

12 Government and Politics

12.1 Issues and Priorities

- The 2006 Local Government White Paper sought to devolve powers from central Government, strengthen local government leadership, and expand the opportunities for local people to influence decision making. The resulting legislation and guidance were introduced during 2007.
- The White Paper included measures to improve the accountability of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to local people. It also placed a duty on county and unitary authorities to prepare Local Area Agreements (LAAs) in consultation with named local partners. Both LSPs and LAAs have a key role to play in helping to identify and address local priorities.
- The introduction of new four-year term leadership models and other measures in the Local Government White Paper has changed the ways that councils operate, and how they support their local communities.
- The White Paper also invited councils in shire areas to bid for unitary status. Cornwall and Wiltshire were successful, and the new unitary authority in each area started on 1 April 2009.
- The 2007 Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration outlined the Government's plans to encourage economic growth and tackle deprivation in each region by refocussing the powers and responsibilities of regional bodies and local authorities.
- As a result of the Sub-National Review (SNR), many of the powers currently held by the South West Regional Assembly will be transferred to the South West Regional Development Agency and a new Local Authority Leaders Forum. This includes the combining of all current regional strategies into a Single Regional Strategy (SRS).
- In addition to the Local Government White Paper and the SNR, other Government legislation has seen recent changes to local governance in the regions. This includes the introduction of Regional Ministers and Regional Select Committees.
- In reaction to the current economic downturn, the region has formed the South West Regional Economic Task Group (SWRETG). The Task Group comprises representatives from public, private and voluntary sector bodies, and is chaired by our Regional Minister. Its aim is to help Government and the region better understand the impacts of the recession, and to co-ordinate an effective response.

12.2 Key Data

- The South West is represented in Parliament by 51 MPs: 22 Conservative, 13 Labour, and 16 Liberal Democrat.
- The South West is the only English region where no single political party holds more than half of the Parliamentary Constituencies.
- Electorate turnout in the South West for the May 2005 General Election was higher than in any other English region.
- The region is represented in Europe by 7 MEPs: 3 Conservative, 1 Labour, 1 Liberal Democrat, and 2 UK Independence Party.
- As of 1 April 2009, there are 41 local authorities in the South West: 12 unitary authorities, and 4 counties which between them contain 25 districts.

- None of the county or unitary authorities in the South West holds either of the two lowest Comprehensive Performance Assessment ratings of 0 or 1 star, and none of the district authorities currently has the lowest possible rating of 'poor'.
- Between them, the Government Office for the South West, the South West Regional Assembly, and the South West Regional Development Agency channeled nearly £800 million of Government and European funding into the region in 2007/08.

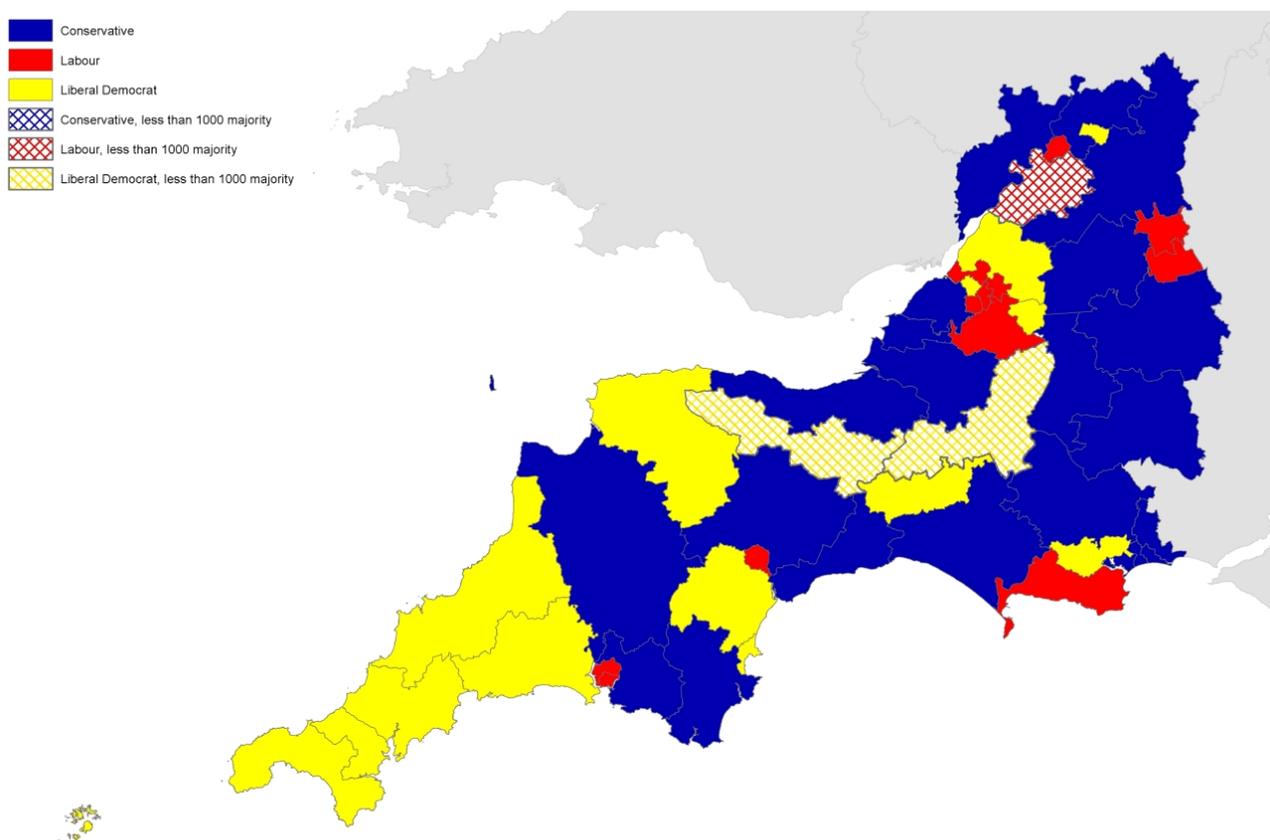
12.3 Introduction

12.3.1 This chapter offers an overview of the region's political and governance structures. It outlines the roles of some of the key organisations and agencies, and how their respective agendas complement each other. Regional government places great emphasis on working with communities, therefore this chapter also examines some of the partnerships that have been established to foster productive relationships between Government and local people.

12.4 Political Representation

12.4.1 The balance of political power inevitably affects policy making on a local and regional level. This section looks at how the major political parties are represented across the region and within the region's local authorities, and how this has changed over recent years.

Figure 12.1 Parliamentary Constituencies in the South West, by Political Party May 2005



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Source: Government Office for the South West

12.4.1 Parliamentary Constituencies

12.4.1.1 There are 51 Parliamentary Constituencies in the South West, representing the region's population of just over 5 million people. The last General Election, in May 2005, brought relatively little change to the overall political picture in the region. Following this election, the distribution of seats between Members of Parliament (MPs) was as follows:

- 22 Conservative MPs
- 13 Labour MPs
- 16 Liberal Democrat MPs

There have been no Parliamentary by-elections in the region since May 2005. To find out more about Parliament, the role of an MP, and to find your local MP, see the [UK Parliament website](#).

12.4.1.2 The South West is the only English region where no single party is dominant (controls more than half the seats). It contains more than a third of all the sitting Liberal Democrat MPs in England. There are also relatively few marginal constituencies in the region. Only three of the 38 English constituencies with majorities of less than a thousand are in the South West – Somerton & Frome (Lib Dem), Stroud (Labour) and Taunton (Lib Dem).

12.4.1.1 New Constituencies

12.4.1.1.1 There will be new constituency boundaries at the next General Election. These were recommended by the fifth periodical report of the Boundary Commission for England, and approved by Parliament in June 2007. The report's main purpose was to ensure a similar number of electors in each constituency, but the Commission also considered local boundaries, local ties, geography, and the inconvenience caused by changing boundaries.

12.4.1.1.2 The report has resulted in the number of South West constituencies rising to 55 and in changes to the structure of all but four of the existing constituencies. Some of the changes are quite significant, resulting in name changes for about a quarter of the region's constituencies. The four additional constituencies are in Cornwall, Devon, South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

12.4.1.1.3 For information about the new constituencies, see the [Boundary Commission website](#).

12.4.1.1.4 The date of the next General Election will not be known until it is called by the Prime Minister. However, there must be a General Election at least every five years, so at the latest this would have to be by May 2010.

12.4.2 Members of the European Parliament

12.4.2.1 There are 7 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) representing the South West region. Since June 2004 these have been:

- 3 Conservative MEPs

- 1 Labour MEP
- 1 Liberal Democrat MEP
- 2 UK Independence Party MEPs

European Parliamentary elections are held every 5 years, with the next elections being due in June 2009. To find out more about the European Parliament and MEPs, see the [UK Office of the European Parliament website](#).

12.4.3 Local Authorities

12.4.3.1 There are two different structures of governance in the South West. The two-tier structure sees responsibilities shared between a county council and its component district councils. There are also single-tier unitary authorities, where all services are the responsibility of one council.

There are 51 local authorities in the South West. Six of these are county councils that between them contain a total of 35 district councils. Outside of the county governance structure, the region also has 10 unitary authorities.

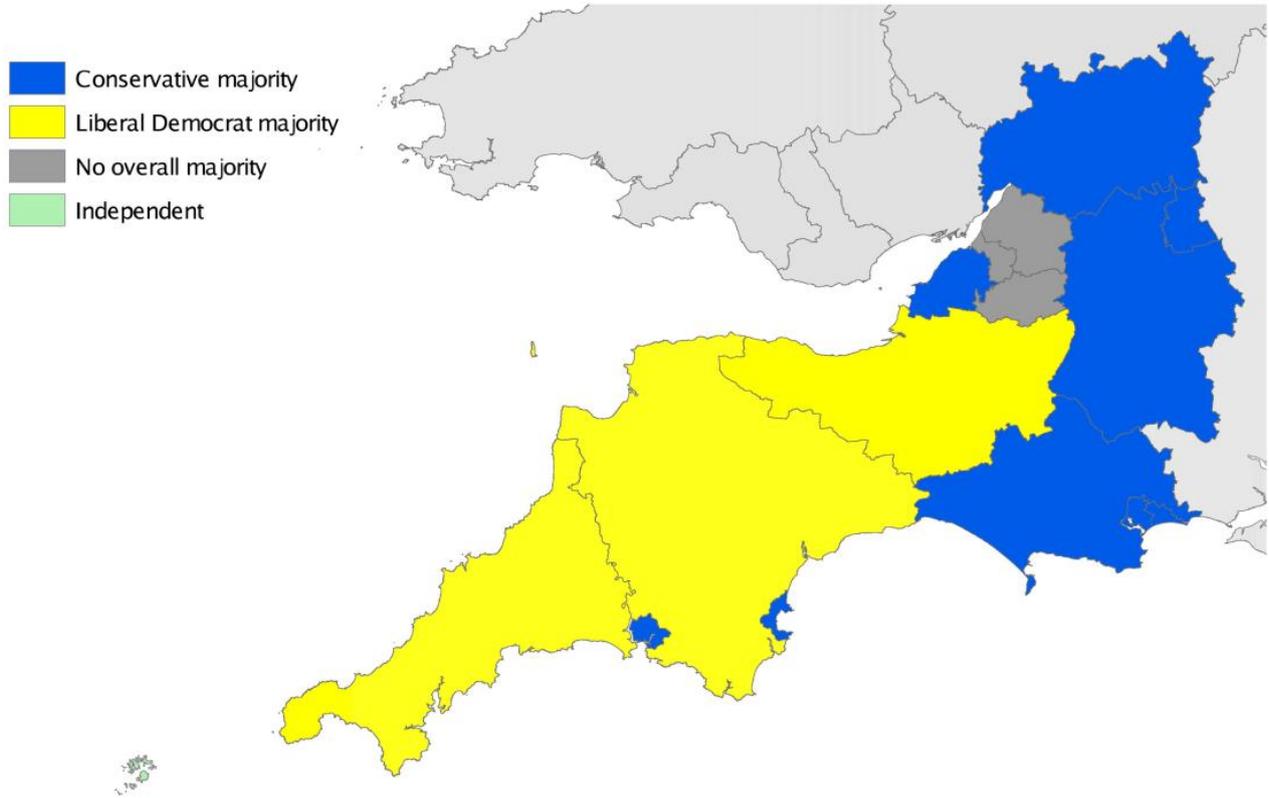
The 2006 Local Government White Paper invited councils in shire areas to bid for unitary status. In December 2007, Communities and Local Government (CLG) announced five new unitary authorities, including Cornwall and Wiltshire in the South West. These will come into effect in April 2009, so from that date there will be 12 unitary authorities and 4 county councils in the region, the latter containing a total of 25 districts.

A proposal for unitary status from Exeter, currently a district within Devon, did not meet the Government's affordability criteria, but was referred to the Boundary Committee for further review. The Committee has subsequently conducted a full structural review and consultation on proposals for unitary local government in Devon. A consultation on further draft proposals is currently underway, after which the Committee will submit their advice to the Secretary of State in July 2009.

For further details on the Devon structural review, see the [Boundary Committee website](#).

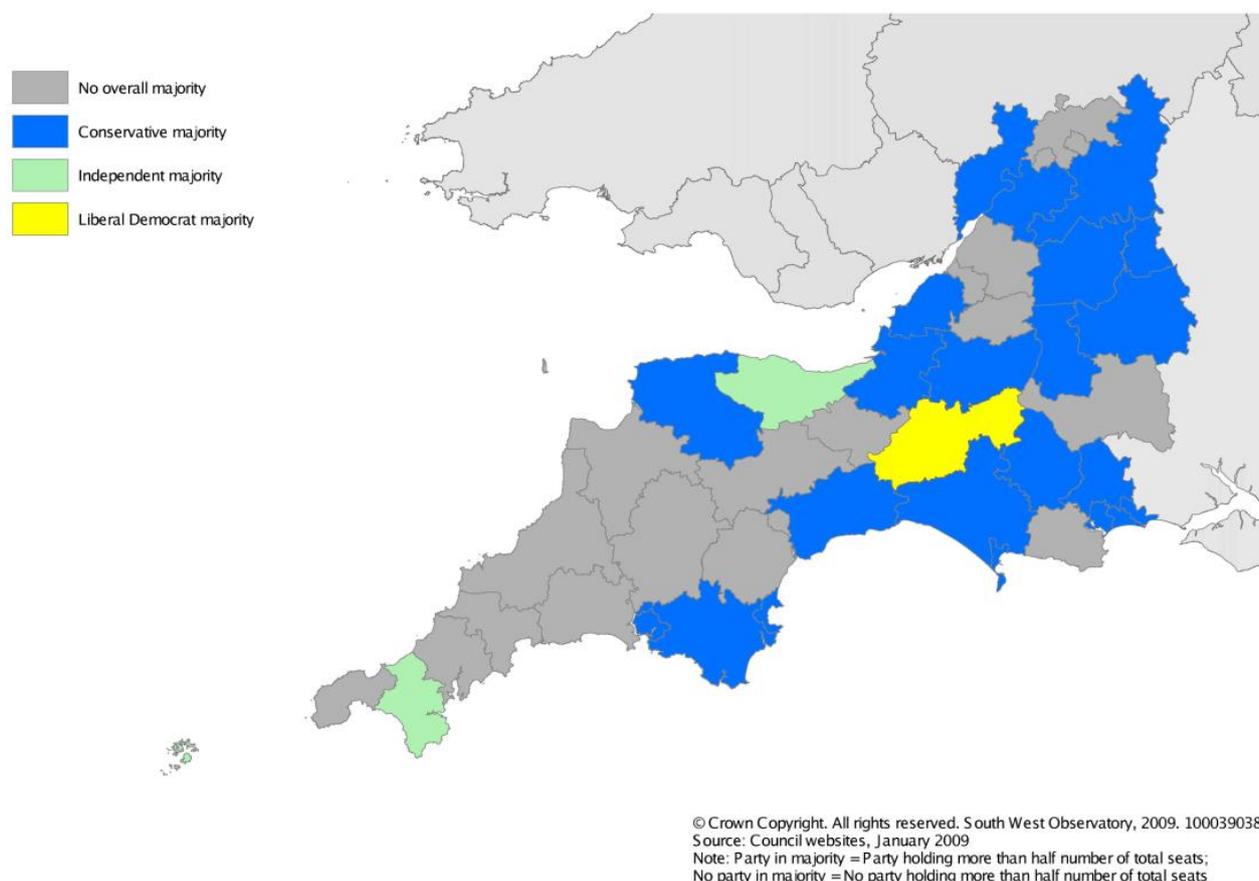
12.4.3.2 As at January 2009, 3 of the 16 current county and unitary authorities have no overall political majority in terms of number of council seats. 16 of the 35 district councils also have no overall majority. The lack of an overall majority does not mean that there is a political stalemate, and the executive cabinets of many councils effectively share power between parties. Other councils have single party cabinets, even though that party does not hold a majority of seats.

Figure 12.2 County Councils and Unitary Authorities in the South West: Political majorities as at January 2009



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Source: Council websites, January 2009
Note: Party in majority = Party holding more than half number of total seats;
No party in majority = No party holding more than half number of total seats

Figure 12.3 Unitary Authorities and District Councils in the South West, Political Majorities as at January 2009



12.4.3.3 Torbay is the only South West council among twelve in England that have a directly elected mayor (as at January 2009). The 2006 Local Government White Paper includes this as one of the three options for executive models, all with four-year terms. The other two options are a directly elected cabinet, or a cabinet appointed by a leader elected by the council. However, less populous authorities are still allowed to operate a non-cabinet reformed committee system. Twelve of the smaller South West districts operate with these 'alternative arrangements'.

12.4.3.4 The table below shows the change in political majorities among local authorities in the South West over the past three years (ie: at the last three local election dates, and as at January 2009). Over this period, the number of Conservative controlled councils has risen by six, and now includes six of the ten unitary authorities, and three of the six county councils.

Table 12.1 Political majorities of County, Unitary and District Councils in the South West: May 2006 - January 2009

	At May 2006	At May 2007	At May 2008	At January 2009
Conservative	19	25	24	25
Labour	0	0	0	0
Liberal Democrat	9	5	4	4
Independent	1	2	3	3
No overall majority	22	19	20	19

Source: local authority websites

12.4.4 Town and Parish Councils

12.4.4.1 Parish and town councils are the most local level of government in England. They are elected bodies which represent their communities and provide services to them. Parish and town councils vary enormously in size, activities and circumstances. They represent populations ranging from less than 100 to up to 70,000, but the majority of them are small with around 80 per cent representing populations of less than 2,500.

12.4.4.2 There are currently over 10,000 parishes in England with around 2,000 in the South West region. The business of the parish is conducted either through a parish council or, in some locations, a parish meeting. In some areas, a number of smaller parishes may come together to be represented through a single forum. Historically, parish councils were a characteristic of rural areas. However, a number have now been created in more urban areas.

12.4.4.3 The responsibilities of parish and town councils vary depending on how large and how active they are and local authorities can devolve additional functions and budgets to them. Responsibilities falling to a council can include: street lighting, footpath maintenance, community transport initiatives, crime prevention, managing cemeteries, allotments, commons, playgrounds, village halls, war memorials and markets. Parish and town councils must also be notified of all planning applications and consulted on the making of certain byelaws.

12.4.4.4 The 2006 Local Government White Paper made proposals for strengthening the capacity and increasing the number of parish and town councils as well as looking at other models of community governance.

For more information on parish and town councils, see the *All about parish and town councils* booklet available from the [National Association of Local Councils website](#).

12.4.5 Election Turnout

12.4.5.1 At 66.5%, electorate turnout in the South West for the May 2005 General Election was the highest of any English region, and was much greater than the turnout for England as a whole (61.3%). The 2005 turnout in the South West was 1.6 percentage points higher than in 2001, a smaller rise than for England (+2.2 percentage points). Within the region in 2005, turnout tended to be higher in rural constituencies, and in the more closely contested urban seats. Dorset West had the highest turnout of any English constituency (76.4%).

12.4.5.2 In 2005, the South West also had the third highest proportion of votes cast by post among the 9 English regions (16.5%; England: 15.4%). Within the region, the proportion was highest in Cheltenham and St Ives, where more than a quarter of the votes were postal. For more analysis of past elections, and for details of forthcoming elections, please see [The Electoral Commission website](#).

12.5 Role and Performance of Local Government

12.5.1 Local government is responsible for working with the community to implement Government policy and maintain public services and facilities, from parks and education to social services and transport. This section looks at the structure, funding and roles of local government in the South West. It also looks at the local partnerships responsible for ensuring that government and community work together.

12.5.1 Local Government Responsibilities

12.5.1.1 In the county structure, the county councils are responsible for:

- education
- strategic planning
- transport planning
- passenger transport
- highways
- social services
- public libraries
- waste disposal
- fire services

The district councils are responsible for:

- housing
- planning applications
- leisure and recreation
- waste collection
- environmental health
- revenue collection

12.5.1.2 Unitary authorities act as county and district, and so are responsible for the functions of both. For more information on local government structure and responsibilities, see the Local Government Association leaflet [Local Government Structure](#) .

12.5.2 How Local Authorities are Funded

12.5.2.1 Local authority funding comes from grants from central Government, redistributed business rates, and local taxation (the Council Tax). The first two of these funding sources forms the Formula Grant, annually allocated to each local authority. However, this excludes targeted or specific grants such as the Dedicated Schools Grant. Every year, in the Local Government Finance Settlement, Formula Grants are calculated and allocated using

mathematical formulae that are designed to measure the relative needs and resources of different local authorities. From 2006/07, schools have been directly funded via the Dedicated Schools Grant, therefore Formula Grants are now smaller than in previous years, even though the level of overall funding from central Government grants has increased.

12.5.2.2 In 2009/10, about 57% of the budgets (excluding targeted or specific grants) of South West local authorities are provided by Council Tax receipts. Among the nine English regions, this is the second highest proportion, and compares to an average for England of 48%. In effect, this means that South West residents are required to bear a higher proportion of the cost of their local services. This is because the formulae used in the Local Government Finance Settlement assess the resources of the region's population to be higher than elsewhere, and hence the region's councils can raise more revenue from their 'Council Taxbase'. The taxbase is calculated as the total number of properties in an area, equalised to Council Tax Band D.

Further information about the Local Government Finance Settlement is available on the Communities and Local Government website: [Local Government Finance Settlement 2009/10](#), which includes the leaflet: [A guide to the Local Government Finance Settlement](#).

12.5.3 Measuring Performance of Local Authorities

12.5.3.1 Local authority performance is currently subject to a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) by the Audit Commission. This looks at performance from a range of perspectives, and combines a set of judgements to provide an overall rating. Since 2002, there has been an annual reporting of scores and analysis for all English county and unitary authorities.

12.5.3.2 In 2005, the Audit Commission introduced a new framework for CPAs for these authorities, designed to provide a harder test. The framework for this comprises annual assessments of service performance, use of resources and direction of travel, and periodic (once every three years) corporate assessments measuring how effectively the council is working to improve services. These are combined to give one of five CPA scores (0 to 4 stars), and one of four directions of travel (improving strongly, improving well, improving adequately, or not improving adequately).

12.5.3.3 In the 2008 annual report, published in March 2009, none of the 16 South West county councils and unitary authorities held either of the two lowest ratings of the five CPA categories (0 or 1 stars). Four authorities in the region (Devon, Poole, Somerset and South Gloucestershire) have the highest 4 star rating, seven have 3 star ratings, and four have 2 star ratings. The Isles of Scilly Council is exempt from a star rating.

12.5.3.4 In direction of travel, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire are all judged to be improving strongly. Of the other 13 South West authorities, 11 are improving well, and one is improving adequately; only Cornwall is judged to be not improving adequately.

Table 12.2 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) scores of South West County and Unitary Authorities: as at March 2009

South West County Council (CC) or Unitary Authority (UA)	Local authority type	Overall Star Category 2007 (lowest = 0 stars, highest = 4 stars)	Direction of travel (4 categories: Not improving adequately / Improving adequately / Improving well / Improving strongly)
Bath & North East Somerset Council	UA	3 stars	Improving well
Bournemouth Borough Council	UA	3 stars	Improving well
Bristol City Council	UA	2 stars	Improving well
Cornwall County Council	CC	3 stars	Not improving adequately
Devon County Council	CC	4 stars	Improving well
Dorset County Council	CC	3 stars	Improving well
Gloucestershire County Council	CC	3 stars	Improving well
Isles of Scilly Council	UA	exempt	Improving adequately
North Somerset Council	UA	3 stars	Improving strongly
Plymouth City Council	UA	2 stars	Improving well
Borough of Poole	UA	4 stars	Improving well
Somerset County Council	CC	4 stars	Improving strongly
South Gloucestershire Council	UA	4 stars	Improving strongly
Swindon Borough Council	UA	2 stars	Improving well
Torbay Council	UA	2 stars	Improving well
Wiltshire County Council	CC	3 stars	Improving well

Source: Audit Commission, Comprehensive Performance Assessments

12.5.3.5 The 2008 annual report for counties and unitary authorities was the final report of this kind. Future assessments will be under the new system of Comprehensive Area Assessment (see below).

12.5.3.6 District councils were reviewed in county groups from June 2003 to early autumn 2004, with a CPA category being published for each. In July 2006, the Commission confirmed the process by which councils could be re-categorised through a corporate assessment. This only takes place where a council requests it and is able to demonstrate significant evidence of improvement, or where the Commission identifies evidence of significant deterioration.

12.5.3.7 Each authority has received one of five overall ratings. Among the region's 35 district councils, four have been rated as 'excellent' (Exeter, North Cornwall, South Hams and Taunton Deane), fifteen as 'good', twelve as 'fair', and four as 'weak'. None of the region's districts are currently rated as 'poor'. Three districts have also had their scores improved to 'good' via voluntary reassessment.

Table 12.3 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) scores of South West District Authorities: as at February 2009

South West District Council	County	Overall Score (5 categories: Excellent / Good / Fair / Weak / Poor)
Caradon District Council	Cornwall	Fair
Carrick District Council	Cornwall	Good
Kerrier District Council	Cornwall	Fair
North Cornwall District Council	Cornwall	Excellent
Penwith District Council	Cornwall	Good
Restormel Borough Council	Cornwall	Fair
East Devon District Council	Devon	Good
Exeter City Council	Devon	Excellent
Mid Devon District Council	Devon	Weak
North Devon District Council	Devon	Fair
South Hams District Council	Devon	Excellent
Teignbridge District Council	Devon	Good
Torrige District Council	Devon	Good
West Devon Borough Council	Devon	Good
Christchurch Borough Council	Dorset	Fair
East Dorset District Council	Dorset	Good
North Dorset District Council	Dorset	Good
Purbeck District Council	Dorset	Fair
West Dorset District Council	Dorset	Fair
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council	Dorset	Good
Cheltenham Borough Council	Gloucestershire	Good
Cotswold District Council	Gloucestershire	Good
Forest of Dean District Council	Gloucestershire	Weak
Gloucester City Council	Gloucestershire	Fair
Stroud District Council	Gloucestershire	Good
Tewkesbury Borough Council	Gloucestershire	Fair
Mendip District Council	Somerset	Weak
Sedgemoor District Council	Somerset	Fair
South Somerset District Council	Somerset	Good
Taunton Deane Borough Council	Somerset	Excellent
West Somerset District Council	Somerset	Weak
Kennet District Council	Wiltshire	Good
North Wiltshire District Council	Wiltshire	Fair
Salisbury District Council	Wiltshire	Good
West Wiltshire District Council	Wiltshire	Fair

Source: Audit Commission, Comprehensive Performance Assessments

12.5.3.8 From April 2009, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will replace CPA. This will result in a change in focus of the assessment regime. While CPA focused on services provided by local authorities, CAA will look at the public services in an area delivered by councils' partners, including the private and voluntary sectors, as well as by the council itself.

12.5.3.9 CAA will be a system based on a combination of risk assessment, largely risk-triggered inspection, and audit. It aims to provide assurance about how well-run local public services are and how effectively they use taxpayers' money. But its purpose is also to be more relevant to local people by focusing on issues that are important to their community. It aims to develop a shared view about the challenges facing an area and to create a more joined up and proportionate approach to public service regulation.

12.5.3.10 CAA will be delivered by seven partner inspectorates working together: the Audit Commission; the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI); the Healthcare Commission; HM Inspectorate of Constabulary; HM Inspectorate of Prisons; HM Inspectorate of Probation; and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

12.5.3.11 CAA is composed of two basic components: an area assessment; and an organisational assessment. The area assessment will be a joint judgement on outcomes in a specific area, not a direct assessment of the local strategic partnership, a council or any other local service body. Organisational assessment will measure the effectiveness of local public bodies, and will combine the use of resources and other performance assessments.

12.5.3.12 Area assessments will be a report, and not result in a score as such. However, where there are significant issues arising red and green flags may be issued. A 'red flag' will indicate significant concerns about outcomes or performance that are not being adequately addressed. 'Green flags' will indicate where others may have something to learn from innovative or exceptional practice in the area. It is therefore quite possible that an area assessment will include no red or green flags in a particular year. The first CAA reports are due to be published in November 2009.

12.5.3.13 For more information on Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Comprehensive Area Assessment, see the [Audit Commission CPA](#) and [CAA](#) webpages.

12.6 Partnership Working

12.6.1 In addition to the delivery of public services by individual councils and other statutory agencies, there is an increasing emphasis on the importance of organisations of all types working in partnership with each other. This section gives a few examples of the way in which partnership working is being delivered in the South West.

12.6.1 Local Strategic Partnerships

12.6.1.1 A Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is a single non-statutory body designed to help people in a specific area work together in the running and delivery of public services. This is done by bringing together key service providers from the public sector with the private, business, community and voluntary sectors.

LSPs are generally aligned with local authority boundaries, and are expected to:

- take many of the major decisions about priorities and funding, with the aim of improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area
- bring together and, where possible, streamline the number of local plans, partnerships and initiatives, improving linkages and simplifying arrangements
- help develop and drive the implementation of community strategies and Local Area Agreements (LAAs, see the next section for more information), including developing partnerships to deliver better public service outcomes.

12.6.1.2 The 2006 Local Government White Paper sought to improve the accountability of LSPs to local people by strengthening the involvement of elected members in executive and scrutiny roles. It also included plans to increase the effectiveness of the representation of local third sector bodies on LSPs.

To find out more, see the [Communities and Local Government LSPs webpage](#).

12.6.2 Local Area Agreements

12.6.2.1 Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are three year agreements that set out the priorities for a local area. The agreement is made between central Government, represented by the Government Office (GO), and a local area, represented by the lead local authority and other key partners through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). LAAs are designed to help join up public services more effectively and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances, whilst ensuring targets set out in national Public Service Agreements (PSAs) are met.

12.6.2.2 Following their introduction in 2005, the 2006 Local Government White Paper strengthened the role of LAAs and set out fundamentally different arrangements for them. It gave a stronger role to local authorities to work with other local service providers to innovate and respond to local needs. LAAs replace the multiple national performance frameworks under which local authorities had previously operated. They play a fundamental part in the new performance framework, which will be fully in place by 2009 when Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAAs) are introduced. For more information on this framework see the [Communities and Local Government Performance Framework, Partnerships and Local Area Agreements](#).

12.6.2.3 Specifically LAAs aim to provide:

- more emphasis on area based service delivery – stronger partnership working, consistent performance management arrangements and an improved area-based assessment (Comprehensive Area Assessment);
- more freedom in spending decisions - a presumption against ring fencing grants unless there are strong reasons for doing so (which will be made public);
- fewer central targets and reporting systems – only around 190 national indicators with each LAA having no more than 35 negotiated (designated) alongside 16 statutory education and early years targets

Details of an area's LAA can generally be found on the website of the lead local authority. For more information see the [Communities and Local Government LAA webpage](#).

12.6.3 Multi Area Agreements

12.6.3.1 Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) are voluntary agreements involving two or more top-tier or unitary local authorities with a specific focus of improving economic prosperity in a particular functional economic area. The agreements are between the authorities, their partners and Government.

12.6.3.2 As well as setting agreed targets, MAAs allow the authorities to pool resources such as area-based grants, and to request action by central Government that will enable them to meet their shared objectives.

12.6.3.3 In the South West, Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset signed their MAA in June 2008. It focuses on skills, transport, the environment, business growth and housing. The economic downturn will test the resilience of the MAA, and its flexibility in changing circumstances.

12.6.3.4 The four West of England councils are preparing their submission for sign off later in 2009.

For more information on Multi Area Agreements, see the [Communities and Local Government MAAs webpage](#).

12.6.4 Strategic Economic Partnerships

12.6.4.1 There are 11 Strategic Economic Partnerships (SEPs) in the South West involving all 16 county and unitary authorities. These act as the economic arm of the region's Local Strategic Partnerships. Their functions vary according to the predominant economic characteristics and opportunities of the area, but in most cases include:

- integrating the economic themes in Local Area Agreements with planning, transport, housing and other economic development issues, as well as with wider Local Strategic Partnership objectives at the local level;
- strengthening local engagement to establish and agree local economic priorities;
- delivering value at the regional level, such as representing local views in regional or national policy development.

12.7 Regional Governance

12.7.1 The Government Office for the South West (GOSW), the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA), and the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) are instrumental in delivering Government policies for the benefit of the region. The Government and European funding that flowed through these three bodies into the region was nearly £800 million in the financial year 2007/08.

12.7.2 At regional level, led by SWRA, the three organisations developed an Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) – *Just Connect!* This set out the region's key economic, social and environmental aims and objectives, and was the subject of wide consultation. It has been endorsed by a range of regional organisations, and provides a framework for the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and Regional Economic Strategy (RES).

12.7.3 The three organisations also operate at the sub-regional, local and, in some cases, neighbourhood level for the benefit of people in the South West. Whilst they can work jointly on regional strategies, priorities and investment decisions, they do have very distinct roles, responsibilities and governance.

12.7.4 The paragraphs that follow describe the current roles and responsibilities of the regional bodies, and also of the Regional Minister. The Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration (Sub-National Review, or SNR) recommended future changes to the roles and functions of regional bodies, as well as other changes to regional governance arrangements. For more information see the section on the SNR below.

12.7.5 As a response to the economic downturn of the last year, several further governance structures have been put in place. The final section here gives more details on these new bodies and their actions.

12.7.1 Regional Ministers

12.7.1.1 In June 2007, the Prime Minister appointed Ministers for each English region. Ben Bradshaw, MP for Exeter, is the Minister for the South West. The role of Regional Ministers is to provide a clear sense of strategic direction for their region and to give the general public a voice in central Government, ensuring that Government policy takes account of the differing needs of the nine English regions.

12.7.1.2 The range of functions that Regional Ministers undertake are mostly based around the responsibilities of the Government Offices and the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), particularly in relation to economic development. Each is a visible representative of their area, and their responsibilities include taking a key role in bringing together local services and different arms of Government at important times for the region. Regional Ministers are currently taking a key role in responding to the economic downturn, such as chairing regional economic fora; this is discussed more fully in a later section.

12.7.1.3 Regional Ministers are able to take questions in Parliament on the work of regional bodies and on regional strategies. However, the accountability and scrutiny of regional governance will soon pass over to Regional Select Committees, as discussed in the next section. Regional Ministers themselves will come under the scrutiny of the new Regional Grand Committees.

Further information about Regional Ministers and regional select committees is available from the [GOSW website](#).

12.7.2 Regional Select Committees

12.7.2.1 In order to improve the scrutiny and accountability of the English regions, and as part of the *Governance of Britain* programme, the Government proposed setting up regional select committees, run along similar lines to the main departmental select committees.

12.7.2.2 In November 2008, the House of Commons voted to establish eight Regional Select Committees, one for each of the English regions, excluding London. Each committee will ideally have nine members, reflecting the national political balance, and will scrutinise the work of regional bodies and regional strategies. Regional Select Committees are expected to meet publicly between four and six times a year.

12.7.2.3 The House also voted to establish eight Regional Grand Committees for the eight English regions (again, excluding London), which will probably meet once or twice a year. These will provide a forum for all sitting MPs in the region, and will provide an opportunity for the Regional Minister to take oral questions.

12.7.2.4 Regional Select Committees and Regional Grand Committees will be implemented in 2009, initially on a temporary basis for review at the end of the current Parliament.

12.7.2.5 The South West Select Committee held its first public evidence session on 30 March 2009. Information about the work of this Committee may be found on its [UK Parliament web page](#).

12.7.3 Government Office for the South West

12.7.3.1 The Government Office for the South West (GOSW) represents central Government in the South West region, and its staff are civil servants. It uses Government policies and programmes to promote sustainable growth, and to develop healthy, safe and prosperous communities that meet the diverse needs of everyone who lives and works in the region. GOSW's role is to join up and put Government policy into practice at local level, implementing key programmes and initiatives in partnership with regional and local organisations, and providing feedback to central Government to inform future policy.

12.7.3.2 GOSW also supports and challenges the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) and the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), advising on strategies they may be developing, ensuring that these align with each other, meet the needs of the region and that the strategies help deliver Government aims and objectives. GOSW also leads on the negotiation of Local Area Agreements with local authorities and their partners.

12.7.3.3 In March 2006, HM Treasury and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published the *Review of Government Offices*, setting out a vision for more streamlined, strategic Government Offices. The Review strengthens the GO role as the essential link between central and local government and its partners, and acknowledges the key role played in supporting local and regional delivery and promoting flexibility within the devolved decision-making framework. The Review charges the Government Offices with delivery of three strategic objectives:

- working with local and regional partners to understand priorities and stretch performance for places
- giving central Government departments focused policy and performance feedback
- supporting and challenging regional strategies to improve their quality and consistency

Following the publication of the Review, Government Offices have undertaken work to implement new organisational structures in line with these priorities.

12.7.3.4 The Government Office also includes a new Regional Parliamentary and Private Office (RPPO), which provides secretarial support for the Regional Minister and Regional Select Committees.

For more information on the Government Office for the South West, see the [GOSW website](#). For further information on the Government Office Review, see the [Government Offices national website](#).

12.7.4 South West Regional Assembly

12.7.4.1 The South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) works to provide a voice for the region promoting the economic, social and environmental well being of the South West. It aims to build consensus across the region and adds a political dimension at the regional level.

12.7.4.2 The Assembly is a voluntary partnership drawing together councillors from all 51 local authorities in the region, and representatives of the National Parks and parish councils. The political balance of these councillors reflects the political make up of the region. In addition, 30% of the membership is composed of representatives from equalities groups, environmental groups, business, the unions and the voluntary sector. These representatives are known as the Social, Economic and Environmental Partners (SEEPs).

The Assembly is supported by a small regional secretariat with officers employed under local government terms and conditions.

The Assembly has five key functions:

- co-ordination and integration of regional strategies: the Assembly takes the leading role in promoting and supporting the integration of regional strategies in the context of *Just Connect!*
- scrutiny of the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA): the Assembly acts as a critical friend, scrutinising the work of SWRDA, and providing the opportunity for SWRDA to be accountable to the region. This activity takes account of the fact that SWRDA is ultimately responsible for delivery to central Government Ministers (Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR))
- Regional Planning Body: the Assembly is the statutory Regional Planning Body with responsibility for keeping under review the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). As part of the RSS, the Assembly is also required to produce a Regional Transport Strategy, and takes the lead role on strategic transport issues. (Note: final approval of the RSS currently rests with Ministers)
- Regional Housing Body: the Assembly leads the body responsible for developing and overseeing the Regional Housing Strategy. Both SWRDA and GOSW are members of the body, as are other key regional stakeholders
- voice of the South West region: the Assembly undertakes much lobbying activity on behalf of the region, aiming to ensure a better deal for the South West from central Government and from Europe.

12.7.4.3 As a result of the Sub-National Review (SNR), the regional planning and strategic roles that are currently held by the Assembly will be transferred to a combination of the SWRDA and a new Local Authority Leaders' Forum. All regional strategies previously co-ordinated by SWRA will be incorporated into a new Single Regional Strategy, and the Assembly will be dissolved by April 2010. In anticipation of this change, a South West Strategic Leaders' Board has already been formed for the region, and in February 2009 they issued a statement on proposed new governance working arrangements

For more information on the South West Regional Assembly, and on the South West Strategic Leaders' Board, see the [SWRA website](#).

12.7.5 South West Regional Development Agency

12.7.5.1 The South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) is a non-departmental public body, funded by Government and accountable through its Board to Ministers. Its role is set out in legislation, and is to ensure the long-term economic success of the region, in particular:

- to further economic development and regeneration;
- to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness;
- to promote employment;
- to enhance development and application of skills relevant to employment;
- to contribute to sustainable development

SWRDA acts in partnership with others, and intervenes only where market failure is blocking progress. Essentially its job is to help create a more sustainable future by:

- supporting business creation and growth;
- encouraging innovation;
- ensuring the workforce has the right skills;
- providing commercial and industrial property;
- regenerating run-down communities;
- building the towns and cities of the future;
- promoting what is best about the South West;
- bringing private and public investment into the region

12.7.5.2 In doing this, SWRDA is guided by the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), which it produces on behalf of the region. SWRDA concentrates strategic influence, investments and direct interventions on delivering the RES, but its remit means that it has a wider interest in many things such as housing, connectivity and transport infrastructure.

12.7.5.3 As a consequence of the Sub-National Review (SNR), SWRDA will be taking on many of the roles previously held by the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA), including regional planning responsibility. Furthermore, regional strategies previously co-ordinated by SWRA will be combined with the RES into a Single Regional Strategy (SRS) which will be jointly implemented by SWRDA and the new South West Strategic Leaders' Board.

For more information on the South West Regional Development Agency, see the [SWRDA website](#).

12.7.6 Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration

12.7.6.1 The Government published the Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration (the Sub-National Review, or SNR) in July 2007. The review was jointly led by HM Treasury, and the departments for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR).

12.7.6.2 The SNR outlined the Government's plans to encourage economic growth and tackle deprivation by refocussing both powers and responsibilities within each region. It set out a framework to allow central and local government, and its partners, to work together to support the private sector to increase prosperity in all parts of England.

12.7.6.3 The main recommendations of the SNR were:

- clearer objectives and responsibilities from central Government departments to provide more effective support and better coordination for economic development and neighbourhood renewal at all spatial levels;
- a streamlining of the regional tier outside London, based on more effective and accountable RDAs, which would be responsible, working closely with local authorities, for preparing a Single Regional Strategy for each region;
- empowering of all local authorities, allowing them greater flexibility, stronger partnership working and cooperation from other agencies, and offering them better incentives;
- giving local authorities responsibility for scrutinising the RDA; and undertaking economic assessments for their areas, and
- supporting local authorities in all areas to work together more effectively across administrative boundaries, where they so wish, for example through Multi Area Agreements (MAAs).

12.7.6.4 In November 2008, the Government published *Prosperous Places: taking forward the review of sub-national economic development and regeneration*, its response to the consultation on SNR launched in March 2008, and described the proposals to be taken forward. These include a duty on all English upper tier and unitary authorities to produce an economic assessment for their area. This will be done in co-operation with local partners, including private sector and voluntary sector bodies. A related proposal will establish ways for local authorities to voluntarily set up formal sub-regional collaborations with neighbouring areas, with the creation of Economic Improvement Boards.

12.7.6.5 Further measures detailed include the combining of all existing regional strategies, in particular the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), into a Single Regional Strategy (SRS). Responsibility for regional planning will pass from the Regional Assembly to the Regional Development Agency (RDA), with the former body being dissolved by April 2010. The RDA will also be given executive responsibility for producing the new SRS; however, this will be signed off jointly by the RDA and all the local authorities in the region acting through a new Local Authority Leaders' Forum. The RDA and Leaders' Forum will also be jointly responsible for implementation of the SRS.

To read the full *Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration*, see the [HM Treasury website](#). For further details on the response to the consultation, see the [Communities and Local Government Sub-National Review page](#).

12.7.7 Response to Economic Downturn

12.7.7.1 As with other regions and countries of the UK, the South West has seen a marked economic downturn since 2008. The overall trends and effects of the recession on the region are analysed in more detail in the Economy chapter.

12.7.7.2 At central Government level, as well as Cabinet decisions and measures that have been taken to stabilise the economy, a number of councils have been set up to better co-ordinate and manage actions. The highest of these is the National Economic Council (NEC), a full Cabinet council chaired by the Prime Minister, and meeting twice weekly. Two further national councils have regional remits, and report directly to the NEC. These are the Regional Economic Council (REC), and the Council of Regional Ministers (CRM).

12.7.7.3 The REC is in place to ensure issues and areas of concern to regions are heard and acted upon within Government. This Council meets quarterly, and is chaired by both the Secretary of State for BERR and the Chancellor. Membership includes Regional Ministers, Regional Development Agency (RDA) Chairs and representatives of business and the trade unions.

12.7.7.4 The CRM operates alongside the REC, but seeks the views of a wider range of regional stakeholders. Currently meeting monthly, this Council is chaired by Liam Byrne, Minister for the Cabinet Office, and includes all Regional Ministers. The CRM's main purpose is to discuss common issues, take action where appropriate, and make recommendations to the REC and the NEC. It also acts as a conduit for information and key messages between the regions and the other Councils via the Regional Ministers.

12.7.7.5 In addition to the national Councils, Regional Ministers were asked to chair region-level groups or task forces to better understand the impact of the economic crisis and respond to local / regional 'economic shocks'. These task groups meet monthly, and include representation from the Government Office, Regional Development Agency, Jobcentre Plus, Learning and Skills Council, Housing and Communities Agency and Trades Union Congress, along with business and local authority representatives. The South West Regional Economic Task Group (SWRETG) held its first meeting in November 2008.

12.7.7.6 SWRETG's remits are:

- to assess the regional impact of current economic conditions;
- provide a conduit for the Regional Minister to discuss economic challenges with private and public sector bodies, and for the views of regional stakeholders to be represented at the national level;
- provide a structure through which problems affecting particular sectors or sub-regions / localities can be addressed, and public sector intervention be co-ordinated to optimum effect

As a result of the earliest SWRETG meetings, four work strands have been identified as priorities, and Action Groups set up for each. These are:

- skills and employment;
- infrastructure and construction;
- resilience of public services;
- support for business

For further information on the Regional Economic Task Group, see the [SWRETG website](#).

12.8 Conclusion

12.8.1 High standards of living, good quality health and social services, and a well managed economy all depend to a greater or lesser extent on good governance at the appropriate local level. With an increasing devolution of power from central Government, regional and local governance will be more important than ever.

12.8.2 The range of organizations operating at the regional and sub-regional level provides the means both to identify and to address the diverse issues that affect the South West. However, it also underlines the importance for these organizations to work together in maximizing available resources to deliver shared aims and objectives.