

Newsletter 28: 26th October 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

**Programme
alignment**

Throughout development of the Convergence European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Operational Programme, partners and stakeholders have stressed the importance of aligning ERDF investment with European Social Fund (ESF) activity to get the most out of Convergence. That has been a view shared by partners and stakeholders developing the ESF Programme and efforts have been made to ensure the Programmes will be lined up both at the local delivery level as well as at a strategic level.

**Joint Programme
Monitoring
Committee**

Picking up the strategic links, agreement was reached some time ago to form a joint ERDF Programme Monitoring Committee and ESF Regional Committee. Last week's meeting was the first which undertook a formal role in respect of ESF, as the joint Committee considered the detail of the two ESF Co-Financing Plans that will operate under Convergence. The content of the Learning and Skills Council and the Department for Work and Pensions Co-Financing Plans were agreed in principle, subject to further consideration of some process issues in relation to the latter, and the call for tenders will be available on their websites in due course.

**Approval
anticipated**

The anticipated approval of the ERDF Operational Programme by the European Commission later this year means that the Programme will 'go live' soon after. A summary of the Joint Committee discussions will be available at www.objectiveone.com under 'Towards Convergence'.

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

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CONVERGENCE

ERDF Operational Programme	Following negotiations the Convergence ERDF Operational Programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has been informally re-submitted to the European Commission, awaiting feedback. It is expected to be formally submitted for approval in October and approved in November/December. The draft Operational Programme can be found 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	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. 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.

Full details of the tendering and procurement processes can be found on the South West Learning & Skills Council and Department for Work & Pensions (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.

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, will be launched on 1 November 2007. For further information, 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.

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.