



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme
<b>Date:</b>	10 September 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, ext 3470
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459 Lisa Martin, Economic Development Manager, ext 3427

### 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).

Members will also be aware that at the Development Committee of 9 April 2008, approval was given for the Chair of Development to represent Belfast City Council on the Strategic Joint Committee (SJC) and the Deputy Chair of Development to represent Belfast City Council on the Local Action Group (LAG).

Following an open call for applications, social partners for the LAG were recruited. Once these structures were in place, work began on the development of the rural development strategy for submission to DARD in order to draw down funding.

### Key Issues

Following nominations of elected members onto the SJC and LAG, the council cluster began recruiting social partners for the LAG (composition is 50% elected members and 50% social partners).

A total of 11 social partners have been recruited with 8 allocated to Lisburn, 2 to Castlereagh and 1 to Belfast. This was done through a self-selection process taking into consideration Section 75 requirements required by DARD. Recruitment of social partners was facilitated by Locus Management, the consultancy chosen after a competitive procurement process to oversee this activity and to develop a rural strategy for the cluster. The list of social partners is attached as Appendix 1.

Following the recruitment of social partners, the strategy planning process began and an extensive consultative exercise was undertaken. Over 120 individuals participated in public consultation meetings with representation from the farming community, rural businesses, community organisations, stakeholder organisations, elected representatives and Council Officers. The draft strategy developed is a reflection of the needs that exist in the rural area across the three councils and explains how Rural Development funding will be used to best meet these needs. The Strategy's aims and objectives are based upon the 6 measures identified under Axis 3 of the NIRDP, these include:

- Measure 1 : Diversification into Non Agricultural Activities
- Measure 2: Business creation and Development
- Measure 3: Encouragement of Tourism Activities
- Measure 4: Basic Services for the Economy and Rural Population
- Measure 5: Village Renewal and Development
- Measure 6: Conservation and upgrading of Rural Heritage

The draft Rural Development Strategy (see Appendix 2 for a copy of the full strategy) was submitted to DARD on 31 August 2008 and will be used to apportion funding allocation to the cluster. The strategy contained a bid for £9,793,174 including £8,253,000 of programme activity funds and £1,543,174 programme administration. This accounts for 9.7% of the total funds available under Axis 3 of the programme across Northern Ireland. This draft strategy was approved by the Strategic Joint Committee on 29 July 2008.

If approved by DARD, programme funds will be awarded via a public call for applications under the above headings. The likely launch date for this call is January 2009. Maximum grant allocations will be based upon the following thresholds:

- Private businesses – up to £50,000 at 50% funded
- Social Enterprises and Local Authorities – up to £250,000 at 75% funded

Within the Rural Development Strategy a minimum of 5% of the overall programme spend, allocated to the cluster must be spent on transnational and co-operation projects. These elements of the programme will focus on delivering joint projects and sharing best practice with other councils involved in NIRDP and/or organisations delivering comparable projects throughout Europe. It is proposed that Belfast City Council's European Unit will facilitate the identification of Co-operation and Transnational Networking projects for the cluster. In providing this role the council's European Unit will be reimbursed for staff time allocated to working on this project, payable from the administration budget of the NIRDP.

### **Resource Implications**

None at present – all administrative and project funding to be covered by NIRDP.

### **Recommendations**

- To note the content of the strategy document attached
- To approve the transnational facilitation role proposed for Belfast City Council's European Unit.

**Key to Abbreviations**

NIRDP – Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme  
SJC – Strategic Joint Committee  
LAG – Local Action Group  
DARD – Department for Agriculture and Rural Development

**Documents Attached**

Appendix 1 – List of Social Partners  
Appendix 2 – Draft Rural Development Strategy

**Blank Page**