



South West Regional Secretariat  
2007/2008 Annual Report



## WHAT IS THE SOUTH WEST REGIONAL SECRETARIAT?

The South West Regional Secretariat supports the work of three separate organisations, the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA), the South West Local Government Association (SWLGA) and the South West Provincial Employers (SWPE). 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 each of the three organisations have achieved with support from the Secretariat in the past year.

## THE VISION

**The vision of the Secretariat working through Members is to:**

*“Improve the quality of life of all the people in the region and make it 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. Ensure a better awareness of the role of the three regional organisations (SWRA, SWPE, SWLGA) so that it is possible to act effectively as the leading voice on key regional issues, and influence and shape policy affecting the South West to ensure it positively responds to the region's aims
2. Working in partnership develop and implement policies that reflect the region's aspirations and are in line with the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) and keep the work of key regional players under review to encourage them to collectively and consistently work towards the achievement of the region's aims
3. Ensure that the Regional Spatial Strategy and Regional Housing Strategy support each other in delivering the region's aims and objectives as set out in the IRS and the statutory function is delivered efficiently and effectively
4. Encourage improved performance and capacity across the region through the provision of high quality advice and support, and the sharing of accessible information and knowledge on a range of relevant issues, between local authorities
5. Promote the common interests of Local Government as a major regional employer to ensure that Local Government and the regional organisations continue to provide the region with high quality employment opportunities and attract employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide first class services
6. Ensure that all the work carried out by the three member organisations is underpinned by the principles of equality of opportunity and sustainable development; is carried out in true partnership spirit openly and transparently and is delivered to a high professional standard by a workforce that is supported by good employment practice

# SUMMARY ACHIEVEMENTS 2007/08

## SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

The key successes of Assembly Members working through the various groups and of the Secretariat supporting them are:

- Successfully lobbied for an extra £23 million to be added to the Regional Housing Pot total for the region using evidence provided by local authorities, to ensure that all the region's housing priorities were met
- Secured a total of £826 million for the region to spend on housing in the period 2008-11 which represented the greatest funding increase of all the regions in the country – with 86% of that to be spent on Affordable Housing
- Hosted regional site visit of housing academic Professor Glen Bramley, Board Member of the NHPAU, to discuss affordable housing priorities in the South West in order for him to offer advice on this to Government
- Consulted stakeholders and the public on how the Regional Housing Pot for 2008-11 should be allocated by publishing an online questionnaire (April 2007) which helped to inform regional advice to government by the Regional Assembly which led to the Regional Assembly recommending at least 79% of the Regional Housing Pot should be spent on affordable housing
- Completed in its role as Regional Planning Body the presentation of the Regional Assembly's case on the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (Draft RSS) to the Examination in Public Panel
- Developed website portal for the Examination in Public (EiP) of the Draft RSS, issuing weekly press releases, detailing participants, topics and how to find out more
- Posted weekly bulletins on website reflecting the discussions at the EiP (April – July 2007)

- Provided an online resource and Regional Assembly response to the Independent Panel's report into the Draft RSS, including maps and reference material for stakeholders and regional partners
- Undertook a partial review of the Draft RSS on Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision. This included promoting the consultation into future pitch numbers in the South West and providing a website facility for Local Authorities, and the settled and traveller community. The Consultation document was also made available in audio CD and tape format to help encourage participation
- Engaged with 'hard-to-reach' groups including Gypsies and Travellers and held events with them to discuss the partial review of the Regional Spatial Strategy for pitch provision
- Continued working as a statutory planning consultee via the Conformity Panel assessing Local Development Documents and strategic applications for general conformity with the Draft RSS
- Developed a guide to improving rail in the South West, working with a regional 'Rail Champion' to lobby government on this issue
- Lobbied Government to make improvements to rail connections between the South West and London Paddington by upgrading Reading Station
- Discussed regional rail issues with Transport Ministers in relation to the region's response to the Government Draft Local Transport Bill
- Commissioned research to identify examples of best practice in partnership working in the region in line with the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS), with examples published on the website
- Analysed the following key regional strategies against aims and objectives of the IRS: South West Cultural Infrastructure Development Strategy 'People, Places, Spaces'; Regional ESF Framework and South West Regional Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Third Sector

- Promoted the Sustainability Checklist ([www.checklistswest.co.uk](http://www.checklistswest.co.uk)) a resource for developers, architects and planners to ensure their plans meet or exceed the South West Regional sustainability guidelines as set out in the Draft RSS
- Produced a draft Climate Change Action Plan in partnership with Regional Partners. A substantial evidence base informed the Plan, along with extensive consultation with stakeholders and experts
- Produced six e-bulletins on the development of the Climate Change Action Plan and including current issues, and distributed to the Core Group and key consultees
- Produced studies on the potential for carbon emissions reduction from business and transport; and an overview of community led activity on climate change: A Movement of the People Community Climate Action in South West England; and a study of the regions vulnerability to extreme weather events.
- Supported and promoted the Ecos Trust's Zero-Carbon Conference and provided our Principal Sustainable Development Advisor, as guest speaker. The conference saw policy-makers, developers, local planners and professionals discuss new policies and explored how these issues could be addressed in practice
- Worked closely with Sustainability South West on specific projects such as Pioneers of Packaging and Fair Shares, Fair Choices in relation to carbon budgeting
- Completed work on a Review of Quality of Employment Opportunity led by the Regional Scrutiny and Review Panel, culminating in a report which was approved by the Assembly in July 2007, thereafter monitoring the progress of implementing the recommendations
- Undertook a new review on the Economic and Environmental theme of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). This involved an extensive evidence gathering process, seeking the views of stakeholders on the roles of regional partners in developing and delivering the economic development theme of LAAs. This culminated in bilateral discussions in November 2007, with the final report published in January 2008

- Published three Regional Assembly Newsletters and Post-Assembly Meeting Bulletins to inform Members and partners about the current work of the Regional Assembly; and published two Housing Body Newsletters and distributed to key regional housing contacts. All publications are available to download from the Regional Assembly's website
- Improvements to the website included easy to use 'portals' on key topics, such as Climate Change, Sub National Review, Gypsy and Travellers Partial Review and Consultation, and the Development of the Regional Spatial Strategy. By providing documentation, background information and frequently asked questions centrally by topic, challenging subjects have been made more accessible for Members, stakeholders, members of the public and the media to use

# SUMMARY ACHIEVEMENTS 2007/08

## SOUTH WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

- **Lobbying Government, MPs and the Regional Minister on the first ever three year local government finance settlement**

Recognising this was a tight settlement SWLGA sought to highlight historic underfunding and particular challenges facing local authorities in the region, and asked MPs to ensure that the Government took account of these in the formula grant distribution. A fact book was produced, with the input of local authority finance officers, highlighting the financial implications for authorities in the region. Subsequently a formal response to the consultation was adopted by SWLGA. According to Communities & Local Government (CLG) figures, the South West will receive the second highest increase in formula grant funding for any English region across the three year period as a whole (4.3% in 2008-09, 3.3% in 2009-10 and 3.2% in 2010-11 over 2007-08 figures)

- **Lobbying Government on the financial implications for South West councils of the national roll out of the Concessionary Bus Fare Scheme**

This was a key issue for councils in the South West given the popularity of the region as a tourism destination and its demographic profile. SWLGA lobbied for accurate reimbursement of local authority costs in this area and for the Government to distribute an extra £212 million available nationally (2008/2009) by special grant (rather than through the Local Government Finance Settlement). Following debate and a consultation response by SWLGA, the Government adopted the option for distributing the special grant which most recognised the needs of the South West, which will mean that funding will help Local Authorities cope better with demand

- **Taking the lead on the wider migration agenda by establishing a new Board structure to take account of the needs and opportunities provided by migrant workers, as well as asylum seekers and refugees**

The SWLGA are now positioned and recognised as the regional point for migration policy co-ordination, information and analysis. As a result, local authorities are readily able to learn from best practice and identify opportunities for joint work to be undertaken. The benefits that migrant workers bring to the region, without which many industries would struggle, as well

as some of the challenges presented to the delivery of public services in some areas, are now increasingly being realised. Research undertaken by WLGA has informed the work of the Home Office and national migration forum

- **Inputting into the work of the Councillors Commission and the All Party Parliamentary Group inquiry on the role of councillors**

The report of the All Party Parliamentary Group recognised the innovative support available from SWPE (including BTEC qualifications for Members). Cllr Cathy Bakewell (one of the Commissioners) welcomed the detailed input from SWLGA and subsequently a special event was held with her and Member Support Officers to discuss the findings. The Government is now considering how the proposals should be implemented and increased support provided to Members in their roles

- **Inputting into the response on the Housing Green Paper on the recommendations to increase the housing stock**

This raised concerns about delivery and sustainability which will now be taken up in other areas of Regional Secretariat work

- **Facilitating a joint SWLGA and SWRA waste peer review with waste disposal authorities**

This engaged specialist technical officers in local authorities to help develop a consistent and coherent approach to evidence bases and assessing future needs, as well as incorporating challenge on how the evidence is translated into policy. As a result a wide range of actions have been identified, which will be taken forward through the LiftSW Waste Delivery Plan

- **Meeting the Regional Minister to discuss local authority priorities**

Members of the SWLGA and SWRA met with Ben Bradshaw MP as part of the effort to ensure the best deal for South West councils in the proposed changes to regional arrangements. Other important issues discussed included the future role and responsibilities for Local Councils in economic development, with Councils being given a statutory responsibility to promote this within their local area, as well as the implications for local authorities of the Government's Draft Legislative Programme

- **Calling on Government to review the current policy of Daylight Saving, on the ground of the potential social, economic and environmental benefits to the South West**

- **Co-ordinating workshop meetings with South West Local Authority Communications Officers**  
 The meetings engaged communication teams across the region in a new programme of Peer Reviews to identify where councils can improve their strategic and operational communications. Initial feedback from pilots such as Somerset County Council has been very positive
- **Developing, with partners, the work of LiftSW**  
 The regional improvement and efficiency partnership aims to improve the quality of local government and will be providing around £7m of support for councils in the region a year. SWLGA ensured that Members and local councils had significant opportunities to influence the development of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategy, which was successfully signed off by Ministers in March, together with £22m of funding. SWLGA officers have also been working to develop thematic delivery plans for LiftSW
- **Influencing the development of the SWRDA Corporate Plan to ensure the needs of local authorities are recognised**
- **Considering with Paul Coen, national LGA Chief Executive, the implementation of the findings of the Independent 'Best' Commission on the LGA**  
 This led to increased recognition of the need to draw on the views and expertise of regional LGAs, in particular as a means of engaging with Members of local authorities more widely
- **Liaising with the Regional Skills Partnership on the Regional Skills Strategy and Regional ESF Framework**  
 This included ensuring recognition of the needs of discrete groups, such as Migrant Workers, were considered
- **Supporting a number of Local Government networks and events whilst also encouraging collaborative working to improve sharing of best practice, raise awareness of key regional issues and improve access to services**  
 A wide range of specialist local authority officer networks have been supported (such as those for Chief Executives, Economic Development Officers, Scrutiny Officers and Member Support Officers amongst others) to enable shared learning and opportunities to influence the development of government policy in favour of the South West and its councils

# SUMMARY ACHIEVEMENTS 2007/08

## SOUTH WEST PROVINCIAL EMPLOYERS

- Supported a number of Local Authorities with the recruitment of senior staff including Chief Executives
- Supported several Authorities during a re-structuring of some or all of their senior managerial posts
- Advised Members on sensitive and confidential employment issues
- Supported Member panels during the appraisal of their Chief Executives
- Provided comprehensive HR advice service via telephone and e-mail on employment and human resource issues including employment conditions and rights and tribunal cases
- Assisted Authorities in delivering enhanced performance by supporting them to implement workforce planning and capacity building initiatives
- Continued to support Authorities across the South West with job evaluation processes to enable them to conduct and implement pay and grading reviews
- Supported learners from a wide range of public sector and national organisations in developing their skills and acquiring new knowledge retaining a healthy share of the market. Training was provided to:
  - 48 out of the 51 South West Local Authorities (94%)
  - 130 of the 410 national Local Authorities (32%)
  - Over 60 other organisations including DEFRA, Environment Agency, Highways Agency, Forestry Commission, Meat Hygiene Services, Police Authorities, Fire and Rescue Services, Department for Communities and Local Government, Regional Pension funds, UCAS, MOD, Regional Sea Fisheries Committees

- Continued to provide Tormarton services to major private sector clients within the industry including Amey Mouchel Joint Venture, WS Atkins, Balfour Beatty Infrastructure Services and InterRoute
- Increased the portfolio of learning and development events to meet current demand
- 85% of delegates rated the courses as excellent
- Provided accredited Members' qualifications including Professional Award in Local Governance
- Implemented the Level 3 BTEC Advanced Award for Local Government Member Champions. The South West is the first region in the UK to offer a qualification for aspiring Member Champions, which will help Councillors to connect their community to their Council. The first intake of councillors are due to complete their training in July 2008
- Developed a support network for Member Champions
- Designed a Professional Development Programme – a Level 5 management qualification which has gained accreditation from ILM
- Supported and assessed the first two South West Local Authorities to successfully achieve Member Development Charter Status (Torbay and South Somerset)
- Attended and supported a number of regional networks: Member Support Officers, Member Development Group, Member Allowances, Learning and Development Network, Safety Advisers Panel
- Ensured Tormarton Training Centre continued to be one of the key training providers to the highway industry in the UK, providing 1,020 days training and assessment. The total number of delegates that attended training or assessments events was approximately 3,223

- Ensured that Tormarton continued to be the only highways training provider to hold accreditation under ISO 9001/2000 for design and delivery of highway maintenance training and assessment activities
- Continued provision of City & Guilds training and assessment under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991
- Continued to meet the demand for Winter Service V.Q from our customer base to provide training and assessment for Winter Service providers
- Continued provision of Lantra Awards accredited Sector 12 schemes in traffic management
- Continued to be an approved assessment centre to the Waste Management Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB), providing NVQ Level 1 to 4 for the Waste Management industry
- In response to changes in legislation and official guidelines, designed and delivered new training on the revised traffic signs manual, Incident Support, and Emergency Traffic Management Development

<b>OVERALL SATISFACTION (345 Responses from 1203 delegates = 29% Response rate).</b> Trading Standards evaluation not included, which have been collected separately.			
			
<b>EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING</b>	311	32	3
<b>CONTENT OF EVENT</b>	282	53	6
<b>EFFECTIVENESS OF TUTOR(S) &amp; SPEAKER(S)</b>	301	38	2
<b>QUALITY OF OUR ADMINISTRATION</b>	312	28	3
<b>QUALITY OF VENUE</b>	264	65	13
	<b>85%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>2%</b>

## FINANCE 2007/08

The Secretariat is accountable directly to its Members for expenditure. The accounts for 2007/08 were signed off in July. External auditors are appointed annually and the auditors for 2007/08 will be Grant Thornton. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Home Office also audit their funding of the Secretariat.

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

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

**Total income from Local Authority subscriptions = £535,710**

Funding from Associate Members (Fire, Police etc) to SWLGA/SWPE.

**Total income from this source = £17,229**

The 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 plus an element of planning delivery grant.

**Total CLG Grant 2007/08 = £2,594,620**

The Home Office provides funding for the SWLGA, to support the activity of the regional Asylum Seekers agenda.

**Total income from this source = £104,145**

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 SWPE role, enabling investment in the development of new and innovative methods of helping build capacity within Member organisations.

**Total income generated by SWPE = £1,312,438**