



SOUTH WEST
Regional Assembly

SOUTH WEST
Local Government Association

SOUTH WEST
Provincial Employers

Annual Report

2003 - 2004

Large Print Version

Annual Report Summary

This Annual Report draws together a brief summary of the achievements of the three regional organisations supported by the south west combined Secretariat:

**the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA)
the South West Local Government Association (SWLGA) and
the South West Provincial Employers (SWPE)**

The shared key objectives for 2003/04 were:

- ensure that Member organisations have their voices heard
- work to improve the co-ordination of policies at regional level, encouraging and promoting an integrated approach to policy and plan making
- provide high quality and accessible information on a range of relevant issues, and encourage the sharing of information and experience across the region
- respond effectively as a region to the development of central Government policies and ensure that the implementation of policy brings decision-making closer to those it affects
- work with partners to support improved performance and capacity within the region
- work effectively with other regions and national organisations
- promote the common interests of Local Government as a major regional employer
- further develop the Secretariat to be a highly efficient and effective organisation, and an exemplar of good employment practice

To achieve these objectives, we prioritised the following key work areas:

Better Joint Working

Working together SWRA, SWLGA and SWPE achieved:

- increased co-ordination and effectiveness of equalities work at regional level by supporting the creation of the regional group, Equality South West
- better access to information and background material for Members, stakeholders and the public by improving facilities on, and presentation of, the website
- greater regional coherence through support for work on regional housing, regional employment and social exclusion
- greater recognition of South West issues at national level by improving links with regional and national networks: English Regions Network; Local Government Regional Forum; National Association of Regional Employers; Improvement and Development Agency and, the National Employers' Organisation
- publication of series of 'Profile' leaflet to help explain work of all three bodies supported by the Secretariat – welcomed by Members and stakeholders

The South West Local Government Association also achieved:

- better recognition of intra-regional disparities by co-ordinating comments from South West Local Authorities, about the draft proposals from the Office for National Statistics, on the update to the Indices of Deprivation and the Index of Multiple Deprivation

The South West Regional Assembly also achieved:

- a recognition of the importance of regional planning issues for delivery of South West agenda. It was supported by creating the Regional Spatial Strategy Group, drawing together Assembly Members, a Board Member from the South West Regional Development Agency (SW RDA) and senior representatives of the Statutory Environmental Bodies. The group, with advice and support from Government Office for the South West (GOSW), ensured more effective engagement of key organisations on the issues
- initial agreement within the region on the complex process for apportioning abstraction of minerals across the South West to meet development needs
- a contribution to the development of renewable energy targets by supporting the ReVision 2010 project. This project is vital for the region and aims to counteract the potential effects of climate change
- support for key regional sustainability activities, through financial contributions and partnership work with Sustainability South West and the South West Climate Change Impacts Partnership, helping the region to plan for and adapt to climate change
- support for a programme to deliver action on Protected Landscapes in the South West – a signatory of the South West Statement of Intent for Protected Landscapes submitted to Government

Better Deal for the Region

Working together SWRA, SWLGA and SWPE achieved:

- a coherent and united presentation of the region's needs to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Regional Disparities at a Hearing held in the South West
- a significant contribution to the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) development, ensuring it focuses on regional needs. We have helped to deliver a better housing programme, with better value for money and more units delivered per pound invested than any other region. We lobbied with Local Authorities and other partners to ensure Government recognition of South West affordable housing problems and needs
- a better chance for cutting edge wave energy pilots in the South West through organising, with RegenSW, lobbying to prioritise Strategic Environmental Assessment in the South West. We secured support from many Local Authorities and MPs and MEPs
- region-wide support for London's bid for the 2012 Olympic Games recognising the potential benefits to the South West
- region-wide support for Bristol's bid to be City of Culture 2008

The South West Regional Assembly also achieved:

- focussed regional support for Cornwall's Objective One programme and transitional funding in Objective Two areas from the European Union, joint hosting a conference on European Cohesion

- coherent representation of the region's views on rail transport provision in the region and contribution to improved rail services in the South West. Assembly successfully argued for the early merger of the Great Western and Thames franchises aimed at ensuring a better coordinated service provision for passengers
- consensus on the region's air travel needs, working with the SW RDA through research and consultation on the Government's proposals on the future of air transport
- region-wide comprehensive consultation on preferences for second strategic road route for the region. We have achieved Government recognition for the South West need for a second strategic route
- lobbying Government for a full range of measures arising from the South West and South Wales Multi-Modal Study (SWARMMS) including investment in infrastructure and demand management

The South West Local Government Association also achieved:

- recognition and consideration by Government of South West case on under funding of Local Government, following lobbying activity supported by the region's Local Authorities
- an informed contribution to Parliamentary debate on tax changes to second homes through provision of key evidence with support from Local Authorities. As a result almost all Authorities in the South West amended their council tax discount on second homes from 50% to 10% leading to greater resource for affordable housing in South West

- a South West contribution to evidence on the balance of Local Government funding review which highlighted the impact of the proposals, including the 'gearing effect' and the potential impact of localising business rates on the region
- facilitation of a constructive contribution to debate on provision of a toolkit through lobbying national Local Government Association on fire sprinklers

Better Dialogue

Working together SWRA, SWLGA and SWPE achieved:

- creation and support of a high level group of regional stakeholders to share information and priorities - the Regional Forum - drawing together senior officers from South West Local Authorities; Government Office South West, South West Regional Development Agency and other key partner organisations
- engagement with existing networks in support of Local Authorities, including Chief Executives, the Society of Chief Personnel Officers, Personnel Officers and Equalities Officers

The South West Local Government Association also achieved:

- stimulation of debates in the SWLGA around key issues including the electoral cycle and waste management and recycling
- debate around the new Highways Agency Incident Management System. The SWLGA pressed the Highways Agency to 'roll-out' the incident management arrangements into the South West region so that incidents are managed on a more effective basis

The South West Regional Assembly also achieved:

- promotion of best practice consultation procedures in the region, through adopting a set of consultation principles based on the Cabinet Office best practice guidance. We adopted these procedures in consultations carried out, including the 'Regional Environment Strategy', 'Regional Waste Strategy', 'Trends and Challenges for the South West' and development of Equalities South West

Better Regional Strategies

The SWRA achieved:

- development of the regional transport priorities, following discussions in the Regional Transport Forum. In response to Ministerial invitation, the Assembly prepared the document 'Developing the Regional Transport Strategy' which reviews regional transport priorities for investment and management
- production of the South West Issues Report 'Trends and Challenges for the South West' which identified the main issues of concern to the region as a whole. The key regional aims were endorsed by the Full Assembly
- development of the evidence base for Issues Report and future strategic policy making through innovative work commissioned from 'Local Futures'
- creation of reliable and interconnected datasets for decision-makers across the region to provide a joined-up evidence base through support of Regional Observatory
- a significantly expanded review of the Office for National Statistics 'Focus on the South West' through support of the Observatory's 'State of the Region' report

- with the RDA and GOSW partners, sponsored a performance review of the Observatory Core Unit
- jointly sponsored development of the South West Information Database (SWID) for the Observatory web-site. This draws together a large number of existing data sources from around the region for easy use by practitioners and the general public alike
- testing the delivery of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework by carrying out full sustainability appraisals of the Regional Housing Strategy and the Regional Environment Strategy
- a co-ordinated South West response to the Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy consultation to ensure the region's key priorities were reflected in the Delivery Plan
- full analysis of existing community strategies, to ensure regional strategies are properly informed by local needs and priorities
- publication of the Draft Regional Waste Strategy, drawing together long term planning for municipal and commercial waste.

Better Regional Planning

Working together SWRA, SWLGA and SWPE achieved:

- development of Symphony – a simulation training programme for embedding sustainability into decision-making
- region-wide support for the key strategic proposals identified in the Waste Strategy document

The South West Regional Assembly also achieved:

- as the first stage in the process of reviewing and revising RPG10 to produce a new Regional Spatial Strategy: a successful launch of Regional Spatial Strategy review – events held at Weston-super-Mare and Plymouth - with over 250 stakeholders involved. Consultants were commissioned to assess how well RPG10 meets the new requirements for regional strategies, as well as how successful the strategy in RPG10 has been. This “fitness for purpose” study is providing valuable guidance in the development of the new RSS
- support for the creation of partnerships of Local Authorities and others in six ‘Joint Study Areas’ to integrate planning of larger urban areas – funds were made available by the Assembly to enable necessary studies to be undertaken
- support for Local Authorities and other regional partners in preparing for implementation of a new European Directive and ODPM guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessment through research and pilot studies
- enhancement of on-line planning monitoring facility, viewed by Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as leading system for planning monitoring. It now provides improved data analysis through development of Geographic Information Monitoring Systems capability
- working with ODPM to reduce the burden on District Councils by combining requests for house-building and related planning monitoring information with Government requirements. This has resulted in greatly improved participation

- helping District Councils to develop monitoring on planning matters relating to the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG10), and the Annual Monitoring Report (such as new housing numbers and tenures - including affordable housing). This will help Districts in monitoring their own Local Plans, and the new Local Development Frameworks
- the Regional Assembly supports the South West Regeneration Centre - Creating Excellence - and co-sponsored the collaborative initiative “Designing Our Environment: Towards a Better Built Environment for the South West” in December 2003
- commitment to being an Ambassador for ‘Future Foundations’, supporting sustainable construction in the region

Better Performance and Capacity

Working together SWRA, SWLGA and SWPE achieved:

- fast response to Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) briefing for all Local Authorities and provision of support and guidance on targets in relation to CPA compliance
- better information service for Members through the Assembly Newsletter; Provincial Employers Bulletin and SWLGA e-Bulletin providing better information service for Local Authorities with key contributions from the Chair of SWLGA and a national LGA Vice Chair
- development with partners of the South West Improvement Partnership (SWIP) to ensure better co-ordination and sharing of best practice: secured Government funding to help maximise resources and streamline access to other funding streams

The South West Provincial Employers also achieved:

- support on learning and development activities. Revamp of Learning and Development provision to meet changing needs including development of new flagship programme supporting strategic management, a modular management programme and ongoing support for workforce skills
- fast response to emerging needs – delivered one off events to inform pay negotiations and contribute to the Pay and Workforce Strategy
- response to over 4,000 of requests for information and advice on employment and human resource issues including employment conditions and rights and tribunal cases
- facilitation of more modern employment practices by helping Authorities revise their terms and conditions of employment
- continued support to Counties, Unitaries and Districts across the South West with job evaluation processes to enable them to conduct pay and grading reviews
- continued assistance to Authorities in the development of their managers to enhance organisational development

The South West Local Government Association also achieved:

- funding from National Asylum Support Service to support regional work through a regional partnership
- development of the South West Asylum and Refugee Forum and provision of training, conferences and seminars
- support for the development of an e-government network. Successful bid for funding from Government work on regional e-government project and the establishment of a regional partnership

Better Governance and Regional Accountability

Working together SWRA, SWLGA and SWPE achieved:

- introduction of Code of Conduct and Register of Interest for all Members
- development of financial systems, praised in audit report by Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

The South West Regional Assembly also achieved:

- increased involvement of Social, Economic and Environmental Partners in the Assembly's range of activities. In particular through changing the constitution to allow them full participation on regional planning matters
- strengthened regional accountability through an enhanced Scrutiny process – agreed with SW RDA – focussing on key regional priorities in Regional Economic Strategy
- assessment of SW RDA's success in addressing regional needs using formal and wide-ranging consultation, interviews and regional workshops
- completion of two successful scrutiny exercises, assessing SW RDA's work to support Urban Renaissance and Business Development in the South West. Scrutiny work resulted in development of a 'prospectus' that clarifies SW RDA's roles and responsibilities in urban areas following recommendations arising from the scrutiny on urban renaissance. Business development scrutiny provided a 'timely review' that informed SW RDA's distribution of funding for business support

Better Understanding of Regional Views

The South West Local Government Association achieved:

- consultation on views about the Standard School Year and support for cross-boundary working. We lobbied national Local Government Association so the South West position on the Standard School Year was accepted as the national position

The South West Regional Assembly also achieved:

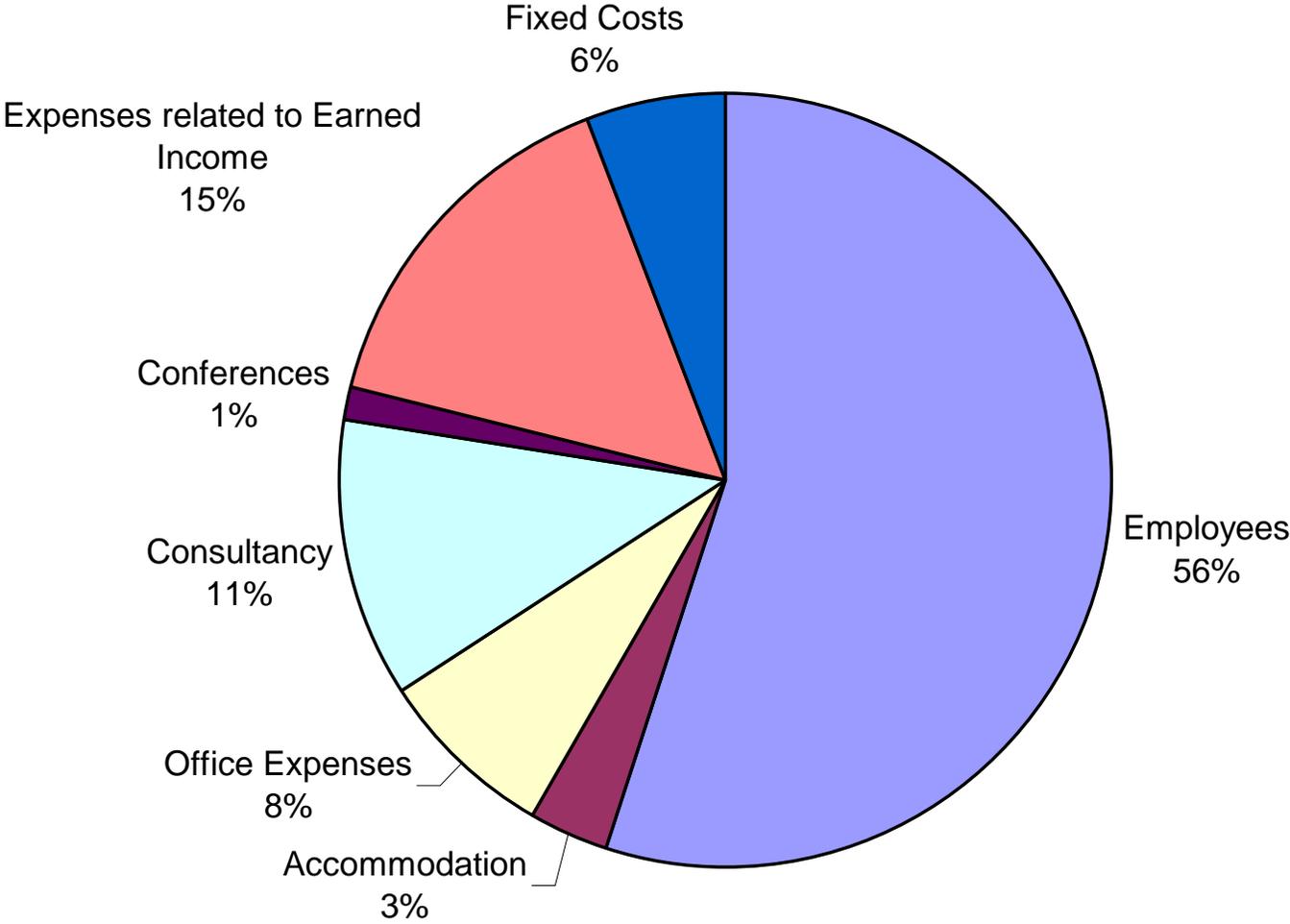
a series of discussion forums held for over 200 representatives from all sectors and areas to discuss key regional issues and priorities ahead of the development of the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS)

- consensus with partners on the content of the Regional Emphasis Document (RED). Worked with GOSW and SW RDA to provide the region's input to the Treasury's 2004 Spending Review and set out how resources can be re-prioritised to address the region's needs. The preparatory work on IRS supplied important insights to this document
- widespread engagement with stakeholders to develop the Regional Environment Strategy, leading to endorsement by key regional agencies and commitment to delivering priority actions to protect and enhance our valued environmental assets
- a pilot for on-line consultation as part of the consultation on the draft Waste Strategy

Resources

The Secretariat continues to seek value for money in using public money. Economies of scale continue to be realised as a result of the combined regional Secretariat, which allows resources to be used in a flexible way to meet peaks and troughs in workloads. Work is continuously reviewed to ensure resources are being effectively focussed. The total expenditure of the three regional organisations was £3,973,977.

Areas of Expenditure 2003/04

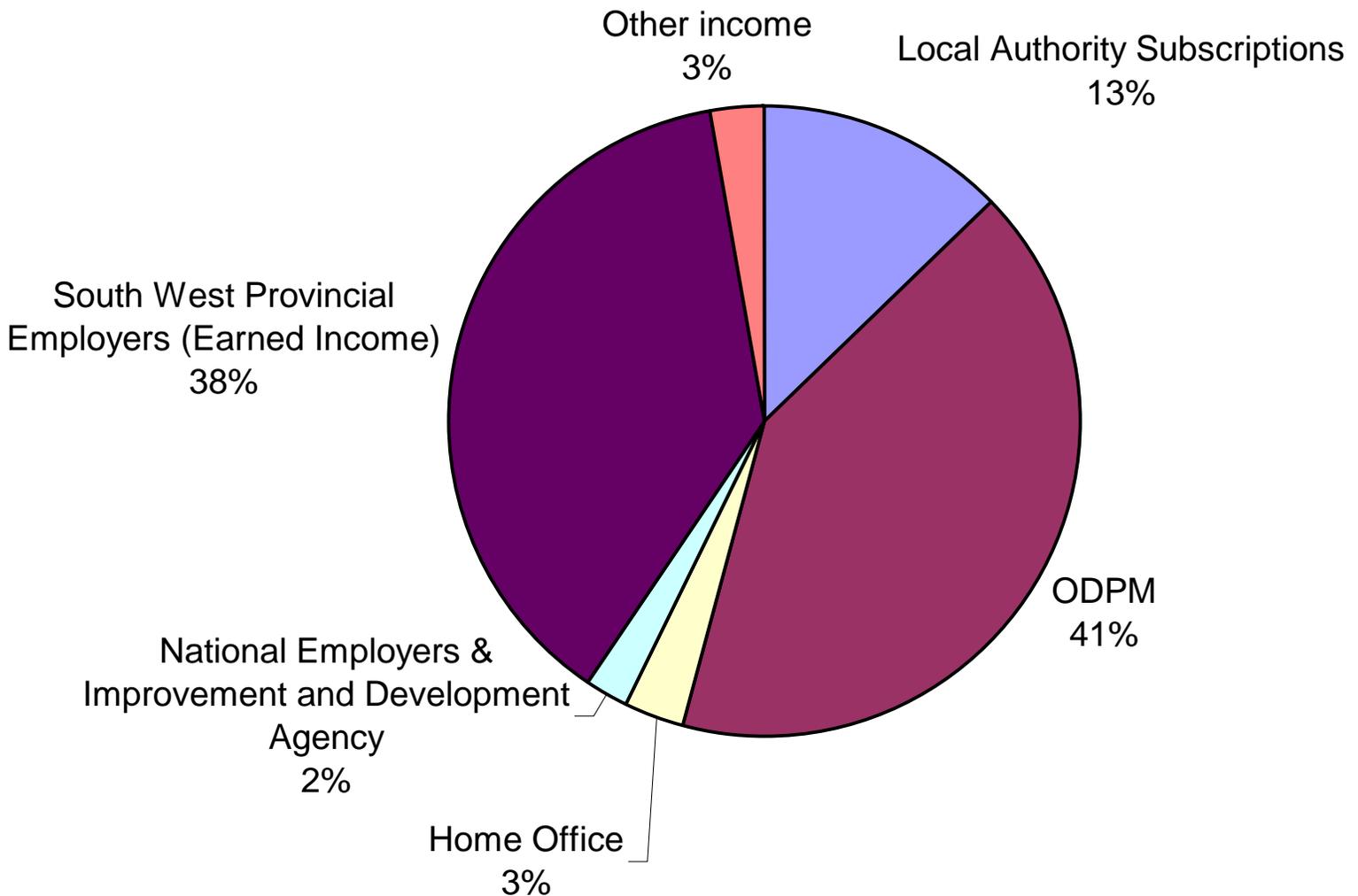


Income

The three member organisations receive financial support from a range of sources. The main ones are set out below:

- Local Authorities continue to provide support for all three organisations. For 2003/04 the total subscriptions received for SWRA, SWLGA and SWPE was £454,012, representing a reduction from the level of subscriptions in 2002/03 which was £699,969. Non financial support is also offered by authorities through officer support and access to facilities at no cost
- The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has been providing funding to the Assembly through the 'Strengthening Regional Accountability fund' since 2001. The ODPM also provides funding in support of the Regional Planning function through a core level of funding plus an element of Planning Development Grant, which is agreed on an annual basis. In 2003/04 this grant was £1,488,873
- the Home Office provided funding of £106,677 for the SWLGA in support of the activity to encourage regional working on the asylum seekers agenda
- earned income from the Secretariat's activities in support of the region's Local Authorities continued to be generated through the provision of employment support and learning and development events. In 2003/04 £1,349,544 was earned from services provided. This "self generated" income continues to provide a vital underpinning for the SWPE role enabling investment in the development of new and innovative methods of helping build capacity within Member organisations

Areas of Income/2003/004



The Regional Assembly Secretariat

The South West Regional Assembly Secretariat is based in Taunton, and supports three organisations:

- The Regional Assembly is a partnership between all the Local Authorities in the South West. It also includes representatives of Social, Economic and Environmental Partners, including the Trades Union Congress, business, the voluntary sector, and others

- The South West Provincial Employers provides training, development and guidance on all employment issues to Local Authorities
- The South West Local Government Association represents and promotes the interests of all South West Local Authorities
- The three organisations are supported by a shared Secretariat, but continue to carry out their own functions, working together wherever possible in the best interests of the region

Key Contacts

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Serving the needs of the South West