

REPORT OF THE CHAIR, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

LEADER RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – NOTTINGHAMSHIRE PROPOSED SUBMISSIONS

Purpose of the Report

1. To authorise the Corporate Director, Policy, Planning and Corporate Services, in consultation with the Chair of the Economic Development Committee, to provide County Council endorsement for the submission of two Local Development Strategy (LDS) submissions to the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for LEADER Funding to support and develop new rural growth activity in eligible parts of Nottinghamshire (2014-20).
2. To seek authority for the County Council to undertake the Accountable Body role should both bids be successful, provided that no risks of performing this role are identified which cannot be satisfactorily managed or mitigated in the view of the Council's Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Section 151 Officer. Should such risks be identified and given the deadline for submissions, further authority would be sought to perform this role through the Council's agreed urgency procedures unless an acceptable alternative Accountable Body organisation can be identified.

Information and advice

3. In February 2014, the Government announced funding to help support new and existing Local Action Groups (LAGs) to develop bids for rural economic development activities under the forthcoming LEADER Programme 2014-2020 ['Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale' or 'links between the rural economy and development actions'].
4. LEADER is funded through the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. An estimated £138 million will be available in England over the programme period – although competition is expected to be very high and overall awards lower than under previous programmes (current Defra estimates £1.5 to £2m per area), as the government has sought to encourage wider access to LEADER funding.
5. The key aim of the Programme is to promote economic growth and job creation in rural areas. This is cross sector support but includes the following priorities:
 - The promotion of increased farming and forestry productivity

- Support for micro and small businesses and farm diversification
 - Support for rural tourism
 - Provision of rural services, including broadband and
 - Support for cultural and heritage activity
6. In March 2014, Economic Development Committee approved the delegated authority for the County Council to apply for Defra preparatory funds. After collaboration with the District Councils, four bids were submitted covering key “rural” wards in Gedling, Ashfield, Mansfield and Rushcliffe. The existing North Nottinghamshire LAG was awarded separate funding through Bassetlaw District Council.
 7. Preparatory funding for all 4 “new areas” was approved by Defra to a total value of £20,000. This funding is being used to support consultancy to develop cohesive geographic areas, create a shadow LAG and local engagement and identify priority needs and solutions within a framework issued by Defra. The intention is that this will culminate in the drafting of a Local Development Strategy (LDS) The LDS, when completed, forms the application for LEADER funds 2014-20 – although activity and spend will not commence until 2015. Rose Regeneration, following a procurement exercise, has been appointed to fulfil the consultancy role.
 8. Eligible rural populations that can be included in a LEADER area are narrowly defined. Following work with partners and Defra, 2 Nottinghamshire LAG areas have met the necessary requirements to progress to the full LDS bidding stage. These are i) the South Nottinghamshire LAG area (working title) including eligible areas of Rushcliffe and Gedling and ii) the North Nottinghamshire LAG area – covering Newark and Sherwood and Bassetlaw (as under the previous programme) plus eligible populations in Mansfield
 9. Eligible populations in Ashfield were significantly beneath the numbers required to proceed independently, however the consultant has been tasked with assessing the value and relevance of adding some rural areas in Ashfield to the South Nottinghamshire LAG. This data will then be considered by partners for possible inclusion in the South Nottinghamshire LDS subject to further discussions with Defra.
 10. Between now and the submission date of 5th September, two separate Local Development Strategies will be developed for South and North Nottinghamshire. If the final documents comply with the LEADER eligibility criteria in terms of proposed project activity and area, viability in terms of delivery and value for money, it will be signed off by both the LAG and the chosen Accountable Body as that area’s submission for LEADER funding 2014-20.
 11. Following receipt of the LDS, Defra will then appraise and score the submissions both locally and nationally. It is intended that in November 2014, funding decisions will be announced to allow contracts to be completed with each Accountable Body in December in order to facilitate the commencement of spend and activity in January 2015.

12. Discussions are under way in respect of who the Accountable Body organisation(s) should be. With the intention to develop two LDS submissions for Nottinghamshire, and with Defra wishing to drive efficiencies in terms of administration costs, it would seem logical for a single body to provide shared back office functions to support both Programmes should they be successful. Partners have requested County Council consideration of this potential Accountable Body role. This would be supported by a Management and Administration grant from the programme of up to 17% of total programme award.
13. Discussions and option appraisals are currently underway and authority to proceed in any Accountable Body role is sought now (given the 5th September deadline for submissions), provided that after careful analysis of the risks and opportunities, there are no risks to the County Council which cannot be satisfactorily managed or mitigated in the view of the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Section 151 Officer.
14. Should only one LDS be chosen to progress or be successful, it would not be appropriate for the County Council to fulfil the Accountable Body role – discussions with partners will identify a suitable organisation to fulfil the role in such circumstances.

Reason(s) for Recommendations

15. Defra has invited LDS applications under the LEADER programme 2014-2020. Two Nottinghamshire applications are in development and require County Council endorsement as a key partner and formal approval should it be determined that the County Council also act as the Accountable Body for both bids.

Statutory and Policy Implications

16. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described in the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. It is recommended that the Policy Committee:
 - a) authorises the Corporate Director, Policy, Planning and Corporate Services in consultation with the Chair of Economic Development Committee, to consider and endorse LDS application(s) to Defra by the deadline of 5th September 2014;
 - b) authorises the County Council acting as Accountable Body for the LDS applications provided that there are no risks to the County Council which

- cannot be satisfactorily managed or mitigated in the view of the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Section 151 Officer;
- c) Should such risks be identified and no acceptable alternative Accountable Body can be found, further authority would be sought to perform this role through the Council's agreed urgency procedures.

Councillor Diana Meale

Chairman, Economic Development Committee

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Constitutional Comments [LM 19.06.2014]

The Policy Committee has delegated authority within the Constitution to approve the recommendations in the report'.

Financial Comments [SEM 24.06.2014]

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

<http://rdpenetwork.defra.gov.uk/funding-sources/leader-resources>

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

Eligible rural areas in Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood and Rushcliffe.