

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **WEDNESDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2013**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT**

SUBJECT: **RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To update Members on the progress made in implementing the Rural Development Plan for Wales (RDP) in Flintshire and on the current position with the 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.

2.03 The Axis 3 and Axis 4 projects have been granted approval by the Welsh Government to extend the delivery timescale and will now need to be concluded by December 2014.

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 58 bursaries to date with a total value of £161,711. During the last 6 months there has been a very high level of enquiries. The project has exceeded its original target of 45 bursaries awarded and is expected to reach its revised target of 60 within the next quarter. New business ventures that have been supported recently include: childcare for autistic children, bespoke party cakes, theatrical and media make-up artist and vintage clothing.
- 3.03 The Linking Flintshire's Communities project is progressing with the three coastal schemes in the north of the county. The Gronant Pegasus crossing/highway safety scheme is near completion. There have however been some disputes with the contractor during the works which should be resolved shortly. The Footpath 64 scheme in Mostyn has commenced and the improvements will be completed by the end of this year. Options for the Talacre-Ffynnongroyw scheme have been drawn up for consideration with the preferred option likely to be implemented next Spring.
- 3.04 To date the Flintshire Community Key Fund has approved 27 rural village and community building enhancement schemes. The total value of these renewal schemes is £472,226 with a RDP contribution of £349,674. The majority of the schemes have either finished or are near completion. Schemes that have been completed over the past 6 months include the renovation of the roof at Pantymwyn Village Hall, kitchen improvements and energy efficiency measures at Cymau Community Centre, improvements to the community room at Pontblyddyn Cricket Club and the creation of a multi-user community space at St Michaels Church in Brynford.
- 3.05 A package of parking options for overspill car parking solutions in Talacre was approved by Cabinet in September. Comprehensive negotiations have been conducted with landowners and stakeholders and legal terms and conditions are currently being drafted. Planning consent has been obtained for a couple of the pieces of artwork and the fabrication of the structures has commenced. A consultation exercise was undertaken at the end of August for the Holywell streetscape works. The feedback will help inform the decisions on which proposals are implemented. The Daniel Owen Square designs are almost complete and a planning application for the works is due to be submitted by the date of this meeting. Work has completed on two building schemes (as part of the Streetscape Improvement Grant) in Holywell, with renewal developments taking place on two properties in Mold.
- 3.06 The Axis 3 quarterly progress updates (Appendix 1) and the financial

spreadsheets (Appendix 2) relate to the period **1st June 2013 to 31st August 2013** for the Business Plan 2 projects. The appendices provide more detail in the activity and the financial situation of each project.

- 3.07 The 2014-2020 RDP programme is still under development at the EU, UK and Wales levels. At present the allocation of RDP (Pillar 2) funds for Wales is not known. The anticipated timetable of activity over the coming months is as follows:
- Local Action Groups invited to submit Expressions of Interest to deliver the new programme – October 2013.
 - Main Rural Development Plan Regulation to be presented to European Parliament – November 2013.
 - Results of the RDP Vision and Outcomes work presented to Common Agricultural Policy Programme Board – December 2013.
 - Proposals put to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food – January 2014.
 - Formal written consultation exercise on the RDP – March 2014
 - Formal submission of the RDP to the European Commission – June 2014
 - Approval by European Commission – December 2014
 - Implementation of the RDP 2014-2020 – not before January 2015

European Structural Funds

- 3.08 The Regulations for the new programmes have not yet been agreed at the Commission level but development work is underway in parallel to maintain progress towards a start date in the first half of 2014. The programme level budgets are not yet finalised but early indications are that the programme in East Wales will be significantly larger than anticipated, with an estimated value of £330m compared to £110m for 2007-2013.

The draft Operational Programmes are due to be made public by Welsh Government in late October 2013 which will include the detailed priorities for the programmes and the funding allocations. In addition, the Welsh European Funding Office will release the draft Economic Prioritisation Framework for Wales, a document which will steer Structural Fund investment in the future. This will include regional priorities and WEFO have been in liaison with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board in identifying these.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

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

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 There are no changes to the financial implications since the previous report (10th April 2013). The County Council's commitment to provide funding to Cadwyn Clwyd's core costs (£17,000 p.a.) and to match fund rural projects (£18,000 p.a.) is up to the end of 2013.

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, low 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 contribution 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 is 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 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 2a – Axis 3 Financial Report
Appendix 2b – Axis 3 Financial Narrative

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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