

Kent's European Relationship Select Committee - Supplementary information provided by Huw Jarvis

The Leader approach 2007 - 2014 background

The Leader approach is a delivery mechanism under the **Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2007-2014**. Also known as Axis 4, the Leader approach is not a scheme, fund or set of objectives, but is a method of harnessing local knowledge to enable a “bottom up”, community led approach to deliver RDPE funding in rural areas.

There are about 130 leader areas in England. Each Leader area bid for RDPE funding to operate a programme in their area based on a Local Development (Delivery) Strategy (**LDS**), a plan that identifies priority funding for Leader areas.

The term leader comes from the French acronym for 'Liaison Entre Actions de Developpement de l'Economie Rurale meaning 'Links between the rural economy and development actions'. In practice, it is a method of delivering rural development in rural communities where local people have the opportunity to take funding decisions at a local level in line with their LDS,

Leader should represent public and private partners and local interest groups. **Local Action Groups (LAGs)** can be existing partnerships set up under previous LEADER programmes; existing partnerships set up for another purpose but which follow the Leader principles; or be a completely new partnership. The LAGs should be broad, covering all sectors of the local society and economy. The Leader delivery approach can be aligned with other initiatives, such as Local Area Agreements.

LAGS developed and submitted Local Development Strategies which set out their plans for their areas, including selection criteria for local projects. The Selection Panels for LAGs include representatives from the Regional Development Agencies (formerly SEEDA in the SE now Defra), which are responsible for the overall management of the delivery of the Leader approach, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. Once selected, the groups are responsible for delivering against their LDS, selecting and funding projects which best meet the priorities for their area and support the delivery of their Strategy.

The Leader Approach delivers a minimum of 5% of the EU funds within the RDPE. This means a minimum of £105m across the country.

It will be the role of Defra, as the Managing Authority for the RDPE, to ensure that the application of the Leader approach across England conforms to the requirements specified in the relevant EU regulations. That includes that the minimum spend requirement (£105 million) is met over the period of the Programme.

LAGs are required to select an administrative and financial lead actor or 'accountable body' (in our case KCC) to take responsibility for overseeing the funding and the operation of the partnership. Alternatively, the LAG members may come together in a legally constituted common structure, the constitution of which would provide assurance on the operation of the partnership and its ability to administer public funds.

The lead role is important, since it involves an assumption of responsibility for regulatory compliance, including state aid rules.

Under the Rural Development Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005) each rural development programme is required to establish a Monitoring Committee which will "satisfy itself as to the effectiveness of the implementation of the programme". **Defra** has therefore established a Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) for the Rural Development Programme for England 2007-2013 (RDPE).

The Regulation requires representation on the Committee from organisations of:

- the competent regional, local authority and other public authorities;
- the economic and social partners;
- any other appropriate body representing civil society, non-governmental organisations, including environmental
- organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women.

Kent County Council as Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Local Action Group Accountable Body

Kent County Council (KCC) will assume the role of accountable body.

KCC has the capacity to take on this role given that:-

- it already assumed the accountable body role for three regeneration programmes (Kent Rural Towns, Kent Rural Revival and Mid Kent LEADER+)
- It operates as lead body for two key rural partnerships (Kent Downs AONB and the Kent Rural Board)

- it contracts rural delivery work through Service Level Agreements with three strategic partner agencies (Action with Communities in Rural Kent, Kent Association of Parish Councils and Produced in Kent Ltd.)
- it worked in partnership with Medway Council and Action with Communities in Rural Kent to prepare and deliver a sub-regional 'Rural Access to Services' programme (financed by SEEDA).

Cost effectiveness is a priority for KCC. As such a 'Best Value' solution to providing the administrative and financial support services necessary for successful LDS delivery will continue to be examined and implemented.

The LAG will be supportive of KCC in its role as the accountable body.

Functions that the Accountable Body will perform.

KCC will continue to employ the programme staff (Project Manager and Project Officer). Line management of programme staff is provided by the accountable body but the Programme Manager also has a direct working relationship with the LAG Executive Chair. Both the Programme Manager and Project Officer are responsible for the development of projects, project applications and the marketing of the programme.

The accountable body will provide office space, IT/telecom support and internal training and development opportunities for the programme staff.

The accountable body is responsible for all the financial considerations with reference to the **facilitation** of the programme. It will also provide support and assistance to the programme staff with project specific claims.