

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**RURAL LEADER BUSINESS GROWTH PROGRAMME – RESOURCING AND
CONTRACT EXTENSIONS TO 31 DECEMBER 2021****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report sets out the Nottinghamshire LEADER Rural Business Growth Programme performance and seeks Policy Committee approval to adjust the level of temporary resources to ensure enough cover for the remainder of the Programme.

Information

2. The Council Plan: Your Nottinghamshire, Your Future (2017 to 2021), sets out the authority's intention to create new jobs, boost tourism and unlock growth in Nottinghamshire. The Council and businesses both benefit from a strong working relationship which has seen services adapted to help and support small and medium sized enterprises. There is a significant amount of valuable business engagement taking place in Nottinghamshire. The Council is particularly successful in engaging with key employers, for example through Summit events and 1:1 meetings. There is also a good range of business networks and business representative organisations active around the County.
3. In recognition of the importance of the rural economy to the County as a whole, since 2015 Nottinghamshire County Council has been managing the North and South Nottinghamshire LEADER Programmes (hereafter referred to as a single programme – LEADER). This Programme is fully-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. As a rural fund, LEADER provides support to businesses and organisations to create jobs and economic growth and opportunity in eligible rural areas.
4. LEADER is managed nationally by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), with grants awarded by Local Action Groups (LAGs) to projects that support delivery of the approved Local Development Strategy. As the Accountable Body, Nottinghamshire County Council has been responsible for delivering LEADER on behalf of the LAGs, in partnership with local communities.
5. Following the last progress report to committee in December 2018, two key changes have occurred. Firstly, additional monies have been secured and allocated to Nottinghamshire businesses and organisations. Secondly, the Programme period has been extended by a year meaning the costs of the Council's Accountable Body role can be met in full until 31 December 2021.
6. LEADER works to leave a legacy within our rural areas. A total of 63 projects have been approved and contracted to the value of the £4.3 million to deliver:

- 137 new jobs – of which 42 are in tourism
 - £4,636,974 of private sector investment
 - 127,099 additional day visitors
 - 33,051 additional overnight stays
7. In December 2018, Policy Committee approved contract extensions for fixed term staff involved in LEADER marketing, contracting, claims and compliance functions. This resulted in a staged reduction in staffing resources from 5.5 to 2.5 Full-time equivalents (FTE), each of which is currently contracted to 31 March 2020.
8. The last LEADER grant contract was signed on 25 October 2019. This means the needs of LEADER are now focused on ensuring applicant claims are submitted, processed and defrayed by the deadline of 31 December 2020. A further period of monitoring of activity is also contractually required up to 31 December 2021.
9. Therefore, to guarantee contractual compliance, subject to Policy Committee approval, it is proposed that the existing LEADER posts (for which the costs will be fully met by the Programme) are extended as set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1				
LEADER role	Contract	Current End Date	Proposed End Date	Variation
Business Support Officer #1	1 FTE	31 March 2020	30 April 2020	+1 month
Programme Manager	0.5 FTE	31 March 2020	31 May 2020	+2 months
Business Support Officer #2	0.5 FTE	31 March 2020	30 June 2020	+3 months
Business Support Officer #3	0.5 FTE	31 March 2020	31 Dec 2021	+21 months

10. Up to 31 December 2026, the obligation remains to ensure any outstanding contractual requirements and reporting are met, along with stringent document retention requirements. As this prerequisite is expected to be minimal, it is proposed that these requirements are met from substantive members within the Growth and Economic Development Team.

Other Options Considered

11. In recognition that Nottinghamshire County Council has consistently demonstrated an ability to deliver quality projects to target, through a combination of favourable Sterling/Euro exchange rate adjustments and a reallocation of national resources from under-performing programmes, Nottinghamshire received a grand total of over £4.3 million. Whilst there are resource implications aligned to these extra resources, all costs are fully recoverable from LEADER, which resulted in discounting of the 'do nothing' option.

Reasons for Recommendation

12. Subject to Policy Committee approval, this proposal will ensure that all contractual obligations are met, with resources being fully recovered from LEADER.

Statutory and Policy Implications

13. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

14. Funding for the proposed temporary extensions will be contained within the existing grant provision. There is no additional cost to the Council. A staff overhead provision of 15% of defrayed staff costs is also recoverable.

15. Redundancy costs will apply to each of the posts which have been budgeted for in approved financial profiles submitted to DEFRA. Redundancy costs will be met by the LEADER Programme.

Human Resources Implications

16. Timely decisions need to be taken to adhere to Nottinghamshire County Council's "at risk" and re-deployment staffing policies and procedures. All members of staff have been appropriately consulted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Policy Committee:

- 1) Approves the post extensions set out in paragraph 9, to ensure compliance with the contractual processes involved in the LEADER Programme closure.

COUNCILLOR MRS KAY CUTTS MBE
Leader of the County Council

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Constitutional Comments [CEH 12/11/2019]

17. The recommendation falls within the remit of Policy Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments [SES 27/11/2019]

18. The financial implications are set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 of the report. The funding for the proposed temporary extensions and applicable redundancy costs will be contained within the existing grant provision. There is no additional cost to the Council.

HR Comments [JP 27/11/2019]

19. Contracts of employment will be extended in line with the provision set out in Table 1. Consultation with staff has taken place and staff will be supported by the relevant HR policies and procedures.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- *Rural LEADER Business Growth Programme- Management and Resources to 31 March 2020* – Report to Policy Committee, published 19 December 2018

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All