

Theme 5: Regional Inequality / Access

A Sustainable Future
for the South West



The Regional Sustainable Development Framework
for the South West of England



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Headline indicator:
Relevant index of deprivation.

Setting the Scene

Sustainable development is about improving the quality of life for all - the equality of life.

This does not mean everyone must have the same income or wealth. It is not about equality of outcome because we recognise the importance of incentives and the rewarding of responsibility. But neither is it just about equality of opportunity. This is, partly at least, enshrined in law, especially with the new Human Rights Act. But legal existence does nothing about practical barriers people may face in taking opportunities. *Sustainability means equality of access to opportunity.* How can that be achieved?

Some people suffer a disadvantage in society and its economy. This may not be viewed by them as a disadvantage - eg, being a lone parent or living in a rurally isolated place - but some people in that position need support to enable them to compete on equal terms with others and to be able to participate fully in economic and social life. Reducing regional inequality is about helping them get the same access to opportunity as someone who does not share their circumstances. This means there should be no priority of urban deprivation over rural - only a recognition that very different problems require very different solutions - solutions that have to be come from the communities affected.

The South West should be a region where people that suffer a disadvantage will be able to get advice and support (both financial and practical) to do something that will enable them to compete in the labour market on an equal footing with everyone else (eg, a personalised package of training and work experience, including child care and other services) and enjoy a minimum standard of living sufficient for their needs (eg, a house or flat that they can afford and is big enough for their family).

As well as people, places in the South West suffer disadvantage. Every district should have the right to a minimum level of public service and, therefore, targets set for those services - either 'floor' targets, a minimum beneath which they should not fall (eg, a bus every hour); or 'convergence' targets (eg, all wards should be within 10 minutes of the regional average for time taken to get to the nearest A&E department at a hospital).

What are the opportunities for improving sustainability ?

In the South West there are 4 key opportunities to improve sustainability:

Improve rural social inclusion -

this means overcoming a range of barriers imposed on sustainability, under two main headings: unequal access to information, and to services like health, child care and affordable housing; and, crucially, the issue of car dependency in rural areas and access to forms of public transport. Some counties in the region have experimented successfully with innovative forms of public transport to target isolated areas (eg, Wiltshire's wiggly bus, schemes to provide a low cost moped service). And there are wider issues to be addressed - eg, if the National Health Service concentrates specialist services in fewer locations, the costs will fall unduly on rural areas; recognition that enhancing service standards in rural areas costs more per person than in urban areas. The Countryside Agency, in 2001, will build on work on the nature and extent of rural exclusion which will be developed, with partners, into a regional statement of intent.

Develop coastal and market towns, and reduce seasonal unemployment -

seasonality is a problem for business and employees, particularly in tourism and farming. There are also problems about how farming can adapt to new ways of working with the land to offer alternative opportunities. Coastal towns have suffered long term decline and need to be able to adapt and diversify their economies. This would be helped by, eg watersports, and their inclusion in EU bathing water directives. The Regional Development Agency have begun a Market and Coastal Towns Initiative in partnership with other agencies and the community.

Improve urban housing estates and reduce inner city poverty -

problems of isolation are not just restricted to rural areas. People living in some urban areas suffer multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers, including transport, areas in economic decline in which people are reluctant to invest, post-code hostility by prospective employers, not being in the usual networks of knowledge about job opportunities, crime, ill health and educational under achievement. A sustainable society would have strategies in place to deal with these issues - eg, building a sense of community and reaching out to employers and businesses.





The SW will have the biggest 'age shift' of any region in England
People over 60 rising from 21% of the population in 1997 to 28% in 2021. This will significantly affect the employment of older people and markets for new products and services.

Justice for ethnic minorities, older people, lone parents, the disabled, gypsies and travelling people, the unskilled, refugees and young people - groups all at risk of social exclusion and economic inactivity. Racism is still rampant and the recognition recently of institutional racism may help in giving us a checklist against which we can judge whether our own organisations are institutionally racist. The relatively small proportion of the rural population of ethnic minority origin puts more of a barrier in place than that faced by the ethnic minorities in urban areas, where a sense of community may help in boosting self confidence and support. The work done by the Racial Equality Councils - and the proposal for a Racial Equality Strategy for the region - will make a significant contribution.

The opportunity to learn throughout life and access to work is the best means most of us have of both ending poverty and allowing us to fulfil our potential. Access to services is essential for both of these objectives as well as as many other aspects of economic and social life.

The Regional Assembly has a working group on social exclusion, chaired and run by the Assembly's social and economic partners group. Recently the group has linked strongly with the regional Social Exclusion Partners group, which has representatives from all the main public sector agencies, including probation, police and prison services, further and higher education, the RDA, NHS, social services, Home Office, a sprinkling of local authorities, and so on. Both the Assembly group and the Partners group are to join forces on a 'state of the region' analysis of the gaps across the region in meeting social exclusion needs.

The Index of Local Deprivation 2000

The Index has been substantially revised. It is now based on 33 ward level indicators grouped together in six 'domains': low income, labour market conditions, education and training inadequacies, poor health and disability, poor housing and poor geographical access to services. The last of these, in particular, has given more emphasis to problems faced in rural areas and lessened a perceived urban bias in the Index.

According to the new Index, severe deprivation is now entrenched in some of the coastal and rural areas of the South West, with largely rural authorities such as Penwith and Kerrier containing groups of severely deprived wards. The urban areas of Plymouth and Bristol also have several severely deprived wards.

The South West has 30 wards which feature in the 10% most deprived wards in England a relatively small number compared to other regions. But even ward level is too high to capture small and dispersed pockets of deprivation, especially in rural and urban coastal areas.

10 Most Deprived Wards in the South West

Ranked in England	Ward Name	LA Name	Child Poverty %
133	Lawrence Hill	Bristol	71.8
221	Filwood	Bristol	62.2
249	St. Peter	Plymouth	77.3
336	Penzance East	Penwith	64.5
415	Boscombe West	Bournemouth	60.1
441	Wallisdown	Bournemouth	61.3
458	Wonford	Exeter North	65.6
466	Weston-Super-Mare South	North Somerset	63.7
509	Westward Ho!	Torridge	41.4
518	Barton	Gloucester	60

What are the objectives for improving sustainability in the South West?

Objective	Examples of how it might be achieved	Links to potential partners and processes
Everyone in the South West has the opportunity throughout their lifetime to learn and develop new skills that enable them to achieve their full potential	Learning Partnerships set service standards for urban and rural areas. The six Learning and Skills Councils in the South West ensure standards of provision both improve and equalise across the region	Coping with the change from TECs to LSCs will need effective partnership working especially in further education. LSCs will need to consult widely and ensure community participation in its decision making - especially the business community.
Everyone in the South West has the opportunity to work and to have their work recognised and valued by the community (whether paid or unpaid)	Active participation in and commitment to Community Strategy objectives. Partnerships include key agencies like the new Working Age agency and the voluntary and community sector	These partners and local communities, including the business sector, should work closely with the new Local Strategic Partnerships, especially those being set up initially by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, in Penwith, Kerrier, Bristol and Plymouth.
Everyone in the South West has access to a minimum level of service standards across the range of community services	Government Departments set 'floor' targets for minimum standards of access to essential service, eg, hospitals and primary care services, as part of their Public Service Agreements with Treasury	



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