

**Report of the Designated County Manager  
to the  
South-East Regional Authority  
for the period July 2004 – October 2005**



**November, 2005**

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Cathaoirleach and Members,

Under the process of *Better Local Government - A Programme for Change (DOE, 1996)*, a County Manager in its region was designated to each Regional Authority. This was in order to improve the capacity of authorities to fulfil their mandate and strategic role and to provide for better co-ordination and co-operation in activities and linkages between the regional authorities and their constituent local authorities. It is in this context that, as required, I submit this report for the period July 2004 – October 2005 for your information and consideration.

### **Statutory Requirements**

The South-East Regional Authority has fulfilled all its statutory obligations under the Local Government Act, 1991 (Regional Authorities) (Establishment) Order 1994, namely –

- Preparation of an Annual Report
- Preparation and adoption of an Estimate of Expenditure and Receipts for 2005
- Preparation of a Statement of Accounts for 2004
- Preparation of a Programme of Work for 2005.

The Authority held 11 monthly meetings and its Operational Committee met a number of times over the period covered by this report. The Authority also participated in the work of the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly, particularly in the context of its management of the Regional Operational Programme of the NDP/CSF 2000-2006.

### **Coordination**

The past year has seen a continuation of a high level of activity, coordination and cooperation between the local authorities in the South-East Region in relation to activities and services of a regional nature, both at elected member and official level. The Regional Authority works in close co-operation with local and public authorities, with business, farming, employer and employee organisations and with local communities in articulating the deficiencies, development needs and investment priorities of the region. What follows are examples of these activities/joint actions relating to specific services, projects and initiatives.

### **Regional Planning Guidelines (RPG)**

The Authority, in accordance with the Planning and Development Act, 2000, has prepared Regional Planning Guidelines for the South-East Region. The Guidelines, which were launched in February 2005, incorporate a regional socio-economic strategy, constitute a framework for Local Authority Development Plans and incorporate measures to implement the objectives of the National Spatial Strategy as they relate to the South-East. The RPG will guide the future development of the region for the next 20 years and are now in the implementation phase.

Planning authorities are required to ensure that the RPG are translated into all existing and new Development Plans, while the role of the Regional Authority is to monitor, coordinate and guide the implementation of the RPG and to maintain a regional-level overview of the process.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has prepared ‘Best Practice Guidance’ for the implementation of RPG. This document sets out advice and recommendations in relation to implementation and the structures, supports and resources that need to be put in place by local and regional authorities. These have been taken on board by the regional and local authorities in the design of the RPG implementation process that is now in train.

### **‘SERPANT’ Broadband Infrastructure Project**

The ‘SERPANT’ (South-East Regional Public Access Network of Telecommunications) project was coordinated and managed by the South-East Regional Authority on behalf of its 6 constituent City/County Councils. The project is a very important development for the South-East Region in that it involved the installation of a key, state-of-the-art telecommunications infrastructure in the principal urban centre in each county: Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow, Clonmel, Wexford and Dungarvan. The networks were officially launched on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2004 by Mr. Dermot Ahern, T.D., Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. The ‘SERPANT’ project represents a unique example of practical cooperation between counties, cities, towns and their local authorities in the South-East Region.

The networks offer a new competitive model for the delivery of broadband telecommunications in these towns/cities, they will encourage the location of new industry and give first mover advantage to the existing industries located in the South-East. This move towards public ownership and provision of broadband telecommunications infrastructure is a new departure for regional and local authorities in Ireland and it represents a strategy to fill the gap in service provision that the private sector has hitherto failed to achieve.

The contract for management, maintenance and operation of these Government and local authority Regional Metropolitan Broadband Networks (MAN) has been awarded to the Limerick based company, E-Net.

Under Phase II of the Regional Broadband Programme the South-East Regional Authority prepared and submitted a bid for funding for the roll out of broadband to a further 9 towns in the region with a population over 1,500 - Bagenalstown, Tullow, Thomastown, Tramore, Dunmore East, Cahir, Cashel, Carrick-on-Suir and Tipperary. Approval in principle to the proposals for these towns has been received from the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources (DCMNR) and the public procurement process for design and project management services for this project has commenced.

### **County and Group Broadband Scheme**

The national County & Group Broadband Scheme was introduced to promote the roll-out of broadband access through the establishment of sustainable broadband services in towns, villages, rural hinterlands and underserved areas of larger cities and towns on the basis of regional/local authority coordination and community driven initiatives. The Regional Authority appointed a Regional Broadband Coordinator who worked with local authorities, communities and service providers to promote the scheme and to generate applications for funding for the provision of broadband service to the maximum number of communities throughout the region. A total of 10 applications incorporating 93 communities across the South-East were submitted to the DCMNR under the Second Call and all of these have been approved.

The regional and local authorities will work to generate further applications to serve other communities under the Third Call when it is published.

### **‘SEISS’ South-East Information Society Action Plan**

Local authorities continue to support the Regional Authority initiative – ‘SEISS’ – the South-East Information Society Strategy and Action Plan which is now in its implementation phase. The Authority, with support from various sectoral working groups representative of local authorities and others, continues to work to place the region at the forefront of the Information Society.

### **‘Connected Communities’ Project**

The ‘Connected Communities’ project was funded by the Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly through its Regional Programme of Innovative Actions under Article 10 of the European Regional Development Fund. This project forms part of the Authority’s implementation of its South-East Information Society and Action Plan (SEISS).

The project involved the development of a dynamic and all inclusive pilot ICT development and demonstration site in a selected community in each county in the South-East Region which can be used to demonstrate best practices and provide templates and models that can be transferred to other community sites within each county in the region. The community groups selected were ; Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow, Cahir, Co. Tipperary, Dunhill, Co. Waterford, Freshford, Co. Kilkenny and Raheen, Co. Wexford. A co-ordinator for the project was appointed to each of the five areas and was responsible for the development of a community based website.

### **'Atlantic Gateways' Project**

The NSS aims to promote balanced regional development, a better spread of job opportunities, better quality of life for all and better places to live in. To achieve the objective of balanced regional development, a greater share of economic activity must take place outside the Greater Dublin Area.

The 'Atlantic Gateways' project is a feasibility study to identify, through consultation and research, the potential for greater linkages and cooperation between the existing Gateways of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford as a means of creating critical mass and a counterbalance to Dublin. The project involves a partnership between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the relevant Regional Authorities (and their constituent local authorities) and Shannon Development. The project is closely linked to the Regional Planning Guidelines process. When the feasibility study has completed it will provide an input into government policy and decision-making within the framework of the NSS.

### **South-East Employment Development Strategy - 'SEEDS' Project**

The 'SEEDS' project involved the preparation of an Employment Development Strategy for the South-East Region, based on a thorough examination of the employment situation in the region. The Regional Authority, in close cooperation and partnership with local authorities and other socio-economic actors in the South-East developed the strategy in consultation with a wide range of interested stakeholders in the region. The strategy was adopted by the South-East Regional Authority in July 2004.

The 'SEEDS' strategy was officially launched by Mr. Frank Fahey T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment at the 'SEEDS' international conference held in Cashel, Co. Tipperary on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2004. The conference was centred on the theme "Regions Driving the Employment Agenda".

Funding for the project was obtained from the European Commission under Article 6 of the European Social Fund. The strategy contains a number of innovative actions requiring implementation under the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy: Adaptability, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Equal Opportunities. A Project Implementation Committee representative of the action leaders has been established and it is responsible for the implementation of actions.

The Strategy will benefit policy-makers, agencies implementing employment measures and ultimately individuals who seek to find a sustainable, value-added form of employment. The project also provides a model of best practice for other EU regions in terms of developing such strategies.

### **'E-BYGOV' project**

'E-BYGOV' is an INTERREG IIIB project co-funded by the European Commission that involves five partner organisations from Ireland (South-East and South-West), the UK (Lancashire) and Spain (La Rioja and Basque Country). The overall aim of the project is to make government services more responsive, easier to use and more accessible for all citizens and business in the region. In partnership with the constituent local authorities and the Local Government Computer Services Board the Authority has developed an 'eReceipts Web Interface' initiative. Through this initiative the facilities to pay for certain services online has been provided to local authority customers. The services selected for the initiative initially are housing rents, housing loans, water charges, traffic fines and fire charges.

The South-East and South West Regional Authorities co-hosted a very successful International Conference in Middleton, Co. Cork on 14-15 June 2005 on the theme 'Delivering eGovernment Locally'. The conference **was** designed to provide a broad range of practical presentations to demonstrate what is currently happening at the local and regional level with eGovernment initiatives and to outline practical ICT solutions that are delivering significant benefits, for employees and

customers, within the public sector. It was attended by local and regional government organisations in Ireland and internationally.

### **‘SENSITIC’ Project**

The ‘SENSITIC’ project is a ‘SEISS’ initiative funded under INTERREG IIIB. The project carried out a series of enquiries and surveys designed to establish an inventory of Information and Communications Technology equipment and use in seven regions of the Atlantic Area and to benchmark the results between the regions representing the five countries.

By providing analysis of the impact of Information Technologies in the region, decision-makers will be enabled to more effectively adapt their strategies in terms of activities associated with the Information Society. The project will also facilitate the transfer of experience to other regions in the Atlantic Area so as to promote knowledge transfer and enhance competitiveness.

### **‘EnACT’ Project**

The ‘EnACT – Enterprise in Action’ project was a pilot implementation of the Business Development Model developed as part of the Regional Authority’s ‘FINESTRA’ EU project. The partners involved in the programme included the City/County Enterprise Boards in the region, Enterprise Ireland, Waterford Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology, Carlow and the South-East Regional Authority with management of the project being carried out by Waterford IT.

The ‘EnAct’ project concluded in December 2004. As part of the project, twenty diverse ‘rural’ SMEs were recruited and challenged to strategically grow their businesses. A team of business coaches and facilitators were recruited and encouraged to help the companies overcome difficulties and position them for further development. A project team was put in place to facilitate management of the various partnerships and business relationships.

### **EU Projects**

The South-East Regional Authority participates in a range of EU projects involving inter-regional, cross-border and transnational cooperation. Local authorities in conjunction with City/County Enterprise Boards, Leader and Area Partnership Groups, Institutes of Technology and other public agencies such as Enterprise Ireland actively support the Authority in these projects and participate as local partners.

The Authority has successfully sought funding, in partnership with various public agencies and the local authorities, in response to calls for proposals from the European Commission over the past year. These include projects submitted under Article 6 of the European Social Fund, Article 10 of the European Regional Development Fund and Interreg. The regional and local authorities continue to work together in maximising the sourcing of funding and developing new EU projects, networks and initiatives.

The Regional Authority was approved to participate in the following INTERREG IIIC transnational projects during 2004: Biologic@, SportUrban and Revos. Approval was also received for a project, ‘INTRO’ under FP 6 – the Sixth Framework Programme for Research & Development. Work on these projects is ongoing in 2005.

Community Initiatives offer local and regional authorities opportunities to directly access European Funding. The Authority regularly informs local authorities, regional and local organisations, and the public of the various and diverse sources of funding which can be tapped into through the Community Initiatives.

### **INTERREG III**

The South-East Region forms part of the eligible area on the Irish side for the Ireland-Wales Maritime INTERREG programme. There is ongoing contact between local authorities in the region and with the Regional Authority in relation to the operation and promotion of the programme in the South-East. The Authority has also been active in promoting synergies under the North West Europe and Atlantic Area strands of the INTERREG Community Initiative.

### **EU Committee of Regions**

The Regional Authority provides research and administrative support to the region's representative on the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR). Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald was appointed a member of the Regional Authority in December 2003 as a consequence of his appointment as a member of the EU Committee of Regions. Cllr. John Pender, a member of Carlow County Council, is an Alternate Member of the CoR.

### **Irish Regions Office in Brussels**

The Irish Regions Office (IRO) was established in 2000 as a Brussels based resource for sub-national government in Ireland. The operation of the office involves a partnership between the Association of Irish Regions (AIR), the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the County and City Managers Association (CCMA).

The IRO works with and on behalf of the sub-national authorities in Ireland. The office maintains direct contact with the Directors of the Regional Authorities and Regional Assemblies and is routinely engaged in coordinating the production and promotion of policy and position papers on behalf of the AIR and the Irish Delegation to the CoR. It also assists local and regional authorities in developing EU projects (including identifying and accessing EU funds and finding transnational partners) and responds to general requests for information on and from sub-national authorities in Ireland.

### **Socio-Economic Indicators/Regional Profile**

The Authority disseminates reports on the socio-economic performance of the South-East region to members and officials at various times throughout the year. These figures give a comparative analysis of the performance of the South-East in relation to the other NUTS III regions, in the context of the Southern and Eastern NUTS II region and in comparison with National and European figures. The Authority will continue to make these reports and profiles available to local authorities and interested parties throughout the South-East.

### **Regional Drugs Task Force (RDTF)**

Under the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008, 10 Regional Drugs Task Forces have been set up by the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government. Public Representatives from each local authority and the South-East Regional Authority have been nominated to the new Task Force. The RDTFs represents a team-based response to illicit drugs use involving the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

### **Policy Submissions by the Regional Authority**

The Regional Authority responds from time to time to requests for submissions on public policy proposals and, having consulted with local and public authorities and relevant interests, prepares position papers and submissions across a range of policy areas. Submissions prepared during the past year related to the following:

- **Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing (DoEHLG)**
- **Wind Farm Development Draft Guidelines (DoEHLG)**
- **Draft guidelines on the financing of infrastructure at regional airports and State aid for the start-up of new routes departing from regional airports (European Commission)**

### **Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003**

Cuireann Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003 dualgas reachtúil ar Ranna Stáit agus ar chomhlachtaí poiblí, chomh maith le údaráis réigiúnacha, seirbhísí a sholáthar ar bhealach comhtháite, agus socraithe a dhéanamh chun seirbhísí feabhsaithe trí Ghaeilge a chur ar fáil do chustaiméirí. Ciallaíonn seo roinnt mhór seirbhísí a sholáthar trí Ghaeilge agus/nó go dhá-theangach agus a chur in iúl do chustaiméirí go bhfuil sé de cheart acu rogha a dhéanamh maidir le cé acu ceann de na teangacha

oifigiúla go dteastaíonn uathu go ndéileálfar leo. Tá an t-Údarás Réigiúnach agus na h-údaráis áitiúla ag comhoibriú chun coinníollacha an Achta a chur i bhfeidhm.

(The Official Languages Act, 2003 places a statutory obligation on government departments and public bodies, including regional authorities, to make specific provision for the integrated delivery of services and for the provision of improved services through the Irish language for their customers. This will involve providing a high level of services through Irish and/or bilingually and informing customers of their right to choose the official language in which they wish to be dealt with. The Regional Authority and local authorities are cooperating to ensure compliance with the Act.)

### **Conclusion**

Local authorities in the South-East cooperate and coordinate their activities and actions across a wide range of issues and initiatives. These activities add value to the work of local and regional authorities in a practical and co-ordinated way, particularly in cases where there is an overriding regional dimension. This report outlines briefly some of the many areas of cooperation.

The City/County Councils will continue to have due regard to the regional dimension of their operations and provision of services, and will continue where appropriate and applicable, to assist, cooperate and engage with the Regional Authority in its work on behalf of the South-East Region.

As the Designated County Manager in this region, I am pleased to submit this summary report for your consideration and to provide a tangible link with local authorities as well as encouraging their ongoing cooperation and support for the work of the Regional Authority.

Dated this 28th day of October, 2005.

Signed: 

Michael Malone  
Designated County Manager