

EU Funds post 2013 - Update & lobbying strategy

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report updates Members on current lobbying activities related to EU funds. It also proposes a lobby strategy to steer the ongoing work during 2012 and 2013.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. comment on the report;
2. approve the lobby strategy; and
3. give a steer regarding current lobbying work.

Action

Officers to action as directed by Members.

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1. The European Union structural funds typically support economic and skills development activity, and are regularly accessed by local authorities to help realise local ambitions.
2. The funds are worth over £8 billion to the UK between 2007-2013 period, which, once match-funded, represents a potential total investment over £16 billion. They include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Further investment opportunities are available to councils through the EU's Rural Development Programme for England, and a range of thematic EU funds.
3. 2012 is a crucial year in determining what the funds will look like from 2014-2020, and what role councils can play in using them. The LGA continues to play a leading role in discussions with European institutions and the UK Government to ensure that councils are able to lead, shape and use these funds in whatever way is most appropriate for their area.
4. An informal task and finish group continues to lead LGA lobbying on EU funding. The group includes Members from this Board and the Economy and Transport Programme Board. The objectives are to:
 - 4.1 protect investment and maximise the take from EU funds for local areas;
 - 4.2 ensure councils play a leading role in the negotiation and establishment of the new programmes; and
 - 4.3 articulate and push the case for new delivery models that enable local partners to join-up EU funds with all investments in their areas.
5. This paper updates on work to date, and sets out some recommendations for progressing next steps.

Update on ongoing work

6. Members continue to lead work in both Whitehall and Brussels to influence the progress of the EU fund negotiations, spending decisions and management arrangements. Some of these are summarised below:

7. In Brussels

- 7.1 Engagement with MEPs, including proposing amendments to reports currently under negotiation in the European Parliament.
- 7.2 Continued joint lobbying with other European LGA's to develop and push for a coherent EU local government message in Brussels.
- 7.3 Work with the European Commission on a 'code of good practice' on partnership working toward national governments, ensuring they work closely with local government in design and delivery of funds.
- 7.4 Continued work through the Committee of Regions to promote the value of strong local leadership within the EU funds.

8. In Whitehall

- 8.1 Responding to UK Government informal consultation on how to deliver EU billions from 2014 – 2020.
- 8.2 Submission of written and oral evidence to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) Select Committee inquiry into the functioning of ERDF – including some press coverage.
- 8.3 A delegation of members, including Councillors Bore, Nicolson and Keymer met Commissioner Hahn, making the case for locally shaped spending in the future.
- 8.4 Local authority secondments to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to ensure councils able to shape the negotiation of the EU funding programmes in England.
- 8.5 House of Lords EU Committee report supportive of structural funds, and the roles for local authorities.
- 8.6 Creation of an online Knowledge Hub to bring local authority members and officers together to discuss and develop approaches to using the funds, and to build an evidence case for local influence.

Looking ahead – lobbying strategy

9. Members are asked to consider and comment on the proposed next steps, to be taken forward and overseen by the joint task group.

10. Protecting investment in Brussels:

- 10.1 A Member-led lobby visit to Brussels during September, including sessions with MEPs and the European Commission.
- 10.2 Continued Member representation and pressure through the Committee of Regions and Council of European Municipalities and Regions.

11. Making the 'local' case in Whitehall:

- 11.1 Articulate and push the case for new delivery models that enable local partners to join-up EU funds with all investments in their areas.
- 11.2 Member meetings with UK Government Ministers to discuss and take forward local authority approaches following responses to the BIS consultation.
- 11.3 Mobilise the sector and build an evidence case to show how local authorities can join-up spending in their areas to deliver better outcomes and efficiencies.

12. Officers would be keen to support members of the Board wanting to more directly engage their councils in this work, such as supporting them to:

- 12.1 meet their local MEP or MPs;
- 12.2 engage with the local authority secondments to BIS, inviting them to your area/region to discuss the value of engaging with the process for developing new programmes;
- 12.3 provide evidence and examples of how local authorities have engaged with EU programmes; and
- 12.4 considering and developing models for local authorities to engage and shape investment from the EU funds in their areas.

Atlantic Strategy

13. At the last meeting, Members asked for an update on the progression of the 'Atlantic Strategy'.

14. The European Commission proposed the strategy in November 2011 to act as an 'umbrella strategy' to bring together all the different EU funding interventions taking place along the Atlantic coast. The strategy and its associated action plan will cover a diverse range of issues, from marine bio-diversity to reducing carbon emissions. There will be €1.2 million for the creation of an 'Atlantic Forum' to contribute to and oversee the strategy. However, the strategy will have no spend budget itself. Instead budgets from the various different funds and initiatives which contribute to the strategy will be used. The LGA has provided input into the process by arguing that there should be a stronger territorial focus to the strategy, resulting in tangible projects which deliver direct benefits to local coastal areas, including fishing communities. Governance structures should also involve local and regional authorities more directly.

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