

ARGYLL & BUTE COUNCIL

COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP

ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES 7 November 2005

REPORT ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT REGULATION POST 2006

1. SUMMARY

- .1 The Rural Development Regulation (RDR) sets the policy context within which the European Commission will allocate the European Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in the period 2007 to 2013. This is known as the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, and it complements direct funding to the agricultural sector for market support under Pillar 1.
- .2 The Regulation's objectives are set out in four Axes, each of which has a minimum percentage allocation required by the Commission;
 - Improving the Competitiveness of the Agricultural and Forestry Sector (10%)
 - Improving the Environment and Countryside (25%)
 - Improving the Quality of Life in Rural Areas and encouraging diversification (10%)
 - LEADER (5%)
- .3 SEERAD is currently consulting on the required Scottish Rural Development Programme which will set out the Scottish framework for the RDR and mechanism for the implementing the EAFRD. There are objectives within this proposed plan for implementation of the RDR at Scottish, sub regional and local Levels. The Plan preparation phase is ongoing, with proposals currently being sought. Stakeholder meetings, including one in Oban, have been held, and the Plan will be circulated for consultation early in 2006.
- .4 The Regulation presents an opportunity for partnerships in rural areas such as Argyll and Bute to enable communities to benefit directly from rural development funding by taking an integrated local approach to RDR delivery. In fact, Argyll and Bute is in a unique position to do so, given the current partnerships and strategies which are in place. The European Commission's Strategic Guidelines for the EAFRD place particular emphasis on building local partnership capacity and improved local governance at community level. The Scottish Executive has made it clear that it wishes to see more integration between the implementation of the RDR and

Community Planning Partnerships. Both of these issues, therefore, indicate that the implementation of the RDR is particularly relevant to the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership.

The preferred mechanism for doing this, as proposed by the Commission, is to use what is known as the LEADER approach. LEADER programmes in Scotland currently deliver bottom up rural development with funding from European Commission. This delivery mechanism brings together agencies and community representatives to develop a strategy, bid for funding and then allocate that funding to local projects.

The RDR makes provision for this approach to be widened across ALL axes of the RDR, enabling the existing partnerships to come together and deliver a truly integrated rural development programme in Argyll and Bute. This would be developed in the context of a Local Development Strategy which builds on local strengths and combines all RDR objectives.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That CPP respond to the SEERAD RDR consultation proposing local, integrated RDR delivery in Argyll and Bute to achieve some of the key CPP objectives.
- 2.2 That CPP support local delivery of appropriate elements of the RDR using a LEADER approach.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The RDR sets the context for EAFRD funding for all rural areas in Europe for 2007-2013. The scope of the Axes is wide and covers many activities in the rural economy and environment. It illustrates the Commission's commitment to CAP reform, and a broader approach to rural development, moving away from direct subsidy and recognising the complex nature of rural areas in Europe.
- 3.2 The emphasis of the RDR is on
 - Competitiveness
 - Environment
 - Quality of Life (creating employment)
 - LEADER (bottom up Rural Development)

Current delivery of European to support for rural development, apart from LEADER, is undertaken by agencies in Scotland on a Scottish-wide and also a sub regional basis (e.g. Highlands and Islands). There is very little local input into the prioritisation of this funding, or integration with local partners' development plans or priorities.

- 3.4 In contrast, LEADER programmes are delivered by Local Action Groups that comprise members of local communities and local agency representatives. These groups undertake decision-making on small to medium sized grants to communities at a very local level.
- 3.5 The RDR offers an opportunity, set out by the Commission, to deliver an integrated programme of rural support via the locally determined partnerships using the LEADER process. This will enable partners and communities to implement priorities which have already been identified and also to support communities to identify their needs and to find mechanisms for addressing those needs.
- 3.6 In Argyll and Bute, the local LEADER+ Programme is delivered by Argyll and Bute Council over an area including Lochaber and the small isles, and Arran and Cumbraes. This necessitates a strong and broad partnership to deliver a programme, which covers a wide geographic area. The principle themes of the programme are:
- Making best use of natural and cultural heritage
 - Improving quality of life

The programme has delivered over £1.5m European funding to projects totaling over £4m since 2001.

The LEADER + partnership is currently working closely with the Argyll and Islands Agricultural Forum to develop a proposal for a local integrated RDR programme for the area. The recent completion of the Agricultural Forum Strategy is an extremely strong justification for a local RDR programme, as, uniquely, the priorities and action plan for the industry have already been identified. The combination of the locally delivered and determined but rural development focused LEADER partnership, with the agricultural industry focused Forum presents an ideal joint partnership for post 2006 RDR delivery. Bringing this joint partnership together with the CPP to deliver brings an additional strength to that partnership, presenting CPP with an opportunity to achieve rural development and environment outputs to complement the regeneration partnership focus of theme 3.

The RDR offers a wide scope for activity and implementation across a number of strategic plans, including the Argyll and Bute Local Plan, the Council's Corporate Plan, Local Economic Forum business support priorities, Initiative at the Edge capacity building priorities, biodiversity action plan priorities as well as the wider agricultural forum and community development priorities.

Implementation of a future Programme could be delivered via a number of models, which can be developed by the partnerships over the forthcoming

period, but with local prioritisation and decision-making being at the core. It will be vital to utilise the exiting partnerships, organisations and skills, such as the Rural Business Ring, LEADER and the Agricultural Forum to enable this to happen.

- 3.7 The budgetary context for the RDR has not yet been agreed, as the EU budget agreement remains unresolved. The current position therefore is one of principle.

Other Scottish LEADER and rural development partnerships are supporting local delivery of the RDR. These include:

- South of Scotland Partnership
- South Lanarkshire LEADER +
- Rural Dialogue Group
- Local Government Rural Network
- Cairngorms LEADER+ Partnership
- Initiative at the Edge
- Dumfries and Galloway Council

4. CONCLUSION

The RDR offers CPP an opportunity to work in partnership at the local level to support a locally delivered EAFRD through the RDR and achieve some of its key priority actions by using a LEADER approach. This integration between CPP and RDR/EAFRD delivery is sought by the Scottish Executive in principle, and in Argyll and Bute there is an opportunity to develop it and make it best practice.

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