

D Governmental and Political Context

Introduction

D.1 An equitable standard of living for all, including good quality public services, such as education, health, police and social services, a well managed economy and employment, and a rich cultural life, all depend to some degree on good governance and administration at the appropriate geographical level. Good governance is equally essential for housing, transport and environmental planning. With an increasing devolution of power from central Government, local government, as well as the community and voluntary sector, will continue to play an important role in delivering a good standard of living and quality of public services.

D.2 The following sections offer an overview of the South West's political and governance structures. Following the change in government in May 2010, several subnational structures are facing closure. For local authorities, the focus under the Coalition Government is on devolved power and greater autonomy at the local level.

D.3 New proposed structures aimed at driving local growth were identified in the 2010 Local Growth White Paper, and are now beginning to emerge. This chapter provides an overview of those structures which have been announced to date. In the months that follow the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) will develop them further.

D.4 At a Parliamentary level, the South West's population is represented in Westminster by its MPs. The General Election in May 2010 has seen significant changes in the MP composition, with the South West moving from having no overall majority, to a Conservative majority. The region also forms a European Constituency, and as such returns MEPs to the European Parliament.

Parliamentary Governance

D.5 All governance in the English regions is to some extent underpinned by policy and legislation that is passed down from national Government, and in some cases European Government. The people of the South West have their say in both these Parliaments through their elected representatives. This section looks at how the major political parties are represented across the region, and how this has changed over recent years.

Members of Parliament

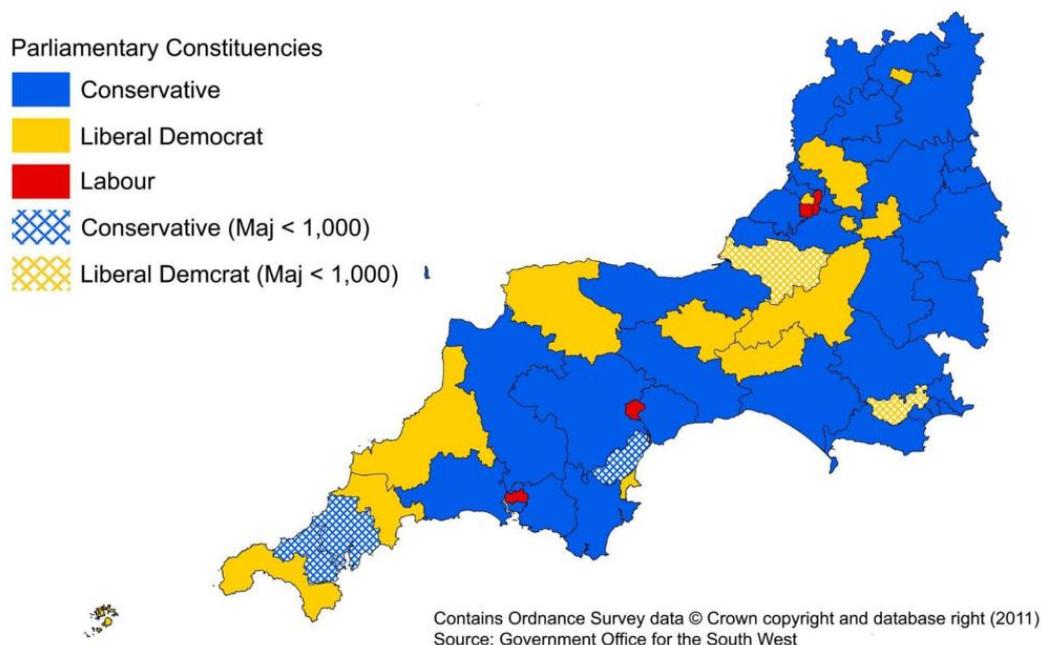
D.6 There are 55 Parliamentary Constituencies in the South West, representing the region's population of just over 5 million people. The last General Election, in May 2010, brought significant change to the overall political picture in the region. Following this election, the distribution of seats between Members of Parliament (MPs) was as follows:

- 36 Conservative MPs (22 at 2005 General Election)
- 4 Labour MPs (13 at 2005 General Election)
- 15 Liberal Democrat MPs (16 at 2005 General Election)

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.

D.7 The dominant party in the South West region is Conservative. The region contains almost a third of all the sitting Liberal Democrat MPs in England (29%), and around 12% of all the Conservative seats. There are relatively few marginal constituencies in the region. Only five of the 41 English constituencies with majorities of less than a thousand are in the South West – Cambourne & Redruth (Con), Dorset Mid and Poole North (Lib Dem), Newton Abbott (Con), Truro and Falmouth (Con) and Wells (Lib Dem).

Figure D.1 Parliamentary Constituencies in the South West by Political Party, May 2010



Members of the European Parliament

D.8 There were previously seven Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) representing the South West region. However, due to changes following enlargement of the European Union, this dropped to six for the European Elections of June 2009. The MEPs returned from these last elections were:

- 3 Conservative MEPs
- 2 UK Independence Party MEPs
- 1 Liberal Democrat MEP

D.9 Representation by the political parties was unchanged from before the elections, except that Labour's share of voting was not high enough to retain the seat they had held previously.

D.10 European Parliamentary elections are held every five years, with the next elections being due in June 2014. To find out more about the European Parliament and MEPs, see the [UK Office of the European Parliament](#) website.

Election Turnout

D.11 At 69.0%, electorate turnout in the South West for the May 2010 General Election was the highest of any English region, and was greater than the turnout for England as a whole (65.5%). The 2010 turnout in the South West was 2.5 percentage points higher than in 2005, a smaller rise than for England (+4.2 percentage points).

D.12 In 2010, the South West also had the fourth highest proportion of votes cast by post among the 9 English regions (19%; England: 18%). Within the region, the proportion was highest in Taunton Deane, St Austell and Newquary, St Ives and Torbay, where more than a quarter of the votes were postal.

D.13 The South West also had a high election turnout for the June 2009 European Elections. At 38.8% of the electorate, this was again the highest turnout of an English region. Overall, England turnout was 35.1%. Detailed turnout figures for the Local Elections held on the same day are not centrally collated. However, due to local interest, these are generally expected to be higher than turnouts for European voting.

D.14 For more analysis of past elections, and for details of forthcoming elections, please see [The Electoral Commission website](#).

Local Governance

D.15 Local government is responsible for the social, economic and environmental well being of the area it administers, and maintaining 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 communities work together.

D.16 There are two different structures of governance in the South West. The two-tier structure sees responsibilities shared between a county council and the area's component district councils. There are also single-tier unitary authorities, where all services are the responsibility of one council.

D.17 Currently, there are 41 local authorities in the South West. Four of these are county councils that between them contain a total of 25 district councils. Outside of the county governance structure, the region also has 12 unitary authorities.

D.18 The two youngest unitary authorities in the South West are Cornwall and Wiltshire, both of which came into effect in April 2009. Both were previously counties with districts within them, and made successful bids for unitary status following the 2006 Local Government White Paper.

D.19 As at May 2010, three of the 16 current county and unitary authorities have no overall political majority in terms of number of council seats (Bath and North East Somerset, Cornwall and South Gloucestershire). Ten of the 25 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 may have single party cabinets, even though that party does not hold a majority of seats.

Figure D.2 South West Unitary and County Authorities: Political Majorities at May 2010

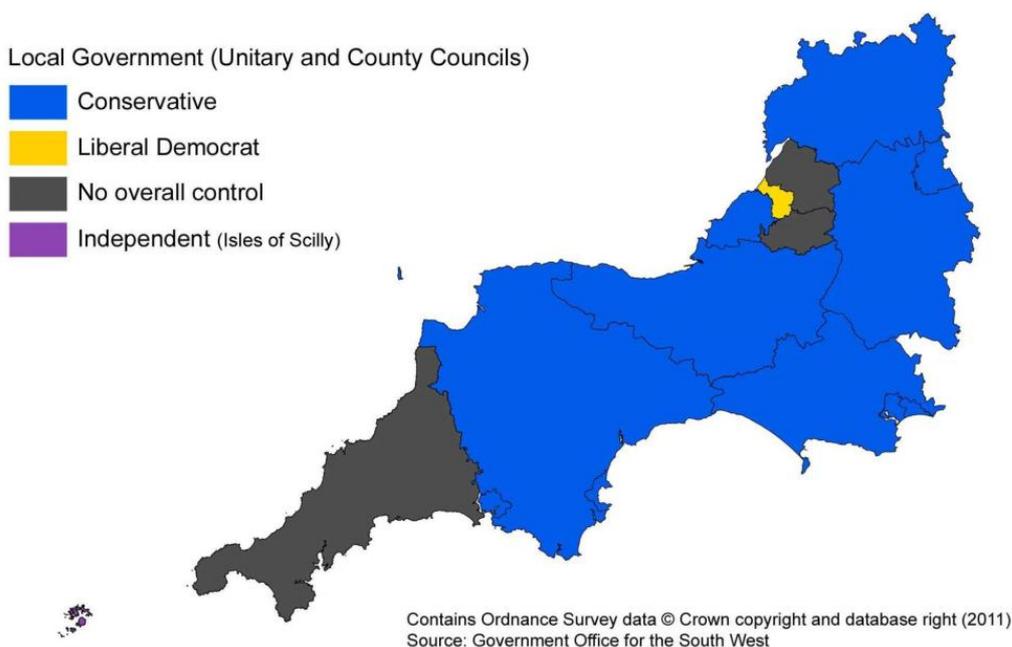
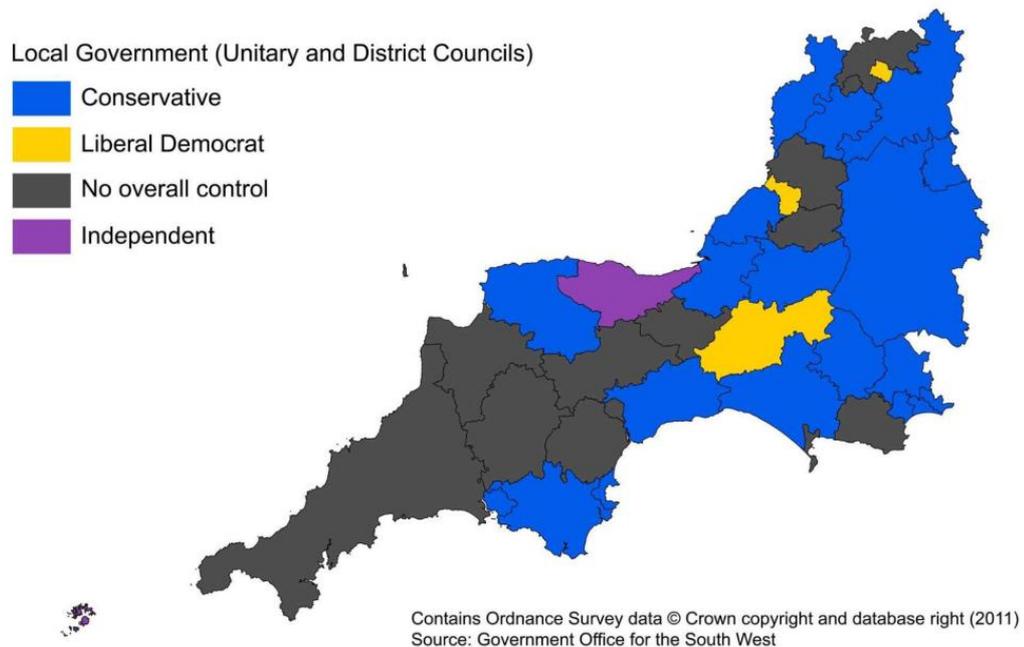


Figure D.3 South West Unitary and District Authorities, Political Majorities at May 2010



D.20 Torbay is the only South West council among twelve in England that have a directly elected mayor (as at May 2010). This is 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. Some of the smaller South West districts operate with these 'alternative arrangements'.

D.21 The table below shows the change in political majorities among local authorities in the South West over the past three years (i.e. at the last four local election dates). Over this period, the largest number of councils have been Conservative controlled, whereas Labour have not held majorities on any councils.

Table 1 Political majorities of County, Unitary and District Councils in the South West: May 2007 - May 2010

	At May 2007	At May 2008	At June 2009	At May 2010
Conservative	25	24	24	23
Labour	0	0	0	0
Liberal Democrat	5	4	2	3
Independent	2	3	2	2
No overall majority	19	20	13	13

Source: Local Authority Websites

Local Government Responsibilities

D.22 In the county structure, the county councils are responsible for most of the public services in an area, including:

- schools
- public transport
- social services
- waste disposal
- strategic planning
- economic development

The district councils are responsible for more local services, including:

- housing and homelessness
- local planning
- leisure and recreation
- recycling and waste collection
- revenue collection

Unitary authorities act as county and district, and so are responsible for the functions of both.

D.23 Some local government authorities share services that cover a wider area with other local authorities, such as police, and fire and rescue services.

D.24 For more information on local government structures, see the [Directgov](#) website.

Town and Parish Councils

D.25 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.

D.26 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.

D.27 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 bye-laws.

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.

How Local Authorities are Funded

D.28 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, allocated to each local authority.

D.29 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. In 2006/07, for the first time, the Government moved to produce forward allocations of most grants into multi-year settlements, thus allowing better future budget

planning by local authorities. The first full three-year settlement was for 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11.

D.30 In 2010/11, about 57% of the budget requirements (excluding specific, targeted and area based grants) of South West local authorities were provided by Council Tax receipts. Among the nine English regions, this is the joint second highest proportion, and compares to an average for England of 48% (47.4%). 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, equivalised 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 2010/11](#), which includes the leaflet: [A guide to the Local Government Finance Settlement](#).

D.31 Besides local authority funding, there are many other public expenditure funding streams that come into a region and its local areas, some of this directly from central Government, and some via non-departmental agencies. A full analysis and summary of all public spending can be found on the [HM Treasury Statistics on Public Finance and Spending](#) website, which includes the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) series.

Localism

D.32 The Localism Bill was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on 13th December 2010.

D.33 The Localism Bill is a Department for Communities and Local Government sponsored piece of legislation introduced against the backdrop of significant spending cuts: first in the Comprehensive Spending Review of 20 October 2010, and then by the local government settlement on 16 December. The Bill and its objectives should therefore be viewed in this context.

D.34 The Bill deals with a wide range of issues relating to local government, local government finance, community empowerment, housing and planning. It embodies one of the main policy objectives of the Coalition Government, namely its commitment to localism. This also encompasses elements of the Big Society. Much of the Bill is 'enabling.' This means that provisions within the Bill will provide discretionary regulation-making powers to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and his Ministers. This is a regular feature of Acts of Parliament.

D.35 The principal components of the Bill include:

- Abolition of Regional Strategies in favour of neighbourhood planning and community rights to participate in planning decisions
- Reform of local plans
- Housing and housing finance reform
- New powers for local people to demand local referendums on important issues, including levels of council tax
- A General Power of Competence designed to allow local authorities freedom to act in any way they believe is in the interests of their communities, so long as it does not contravene the law

D.36 The Localism Bill will affect all tiers of local government, including town and parish councils who will be empowered to participate more deeply in issues and activities effecting their area.

D.37 The South West Observatory recently published a policy briefing on the Localism Bill, which can be found [here](#).

Changes to Local Government Data Requirements and Audit

D.38 The Coalition Government have abolished the Local Area Agreement, National Indicator Set, and Comprehensive Area Assessment regime.

D.39 Following the General Election, the Government stated that final guidance on Multi-Area Agreements (MAA) would not be published. The development of Local Enterprise Partnerships means that many partners are unlikely to take up MAA duties.

D.40 Local authorities are now free to measure and manage their performance as they choose. The government has also stated that it will specify the data it requires from local government through the Single Data List, which will come into effect in April 2011.

Single Data List

D.41 In October 2010 the government announced that a Single Data List would be created to list all data that local authorities and some other public bodies would be required to provide to central government and departmental arms-length bodies.

D.42 The draft list was published in December 2010, alongside a consultation which ran until early February 2011.

D.43 The objectives of the Single Data List are:

- To be a clear, definitive list of data that central government needs from local authorities
- To help reduce data burdens on local authorities
- To be open for scrutiny, challenge and regular review

D.44 Furthermore, the government states that the list will:

- Help government reduce the number of datasets required by first cataloguing them
- Facilitate transparency by making it easier for the public to access data about their areas

D.45 Some data requirements include ex-National Indicators, but for government use instead of top-down local authority performance management or audit.

D.46 The draft Single Data List contains 162 indicators, made up of 463 data 'topics' or themes.

Partnership Working

D.47 Partnership working remains a priority for the Coalition Government. Delivery mechanisms for partnership working arrangements are nevertheless changing. This section details those mechanisms still existing from the previous administration (at the time of

writing), before moving on to look at some of the new subnational structures which may take on some of this responsibility.

D.48 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are single non-statutory bodies 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 always aligned with local authority boundaries, but may exist at both county/unitary and district levels. LSPs were set up under the previous government and as such there is currently a question mark over their future.

LSPs 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

D.49 Previously, a major aim of the LSPs was to help develop and drive the implementation of community strategies and, for those at the county/unitary level, Local Area Agreements (LAAs), including developing partnerships to deliver better public service outcomes. In October 2010, LAAs were abolished. At January 2011, many LSPs continue to operate, and may continue to do so with a much greater degree of flexibility.

The future of LSPs is likely to evolve as other subnational working arrangements develop. To find out more and for definitive guidance, see the [Communities and Local Government Local Strategic Partnerships](#) webpage.

New Subnational Arrangements

D.50 Following the change in government in May 2010, substantial changes have been made to the subnational government tier. Regional government structures such as Government Office for the South West and the South West Regional Development Agency are both in the process of closure. For a description of the former function and remit of these bodies, see [State of the South West 2010, Government and Political Context](#).

D.51 The coalition government has identified new structures which will be responsible for driving subnational partnership working, strategic leadership and the delivery of economic growth.

This section covers the detail of these structures available at the time of writing.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

D.52 The Local Growth White Paper, published by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) on the 28th October 2010, set out a new approach to local growth. There were three key themes to the paper:

- Shifting power to local communities and businesses
- Promoting efficient markets
- Supporting investments to tackle barriers to growth

D.53 Local Enterprise Partnerships were one of the key proposals set out in the paper. LEPs will act as joint local authority-business bodies working to promote local economic development and growth.

D.54 Through the white paper, BIS invited Local authorities and business leaders to come together to form LEPs. In all, 24 such bodies were initially approved across England, though the number of LEPs has since grown to 31. Although a timetable is not currently available, LEPs have been encouraged to submit their proposals when they are ready to do so. At the time of writing, LEP coverage is at 80% of the UK.

D.55 In the South West, two LEPs have so far been agreed. LEPs have been set up in the West of England, and in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

D.56 The government envisages that LEPs will exist under business and civic leadership and are intended to promote a vibrant environment in which the private sector, including social enterprises, might thrive and generate new employment and increased prosperity.

D.57 A question remains over the relationship between LEPs and LSPs. Although Local Area Agreements are being abolished, and there is no mention of LSPs in the Local Growth white paper, the coalition government has proposed

no major change to their status and role and continues to encourage joint working at local level.

Regional Growth Fund

D.58 The Regional Growth Fund was launched by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, also through the publication of the Local Growth White Paper, in October 2010.

D.59 The fund aims to stimulate enterprise and create long term private sector led economic growth and employment, and to help those areas and communities currently dependent on the public sector make the transition to sustainable, private sector-led growth and prosperity.

D.60 The fund is available to bids from the private sector, and public/private sector partnerships. LEPs for example can play a role in co-ordinating bids in the areas they cover. The first round of bidding to the Regional Growth Fund ended on the 21st January 2011. Four hundred and sixty four bids were received with a combined total value of £2.78 bn. The second round of bidding opens on 12th April.

D.61 For the latest on the Regional Growth Fund, always refer to the [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills website](#). A short summary of the bids received is available via the BIS website. Further summary information will be published in due course.

BIS Local

D.62 All regional government offices will be closed by 31st March 2011. BIS local is the title given to the presence that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will maintain across England to develop and maintain links between the department and those delivering its policies. Its role will be to:

- Support the BIS ministerial team with briefings, updates, handling visits and generally acting as a conduit between BIS and local areas
- Lead and develop relationships with Local Enterprise Partnerships and local government so they fully understand BIS national policy priorities, can help coordinate economic development, and can build capacity and capability amongst key partners and stakeholders
- Provide intelligence to BIS

- Coordinate government responses to 'economic shocks' including where major companies fail
- To develop local understanding and buy-in to BIS policies by maintaining strong links with selected large businesses, key sectors and local business bodies
- Provide local intelligence to BIS so that the department understands the impact of policies
- Contribute to the development of new policies

sector. These arrangements are in their infancy, with the months and years ahead doubtless providing interesting and challenging times.

D.63 The BIS Local office for the south west will cover the entire south west region and the south east region except Kent, Medway and East Sussex. You can find out more about the Local offices, and their emerging roles, [here](#).

Conclusions

D.64 The General Election 2010 saw considerable change to the political composition of the South West. Following the election, the distribution of seats in the region led to an overall Conservative majority, with many constituencies swinging from Labour to Conservative. Historically the South West has had a strong showing for the Liberal Democrats; this remains the case, although the Liberal Democrats did lose one seat in the region, at the 2010 election.

D.65 People in the South West are keen to exercise their right to vote, with consistently higher turnout rates than other parts of the country. This was apparent again last May, with the South West seeing the highest turnout rate, when compared with all other government regions.

D.66 With a reduction in audit and monitoring processes, and the plans set out in the Localism Bill for greater devolution, local authorities are now working with increased flexibility and freedom. However budget cuts announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review of October 2010 are having wide ranging impacts within local governance and the public sector as a whole⁽¹⁾. Whilst the regional government tier has been abolished under the current government, new subnational arrangements are being developed to encourage and foster partnership working and economic growth, particularly between the public and private

1 for analysis on how the South West has been affected by the spending cuts, see also [SWO Economy Module Special Publications, The Impact of Public Sector Spending Cuts - September 2010](#)