

Letter from Jon Bright, Regional Director

Dear colleague

September 2008

I hope you had a good summer in spite of the poor weather. In this letter, I would like to share with you some thoughts about regional priorities and managing the challenges ahead. I will start off with some good news.



Jon Bright

Provisional 2008 GCSE results

Provisional results released in August showed that overall, the England A*-C pass rate increased by 2.4% to 65.7%. GCSE results for Bristol - a priority area in terms of educational attainment - show an improvement of 3.5% including English and Maths (5% overall), reflecting the overall improvement in the South West.



Only 36 schools in the South West have less than 30% of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades - 15 fewer than 2007). Official results will be published on 16 October.

Managing Housing Growth

We published the Proposed Changes to the [Regional Spatial Strategy](#) on schedule on 22 July. Because of a delay in sending out printed copies, the period for public consultation has been extended until 24 October. This may mean that the final RSS will be issued in early 2009.

Everyone agrees that it is important that housing growth is sustainable and that the infrastructure necessary to support it should be delivered in parallel. Baroness Andrews has asked for more work to be carried out on the region's infrastructure priorities. The new round of Regional Funding Advice is part of this process but it needs to go wider, to include schools and health provision.

One option is to set up a Regional Infrastructure Board and we are discussing this with the SW RDA and SW Regional Assembly. Regional bodies are meeting regularly with local authorities to discuss growth issues and GOSW is working with the chief executives of Government agencies in the region - and with relevant Whitehall departments - to ensure a consistent cross-government approach to delivering regional priorities.

Regional Economy

During the Summer, the SW RDA prepared an analysis of the regional economy and the effect of the current economic downturn. Whilst the South West has a relatively strong economic base, it makes sense to explore ways of strengthening economic resilience. Our Regional Minister, Ben Bradshaw, and the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Angela Eagle, met with business representatives and regional stakeholders on 17 September. This was the first of a series of planned visits by Government to hear the concerns, suggestions and views on the economy of business leaders and local groups.

Local Area Agreements—Next Steps

Now that the LAAs have been signed off, we are talking to Local Strategic Partnerships about delivering improved outcomes (see also item below on outcome planning). A number of stakeholders are involved in implementing the new Performance Framework and the event we jointly hosted with the Audit Commission on 16 July was

well received. We will be working on this approach with the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (LIFT SW) and others over the coming months.

We have learnt the benefit of early preparations for LAA negotiations. We have shared with key partners the provisional timetable for the review and refresh process and will be discussing this in detail over coming months.

Climate Change and Sustainability

As I mentioned earlier this year, GOSW leads a national network of Government Offices, national agencies and local authority partners to improve the way in which support for work on Climate Change is provided. Through the Climate Action Support Programme, we will:

- Bring together support for climate change action at regional and local levels, and strengthen the advice and guidance we provide
- Identify any gaps and fill them
- Build capacity through regional-based seminars, workshops, twinning, mentoring and knowledge sharing
- Offer a broader programme of support for Local Authorities on adaptation

In the South West, we are planning two LAA delivery workshops for local authorities and LSPs on Climate Change Mitigation (8 October) and Adaptation (9 October).

Regional Select Committees



New regional Select Committees will be set up this year and start their work in 2009.

The 'Governance of Britain' White Paper and the earlier Sub National Review set out important challenges

for regional accountability and scrutiny.

We will play a leading role in managing this process and will be liaising with many of you over the coming months to discuss evolving arrangements.

You can find the Committee's report and the Government's response by following these links: [Select Committee Report](#), [Government's Response](#)

Government Office

As you may know, the Government Office's three part role is to *influence national policy*, *integrate regional strategies* and *support local delivery*. With regard to the latter, GOSW is leading a national project aimed at strengthening analytical and delivery capability throughout the GO Network.

This project includes piloting the use of *outcomes based planning* to help partnerships make evidence-based decisions to deliver LAA/MAA targets. Mark Friedman, originator of Results Based Accountability, spoke at an event in Bristol in April. We have arranged another visit in November for partners in Plymouth and Torbay.

If you are interested in finding out more about outcome-based planning please contact [Darren Hall](#) at GOSW, or your Locality Manager.

As I mentioned in June, we are keen to arrange strategic discussions with each of the 16 upper tier authorities to review progress, discuss priorities and consider what GOSW can do to help you take them forward. If a date has not yet been fixed, we will be in touch soon.

Finally, you may be contacted by Ipsos MORI to take part in the Government Office Network Stakeholder Survey 2008. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in advance for taking the time to do this - your comments are invaluable to us.

With best wishes

Jon Bright

You will shortly receive a copy of two new publications produced by the GO Network — the 'Strategic Priorities Framework 2008-1' and a companion document, 'Delivering Public Service Agreements—the Government Office role'. You can also find both documents online using [this link](#).

To remove your name from our mailing list, please [follow this link](#).

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