

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL	
COMMITTEE :	Partnerships & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	2 February 2016
SUBJECT:	Regional Engagement Team (RETs) – Future Arrangements
PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S):	Cllr. Ieuan Williams – Economic & Community Development Portfolio
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1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the new regional approach (through the Economic Ambition Board) to provide EU support and assistance, whilst enabling Members to review/ comment from an Anglesey perspective.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The North Wales Economic Ambition Board has been established to better co-ordinate economic development priorities on a regional basis in response to the pressures on public finances. Economic regeneration was identified as a key area requiring a strategic and pro-active approach to re-shape local services so as to achieve greater economies of scale. The delivery of EU advice and guidance has been identified as an area of common regional need that could demonstrate added value through a collaborative approach.
- 2.2 During the 2007-2014 funding programmes, European technical support, advice and guidance was delivered through the Specialist European Team (SET) technical assistance project across Wales. The SETs operated on a National and local level with SET Teams operating within Welsh Government Departments, Third Sector Teams located within the WCVA (3-SET), and within all 22 Local Authorities across Wales.
- 2.3 The Anglesey SET Team was based within the Economic & Community Regeneration Service, but operated on a Corporate basis giving advice and guidance to all IACC led projects as well as serving external organisations on the Island involved in the development and delivery of EU Structural Funded projects. Conwy County Borough Council acted as Lead Body for the *North & Mid Wales SET Project* which consisted of eight Local Authority Partners.

- 2.4 The SET function came to an the end of June 2015, and the European function has ceased altogether within the IACC. EU knowledge and skills have been retained as the staff have remained within the Council's employment, however these skills could be lost if staff were to move on.

3.0 2014-2020 EU Support Arrangements

- 3.1 As part of the preparations for the 2014-2020 EU Programmes, Dr Graham Guilford was commissioned to review the structures and mechanisms utilised during the previous round, making firm recommendations on the way forward. Given the more strategic nature of new European programmes, a firm recommendation was made for the need to improve co-ordination of project development activity on a regional basis so as to achieve better integration and added value on the ground.
- 3.2 The value of regional structures was emphasised in terms of their local knowledge and ability to co-ordinate activity to avoid duplication. The Review recommended that the Wales European Funding office (WEFO) should encourage and support the creation of credible regional planning mechanisms to provide input into the 'Economic Prioritisation Framework', identify demand drivers and provide support for post approval delivery mechanisms.
- 3.3 The Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) decided that this would be best achieved through the establishment of four Regional Engagement Teams (RETs) – North, South West, South East and Mid Wales – and invited lead Authorities from the 4 regions to submit project business plans. Central to this work of the RETs would be the required to work with existing regional partnerships to ensure proposals coming forward are integrated, target agreed strategic priorities and will contribute to the overall vision for economic development of the region.
- 3.4 With regard to the provision of EU technical assistance, WEFO concluded that potential stakeholders were now sufficiently experienced in developing and delivering projects that this level of support would no longer be required. As a consequence, the new Regional Engagement Team will not provide the level of support that was given to projects through the previous SET function in terms of technical advice concerning EU regulations, audit preparation and project closure support.

4.0 Regional Engagement Teams – Roles and Responsibilities

- 4.1 The Regional Engagement Team will be in a position to ensure that proposed operations have the potential for integrated working across all funding streams, and where they may duplicate provision already in place or under development. The Team will have the ability to work strategically and seamlessly with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and its workstreams as well as other organisations across the region to facilitate understanding of proposals for European funds, and in particular how they contribute to the vision for concentrated, integrated investments targeting strategic priorities in the region.

4.2 The Regional Engagement Team will deliver the following activities:

- Promote contacts between the potential partners in proposed operations to develop effective, genuine co-operation, such that proposals secure the support of regional partnerships;
- Ensure that potential beneficiaries identify partners and the potential for support from Territorial Co-operation funds and EU sectoral funds e.g. Horizon 2020, to help demonstrate why ESI funds are needed to close funding gaps;
- Identify where proposed operations have the potential for integrated working across ESI and other funds, and where they may duplicate provision already in place or under development;
- Identify gaps and opportunities for developing new operations and co-ordinate and facilitate the necessary activities to address the issues;
- Facilitate regional prioritisation of projects and broker meetings;
- Assist with regional proofing of National programme sand projects to ensure added value on a regional level.

4.3 Having already led on the North & Mid Wales SET Project during the previous programme, Conwy CBC has been selected by the NWEAB to host Regional Engagement Team during the 2014-2020 programme. The North Wales RET will cover the 6 North Wales Local Authorities, and will consist of a Team of 4 officers working across the region. The programme will be funded through EU Technical Assistance MONIES, along with match funding contributions from the six Local Authorities (circa £10,500 per Authority on an annual basis).

4.4 The Business Plan is currently being assessed by WEFO and approval expected during February 2016. It is hoped that the project team will be recruited and in place by 1 April 2015.

5.0 Recommendation

5.1 To note the content of the report and receive comments on the arrangements for EU advice and guidance from an Anglesey perspective.