

Newsletter 29: 7th November 2007

This is part of a fortnightly series of newsletters that will help explain the process and progression towards the Convergence Programmes for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The newsletters will contain the most up to date information about Convergence as it evolves over the coming months. **Updated information will appear in bold blue type.**

Dear Colleague

UPDATE FROM THE MANAGING AUTHORITY

Operational Programme formally submitted

Responding to the latest European Commission informal feedback on the Convergence Operational Programme that will guide European Regional Development Fund investment in the years ahead, a revised draft has now been formally submitted to Brussels. This brings us nearer to formal approval of the Operational Programme although there is still an opportunity for the Commission to propose further minor amendments over the next week or so.

Available to download

The revised draft will be available at www.objectiveone.com under 'Towards Convergence' from next week, where the final approved Operational Programme will also be posted in due course.

Recruitment under way

Efforts are under way now to recruit the team that will run the Convergence Programme on behalf of partners in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Details of the new team will be announced once the recruitment process is completed. That, alongside the investment commissioning activity that is already under way, will ensure we are ready to begin delivery when the Operational Programme is approved.

**Phil McVey
Director of European Programmes
South West Regional Development Agency**



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CONVERGENCE

ERDF Operational Programme formally submitted	The revised draft of the Convergence ERDF Operational Programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has now been formally submitted to the European Commission for approval. This document will be made available next week at www.objectiveone.com under 'Towards Convergence'.
Management arrangements for Convergence ERDF	Managing Authority tasks for the ERDF Convergence Programme will be undertaken by the South West Regional Development Agency and a 'shadow' Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) and 'shadow' Partnership Delivery Board (PDB) have been established to guide the development of the Programme. These structures will be formalised once the Programme goes live.
Commissioning	An important part of their role is to develop the commissioning process which will enable the ERDF Convergence Programme to focus investment strategically.
Match Funding	Public sector match funding is expected to come from a combination of local, regional and national sources.
ESF Operational Programme approved	The national ESF (European Social Fund) Operational Programme – which was submitted to the European Commission in May - has now been agreed. It includes a ring-fenced allocation of ESF investment and specific priorities for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. It can be found at www.esf.gov.uk .
Management and delivery arrangements for ESF Convergence	The Managing Authority for the ESF Programme in England will be the European Social Fund Division (ESFD) of the Department for Work and Pensions, supported in this region by Government Office for the South West. It has been agreed that a joint ESF / ERDF Programme Monitoring Committee will review the strategy and delivery of the Programme in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Programme delivery will take place at local level through the ESF Frameworks and co-financing plans, overseen by the Regional Skills Partnership.
Convergence ESF Framework	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's ESF Convergence Framework, which outlines plans for ESF investment in this area, has been developed by partners in Cornwall, including the South West Regional Development Agency, Cornwall County Council, the Learning Partnership, Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Economic Forum, the Trades Union Congress and the private sector. This Framework reflects the needs of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and has been informed by Strategy and Action and aligned with the Cornwall Local Area Agreement. It can be found at www.swrsp.org.uk .
ESF Co-financing, tendering and procurement	<p>Co-Financing Organisations' Plans were submitted to Government Office for the South West (GOSW) by the Learning & Skills Council and the Department for Work & Pensions (Jobcentre Plus) at the end of September. The plans were then appraised and presented to the Programme Monitoring Committee.</p> <p>At present, GOSW is working with the Higher Education Partnership in Cornwall to develop a delivery plan for higher education activities supported by the ESF Convergence Programme, working closely with the ERDF Convergence Programme. Proposals will be presented to the Programme Monitoring Committee in due course.</p> <p>Full details of the tendering and procurement processes can be found on the South West Learning & Skills Council and Department for Work & Pensions</p>

(Jobcentre Plus) websites, including dates and, in due course, full tender specifications.

www.dwp.gov.uk/supplyingdwp/what_we_buy/notice_to_providers.asp
www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/SouthWest/esf/esfupdates/

European investment in the Convergence Programmes

The table below summarises European investment in the Convergence Programmes. There is a 70:30 split between ERDF and ESF funding, compared to 75:25 in Objective One.

	£	€
ERDF	c. £311.4 m	c. €458 m
ESF	c. £133.3 m	c. €196 m
Total investment	c. £444.7 m	c. €654 m

The Objective One Programme

The Objective One Programme ran until 31 December 2006 and is followed by Convergence Programmes for the period 2007-2013. Their purpose will be to speed up the economic development of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Differences between Convergence and Objective One

- Convergence will consist only of ERDF and the ESF.
- The rural and fisheries funds will become part of mainstream UK programmes with ring-fenced allocations for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

National Strategic Reference Framework

The Convergence Programmes are underpinned by the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) which outlines broad priorities, management arrangements and funding allocations for ERDF and ESF Programmes 2007-2013. It can be found at www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/page28796.html.

The role of Strategy and Action

Strategy and Action – the overarching economic regeneration strategy for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly - informs the ERDF and ESF Convergence Programmes, which will not be able to do everything in Strategy and Action, but will be able to invest in some of it.

The Lisbon Agenda

European and UK economic regeneration policy is increasingly being driven by the Lisbon Agenda where the EU set itself the goal of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, in response to intensified competition.

Lisbon targets

The Convergence Programmes will need to clearly show how they are contributing to the Lisbon Agenda – this will mean a significant increase in emphasis on business competitiveness and productivity, innovation and a more knowledge based economy. The draft Operational Programme submitted to the European Commission suggests a target of c. 80% of the Convergence Programmes to meet the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda.

Rural Programme

The draft Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2007-13 has been submitted to the European Commission for negotiation and can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/rdp07_13/index.htm. The rural programme in England has a budget of approximately £3.9bn and Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has an allocation of c. £55m (EU investment plus match-funding from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Defra).

The revised Regional Implementation Plan, detailing investment plans for the South West and Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly, will soon be available from the South West Regional Development Agency's website www.southwestrda.org.uk.

Local Action	Pre-commissioning work has started to identify potential projects and Local Action (Axis 4 of the rural programme, focusing on community action to improve quality of life and economic prosperity) was launched on 1 November 2007. Interested communities now have a target date of 31 December 2007 to submit an expression of interest to the South West RDA. Feedback will be given by 31 January 2008. Local Action Groups will then have until 23 May 2008 to submit full bids for assessment in June and decisions in July.
Expressions of interest	The expression of interest is a relatively straightforward, proforma-based process designed to help communities gauge the prospects for success before deciding to commit to the more substantial task of preparing the full bid. It is not a competitive process and any group will be free to proceed to the next stage if they wish. To support groups keen to work up expressions of interest, the Rural Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Partnership has set up a Local Action Discussion Group on www.ruralcornwall.co.uk. Help may also be available from other organisations such as the Cornwall Rural Community Council (www.cornwallrcc.co.uk) and Market and Coastal Towns Association (www.mcti.org.uk, simon.swale@mcti.org.uk).
Further information	For further information about Local Action , please refer to: www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/eafrd/community-led-develo.shtm . Additional information about the rural programme can be found at: www.objectiveone.com under 'Towards Convergence', www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/eafrd/introduction.shtm and www.defra.gov.uk under 'Rural Affairs'.
Fisheries Programme	Work is underway in the Marine Fisheries Agency (MFA) to develop a European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Operational Programme which will be subject to consultation before approval by the EU. A 'Convergence' allocation will guarantee a level of funding for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Further information can be found in the European Cohesion Policy Update which covers all Programmes: www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/policy/european-funding-pos.shtm .

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW ABOUT CONVERGENCE

What activities will be eligible for funding?	Detailed priorities for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are contained in the ERDF Operational Programme, which is in the final stages of development and negotiation with the European Commission.
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More detailed information about Convergence, links to key organisations and websites can be found in the 'Towards Convergence' section of the Objective One website www.objectiveone.com.