



Subject:	Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020
Date:	13 January 2016
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Is this report restricted?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the opportunities for Belfast through the EU funded Rural Development Programme, and seek approval for accessing the programme.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that the Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Notes the opportunities for Belfast within the new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.- Agrees to allocate £10,000 towards the development of village plans for Hannahstown and Edenderry.- Notes the financial and staffing resources required to develop relevant elements of the programme.- Agrees to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to enter into the SLA with Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council.
3.0	Main report
3.1	A budget of £500m has been agreed with the Northern Ireland Executive for the Rural Development Fund 2014-2020.

3.2	Part of the funding is allocated through council-led LAGs (Local Action Groups). Belfast is part of a LAG along with the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area. Not all areas in Belfast are eligible under the Rural Development Programme. This is confined to the rural boundary (see Appendix One).
3.3	<p>A funding allocation of £3.23m is available for all activity in this LAG area. This covers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rural Business Investment Scheme - Rural Broadband Scheme - Rural Basic Services - Village Renewal - All-Island Cooperation Scheme.
3.4	In addition to the LAG – funded activities, councils can benefit from support under the Rural Tourism Scheme. This was the subject of a separate report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in December 2015 with a view to agreeing priority projects to be submitted for funding.
3.5	The LAG governance structure is made up of 51% social partners and 49% elected members. Councillor Stephen Magennis is the appointed Belfast City Council elected member representative. The group is responsible for developing the strategy under which the relevant funding is allocated. An interim strategy has now been drafted. DARD has advised that local strategies should be consistent with council community plans. They acknowledge that these will not be in place until 2016, and therefore they accept that the strategies may have to be revised at that point.
3.6	The LAG in which Belfast and Lisburn & Castlereagh City Councils operate is the only LAG that involves two council areas. All other LAGs are based on single council areas.
3.7	<p>In order to raise awareness of opportunities for funding under this programme within the Belfast area, Officers held two consultation sessions with potentially eligible businesses, community groups and individuals. These took place as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 24 November 2015, Malone House Belfast - 02 December 2015, Sally Gardens Community Centre Belfast.

3.8	<p>The LAG Board formally approved the Lagan Rural Partnership Strategy on 14 December 2015 along with the amended Articles of Association for the new LAG Board. Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council will now enter into a Service Level Agreement with the LAG Board Members including BCC to service the NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.</p>
3.9	<p>Activities relevant to Belfast City Council under the LAG include:</p> <p><u>Rural Business Investment Scheme</u></p> <p>There is a very limited number of businesses operating within the eligible rural boundary. It is proposed that the council's Economic Development team works with eligible businesses to signpost them to relevant support under this scheme.</p> <p><u>Rural Broadband Scheme</u></p> <p>Given that the area already benefits from access to high speed broadband, the LAG has decided not to invest resources in this area.</p> <p><u>Rural Basic Services</u></p> <p>This scheme provides up to £50,000 for “innovative service delivery” capital or revenue investment which provides access to basic services or improvements in social infrastructure. This might include community facilities such as childcare, elderly care or community capacity building. Members should note that there is a 25% match funding requirement on this measure, with a minimum of 5% expected to come from councils. Officers will promote the scheme in the relevant areas. Any requests for match funding would be subject to further reports to relevant committees. No funding has been set aside at this point.</p> <p><u>Village Renewal</u></p> <p>There are two areas in the Belfast City Council area that can be considered as “villages” in line with programme stipulations. These are Hannahstown and Edenderry.</p>
3.10	<p>In order to be eligible for any funding, areas must develop a “village plan”. Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council is in the process of commissioning an organisation to develop these village plans. It is proposed that Belfast City Council agrees to make a contribution of up to £10,000 towards the development of these two plans. Once completed, a report will be brought back to Committee setting out proposed way forward, including any funding requirements. Villages can potentially avail of up to £150,000 and it is likely that up to 6 villages will be funded across the LAG area. Consideration will need to be given to the level of officer support that can be</p>

provided, commensurate with the potential return for the areas.

3.11 LEADER All Island Cooperation Scheme (£200k)

DARD has confirmed that one North/South cooperation project is required for the LAG (7% of LAG budget must be allocated). DARD is to open a first call for applications with a budget of £1m which will be a separate allocation over and above that allocated to the LAG. It was agreed at the LAG meeting on 9 November 2015 that the following will be included in the Interim Strategy:

- Waterways College Programme – an accredited conservation management course led by Lagan Canal Trust and targeted at young people, third age volunteers and long term unemployed that could be delivered from the Trust’s premises at Navigation House.
- Motor cycling tourism – to develop north/south motor cycling tourism products linked to road racing events calendar – self catering B&B sites etc.
- Lough Neagh Tourism – develop Lough Neagh as a tourist destination by learning from other EU countries on how to develop waterways in a way to better impact positively on the wider rural community and economy.
- NI Year of Food and Drink 2016 – to develop north/south cooperation project involving all 10 LAGS.

3.12 Financial & Resource Implications

Members should note that there are staff resource implications with regards to opportunities for the Belfast rural area. Note the £10,000 development costs are available within the current year EU Unit budget.

- Mentoring and business plan development support to businesses eligible for pursuing the business investment scheme funds.
- Development support for village renewal and basic services plans, at a maximum cost of £10,000, for both Edenderry and Hannahstown villages along with a potential request for match funding to be presented at a later date.
- Development, match funding and delivery support for the rural tourism scheme (activity to be led by City and Neighbourhood Services Department).
- Development and delivery support for any All Island cooperation projects, should there be any added value in Belfast City Council involvement.

3.13	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no Equality or Good Relations implications attached to this report.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Map of eligible urban area Appendix 2 – Local Action Group Members