

South West Regional Development Agency's response to the SW Regional Assembly's recommendations stated within their Report of the Regional Strategic Review on Broadband in the South West.

The SWRDA's response is set out in blue italic text, subsequent to each numbered recommendation which has been set out in the original format used by the Scrutiny Panel.

Regional Strategic Context and Roles

That SW RDA recognises the changes which have taken place since the launch of the Regional ICT Strategy and:

1. works with the South West Regional Assembly and other regional partners to review the strategy and its implementation;

Agreed.

The Agency will next be reviewing the implementation based on the Indicative Strategy Timeline (p.5 Regional ICT Strategy) so as to assess progress and performance for end 2004/5. The subsequent review will prepare for the Regional ICT Strategy review which will take place subsequent to the next version of the Regional Economic Strategy to be published 2005/6.

2. restates the vision (which the Scrutiny Panel supports);

Agreed.

The vision was and shall be: "ICT will provide the opportunity for the South West to increase wealth and enrich society's coherence, choice and standards of living. It will cross the digital divide, reach rural areas and reduce environmental stress."

The mission statement for the Agency's Regional ICT Team is: "To cause ICT to become more widely and effectively used to enable economic, social and environmental improvements across South West England."

3. working with regional partners, takes the lead in developing demand for broadband communications technologies;

Agreed.

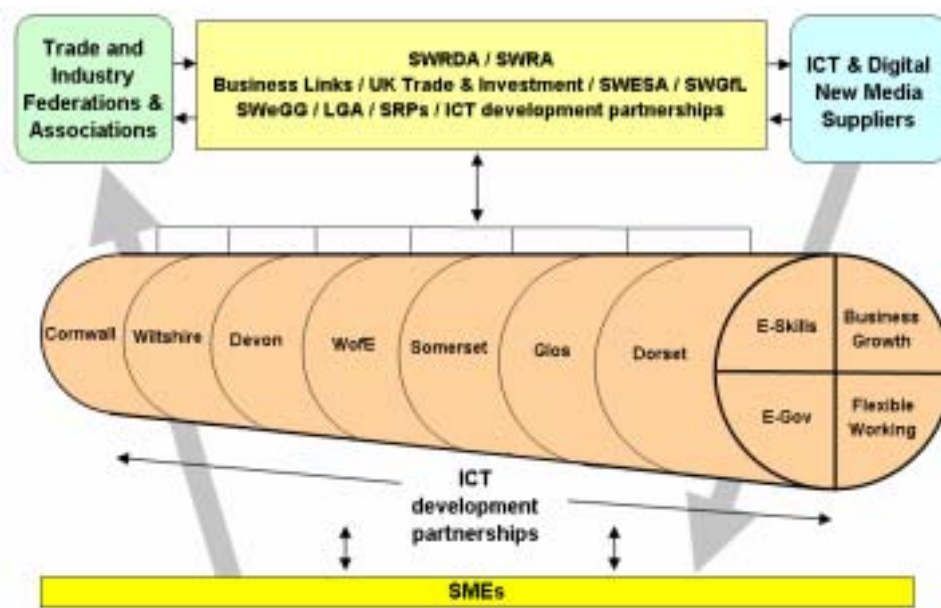
In order to ensure there are good prospects for economic, social and environmental benefits the agenda will be to develop the demand for using broadband content applications, digital new media, e-government services, healthcare services, and learning opportunities.

Working with regional partners and taking the lead in developing demand for broadband communication technologies is fundamental

to the Agency's strategy - the Connecting SW Partnership Programme is about co-ordinating the interests of regional partners around the broadband agenda in order to optimise use of resources in encouraging best practice use of ICT.

The diagram below depicts how the importance of the supply side is recognised. The programme is already actively engaging with the supply side to encourage new ways of working. We have also commenced discussions about new technology test-beds and through the South West e-Government Group / Local Government Association we are seeking proactive public institutions to stimulate the programme further.

In addition to the three operational partnerships – ActNow in Cornwall, Broadband4Devon and Wiltshire & Swindon Smartplace – it is intended that Connecting SW Partnerships will be established across the rest of the region in Somerset; West of England; Gloucestershire; Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole; and to cover non-Objective 2 Devon.



Each of the new projects is focusing on 4 key interrelated areas:

- *Business Growth*
- *Skills and E-learning*
- *Flexible Working / Community Capacity Building*
- *E-Government*

The importance of these has been emphasised by their inclusion in the DTI paper, published in November 2004, titled: "Broadband Content Business Case". Signed by five ministers and having the concept of the Connecting SW Partnership Programme at its heart, this makes a

strong case for including broadband content in strategic thinking and economic policy across the United Kingdom.

The county and unitary partnerships are planned to be in place by the end of 2004/5

4. ensures that appropriate skills development plays an important part in the ICT Strategy.

Agreed.

The Regional ICT Strategy has resulted in a close involvement with E-Skills UK and, within the Agency, the Skills Team and the ICT Sector Group. Between us we are supporting the preparation of the Regional ICT Skills Strategy which is due to be published by the Skills Team at the beginning of 2005/6.

Policy Implications

5. That, in reviewing the Regional ICT Strategy, SWRA and SW RDA evaluate the wider policy implications of improved broadband coverage and usage.

Agreed.

The Agency has already completed extensive consultation with RDAs, DAs and the DTI resulting in the publication of the "Broadband Case for Business" by the DTI, November 2004. The Connecting SW Partnership Programme specifically addresses its recommendations in respect of four crucial policy areas: learning, public sector, community and business.

Ongoing through the life of the Connecting SW Partnership Programme.

6. That SW RDA and SWRA work with partners to promote greater social inclusion through the use of broadband.

Agreed.

This is inherent in the philosophy behind the Connecting SW programme which will facilitate social inclusion. In particular, the emphasis on skills and training means that better opportunities will emerge for people suffering social exclusion. The programme aims to assist local government to tackle this issue.

Methods of evaluating the impact of broadband on social inclusion will be considered as part of the project evaluation process 2005/6.

That in developing the new Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS):

7. SWRA engages the support of SW RDA to consider and evaluate the potential spatial impact of improved broadband connectivity in the South West;

Agreed.

Broadband connectivity could be a key factor in reducing traffic levels. This view is supported by BT's paper "Broadband – the role for communications in beating congestion" which estimates flexible working practices could reduce national traffic by 11% overall and by 17% at peak times.

Within the Agency the Regional ICT Team will continue to work with the Planning and Transport teams to ensure that this is reflected in the relevant strategies.

Ongoing.

8. SWRA ensures the final RSS has a requirement that new commercial or housing developments have good future-proof broadband connectivity.

Within the Agency the Regional ICT Team is working with the Development Team to establish guidelines for best practice for new property developments.

Ongoing.

Public Sector Support for Broadband

9. Local Authorities, and other public sector agencies operating in the region, are urged to work with the Regional Aggregation Body (RAB) when procuring broadband services.

Unfortunately LAs and other public sector agencies have not taken this opportunity. The DT is closing the National Aggregation Body and the RAB will be withdrawing from the promotion of Public Sector. The SWRDA placed a press release setting out the background to this on 1st December 2004.

10. SW RDA and SWRA should work together to research and review the flexible working options available to organisations in the region.

Agreed.

Flexible working is being proposed to feature as a component of the Connecting SW Partnership Programme starting 2005/6.

Local Partnership Working

11. That Assembly and Local Authorities in the South West support the development of County ICT Partnerships and SW RDA's 'ConnectingSW' programme.

Agreed.

The Regional ICT Team is continuing to assist the development of the county and unitary partnerships within the Connecting SW Partnership Programme.

The Agency values highly the support and involvement of the Assembly in the formation of the Connecting SW Partnership Programme regional management group.

The plan is to have all sub-regional partnerships operational by the end of 2004/5 with the formation of the regional management group taking place soon thereafter.

12. That SW RDA continues to support programmes such as RABBIT and ensure the needs of local communities are met alongside those of businesses.

Agreed.

The Agency will work through the sub-regional partnerships within the Connecting South West Partnership Programme to ensure that Rabbit is brought to bear in areas where exchanges have not been enabled.

The Programme is also assisting South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) to try to extend its school connections into communities. The Agency is also investigating further resources which might be brought to bear in the Objective 1 & 2 Areas.

The Agency plans to continue supporting Rabbit through to 2006/7.

Broadband and Business Competitiveness

That SW RDA works with SWRA and other partners to:

13. encourage greater business take up of broadband by providing jargon free advice on the benefits of broadband;

Agreed.

As with ActNow and Broadband4Devon, independent and jargon-free advice will remain a key function of the new Connecting SW partnerships.

The Agency will respond to the emphasis on jargon-free advice by recommending that ICT advisers appointed to the partnerships are trained in effective communication with non-technical clients.

Under the Connecting SW Partnership Programme press releases will be edited for use of plain English and, to date, over 200 case studies on the use of broadband have been collected to ensure messages to businesses are made in their own words. More will be added as the partnerships progress.

Ongoing.

- 14. develop more data on the propensity of different types of business to use broadband technology;**

Agreed.

The benchmarking research ("Research project into business uptake, understanding and awareness of ICT and broadband in South West England", May 2004), referenced at the Scrutiny workshop, has informed the development the Connecting SW partnerships. The proposed next stage of this work will also look at the key priority sectors so as to better understand their propensity to use broadband technology.

Starts Q2 2005.

- 15. promote effective broadband use amongst the key sectors identified in the Regional Economic Strategy;**

Agreed.

The Regional ICT Team will be working closely with the Agency's key sector teams to assess the importance of ICT in each sector and promote effective use of broadband accordingly.

Ongoing.

- 16. assess the influence of broadband as a factor in the location of businesses.**

Since the Bilateral Discussions on 15th June, BT has published a list of exchanges which they will enable to provide ADSL services by the end of the summer in 2005. This will result in over 99% of the South West region having broadband available. Accordingly the influence of broadband as a factor in the location of businesses will be neutral except for less than 1% of the premises within the region.