



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme: nomination of elected members to Local Action Group and Strategic Joint Committee
Date:	9 April 2008
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Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that at the Development Committee of 14 November 2007, approval was given for Belfast City Council to cluster with Lisburn City Council and Castlereagh Borough Council for the delivery of Axis 3 of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP).

The next stage in the process is to establish a range of bodies which will allow a strategy to be developed and the funding to be allocated to projects on the ground.

Key Issues

Following the formation of the Council cluster, a Local Action Group (LAG) and Strategic Joint Committee (SJC) now need to be established to animate the local area and to develop a Rural Development Strategy before funding can be drawn down.

SJCs are a legislative body set up to strategically overview, monitor and administer NIRDP funding. They comprise solely of elected members. The SJC is responsible for submitting the Rural Development Strategy, managing the funds drawn down from Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD) and approving all funding applications recommended by the LAG.

LAGs are a partnership body comprising 50% from the social partners and 50% from elected members. They must also be reflective of section 75 groups. In conjunction with the SJC, the LAG is responsible for the development of the Rural Development Strategy and its subsequent delivery. The LAG will also promote the availability of funding to potential beneficiaries, issue guidance on the application process, assess funding applications and make recommendations to the SJC (see **Appendix 1** for more details on the roles of the SJCs and LAGs).

Elected member representation onto the SJC and LAG will be on a pro rata basis across each of the three Council boroughs based upon the population of the rural community.

Resident population eligible for assistance through the NIRD is as follows:

- Lisburn: 36,000 residents (88% of total)
- Castlereagh: 4,300 residents (11% of total)
- Belfast: 490 residents (1% of total).

In consideration of the distribution of the rural population, the proposed structure of elected member representation for both the SJC and LAG is:

- Lisburn City Council: 7 representatives
- Castlereagh Borough Council: 3 representatives
- Belfast City Council: 1 representative.

It is proposed that the Chair of the Development Committee (or nominee) be appointed as the Belfast City Council representative on the SJC and that the Deputy Chair of the Development Committee (or nominee) be appointed as the Belfast City Council representative on the LAG.

Once the elected members are nominated to the SJC and LAG, the next stage of this process is to recruit social partners for the LAG. This process will be undertaken by the Council cluster and will require ratification by DARD.

When the LAG and SJC are in place, a Rural Development Strategy must be developed by 31 July 2008. This strategy should address the priorities of Axis 3 of NIRD, namely:

- Strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas
- Create employment opportunities and conditions for the creation and development of rural micro businesses
- Optimise the use of natural, human and historic assets through sustainable economic and social development.

The indicative budget for the Axis 3 measures is approximately £100 million across Northern Ireland. Financial allocations to each partnership will be calculated through a two stage process on the basis of both need and the quality of the strategy submission. It is anticipated that the funding available for the cluster in which Belfast City Council is involved may be in the region of £7million.

Resource Implications

Funding will be made available by DARD to establish a secretariat to manage this programme across the three council areas.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Chair of the Development Committee (or nominee) is appointed as the Belfast City Council representative on the Strategic Joint Committee (SJC)
- The Deputy Chair of the Development Committee (or nominee) is appointed as the Belfast City Council representative on the Local Action Group (LAG).

Key to Abbreviations

SJC - Strategic Joint Committee

LAG – Local Action Group

DARD – Department of Agriculture & Rural Development

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Role of the Council Statutory Joint Committee (SJC) and Local Action Group (LAG).