



THE REGIONAL SECRETARIAT

The 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

Chief Executive - Bryony Houlden

Deputy Chief Executive - Richard Payne

Director of Policy and Planning - Peter Brown

Deputy Director: Employment and Learning - Russ Symons

Deputy Director: Housing, Local Government,

Skills & Social Inclusion - Lorraine Chicken

Deputy Director: Central Services - Karen Stone

Deputy Director: Policy and Partnership - Clare Reid

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Regional Policy Managers

Housing - Abbe Hayward

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Serving the needs of the South West



Housing News

Regional Housing - Structural Changes

During the Autumn the housing and planning bodies in the English regions merged. The change is intended to bring regional housing and planning closer together, and is in line with the Barker Review of housing which called for a step change in housing delivery.

In the South West, the Regional Assembly, working with its housing partners, assumed responsibility for the South West Regional Housing Body (SWHB) from September 2006.

The SWHB has always been a partnership success story. Existing SWHB partners continue to sit on a new Member Group for the Assembly, the Regional Housing Advisory Group, which will be assisted by an officer Working Group and a wider group, the Housing Forum.



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The Regional Housing Advisory Group includes seven Assembly members, and one representative from each of the SWHB partner organisations: GOSW, Housing Corporation, SW RDA, English Partnerships, South West Local Government Association, National Housing Federation and the Home Builders Federation.

More information can be found at the South West Housing Body website
www.southwesthousingbody.org.uk

Affordable Housing Topped the Agenda on National Housing Chief Visit

Kevin Williamson, Chief Executive of the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU), which was set up by the Government last year to provide independent advice on improving housing affordability, was a guest at the Regional Housing Advisory Group (RHAG) meeting on 14 February 2007.

With some areas in the South West experiencing a house price to income ratio of 15 to 1, and all areas in the region experiencing a house price to income ratio of at least 11 to 1, RHAG were keen to meet with the head of this new Government unit and for him to hear first hand about the issues facing people in the South West.

Discussions also took place around future forecasting of housing and the group told Mr Williamson how the issues have been dealt with in the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy, which was submitted to Government in April 2006.

The aim of NHPAU is to help strengthen the housing market evidence base and analysis currently available to the regional planning bodies. This will help to ensure that new homes identified in regional plans have a positive impact in improving housing affordability.

Inside this issue:

Assemblies play critical role	2
Energy Powered Debate	2
TV Focus on SWRA	3
Government follows Assembly lead	3
Gypsies and Travellers Update	3
Transport Issues: Public Transport gets investment RSPTG Round-up	4
Championing Community Connections	5
Scrutiny and Regional Strategic Review	6
Get connected!	7
RSS Examination in Public	7
Key Secretariat Contacts	8

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Assemblies play critical role says report

Assemblies play critical role in securing economic and sustainable growth in the regions.

New research published at the end of 2006 confirmed that Regional Assemblies are playing a critical role in securing economic and sustainable growth in the regions.

The independent research commissioned by the English Regions Network found Regional Assemblies are delivering exceptional value across a broad range of functions with clear benefits for the regions.

The report, Adding Value to the Regions, examines the role and impact of the Assemblies and specifies six areas where key policy recommendation have been proposed for consideration by Government as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.



Cllr Keith Mitchell, Chairman of the English Regions Network, said:
"The findings in this report confirm that Regional Assemblies have a crucial role to play in securing vibrant English regions. The Assemblies work as regional strategic partnerships, effective at identifying regional priorities and adept at managing tough decisions. The case study work included in this report clearly shows the positive impact of the work done by Assemblies."

The full report can be downloaded from the Assembly website www.southwest-ra.gov.uk or from the English Regions Network www.ern.gov.uk.

Energy Powered Autumn Debate

Energy demand and supply was the main topic of debate when the Assembly met in October 2006. Members debated how the region could respond positively to the National Energy Review, and move towards a low carbon South West, whilst tackling the challenge of energy demand and supply.

Members broke into workshop groups following the main session to discuss in detail the region's concerns regarding energy, including renewables, nuclear and energy efficiency.

Following the workshops, Members returned for a plenary discussion chaired by Assembly Member, Ian Munro. The panel, pictured below, consisted of (Back Row L - R)

Matthew Spencer (Regen SW), Simon Roberts (Centre for Sustainable Energy), Cllr Jill Shortland (SWRA Chairman), Ian Munro (SWRA SEEP Member and Chair of the Assembly's Regional Scrutiny and Strategic Review Panel), Tony Norton (Exeter University), Nigel Knee (British Energy), (Front Row L - R) Lesley Watson (Sustainability South West), Phil Collins (Natural England), Roger Hull (Severn Tidal Power Group).

The next full Assembly Meeting on 16 March 2007 will see Climate Change as the main topic of discussion. Ben Bradshaw MP, Minister for Local Environment, Marine and Animal Welfare will be attending and taking part in the debate.



Make sure you're connected

Launch of the *Just Connect!* website - www.justconnect-sw.co.uk

Since the publication in 2004 of the Integrated Regional Strategy, Just Connect!, the South West Regional Assembly has been working with regional partners to produce a web-based resource, which provides a suite of information to help deliver the aims and objectives of Just Connect!

www.justconnect-sw.co.uk is the new, easy to use website. The portal provides stakeholders and Local Authorities with the opportunity to explore information on:

- Regional strategies, including a Compendium of Strategies and an analysis of their content against the aims and objectives of Just Connect!
- Regional partnership groups operating in the South West including contact details, their aims and objectives, areas of work, governance arrangements, the activities they undertake and their relationship to the aims and objectives of Just Connect!
- Regional commitments from a number of regional organisations to integrate their work better or make further connections with particular organisations or topics.
- Regional evidence, telling 'the story so far' of how the region is performing against the aims and objectives of Just Connect!
- Future areas of work for improving the integration of strategies, action and cross-sector working.

The site aims to provide essential regional knowledge and connections, identify areas for potential co-operation and partnership working which will make a difference to local areas and people in the South West.

By helping us to know more about each other, what we do and how we work together, www.justconnect-sw.co.uk can help to facilitate integrated working and solutions to complex social, economic and environmental challenges in the South West. It will also allow users to see the multitude of ways in which partnerships across the region are indeed now connecting!

For further information please contact **Stuart Todd or Rowan Griffin** at the Regional Secretariat on **(01823) 270101**.



Assembly Members at the launch of www.justconnect-sw.co.uk (L-R) Jackie Longworth, Deputy Chair Cllr Chanel Stevens, Cllr Andrew Govier, Chairman Cllr Jill Shortland.

Regional Spatial Strategy Examination in Public (EiP)

The Secretary of State decided that an Examination in Public (EiP) should be held to discuss and test the soundness of the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006 to 2026, which was submitted to Government in Spring 2006.

The examination of selected matters arising from representations (submitted comments) on the Draft RSS will be held in public and before an independent Panel appointed by the Secretary of State.

The panel are:
Jim Parke BSc (Hons) Geography, MRTPI - Chair
David Lavender MRTPI - Inspector Member
Rhys Davies CEng MICE - Panel Member

The EiP Panel is assisted by the Panel Secretariat, which consists of Elaine Lamb (Panel Assistant) and Brian Cobley (Panel Secretary). The Panel Secretariat Office is the contact point for any administrative or procedural matters regarding the Examination process.

Preliminary Meetings are being held ahead of the EiP, for the latest information visit www.southwesteip.co.uk

The EiP is to be held at The Thistle Hotel, Queen Street, Exeter. It is due to start on 17 April 2007 and will last around 10 weeks. Members of the public and the media can observe at the EiP hearings, but only invited participants will be allowed to speak.

More information about the EiP or the RSS can be found in the latest edition of the RSS Update Newsletter, available online from www.southwest-ra.gov.uk or from the South West Regional Secretariat on **01823 270101**.



Regional Assembly and SWLGA meet with Immigration Minister

Assembly and SWLGA Member, Councillor Roger Hutchinson, led the delegation when Liam Byrne, Minister for Communities, Immigration and Nationality visited the South West before Christmas.

The Minister visited the Immigration Office at Portishead, home to a screening centre for asylum seekers. He met with key regional partners, including Cllr Hutchinson, Bryony Houlden and John Price from the Regional Assembly and SWLGA, to hear about refugee and asylum issues in the South West.

Mr Byrne talked to representatives to discuss problems faced by local authorities and organisations in the region dealing with these issues. He also spent time discussing migrant workers in the region.

Mr Byrne acknowledged the value of meeting with the regional organisations and local authorities, and their key role and potential in improving the situation for asylum seekers and refugees.

Following the meeting, the Regional Strategic Co-Ordination Board for Asylum Seekers has written to the Minister to highlight issues which they feel weren't covered during his visit.



Liam Byrne MP
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Scrutiny and Regional Strategic Review Update: The Quality of Employment Opportunity in the South West

Having explored issues around the quality of jobs in the South West at a major regional workshop, the Regional Assembly discussed findings with key members of the South West of England Regional Development Agency (South West RDA) at a 'Bilateral' meeting at the end of January 2007.



Workshop: Working through the challenges

One of the Regional Assembly's functions is to examine the effectiveness of the work of the South West RDA, through a process known as a Regional Strategic Review, and the meeting formed part of that process.

The Panel have been examining topics including the challenges facing small businesses, employment issues for minority groups, and what can be done to reduce the numbers of young people and graduates leaving South West England. They also discussed low pay, and employment in changing or declining sectors.

Focus groups and interviews have been taking place over recent months with a number of representatives with interests in employment matters.

At January's Bilateral discussion, the Panel explored the findings and the conclusions made so far with senior South West RDA representatives and Board Members.

The Bilateral forms the concluding phase of the Regional Strategic Review process. The Panel will now put together and publish its report and recommendations on how regional organisations can enhance the quality of employment in the South West region.

The report when published will be available from www.southwest-ra.gov.uk



Ian Munro addresses the delegates at the Regional Strategic Review workshop on 4 December 2006

Government follows Assembly's lead to reduce Carbon Footprint

Following the publication of the Draft RSS, central Government has now adopted the Assembly position of encouraging "zero-carbon" homes, by making new builds exempt from stamp duty and consulting on changes in national planning policy and building regulations.

The Assembly is pleased that Government has recognised the work already undertaken in the South West, reflected in some parts of the pre-Budget report and the consultation papers on zero carbon planning policy published in December 2006.

The decision to exempt new "zero-carbon" homes from stamp duty was one of the most eye-catching green measures in the pre-Budget report. Whilst in the South West, the Assembly had already developed policies which encourage sustainable construction and other such measures, which if adopted will reduce the South West's Carbon Footprint.

A study, jointly funded by the Assembly, SW Regional Development Agency and Government Office South West, has been carried out to monitor progress on carbon neutral developments in the South West and to seek initial views on how the policy should be further developed.

Initial findings were presented to the Assembly's Regional Spatial Planning and Transport Group in December 2006 and final recommendations on how the policy could be best implemented are being further developed.

For more information, log onto: www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pre_budget_report or visit: www.southwest-ra.gov.uk



TV Focus on SWRA

The South West Regional Assembly has been a popular subject for television programmes across the region in recent months.

The BBC's *Politics Show* interviewed Cllr Jill Shortland, Cllr Chanel Stevens and Cllr Mike Bawden at July's Assembly Meeting; whilst Cllr Chanel Stevens, and Cllr Richard Yonge travelled to Torquay for a live *Politics Show* debate on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy.

Chairman Cllr Jill Shortland also appeared on the ITV political programme *The West This Week* on a panel which also featured Michael Ancram MP.

Gypsies and Travellers Update

As Regional Planning Body, the Regional Assembly is undertaking a partial review of the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006 - 2026 (RSS) in relation to provision for Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites.

Following on from a well attended stakeholder briefing event in November 2006, a 6 week consultation on the process and timetable for the partial review was held.

The majority of responses to this consultation were received from local authorities and these have been taken into account in the final project plan for the partial review.

In December 2006 the Assembly issued a request for formal advice from Strategic Authorities (County Councils, Unitary Authorities and National Park Authorities) on district level pitch numbers based on local authority Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA's).

The advice is required by 22 March 2007, and the advice submitted will help to inform a revised RSS policy setting out the number of additional pitches required for each local planning authority in the region for the period 2006 - 2011, together with indicative targets for the remainder of the RSS period, to 2026.

It is intended that the draft revised policy will be taken to Members of the Regional Spatial Planning and Transport Group on 22 May 2007 and the Executive Committee on 8 June. Following this, the draft revised policy will be published for a 6 week statutory public consultation.

For more information on the partial review please visit: www.southwest-ra.gov.uk



Politics Show Crew with Assembly Chairman Cllr Jill Shortland and Deputy Chair Cllr Chanel Stevens

Transport Issues

Public Transport in the South West gets investment

Investment in Public Transport in the South West is being strongly supported by the Regional Assembly.

The Department for Transport has predicted a 29% rise in the amount of traffic on our roads in the next 8 years. A Government report released in December 2006 by Sir Rod Ellington recommended widespread road tolls and huge investment in public transport in order to keep the country moving.

The South West is already one step ahead. In January 2006 Members of the Regional Assembly agreed the priorities for £865m of transport funding for the region. Following a process to update the information, figures show that Public Transport schemes are set to receive at least 46% of the total investment.

Previously, the region was asked by Government to advise where investment should go over the next 10 years, with the aim of improving future public spending decisions.

The advice, known as the Regional Funding Allocations (RFA), has now been refreshed, so that the latest information and progress can be acted upon. Results from the RFA Refresh show that 46% of transport investment in the South West is allocated for public transport schemes, which is an increase from the first round of advice.

The balance between the public transport and road schemes will mean that the investment will work in line with long term goals for the region, as set out in the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy. They include:

- creating a sustainable region
- reducing the need to commute long distances
- encouraging economic growth
- realising potential and focusing the majority of development in the urban centres

RSPTG Round-up Assembly Group focus on keeping the region moving

Having demonstrated its commitment to the region's public transport and economic development, the Regional Assembly has identified a Multi Million pound scheme to develop a Greater Bristol Bus Network as one of the region's major transport priorities.

The Assembly's Regional Spatial Planning and Transport Group (RSPTG) received a presentation about the scheme in December 2006 from Peter Blake, Lead Officer for the project and Head of Sustainable Transport at South Gloucestershire Council.

The scheme, which could provide a more efficient and reliable transport network for Greater Bristol, aims to make the bus an attractive travel option for as many people as possible, through the development of a network of 10 bus corridors and serving 40 improved bus routes across the sub-region.

Due to start in 2007, this is the first major scheme proposal set out in the Joint Local Transport Plan between Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils.

The project was given provisional approval by the Department for Transport in 2006, following the Assembly and partners agreeing the region's transport priorities, through the Regional Funding Allocations (RFA) process.

November's meeting of RSPTG highlighted the key issues of congestion, road safety and the future of the South West's trunk roads.

The Group met with the Highways Agency's Regional Director, Tim Harbot, who told Members about the Agency's role in maintaining the trunk road network and planning for the future of the routes that carry the majority of traffic and are vital to the prosperity of the region.

Members discussed with Mr Harbot the need to tackle congestion and they heard how influencing travel behaviour and encouraging people to use more sustainable forms of transport is one of the Agency's main priorities.

Following the meeting, Cllr Julian Johnson, RSPTG Chair, said:



"It was good to raise our concerns with the Highways Agency and to hear their plans to address major issues affecting our region's roads. The maintenance of our trunk road network is indeed essential to the prosperity of the region, and we need to continue to examine methods to cut congestion."

Tim Harbot is again meeting with Assembly Members during 2007 to discuss pressing highways issues further.



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Champion Idea for Connections to our Communities

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 Level 3 BTEC Advanced Award for Local Government Member Champions, has been created by South West Provincial Employers in partnership with Bath & North East Somerset Council.

The qualification, has 3 units:

- The Member Champion Operating Environment
- Key Interpersonal Skills
- Sources of Information and Support

A comprehensive guidance book *Member Champions Guidance and Advice* has also been produced. It has been written as a practical, comprehensive document to develop and improve local guidance for the benefit of Member Champions. The funding for this project was provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Member Champions project was led by Fay Edwards, Head of Learning and Development at South West Provincial Employers and Graham Russell, Senior Associate of the South West Provincial Employers and former Head of Democratic Services at Bath & North East Somerset Council.

Fay Edwards said: *"This qualification has been designed to enable a greater understanding of the role of the Member Champion and to provide national recognition through an accredited qualification."*

Graham Russell said: *"Central Government and many local authorities are keen to appoint Councillors into specific Champion roles because they provide a direct link with residents and organisations, for example, if a parent wanted to raise awareness of education issues, they would be able to contact the Children's Champion."*



Graham Russell added: *"The Guidance and Advice book will be a very useful tool for the Champions and also for Council Officers. It will make it easier for everyone to fully understand the scope of the Champion role, and the ways to fulfil its potential, through direct engagement with local people and organisations."*

Graham Russell

There will also be an annual conference, scheduled for July 2007, where delegates will here directly from key speakers with valuable Member Champion experience.

Full Assembly Meeting dates 2007

Full Assembly Meetings will be taking place on:

16 March 2007

13 July 2007

19 October 2007



Photo: P. Poland



For more information about the South West Provincial Employers and courses available log onto www.southwest-ra.gov.uk