

Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP
Department for Education and Skills

9 June 2006

Dear Secretary of State

Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West

The South West Regional Assembly has recently published the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which has been submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government and is now open for public consultation. The Assembly is a partnership of Councillors from all local authorities in the region and representatives of various sectors with a role in the region's economic, social and environmental well-being. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and as such has worked with a wide range of partners and stakeholders including all local authorities in the region over the last 2 years to prepare the Draft RSS.

We have set out below how we believe the RSS can help deliver DfES objectives.

As you know, the South West has a population that is growing substantially due to inward migration but is also seeing a substantial increase in average age. This presents particular challenges for the provision of education services. Projections suggest that the population aged between five and 19 years old may actually decline by about 2% over the next 20 years. Even some settlements that experience significant growth may see a decline in the numbers of children and young adults in primary and secondary education. Other places, particularly the larger urban areas, will on the other hand experience continued overall growth in these age groups. This situation will provide opportunities to rationalise and improve total education investment and in producing Local Development Documents (LDD), Local Authorities working with the education providers, will need to take these demographic changes into account. Another of the issues of concern in parts of the South West is the quality of education and educational performance in some of the larger urban areas and its relationship with other indicators of deprivation.

In developing or renewing education facilities, including schools, Further Education Colleges and Universities, locations will be chosen which take account of the future development needs of the economy and the community sector, including the provision of new facilities and potential for expansion of existing provision. Facilities should be safely accessible to all and the development of community facilities alongside mainstream education facilities should be encouraged. LDDs will include policies that ensure sufficient and accessible premises are available to suit skills

training and other vocational education purposes identified through the Regional Economic Strategy, the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA) and those drawn up by Learning and Skills Councils and Lifelong Learning Partnerships and related organisations. In particular, LDDs and Local Transport Plans will take a supportive and pro-active approach to provision of facilities and public transport links to facilities that provide skills training.

We hope that you and your colleagues recognise the great progress which has been made in the South West in the last two years in developing challenging strategies which are well integrated and are positive about the future and about growth, and in addressing regional priorities through The Way Ahead and the Regional Funding Allocation process. Education and Skills remain crucial to the success of the region and we would be glad to meet you and your colleagues to discuss this.

Yours sincerely

**Jackie Longworth
Chair, SWRA**

**Jill Shortland
Deputy Chair, SWRA**

**Chanel Stevens
Vice Chair, SWRA**

**Sir Simon Day
Vice Chair, SWRA**

**Pat Ferguson
Vice Chair, SWRA**