



Photo K Battles

Bryony Houlden, Chief Executive



**SOUTH WEST**  
*Regional Assembly*

**SOUTH WEST**  
*Local Government Association*

**SOUTH WEST**  
*Provincial Employers*

## *The South West Regional Secretariat*

### *What is the South West Regional Secretariat?*

The South West Regional Secretariat or ‘Combined’ Secretariat was formed in 2000. The Secretariat brought together officers supporting the South West Provincial Employers, an organisation that had been in existence for several decades; the newly formed South West Regional Assembly and the South West Local Government Association. The officer support was combined into one secretariat in recognition of the benefits this could bring in terms of joint working, avoiding duplication and allowing economies of scale.



Photo Somerset Tourism

### *What is the purpose of the three organisations supported by the Secretariat?*

The vision of the Secretariat is to support Members in seeking 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***

Photo Somerset Tourism





Photo P. Poland

Dennett House, Taunton

The Secretariat is 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*

The work of the three organisations focuses on the following:

- ➔ **The South West Local Government Association (SWLGA), deals with many topics that matter to local government. These include affordable housing, Local Government Funding and e-Government**
- ➔ **The South West Provincial Employers (SWPE), provides advice to all Local Authorities, Police and Fire Authorities on employment issues and best practice. It also runs training courses on a cost recovery basis. These training courses cover everything through finance, management, trading standards to road maintenance**
- ➔ **The South West Regional Assembly (SWRA), is a voluntary partnership of all Local Authorities in the South West and representatives of various sectors with a stake in the region's economic, social and environmental well being. The Assembly has a formal role in producing the long term planning arrangements for the South West (the Regional Spatial Strategy), as well as examining the work of the South West Regional Development Agency (SW RDA) on behalf of the region. The Assembly is also responsible for making sure all strategies**



*in the region work together coherently, and help to put in place what the region needs for a successful future. To this end the region's first integrated regional strategy, 'Just Connect!', has been produced with regional partners. The Assembly also acts as "the voice of the region" in lobbying government, sometimes jointly with the SWLGA and SWPE*



Photo K Battles

## *How and when were the three organisations supported by the Secretariat set up?*

**SWPE** The South West Provincial Employers have been in existence for many decades, set up by Local Authorities to provide specialist advice and training across a range of employment issues.

In 1996 SWPE took over the management and running of the Tormarton Training Centre, which had provided training for highways personnel for over 25 years. The Training Centre continues to be run for the benefit of our South West Local Authorities, and since 1996 has extended its catalogue of specialist qualifications and courses to ensure that the latest legislation and good practice is incorporated and available to our members.

**SWLGA** The South West Local Government Association met for the first time in July 1998. Its constitution was approved by the national Local Government Association and agreed by representatives from South West Authorities at the inaugural meeting. It was set up to represent and promote the regional interests of the population of the South West, and the Local Authorities that serve them.

SWLGA also supports several regional networks to help Local Authorities share best practice on key issues and to discuss the most appropriate way to tackle common challenges.

**SWRA** The Government's White Paper "Building Partnerships for Prosperity" setting up Regional Development Agencies offered regions the option of establishing regional chambers which, if they met certain conditions, would be formally designated as a chamber with responsibility for scrutinising the work of the RDA on behalf of the region. In early 1998, cross-Party representatives of the Unitary, County and District Councils in the South West, along with representatives of the region's social, economic and environmental interests, came together and agreed to form the South West Regional Chamber. It was formally designated as a regional chamber by the Deputy Prime Minister in July 1999. In July 2000, the South West Regional Planning Conference – which brought together some of the region's Local Authorities and had responsibility for drafting regional planning guidance – was integrated into the South West Regional Chamber and the current South West Regional Assembly was formed. Subsequently it was designated as the regional planning body in 2004 and the regional housing body in 2006.



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### *How has the work of the Secretariat developed?*

Since the combined Secretariat was set up in 2000 the workload of all the three organisations supported by the officers has increased.

SWPE has seen an expansion of its role as its service provision has continued to be regarded by Local Authorities and others as being of high quality and excellent value for money. As a result the turnover on the employment consultancy “not for profit” business of the Secretariat has increased from £123,967 in 2000/01 to £173,609 in 2005/06. The training provision has continued to endeavour to meet new demands from Local Authorities, for example through being the first provider in the country to deliver the new Trading Standards Qualification.

SWLGA has been steadily increasing its influence on behalf of the region’s Local Authorities and taking a lead in lobbying for a fair deal for the region. For example, the joint lobby with the Assembly helped deliver the biggest increase of any region for funding to support efforts to tackle the affordable housing crisis – in 2005/06 the increase was £75m. The SWLGA also successfully bid for Home Office funding to support regional activity on dealing with asylum seekers and refugees and funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to support work on e-government across the region.

SWRA managed to win central Government funding for the first time in 2001, of £500,000. The level of this government grant coming into the South West region has increased as new responsibilities have passed to the Assembly. In 2004 the Government designated the Assembly as the Regional Planning Body with responsibility for producing the statutory regional plan, the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). In 2006, the Government designated the Assembly as the Regional Housing Body with additional central government funding to support the extra work.



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Carmen Bryant, Administrative Assistant

### *What are the staffing and management arrangements for the Secretariat?*

All staff at the Secretariat support the work of the SWPE, SWLGA, SWRA, although many have a prime responsibility to one of the organisations. By sharing the costs of central support activities such as finance, personnel activity and communications these are minimised and economies of scale are achieved by having the three organisations supported together. Some of the staff at the Secretariat are technical specialists. These include planners, and employment and learning and development professionals. These staff may work almost exclusively for one of the three organisations, but will share their expertise or experience with the other organisations when it is needed. For example, planners who mainly work on Assembly business have in the past provided advice on planning, waste and housing issues to SWLGA, or specialist staff from SWPE have helped facilitate Assembly and SWLGA events.

The current staff structure and more information is available on the website: [www.southwest-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk).

### *Who runs the work of the Secretariat?*

The overall management of the Secretariat, which is an unincorporated association, and the employment of staff is undertaken by the South West Regional Board which draws together leading Members from each organisation. Members of the Board are appointed by the three organisations, and the political proportions of Members reflect those of the region as a whole. The Board has fifteen Councillors representing the Assembly, the SWLGA and the SWPE and two Social, Economic and Environmental Partners from the Assembly, who do not have voting rights.

Each year the Board agrees the Business Plan and resources for the Secretariat following recommendations from the Executive Management Committees of the three organisations.

The Board constitution is available on the website: [www.southwest-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk).

### *How is the Secretariat funded?*

The Secretariat receives money from several sources. All Local Authorities across the South West subscribe to the work of the Secretariat supporting the three member organisations – SWRA, SWPE and SWLGA. For the three organisations this provides around £500,000 per year from the 51 Local Authorities. In addition the South West



Photo SWRA

Local Government Association gets funding for specific projects. For example, the Home Office provides funding to support regional work on asylum seekers and refugees and the Department for Communities and Local Government and the funding for regional working on e-Government. The South West Provincial Employers also receives income for the services it provides: training events and specialist employment consultancy support raises around £1 million a year on a “not for profit” basis. The majority of the funding for the Assembly comes from central Government for the work undertaken on regional planning, scrutiny and strategy integration. Full details of our funding and our consolidated Financial Accounts are on our website.

### *Where is the Secretariat based?*

The Secretariat’s main office is located at Dennett House, Taunton but there is also an office at Tormarton, near Bath, from which many of the specialist training services are delivered. Meetings of the three regional organisations take place all over the South West, although predominantly in Taunton and Exeter.

### *How do I find out more?*

Further information can be found on our website: [www.southwest-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk).

We also have leaflets that provide more details about the three organisations we support and we will do our best to answer any questions you have.

**Write to us at: Dennett House, 11 Middle Street, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 1SH**

**You can email us: [info@southwest-ra.gov.uk](mailto:info@southwest-ra.gov.uk)**

**Telephone us on: 01823 270101**



Photo SWRA

The Assembly in Session