



meeting **Cabinet**

date **10<sup>th</sup> January 2007**

agenda item number

### **Report of the Leader of the Council**

### **Response to Consultation by the Department for Work and Pensions on the European Social Fund in England and Gibraltar 2007-13**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To endorse the proposals contained in paragraph 9 below and to note that the County Council's final response will be given by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader in accordance with their delegated powers.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. ESF is one of four Structural Funds designed to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union. During the current ESF Programme (2000-06), it has helped unemployed and inactive people into work, overcome disadvantage in the labour market, and promoted lifelong learning and skills development for employed workers.
3. Together with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), ESF has been a key tool in addressing economic underperformance in Nottinghamshire. In the past 15 years, the County Council has successfully secured over £60m ERDF and ESF funding to support its own projects. With regard to ESF, this has included support for Intermediate Labour Market schemes, increasing skills levels for those in work, and delivering schemes supporting disengaged young people and those with physical and learning disabilities into work.
4. As part of the development of the next ESF Programme (2007-13), the government published the final version of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) in October 2006. This establishes the high-level priorities and strategy for the allocation of all Structural Funds across the UK.
5. The NSRF also sets out indicative regional Structural Fund allocations. Out of a total proposed England allocation of €2.75 billion, the East Midlands ESF

allocation is €220 mi euros (£146 million), which equates to 70% of the current allocation. These regional allocations have been based on employment and skills/qualifications data.

6. The publication of the NSRF now leads the way for regional programmes to be developed to set the scope and priorities for spending the allocations. A consultation on the draft ESF Operational Programme for England and Gibraltar was launched by the DWP on 30 October 2006, and will close on 22 January 2007. The consultation seeks views on the activities that will be supported by the new programme and how it will be delivered.

### **Proposed Response**

7. The DWP has requested that consultation responses are focussed on nine key questions, which broadly seek views on the:
  - a. Analysis of the current English labour market;
  - b. Strategies proposed for using the England ESF Programme to support relevant EU, national and regional policies;
  - c. Suggested target indicative activities and indicators for the proposed priority areas of extending employment opportunities and developing a skilled and adaptable workforce;
  - d. Proposed implementation arrangements for the new programme, including views on the roles of Regional Skills Partnerships in formulating regional ESF strategies; and
  - e. How the themes of equal opportunities, sustainable development and innovation should be implemented.
8. It is proposed that the County Council's response to the consultation takes the form of a letter from the Chief Executive to the DWP, shaped around these nine consultation questions. It is anticipated that the response will be based on the proposed Operational Programme's fit with relevant key priorities of the County Council's Strategic Plan, the Notts Community Strategy and the Nottinghamshire Local Area Agreement.
9. In view of the timescales involved and the on-going intelligence and input being gathered to formulate the response, the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, will approve the Council's final response in accordance with their delegated powers.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

10. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report.

## **Recommendation**

11. It is recommended that Cabinet endorses the proposals set out in paragraph 9 above and notes that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, will approve the Council's final response to the DWP concerning the draft Operational Programme for England and Gibraltar 2007-13.

**Councillor David Kirkham,  
Leader of the Council**

## **Financial Comments of the Strategic Director (Resources)(RWK)**

There are no direct financial implications arising from the proposals in the report.

## **Legal Services' Comments**

This decision falls within the delegation to Cabinet [SSR 12.12.06]

## **Background Papers Available for Inspection**

The full ESF consultation document is available at [www.esf.gov.uk](http://www.esf.gov.uk).

## **Electoral Divisions Affected**

All divisions of the County Council are potentially affected.