

Area North Committee – 25 June 2014

## 10. LEADER Programme for Rural Economic Development (Executive Decision)

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### Purpose of the Report

To brief Area Committees on the new LEADER programme for rural economic development including the appointment of a councillor representative to the Levels and Moors Local Action Group Executive Board.

### Public Interest

At the current time most of South Somerset does not qualify for the LEADER programme which supports locally designed, rural economic development initiatives. Subject to funding, DEFRA may allow existing programmes to change their boundaries, including the possible incorporation of areas not presently covered, in a successor programme, to be launched in 2015.

### Recommendations

- (1) That Members consider and note the report including arrangements for member appointments to be made to each of the 3 prospective Local Action Groups' governing bodies from the Area with greatest coverage
- (2) Appoint one councillor from the Area North Committee to serve on the Executive Board of the Levels and Moors Local Action Group representing South Somerset District Council
- (3) Note that a further report will be brought to the Committee in autumn 2014 reporting on the outcome of applications for funding

### Background

This report is about proposals to extend coverage of the LEADER programme in South Somerset from 2014. LEADER is an investment programme funded by the European Union and DEFRA to assist with local economic development. It particularly applies to rural areas – which are defined as areas with a population of less than 10,000. This is generally assessed by parish boundaries.

Individual programmes are agreed by DEFRA and operate through a 'Local Action Group' (LAG) made up of a range of organisations and individuals covering local business and community interests. Each LAG has an accountable body which administers the programme and ensures public and financial accountability.

The last round of funding (2007-13) provided limited coverage of rural South Somerset by three 'Local Action Groups' including the area around Chard ("Making it Local"); most of Area North together with a small part of Area East (Levels and Moors) and a further 2 parishes in Area East ("Sowing Seeds"). The LEADER programme was also referred to as LARC – Local Action for Rural Communities.

When the new programme for 2014-2020 was announced last year by DEFRA, applicants to the programme were encouraged to ensure that all eligible rural areas were covered by a 'Local Action Group' and preferable by extending current boundaries rather than creating new groups.

For existing groups DEFRA provided financial support towards the costs of revisiting local priorities for investment and submitting a revised business plan.

### **The Next Programme- Local LEADER partnerships and closing the gaps**

*The Levels and Moors (Accountable body – Somerset County Council)* – stretches from the A303 to the coast. Boundary changes are proposed which will take in full coverage of Area North.

*Making it Local* – Is largely based on the Blackdown Hills taking in Chard and western parishes of Area West, proposes to expand to take in a little more of West including the Ilminster area.

*Heart of Wessex* proposes to follow the A303/A30 corridor area, which is a strong economic area due to the impact of these major transport routes into Wiltshire. It will cover the remaining, former 'white' areas, of East, South and West in the Crewkerne area (Yeovil is not eligible due to the size population.)

### **Next Steps**

- The accountable body for each Local Action Group is co-ordinating consultation within its area to establish a reviewed 'Local Development Strategy'. This is Somerset County Council for the Levels and Moors LAG.
- Bids will be submitted to DEFRA by 5<sup>th</sup> September. This is a national, competitive process for limited funding and successful applications can expect to be awarded funding in the order of £1.5m - 1.8m over a 5 year programme of support.

LAGs that have funded rural economy activities in the past will have to think carefully about how to continue to provide support to micro and small enterprises (address gaps and build upon learning and good practice from 2007-2013);

LAGs will need to align activities to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), local authorities, Rural Growth Network Pilot areas, Rural and Farming Networks etc.

### **Appointment of Councillor Representatives**

Local Action Groups have an Executive Board which is made up of a combination of representatives of businesses, community / voluntary groups and appointed councillors from local authorities. Each has slightly differing terms of reference tailored to local circumstances.

SSDC expects to be able to appoint 1 councillor representative to each of the 3 prospective LAGs and this should be an appointment from the main Area of benefit:

Level & Moors - Area North; Heart of Wessex - Area East; Making it Local - Area West. It will be the responsibility of the Councillor representative and lead Area Development officer to ensure communications with other areas included in the LAG as appropriate.

### **Financial Implications**

Supporting the LEADER programme is met from existing budgets. In the last round of the LEADER programme in Area North a number of successful projects also received a community grant from SSDC, these are assessed individually and on their own merits.

### **Council Plan Implications**

The Council Plan states that: *We want a strong economy which has low unemployment and thriving businesses. One of the stated ways we will address this is to: Work in partnership to deliver investment and development that local people value*

### **Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications**

None from this report. However a key assessment criteria for grants under the LEADER programme is to consider environmental impacts and promoting reduced reliance on fossil fuels.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

Rural communities are vulnerable to isolation from services and markets and face higher transport cost. The LEADER programme provides opportunities to support locally important economic initiatives.

***Background Papers: DEFRA guidance documents for LEADER programme***

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