

**Report of the Designated County Manager
to the
South-East Regional Authority
for the period October 2005 – December 2006**



16th November, 2006

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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 October 2005-December 2006 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 1993, namely –

- Preparation of an Annual Report for 2005
- Preparation and adoption of an Estimate of Expenditure and Receipts for 2005 and 2006
- Preparation of a Statement of Accounts for 2005
- Preparation of a Programme of Work for 2005 and 2006.

The Authority held 12 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 & Cooperation between Local Authorities

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.

National Development Plan 2007 – 2013

At the invitation of the Department of Finance, the Regional Authority, having consulted with local authorities and a wide range of public and private sector interests in the South-East, prepared a detailed and prioritised submission on the investment needs and development priorities for the region for consideration by the Department in its preparation of the next NDP covering the period 2007 – 2013.

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 incorporate a regional socio-economic strategy and 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. 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.

An Implementation Steering Group was established in mid-2005 to monitor and oversee the process of implementing the RPG. It consists of an elected member of the Authority from each constituent local authority area, the six County/City managers in the region, a representative from IDA, Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, Department of Transport and Enterprise Ireland. The Steering Group is addressing the Critical Enabling Investment Priorities identified in the RPG.

‘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 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 ‘Atlantic Gateways’ report was published in September 2006. It outlines how the future development of four of Ireland’s cities – Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford (the “Atlantic Gateway” cities) can be promoted, developed and co-ordinated in an integrated way in order to create a major national growth area with the potential to match and complement the scale and performance of Dublin and emulate the growth achieved by other international high-performing city regions.

‘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.

‘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.

A modern telecommunications infrastructure, including the wide spread availability of broadband, will support existing industry and will promote business, economic and social development in the South-East. Beneficiaries of the new broadband networks include the Region’s largest companies, small and medium-sized enterprises, the Institutes of Technology campuses in the Region, local authority offices, hospitals and health service offices, industrial and business parks, and many other public and private enterprises.

The South-East Regional Authority is about to proceed with the construction of broadband networks in a further 9 towns in the region with a population over 1,500 under Phase 2 of the Regional Broadband Programme. These towns are: Bagenalstown, Tullow, Thomastown, Tramore, Dunmore East, Cahir, Cashel, Carrick-on-Suir and Tipperary.

A concern for the regional/local authorities is the comparatively slow uptake of capacity and services on the MANs that have been constructed to date, due in part to such factors as the relatively high cost of connections and the availability of competitively-priced backhaul. The authorities have raised these issues and the need for more active promotion and marketing of the infrastructure with the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources and with e-Net, the appointed Management Services Entity.

The Authority also promoted the County & Group Broadband Scheme to cater for the smaller towns, villages and rural areas during the year.

‘SEEDS’: South-East Employment Development Strategy

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.

Funding by 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.

Regional Entrepreneurial Forum

The Authority hosted a major international Conference in Kilkenny for key regional stakeholders on 'Developing a Spirit of Enterprise' in October 2006. This Conference was held as part of the Regional Authority's participation and work in the 'REFORM' Project, which is part-funded by the European Commission through its FP6 Regions of Knowledge Initiative. The Conference was attended by participants from all across the South-East and also from partner regions in the UK, Switzerland, Poland, Israel, Romania, The Netherlands. The conference is a continuation of the South-East Entrepreneurial Forum process initiated in February 2006 by the Regional Authority and Waterford IT with the support of Enterprise Ireland and the South-East Business and Innovation Centre.

The Entrepreneurial Forum is about supporting the development of the existing SME base in the Region, the creation of new companies and jobs and the promotion of an innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurial culture, i.e. espousing a 'Spirit of Enterprise'. The Regional Entrepreneurial Forum will act as a *knowledge transfer base* within the region between agencies and organisations for the sharing of intelligence and expertise. It represents yet another example of inter-authority and intra-regional co-operation and partnership in the South-East Region led by the South-East Regional Authority.

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, Teagasc, SEBIC, 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, FP6 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 that are of benefit to the region.

INTERREG IIIA

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.

Set out below are examples of some initiatives undertaken during the year by the Authority as part of its participation in various EU projects.

- **'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 facility to pay for certain services online has been provided to local authority customers. These services now include commercial water charges, housing loan repayments, housing rents, refuse collection charges,

landfill charges, fire charges, commercial rates and parking fines.

In addition, a new On-Line and Voice Recognition Payments Service for some 17 Local Authorities in the South-East Region developed under the project was launched in Wexford in July 2006 by Mr. Dick Roche, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government. The South-East is the first region in Ireland to develop such a facility covering a comprehensive range of public services. This new facility will provide all local authorities in the South-East with the ability to interact with, and provide the best possible levels of customer service to, their constituents.

- **'Biologic@' Project**

The South-East Regional Authority is a partner in an Interregional project funded under INTERREG IIIC entitled 'Biologic@' that seeks to promote organic and environmentally sustainable production of food. As part of its participation in this project, the Authority organised and hosted an Organic Food Tasting Buffet in Clonmel in November 2005.

The "Biologic@" project involves regions from Portugal, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Ireland working together and is funded by the European Union through its Interreg programme.

- **'Redetral' Project**

The South-East Regional Authority hosted a Seminar in Waterford on 'Logistics Parks and Regional Development' as part of its participation in 'REDETRAL', a project part-funded by the European Commission through the INTERREG IIIC Community Initiative. The purpose of the project is to examine the relationship between the development of Logistics Parks and sustainable traffic and transport solutions.

Participants in the Seminar included representatives from regions in Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Portugal as well as from Ireland. Practical examples of transport and logistics park developments in other European regions were presented during the Seminar.

The Regional Authority has recently commissioned a study to examine freight movements within the South-East Region. This Study will establish from where, to where and how goods are currently being transported in order to assist in planning the future development of a modern and efficient transport infrastructure providing first-class physical connectivity to facilitate development of transport logistics in the South-East and to enhance the attractiveness of the region as a location for investment.

- **Other Projects**

The Regional Authority is also participating in a number of other INTERREG IIIC transnational projects as well as a project, 'INTRO', under FP 6 – the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Development. Work on these projects in association with a range of local partners is ongoing in 2006.

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.

Renewable Energy/Bio-energy Initiatives

The Regional Authority and the local authorities in the South-East are aware of the growing importance of promoting energy efficiency and developing alternative/renewable energy sources in order to reduce the country's over-dependence on imported fossil fuel based energy and to assist in meeting Ireland's obligations under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the interests of combating climate change. In this context, the Regional Authority is involved in a number of initiatives in partnership with local authorities and other regional/local interests.

- **‘Regbie’ Project**

During the year, the Authority joined a consortium in a renewable energy project for which approval and co-funding was approved under the European Commission’s Intelligent Energy Call for Proposals. This is a transnational project which aims to support and strengthen local and regional actors in efforts to increase the market penetration of bio-energy heating systems and to support the implementation of the EU Biomass Action Plan.

- **Regional Bio-energy Implementation Plan**

During the year, the Authority received funding from Sustainable Energy Ireland to prepare a Regional Implementation Plan for Bio-Energy in the region. The plan will enable the region to have a more focused, direct approach to the management of renewable energy at a local level to ensure that national and EU policies are being adhered to. Relevant stakeholders in the region, such as local authorities, energy agencies, Teagasc, the EPA and other interests, will work with the Authority in carrying out and implementing the project.

- **Declaration on Energy Efficiency**

The Regional Authority signed a declaration during the year to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency and submitted it to the European Federation of Regional Energy and Environment Agencies.

EU Committee of Regions

The Regional Authority provides research and administrative support to the region’s two representatives on the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR), Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald and Cllr. Denis Landy. The representatives give regular briefings to the Authority on developments within 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 represent a team-based response to illicit drugs use involving the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

South-East Regional Airport

The Regional Authority has in the past been, and continues to be, supportive of the Regional Airport. The Regional Authority considers that the regional airport forms a key strategic element of the region's transport infrastructure and, as such, is vital for the future socio-economic development of the South-East. The Authority in the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPG) adopted in 2004 identified the development of the Regional Airport as a Critical Enabling Investment Priority. The Authority has established a broadly-based Consultative Committee to provide advice and support for the development, promotion and marketing of the South-East Regional Airport and its operations.

Waste Management

The Regional Authority prepared a Regional Waste Management Strategy in 1999 which forms a framework for waste management planning by the local authorities over the following 20 years. South Tipperary Co. Council is the Lead Authority that acts on behalf of the six authorities of the region to prepare and coordinate implementation of the Joint Waste Management Plan for the South-East.

University of the South-East

The Regional Authority, concerned at the relatively weak economic performance of the South-East, has consistently identified and articulated the region's overall development needs and investment priorities. The Authority strongly supports the undeniable need for the establishment of a university in the South-East Region. While the region currently has a number of excellent third-level education institutes, there is a widespread view that the lack of a university is reflected in the lower-than-average participation rate, the higher-than-average graduate migration rate from the region and the lower-than-average level of research and development activity in the region.

The Authority has taken the view that these trends can best be reversed by developing the innovative potential of the region with the establishment of a university in Waterford City with links to existing third-level education facilities in Carlow, Kilkenny, Clonmel and Wexford, supported by continued investment in established third-level institutes. The Authority has fully supported the application made by Waterford IT during the year to the Department of Education and Science for the upgrading of the Institute to University status.

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 were made to the following:

- Department of Agriculture and Food (CAP Rural Development Division) and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Rural Development Division) on the development of a Rural Development Strategy & Programme(s) 2007-2013.
- Forfás on Benchmarking Ireland's Broadband Performance.
- Commission for Energy Regulation on the proposal on Revised Gas Connections Policy.
- Department of Finance for input into the National Development Plan 2007-2013.
- Department of Transport on the future development of the Rural Transport Initiative (RTI).

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.)

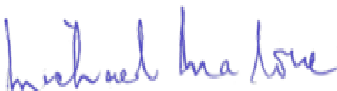
Conclusion

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 16th day of November, 2006.

Signed: 

Michael Malone
Designated County Manager