers in their local area instead of 30; a huge reduction in effort and time.

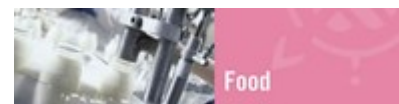


SOUTH WEST EMPLOYERS

Over the past year, South West Employers provide continued support to a number of local authorities with the recruitment and appraisal of senior staff including Chief Executives, and advising on sensitive and confidential employment issues. In 2008-09, South West Employers delivered training to 35 of the 41 South West Local Authorities (85%) and 109 of the 364 national Local Authorities (30%). In addition to this, we delivered training to 78 national organisations including DEFRA, Environment Agency, Fire and Rescue Services, Housing Associations, Meat Hygiene Services, Police Authorities, Regional Pension Funds, Regional Sea Fisheries Committees and Schools.

200 learning events have been run specifically for those working in local government, which covered a wide range of topics - from specialised training to broad-based generic skills that support individuals and organisations to improve performance. In detail, SWE achievements include:

- supporting several local authorities during a re-structuring of their senior managerial posts;
- advising local authorities on comprehensive employment and human resource issues including employment conditions and rights and tribunal cases;
- delivering a wide range of learning events including:



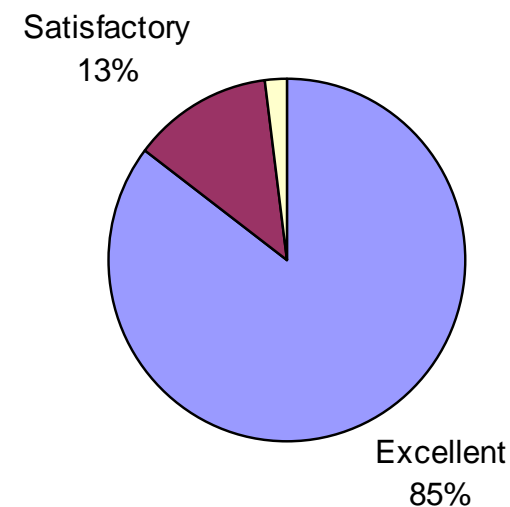
- assessing the first four authorities in the South West to successfully achieve the Charter for Member Development

Mayor Nick Bye, Torbay Council said: *“Achieving Member Development Charter is excellent news for Torbay. Torbay is committed to investing in the development of our Councillors. We recognise that the better equipped we are will enable us to provide a better future for our citizens. The Charter has given us a superb structure to follow to ensure we are meeting the national*

- hosting a successful awards ceremony for Members, to be presented with their qualification certificates and for the four local authorities to receive their Charter award - with the deputy regional minister as the key note speaker;
- increasing overall learner numbers by 10% in 2008/09. 44% of the participants on in-house events were elected Members;
- providing access to accredited learning provision for Members providing two qualification programmes. 17 Members are currently enrolled onto the Level 3 programme, 8 successfully achieved the qualification this year and 25 are working on the L4 programme, again, 8 have achieved it;
- achieving exam results which are considerably higher than the national pass rate for Trading Standards examinations:

Exam Results from May 08	Consumer Protection Environment	Law of Contract & Tort	Legal Systems	Animal Health	Agriculture	Fair Trading Criminal	Food	Intellectual Property	Metrology Law	Metrology Technology	Product Safety
SWE Pass Rate	100%	71%	93%	100%	83%	93%	100%	86%	100%	25%	82%
National Pass Rate	75%	54%	76%	89%	85%	93%	89%	88%	94%	38%	84%

- introducing a new E-learning course to provide a blended learning approach;
- delivering two groups of Professional Development Programmes which lead to a level 5 ILM Management qualification. Our first external inspection from the awarding body (ILM) highlighted good practice in terms of teaching, learning and assessment;
- introducing a new learner support system which has led to a significant increase in learners achieving the Gypsy Site Managers qualification which we deliver;
- achieving very positive feedback and record number of participants at this year's Pension Managers' Conference;



- receiving excellent feedback from external inspection by Edexcel and maintaining our Grade A status. As in previous years, our Learner Handbook and supportive documentation was cited as being of a high standard and is used as an exemplar with other organisations.

External Verifiers said:

“Strong delivery and assessment with areas of good practice.”

“There is much lively discussion and participation on residential courses which aids learning and understanding of the subject”

“A well structured course with full support given from the Centre to students throughout the country”

The following is a selection of quotes taken from Evaluation Forms from Elected Members:

"All three units were valuable. The course can not be faulted."

"This qualification has given me a greater insight into the Member Champion role. It was a well presented and useful learning experience."

“The programme is appropriate for backbenchers to leaders and provides a good opportunity to network with Councillors from other authorities. Hard work – but worth it!”

“I know I will be a better Councillor after completing this course.”

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

In the past year, the South West Regional Assembly delivered a timely response to the Government's Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS); promoted and implemented the Rail Prospectus; provided advice to Government to identify regional priorities through Regional Funding Advice; commenced delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan and published two Regional Strategic Reviews of public sector business engagement and migrant workers.

In more detail, the achievements of the South West Regional Assembly in 2008/09 include:

- delivering the Regional Planning Body's (RPB) response to the Proposed Changes to the RSS providing a clear regional voice on the issues raised, particularly in relation to overall housing provision;
- completing a well received review on business engagement. Following this, the South West RDA is now developing a comprehensive Business Engagement Strategy as part of a wider strategy for stakeholder engagement; they have established a Regional Business Forum and committed to delivering an agency-wide business focused relation management training programme to assist staff to deal effectively with the business community;

Chief Executive of the South West RDA, Jane Henderson said: *"thank you for an extremely informative strategic review....this is an issue which has become even more important in the SW in this challenging economic climate"*

- completing a review on migrant workers which encouraged wide sign up to a jointly agreed Migrant Worker Action Plan, to ensure the South West can make the most of the important contribution that migrants can make to our economy, culture and society;
- undertaking a technical assessment of the National Housing Policy Advice Unit's (NHPAU) advice on housing and the impact of delivery in the current economic climate to inform work on future Spatial Strategy reviews and assist in identifying short term delivery responses;
- agreeing with the RDA a programme of work for the Single Regional Strategy to enable a smooth transfer of work under new regional governance arrangements;
- producing the RSS Annual Monitoring Report, highlighting how the region is progressing in delivering the current RSS, and identifying trends that require further analysis and assessment in the Monitoring Implications Report;

- commencing the review of the submitted draft RSS Implementation Plan - engaging with Agencies and Local Authorities at the early stages to ensure sign-up / buy-in to the process and output;
- working with local authorities on a place basis to help implement the RSS. Benefits from this include: maintaining a dialogue and good working relationship with local authorities; having up-to-date intelligence about good practice, barriers and other issues around delivery; responding to common issues across local authorities; advising local authorities on regional processes, access to the SWRIEP and prioritisation;
- publishing an Infrastructure Planning Advice Note for Local Authorities developed with consultants. The Advice Note provides timely guidance to local authorities (and others) embarking on the process of planning for, identifying and managing infrastructure requirements. It provides options available throughout the process and identifies critical issues which Local Authorities should take into account. It has been signposted in the PAS Infrastructure Planning Resource Pack and is aligned with advice issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) through PAS on infrastructure planning. It has been nominated for an award from the Royal Institute of Town Planners;
- developing a regional infrastructure database to better co-ordinate infrastructure requirements for RSS delivery. The database provides the basis for a better understanding of infrastructure needs and funding / delivery issues on a Strategically Significant Cities and Towns, local authority, single conversation and HMA basis. It will provide the evidence base and monitoring capability necessary to produce and keep live the RSS Implementation Plan and Monitoring Implications Report;
- holding two Peer Review events for Local Authority Environment Directors to share best practice and seek solutions to common problems around delivering urban extensions and urban regeneration. A number of actions came out of the events for both the region and Local Authorities to pursue, some of which have been taking forward through the SWRIEP and South West Councils 'Planning for Growth and Delivery' Events;
- holding the first three in a series of SWRIEP and CLG sponsored events to support local authorities and other regional and national partners in RSS delivery. These events focused on: Infrastructure Delivery Planning; Development Economics; and, Making Better Use of Local Authority Powers and Resources. The events provided the opportunity to share best practice and explore solutions to problems associated with delivery;
- Publishing website pages which focused on the delivery work of the Regional Planning Body. The web pages provide information on the workstreams being progressed as part of the Implementation Framework for the RSS and include signposting pages to useful links and resources when planning for the delivery and management infrastructure and major development;
- conducting research which focused on providing Local Authorities with technical advice on better understanding the spatial implications of employment land allocation in the emerging RSS;

- convening the first in a series of regional workshops (co-sponsored by SWRIEP and Local Authorities) facilitated by Planning Officers Society Enterprises which are focusing on the Community Infrastructure Levy and Infrastructure Delivery Planning. 16 Local Authorities are taking part and actions and good practice from the workshops will be shared with other Local Authorities across the region;
- developing a sustainable communities toolkit to assist local authorities implementing RSS policy for rural areas. This will be taken forward as a national pilot by the Commission for Rural Communities;
- undertaking an assessment of the current economic downturn and implications for RSS delivery (with the RDA);
- identifying regional priorities, in partnership with other regional agencies, and submitted Regional Funding Allocation advice to Government (RFA2);
- at the request of CLG and the Department for Transport (DfT), we responded to the invitation to give regional advice on which transport schemes submitted under the Community Infrastructure Fund workstream best aligned with regional strategies;
- coordinating a regional response to DfT on the region's views on which strategic transport corridors should be considered nationally important to influence national transport policy;
- leading the commissioning of consultants on behalf of the region to better understand the links between the economy and transport with particular reference to improving understanding of the relative importance of transport corridors in the South West;
- meeting with Ministers to argue for additional rolling stock for the Bristol to south coast rail route in line with the priorities set out in the regional rail prospectus;
- lobbying Network Rail to ensure the Great Western Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy fully incorporates the priorities included in the regional rail prospectus to deliver the regional strategies;
- completing an assessment on behalf of the region on the vulnerability of the transport network to extreme weather events;
- introducing a new system for allocating housing funding to meet the region's needs and objectives; this means that local authorities are now invited to bid for part of the private sector renewal capital fund;
- making recommendations for housing funding to local authorities to Government, reflecting the region's housing needs and objectives; this included private sector renewal and gypsy and traveller site grant;

- Identifying future housing priorities for the region through an updated evidence base for the Regional Housing Strategy including an interim report on Strategic Housing Market Assessment progress and a Regional Housing Market Assessment on Older People's Housing;
- meeting with the Regional Minister to highlight the potential impact of the recession on delivery of the region's housing objectives before he met with the Housing Minister; this work continued with regional partners through the Housing and Infrastructure Sub Group;
- co-ordinating, development, and adoption of the first South West Climate Change Action Plan. In committing to it, regional partners are demonstrating their very serious intent to making the necessary step changes in direction and activity which will help the region meet the challenge of climate change. An accompanying Executive Summary has also been published (Sept 2008) explaining the headline priorities for regional action on climate change;

Mark Robins, Chair of the Regional Assembly Climate Change Task Group and Assembly Member said: *"Climate change is real, its happening and its impacts are going to get worse. Our challenge is to be effective, and respond with sufficient ambition and urgency to cut emissions and by reducing our vulnerability to climate change."*

The Secretariat is accountable directly to its Members for expenditure. The accounts for 2008/09 will be signed off in June. External auditors are appointed annually and the auditors for 2008/09 will be Grant Thornton.

The Secretariat receives funding from a range of sources to support the regional Member organisations:

Local Authorities continue to provide support to the regional organisations. Non financial support is also offered by authorities through, for example, officer support and access to facilities.

Total income from Local Authority subscriptions = £645,343

Funding from Affiliate/Associate Members to SW Councils/SW Employers:

Total income from this source = £30,921

CLG provides funding in support of Strengthening Regional Accountability. It also supports the Regional Planning and the Regional Housing functions through a core level of funding.

Total CLG Grant 2008/09 = £2,412,123

The Home Office provides funding for the SW Councils, to support the regional migration agenda.

Total income from this source = £110,000

Administration of the SW RIEP is now maintained by the Secretariat; however Dorset County Council remains the Accountable Body for funding.

Total Dorset County Council funding in support of SW RIEP = £521,269

Income generated from the Secretariat's support of the region's Local Authorities through the provision of Employment Services and Learning & Development events. This 'self generated' income continues to provide a vital under-pinning for the SW Employers role, enabling investment in the development of new and innovative methods of helping build capacity within Member organisations.

Total income generated by SWE = £1,059,030