

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
DATE: WEDNESDAY, 10 APRIL 2013
REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT
SUBJECT: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND EUROPEAN
STRUCTURAL FUNDS

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.01 To update Members on the progress made in implementing the Rural Development Plan for Wales (RDP) 2007-2013 in Flintshire and on the current position with European Structural Fund programmes and the future development of European programmes.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01 The RDP is part of the Common Agricultural Policy and is supported by both European Commission and Welsh Government funding. It has four major objectives, called Axes, aligned to the Commission's priorities for rural development. The purpose of each Axis is as follows:
Axis 1 – to improve the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors.
Axis 2 – to improve the environment and the countryside.
Axis 3 – to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to diversify the rural economy.
Axis 4 – to pilot innovative projects that address Axes 1, 2 and 3.
- 2.02 The County Council acts as the Lead Body and has responsibility for overseeing the implementation and reporting of Axis 3 projects. Cadwyn Clwyd is responsible for the delivery and reporting of all Axis 4 projects.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Rural Development Plan

- 3.01 All four Axis 3 projects commenced at the beginning of March 2011. Two of the projects (Flintshire Enterprise Project and Flintshire Community Key Fund) are delivered by Cadwyn Clwyd. The County Council has the responsibility for delivering the other two projects (Linking Flintshire's Communities and Town & Village Streetscape Enhancements)

- 3.02 The Flintshire Enterprise Project has approved 35 bursaries to date with a total value of £86,811, which will lead to the creation of 35 new rural enterprises and a minimum of 35 new jobs.
- 3.03 The Linking Flintshire's Communities project is intended to provide improved connections between our towns and villages. These new footpath/cycle routes will encourage more sustainable journeys to work, as well as providing new attractions for visitors. Work is progressing on the three coastal communities routes: the Gronant Pegasus scheme, the Talacre cycle path and footpaths 64 and 69 in Mostyn. Further details of this project will be provided in the presentation at the meeting.
- 3.04 To date the Flintshire Community Key Fund has approved 25 rural village and community building enhancement schemes. Schemes that have been completed this quarter include the extension of Nannerch Memorial Hall, improvements to Halkyn Parish Hall, energy efficiency measures for Cilcain Village Hall and the provision of community space at Brynford Church. The Key Fund has been extremely popular and its budget is nearly fully committed.
- 3.05 As part of the Town and Village Streetscape Enhancement (TVSE) project, comprehensive discussions and site investigations are underway to develop a temporary overspill car park in Talacre. This is proving to be a lengthy process because of the need to consider all the environmental designations and to balance them with the views of local residents and businesses. An artist has been appointed to work with the Gronant and Talacre communities to develop sense of arrival/sense of place features. Design consultants have also been progressing the feasibility, consultation and detailed design for the redevelopment of Daniel Owen Square in Mold.
- 3.06 The Axis 3 quarterly progress updates (Appendix 1) and the financial spreadsheets (Appendix 2) relate to the period **1st December 2012 to 28th February 2013** for the Business Plan 2 projects. The appendices provide more detail on the activity and the financial situation of each project. The Cadwyn Clwyd presentation at the meeting will expand on their Axis 3 and Axis 3 activities in Flintshire.
- 3.07 At the end of February the Welsh Government approved enhancements and extensions to the projects. The projects will now proceed as follows:
- Flintshire Enterprise project – extended to the end of 2014 and an awarded an additional £48,000 of RDP funding.
 - Linking Flintshire's Communities – extended to the end of 2014.
 - Flintshire Community Key Fund – extended to the middle of 2014.
 - TVSE – extended to the end of 2014.
 - Lead Body costs – extended to February 2015.

This 12 month extension should provide the necessary time to ensure the projects are successfully concluded to budget and schedule.

3.08 The Welsh Government recently launched its consultation on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform for the new 2014-2020 RDP programme. Key areas for consideration include:

- The geographical area to be supported by CAP
- The removal of the current Axes and Measures structure to be replaced by 6 priority areas.
- Rural development to be covered by a single priority area 'promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas'
- The re-focus of LEADER activities to support entrepreneurship and innovation.
- The delivery framework and the structures required to implement the new programme.
- Better integration with, and alignment to, the European Structural Funds
- Simplifying and streamlining the implementation processes and procedures.

Flintshire County Council (following consideration of a report to Cabinet on 23rd April), the Flintshire Rural Partnership and Cadwyn Clwyd will all be submitting responses to the Welsh Government by mid April.

European Structural Funds

3.09 The European Structural Fund programmes for 2014-2020 are also under development: at the EU, UK and Wales levels. The overall EU budget has not yet been finalised, but it is expected that less funding will be available than previously.

Welsh Government is currently consulting on its proposed approach to the new programmes and the County Council will be responding to this consultation at the end of April.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 That Members note the progress in implementing the Rural Development Plan in Flintshire and the briefing material on European Structural Funds.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 The only change to the financial implications since the previous report is the increase in the Axis 3 match funding underwrite. As a result of the Welsh Government's approval of enhanced funding this has increased from £524,000 to £536,000. The Axis 4 project which currently has a match value of £473,000 is likely to increase slightly

once the Welsh Government has approved the enhancement application. The County Council also provides funding to support Cadwyn Clwyd's core costs (£17,000 p.a.) up to 2013 and to match fund rural projects (£18,000 p.a.).

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 The measures included within the RDP have been identified to assist rural areas, address deprivation and weaknesses such as low productivity, employment, local economic activity rates, the existence of pockets of social exclusion and poor access to services. The programme and the Business Plan projects will therefore make an important contributing towards sustaining communities in rural Flintshire.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 Support will be given to those projects that help to conserve and make the best use of the area's natural and built environment. Environmental sustainability is one of the cross-cutting themes for the programme and all projects will need to integrate this into their design and delivery and their impact will be monitored.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 Axes 3 and 4 have measures which aim to increase participation in community life, assist in establishing and expanding community-led initiatives and maximise the contribution to the economic, social, environmental and cultural regeneration of rural areas. Equal opportunities and social inclusion are cross-cutting themes for the RDP and all projects and contracts will need to integrate these into their design and delivery and their impact is monitored.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 The administration and management role of the Lead Body requires considerable staff time to ensure robust programme and project management. Funding is available from the RDP to provide staff resources to manage the programme.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Rural ward members, rural town and community councils, public sector agencies and voluntary and community groups will play a key role in implementing the programme and have an opportunity to be involved in many of the projects to be undertaken.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation has been very wide in developing the themes and projects for the programme. Individual project delivery organisations have been undertaking their own consultation to develop their specific projects. The County Council has utilised a wide range of publicity methods including a launch event, a project publication, articles in local newsletters, development of a website and attending various events to promote the programme.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1 – Axis 3 Quarterly Progress Report
Appendix 2 – Axis 3 Financial Report

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013 (WG)
Rural Development Strategy for Flintshire
Flintshire Business Plan 1 2008-2010
Flintshire Business Plan 2 2011-2013

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