



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	NI EU Programmes: Draft Consultations Responses
Date:	11 October 2013
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In the course of the last two months, consultations have been issued on the draft EU structural funds programmes for the new programming period (2014-2020). These are the Investment Growth and Jobs Programme (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF)); and the Rural Development Programme. The deadline for responses to these consultations is 21 October 2013.
1.2	The consultations for the Peace and Interreg programmes have not yet been issued. It is understood that these consultations are likely to be issued in the coming month.
1.3	Members will be aware that Belfast City Council, through the EU Unit, has been lobbying to maximise the drawdown of the future NI EU mainstream funds for the period 2014-2020. These programmes offer huge potential to the council as a means of resourcing corporate priorities identified in successive strategies and plans including the Investment Programme, the Masterplan and the forthcoming Integrated Economic Strategy and Skills and Employability plans.
1.4	Chief Officers have asked for work to be undertaken to identify a pipeline of projects to form a draft integrated plan for submission to government departments, in order to try and secure ring-fenced EU funds at the outset of the new programming round. A meeting took place with a range of partner organisations on 23 September 2013 to discuss draft project ideas and

	additional work is now being carried out to substantiate these proposals. Copies of the proposed activities will be presented to Members for endorsement before any formal submission to DFP and other departments.
1.5	Lessons learned from the current programme include the need to invest in management resources to develop and deliver successful projects as well as the need for early engagement with partner organisations in order to ensure that activities complement wider offer and do not duplicate existing provision. There is also significant focus on demonstrating the need and demand for proposed activities and on ensuring value for money.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Proposed responses to each of the following programmes are outlined in appendices I, II, III; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. European Regional Development Programme (ERDF) II. European Social Fund (ESF) III. Rural Development Programme (RDP)
2.2	There are a number of common themes across all the responses. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the opportunity within the programmes for integrated, area-based activities aligned to EU, national, regional and local strategies to promote and support economic regeneration. The leadership role of councils in developing these plans is highlighted • Support for integration across separate funding streams in recognition of the multi-faceted nature of the economic challenges in the region • Support for greater simplification and alignment of administration systems across the programmes • The need to put in place mechanisms to encourage and support access to the range of interventions by SMEs, given the complex and confusing range of provision that is potentially available • A proposed “commissioning” approach for the European Social Fund which will address the issue of duplication and lack of targeting that has been identified within the existing programme • A perceived gap in references to exporting and entrepreneurship in the European Regional Development Fund consultation – both of which the council will play a much greater role in as a result of the transfer of functions.
2.3	Members will be aware of the ongoing engagement with DFP and the other managing authorities for the programmes (DETI, DEL and – to a lesser extent – DARD) with regard to the proposed ring-fencing of support for integrated, area-based plans to be coordinated by local authorities, as part of this funding round. To this end, DFP have asked for details of these draft “pipeline” projects to be submitted to them for consideration in October 2013. It is expected that they will

	provide feedback on these and that this will form the basis of the scale and scope of any delegation of funding directly to councils for economic regeneration activity under the new programme.
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3	Resource Implications
3.1	No specific staff resources at this time. It should be noted that, if projects are successful, staff costs can be built into the overall programme budgets.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no specific equality or good relations implications.

5	Recommendations
5.1	It is recommended that Members consider and approve Belfast City Council draft responses on the ESF, ERDF and RDP programmes, for submission to the respective managing authorities for the programmes by 21 October 2013.