

By: Mark Dance – Cabinet Member for Economic Development
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To: Economic Development Cabinet Committee – 23 January 2014

Subject: **New Leader Programme 2014 - 2020**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Electoral Divisions: Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Maidstone, Shepway and Swale

Summary:

This report gives an overview of the outline activity that will take place in 2014 to develop a new Local Development Strategy for the Kent Downs and Marshes Leader area. This Strategy will be the basis for a bid for Leader funding from the Rural Development Programme for England 2014-2020. Members will receive a further report once information is known on available funds, the outline content of the emerging KDML Local development Strategy and the costs involved in its implementation.

Recommendations:

The Economic Development Cabinet Committee is asked to:

- NOTE the report
- DISCUSS any issues that arise and
- PROVIDE suggestions for the transitional year activities and the future work of the Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Programme

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The current Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Programme will come to an end on 31st December 2013. Although a new Leader Programme will start on 1st January 2014, funding for this Programme will not become available until January 2015. Consequently, 2014 will be a transition year which will allow Leader groups to put together proposals/bids for securing Programme funding up to 2020 to run the new Programme.
- 1.2 The Kent Downs and Marshes Leader (KDML) is part of the Rural Development Programme for England 2007-13 (RDPE) funded by Defra and the EU. KDM Leader was awarded £1,321,546 project funding and a further £330,387 for facilitation and administration to support projects within a specific geographical area between 2007 and 2013. Over the course of this Programme this investment in the KDML area will have supported 54 projects, with a total project value of £4,266,143 in the land based, small and micro enterprise, and community sectors. The Programme will also have helped create 47 new jobs, safeguarded 247 jobs and supported 365 businesses. Fourteen community projects will also have been supported.
- 1.3 Local Authority partners (Ashford, Swale, Medway, Canterbury, Shepway, Maidstone and Dover) have contributed just over £100k during the life of the Programme with a further £60k from KCC. This has been to assist and augment the administration, facilitation and animation (Programme preparation and launch events, publicity and information material, development of a website and a secure portal for posting applications, appraisals and supporting information for KDML members).

- 1.4 KDML has recently successfully bid for, and has been awarded, £30k from Defra to undertake activities in the transition year (2014) to develop a bid for funding from the new RDPE Programme 2014-2020. This has been match funded from the current KDML programme using the remainder of funds from the contributions from Local Authority Partners and KCC. Programme staff have planned for this situation since it was known that funds for the new Programme would be delayed for up to a year from 2014. The transition funding is there to provide continuity in Leader areas by keeping hold of key staff and Leader group members, and allow them to develop new plans and submit a new funding strategy for the period 2015 -2020. If this strategy is successful in its bid for funding, the Leader group will then be in a position to hit the road running when funds become available in 2015. Lessons have been learned from the this current Programme where successful Leader areas were slow to start in the early years (2007/08) and Defra is keen not to see this happen again.
- 1.5 KDML will now work with Defra, SE LEP and key local stakeholders to develop a new proposal for the next RDPE Programme which will;
- Reflect both Defra and KDML emerging priorities.
 - Build on the capacity, expertise and strong working relationships established to date, evaluate performance to date and plan for the future.
 - Offer an integrated approach – which is aligned to the new delivery landscape (LEPs, Rural Farming Networks etc) – and explore local opportunities presented by the ‘multi-fund’ approach to make the most of available funding to produce a new, coherent KDML Local Development Strategy that delivers the bottom up programme specific for KDM area, but is also in line with other area strategies.
- 1.6 In particular, the KDML will be open to change and keen to develop the optimal approach (with regard to available funding) to maximise opportunities afforded by the new Programme. The planned work programme of transitional activity will include;
- Work with local partners and neighbouring Leader groups, mainly West Kent Leader to review different geographical options for the new proposal i.e. to increase the geographical coverage and availability of Leader where possible.
 - A review of the current KDML structure and the way it operates – membership, communication/promotion, training etc. – learning from best practice and recent report findings.
 - Continued joint working with neighbouring Leader groups (West Kent/ Weald and Rural Rother) and consider how this can be improved further to benefit the wider area and achieve economies of scale.
 - Reviewing working arrangements with the accountable body (KCC) – lessons learned, what could be improved, level of support needed and potential solutions to bank rolling some projects.
 - Building further on KDML working relationship with Local Authority partners. This has been a strength of the current programme and the transition period will seek to secure on-going buy-in to the new programme.
 - Undertaking a full and comprehensive evaluation of the current programme to measure the full impact of the Leader approach in the KDML area, capturing

lesson learned, best practice, spend, leverage, outputs and outcomes achieved, how the programme has met local need and value for money. The study will be used to underpin an evidence-based approach to the transitional work programme; highlight additional development opportunities and inform the consultation process highlighted above.

- 1.7 In addition, the KDML is already inputting into the development of the Kent Rural Investment Plan, being developed by the Kent Rural Board which will;
- Set out priorities for unlocking additional rural economic growth and job creation.
 - Inform the SE Growth Programme being developed by the LEP.
 - Create the strategic policy framework within which the KDML new Local Development Strategy will sit.

This work will help KDML attain the necessary strategic alignment of its new Local Development Strategy – but also assist the development of an integrated ‘multi-fund’ approach where appropriate funds can be targeted at addressing particular rural development needs.

- 1.8 The principal outcome KDML expects to achieve through the transition year is the development and submission of a Local Development Strategy. This will need to be accompanied by a strong bid to draw down major new funding for its implementation in the RDPE 2015-2020.
- 1.9 The timescale for the transitional year activities will involve submitting an outline transitional plan to Defra by January 2014. Once agreed, work will start on the development and the completion of a new Local Development Strategy (along with a supporting bid for new RDPE Programme funding) by July 2014. Defra will assess the bid and LDS and confirmation of success or otherwise will be given by September/October 2014 for a start date in January 2015. At the moment it is not known how much funding will be available to Leader groups nationally and because of this the priorities for the new national Leader Programme are yet to be determined. Decisions will be made when the outcome of the Comprehensive Agricultural Policy Reform consultation are known and published towards the end of December this year. Progress on the Local Development Strategy and the bid will be reported to the Regeneration Board and the Kent Rural Board as things progress.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Economic Development Cabinet Committee is asked to:
- NOTE the report
 - DISCUSS any issues that arise and
 - PROVIDE suggestions for the transitional year activities and the future work of the Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Programme

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