

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: FUNDING 'LEADER' - EUROPEAN PROGRAMME & COASTAL COMMUNITIES FUNDS
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 14 JANUARY 2014
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report notes, firstly, a proposal regarding LEADER European funding which would re-align the Council's involvement with a new set of neighbouring areas for the 2014-2020 programme, which Members are asked to approve.

2. BACKGROUND; LEADER

- 2.1 LEADER is a national programme using European funds to deliver community-led local rural development projects. Falkirk is currently in the Forth Valley & Lomond LEADER Local Action Group (FVL-LAG). Kelvin Valley is an existing, neighbouring LEADER programme
- 2.2 Officers were approached in late November 2013 by the Kelvin Valley LEADER group (including North Lanarkshire & E Dunbartonshire Councils) with a view to investigating our interest in joining a LEADER programme with them. Officers have investigated the forward-planning of a 2014 - 2020 programme with Kelvin Valley, which would see LEADER continuing for the Falkirk area, but aligned with new partners, from 2014 onwards, who share key strategic assets and synergies with Falkirk. The new partnership would see Falkirk break-away from current LEADER partners Stirling, Clacks and Loch Lomond/Trossachs National Park, and current partners are aware of this proposal.

3. ISSUES: LEADER

- 3.1 Falkirk LEADER area is approximately 35% of the Forth Valley & Lomond LEADER area, by population, and therefore a significant partner in deploying the grant funds available to the new LEADER group. Analysis of grant spend in the 5 year programme to 2014 showed that awards made resulted in around 16% (=£435,650) Falkirk project spend (21% of successful projects), although further spend of approx £170K is actually across all partner areas.
- 3.2 There is a need to change the approach for Falkirk communities, if they are to benefit as much as those elsewhere in the LEADER area. Community assets in Falkirk LEADER area contrast markedly with those in affluent rural Stirlingshire and in the National Park.

We feel that Falkirk communities need LEADER to take a new focus. Strategies for LEADER 2014-202 are now in development, and this is an important time for Falkirk to better align LEADER to its own needs.

- 3.3 Kelvin Valley, neighbouring to the south-west, are a particularly small LAG (population around 50,000 vs. 130,343 for FVL-LAG) and the Scottish Government had encouraged them to join into something bigger, to accrue economies of scale. On this basis Kelvin Valley looked at joining with Forth Valley & Lomond LAG to create a mega-LAG. However this was recently rejected by Kelvin Valley, because they also consider FVL to be dominated by the considerable assets of the National Park's landscape attractions and the more affluent communities in rural Stirlingshire.
- 3.4 Kelvin Valley interest in Falkirk then arose because we share a focus on low-key urban-fringe landscapes, and our communities are often in regeneration. We also share three significant key linear assets – the Antonine Wall, the Canal and the formative John Muir Way. Kelvin Valley thus made an approach to Falkirk, just when we were starting the next development with Forth Valley & Lomond, also believing that Kelvin might well also join that partnership.
- 3.5 This approach now requires that Members consider the establishment of a new-LAG between Falkirk and Kelvin Valley, based on urban-fringe and regenerating rural communities. Officer enquiries with Falkirk's LAG stakeholders, and with the Scottish Government advisor, has now established strategic support for such a New-LAG, and produced government reassurances that they would facilitate any new constitutional, procedural and administrative arrangements that are required. We have also provided FVL-LAG with a briefing to this effect. Progress with these matters would be required immediately, should Members approve moving to this new arrangement.
- 3.6 Under any New-LAG, the balance of secretariat and resources between the two LAGs will need re-aligned, though the staff-location (currently Stirling, potentially Cumbernauld) has not previously caused any issues for Falkirk. We do not envisage there being any change to the resources apportioned to Falkirk under an alternative LAG, and have had positive discussions with the Scottish Government about the securing a critical mass of resources not just to run an alternative LAG, but also to see it through an initial establishment and development phase.
- 3.7 The current year is a transition phase, where LAGs nationally are closing their 2008-2014 programmes and developing their next 2014-2020 programmes. Under the proposal, Falkirk would contribute strongly to the new-LAG 2014-2020 development, and would take a back-seat in the close-down work (minimal in any case) of FVL-LAG 2008-14 programme.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Members are asked to:

- 4.2 Approve the involvement of Falkirk Council in a LEADER funding programme 2014 – 2020 in association with new partners, now drawn from the current Kelvin Valley LAG, and based on a strategic re-alignment more in keeping with the nature of the Falkirk Council area and;**

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Date: 3 December 2013
Ref: ABB0114DT - Leader
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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Both current LEADER-LAGs have websites –

Kelvin	http://www.kelvinvalleyleader.org.uk
Forth Valley & Lomond	http://www.fvl.org.uk

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 506065 and ask for David Tollick.