

Letter from Jon Bright, Regional Director

Dear colleague

March 2009

First, let me begin by thanking those of you who contributed to the Government Office Network Stakeholder Survey 2008. As I mentioned in my September newsletter, it is extremely important for us to hear your views on our performance.

Our last survey took place in 2005, and I am sure you will agree that Government Offices are now in a very different place.

We have started to think about what the results mean for GOSW. I am encouraged that a large majority of stakeholders feel that we have a sound strategic overview of the key issues facing the region; that we are working well with partners; that we are seen to have played an important role in the LAAs; and that you feel well-informed about our work. I was also pleased to hear that this newsletter hits the right note in giving you relevant information.

Of course, there are areas for improvement. For example, we need to be clearer in our communication with you about how we work with Whitehall, particularly when you ask us to represent your concerns to Departments. We also need to set out more clearly how we will help you drive local delivery. And you asked us to do more to maintain continuity of staff in key positions. I will write to you separately on these issues in the near future.

In the rest of this newsletter, I will update you on some of the major issues in the Region.



Jon Bright, Regional Director, GOSW

Severn Tidal Power

The Severn Estuary tidal power feasibility study will continue for a second year and a shortlist of schemes has been published. Each scheme will be considered in more detail over the coming year.

The five shortlisted schemes are three barrages (Beachley, Shoots and Cardiff/Weston) and two tidal lagoons (one on the Welsh coast and one across Bridgewater Bay).

In addition, a fund of £500,000 is to be made available to support the acceleration of innovative technologies - for example, tidal reef and tidal fence options.

A public consultation is running until 23 April 2009 to seek views on the scope of the Strategic Environmental Assessment - a necessary process for any scheme which might be built. Alongside the con-

sultation, we will see the formal publication of a considerable amount of information already produced within the first year of the feasibility study, including a high level regional economic impact study.

Further details on the consultation are available at the following weblink:

[Consultation website](#)

Sub National Review on Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) ('Prosperous Places')

We welcomed the decision by local authorities in the region to set up a Strategic Leaders Board (SLB). The Board has already played a key part in shaping the Regional Funding Advice.

GOSW will agree a Change Management

Plan with the SLB and the RDA in the Spring to set out these transitional arrangements. These will cover stakeholder and community engagement and links to the work of the new Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

In parallel, and as part of the work on SNR implementation, John McBride, Chief Executive of Poole Borough Council, is chairing a group (comprising SW RDA, SW Councils, HCA and GOSW) looking at how to strengthen local and sub-regional economic development and the fit with RDA and HCA investment planning.

Growth and the Regional Spatial Strategy

We are currently analysing the 35,000 responses to the Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy and expect to announce shortly a revised date for publication of the final version, which will then set the framework for spatial planning in the region until 2026.

The credit crunch has led some partners to suggest that the need to plan for future sustainable economic growth has eased. However, the underlying drivers, particularly for housing growth, remain unaffected and it is important that we continue to plan for recovery as well as managing the immediate impacts of the recession.

We are working with South West Regional Assembly and South West RDA on a programme of work towards RSS implementation. This will cover the further work required on critical infrastructure needs beyond what has been possible for the current Regional Funding Advice exercise.

We have also been talking with the HCA and SW RDA about how the 'single conversations' with individual localities or sub-regions can help clarify priorities and investment requirements.

Good progress was made last year with local authority Leaders, portfolio holders and Chief Executives on identifying and addressing the major obstacles to delivering sustainable economic growth (without prejudice to the final shape of the RSS), and GOSW will be encouraging further activity to along these lines.

Regional Economic Task Group

I mentioned in the last newsletter that a Regional Economic Task Group, chaired by Ben Bradshaw, had been set up to take action in response to the economic downturn in the South West. Activity to

date has included:

- work to implement the governments 'Real Help Now' package, which provides support to people and businesses
- compiling good local practice in responding to the downturn
- progress on unblocking infrastructure projects that have stalled, or are at risk of stalling, as a result of the downturn
- a regional research project on 'green recovery'
- identifying opportunities which support the regions transformation towards a low carbon, resource-efficient, economy
- identifying barriers to delivery of support, and doing something about them – Ben Bradshaw has raised a number of issues at regional and national level.

Following the meeting of the Task Group on 23 February, Regional Minister, Ben Bradshaw, visited Rolls Royce Defence Aerospace in Bristol. After a tour of the site and meeting staff, he expressed admiration for the way in which Rolls-Royce had invested in its facilities, in Research & Development and especially in its people.



We hope you feel there is now effective two way communication with the Group. You can feed through views to your sectoral representative on the Group, and should receive timely feedback from the meetings. For more information, please visit the website at

[South West Regional Economic Task Group](#)

Regional Select Committees

There has been a major development in Parliament that will have a significant impact on the region. Following a debate in the House of Commons on 4 March, Regional Parliamentary Committees have been constituted in eight of the nine English regions (London is excluded because of its particular governance arrangements).

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The Regional Select and Grand Committees will, for the first time, allow Parliamentary scrutiny of regional bodies and regional strategies. The SW Regional Select Committee is currently made up of Labour MPs only (opposition parties have chosen not to nominate Members). It is likely to start its work soon and has already elected Alison Seabeck, MP for Plymouth Devonport, as its Chair.

The Government Office will be playing a central role with regional agencies in responding to the inquiries of the Committee and I look forward to working with many of you over the coming months. Information about the work of the Select Committee will be made available at:

[UK Parliament—South West Committee](#)

Local Area Agreements

The 2009 LAA review and refresh process is moving smoothly towards its conclusion. This has been a difficult process but I believe we have retained the goodwill of LSPs across the region. I have been able to recommend that the 16 refreshed SW LAAs are signed-off as planned on 1st April 2009.

The Agreements need to continue to reflect the priorities of each place, including the impact of the recession as this becomes clear.

Whitehall departments increasingly recognise the importance of the agreements in meeting national Public Service Agreement targets.

Supporting Delivery

LSPs are now concentrating on delivering their LAA targets. Since the sign-up of LAAs in June 2008, we have supported these efforts in a number of cases, using 'Turning the Curve' and outcome planning approaches to stimulate innovative thinking around delivery challenges.

Within GOSW and throughout the GO Network, we have rolled out training for key staff in analysis and delivery. We are also putting a small number of staff through more intensive training to provide a high-quality 'delivery champions' resource within the region. This is so we can support delivery more effectively by helping partnerships make optimum investment decisions to deliver their LAA outcomes.

I will write again within the next month to address some of the points you raised in the Stakeholder Survey. Do get in touch if you want to discuss any of the issues raised in this newsletter.

With best wishes

JON BRIGHT