

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Subject: TOWARDS 2020 – FALKIRK COUNCIL’S EUROPEAN STRATEGY**  
**Meeting: ECONOMIC STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**  
**Date: 6 MARCH 2012**  
**Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Members a proposed European Strategy for the Council, attached as Appendix One of this report and to seek approval for its adoption.
- 1.2 A European Strategy has been developed in response to the European Economic Strategy – Europe 2020. The Council’s European Strategy sets out how, through aligning our local priorities as identified within the Strategic Community Plan 2010-2015 with those of Europe 2020, we can make a tangible contribution to the objectives of 2020 and continue to engage with the European agenda.
- 1.3 The strategy has been developed in consultation with a range of Council Services, particularly those who have direct experience of engaging with European partners and delivering EU funded projects. Additional EU policy input has also been received from the East of Scotland European Consortium (ESEC).

**2. KEY POINTS FROM THE PROPOSED STRATEGY**

- 2.1 Since its establishment in 1996, Falkirk Council has successfully engaged with the European agenda. European funding has been used to lever in additional monies to the area and has helped to deliver a diverse range of initiatives, from large-scale tourism infrastructure projects, local business development and growth, to employment and training programmes that support the most disadvantaged people in our communities.
- 2.2 Engagement with our EU partners has also helped to develop and promote town-twinning, provide additional learning and exchange opportunities for both young people and adult learners and enabled the exchange of best practice between teaching professionals; these are aspects we wish to continue and build upon.
- 2.3 The European Commission has recently announced its budget proposals for the period 2014-2020 and discussions are now taking place on future funding priorities. This has coincided with the launch of its revised economic strategy “Europe 2020”, which provides an ambitious vision for our continent by the end of this decade.

- 2.4 Europe 2020 aims to create a framework for a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. It has 3 main priorities:
- *Smart growth*: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
  - *Sustainable growth*: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy; and
  - *Inclusive growth*: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.
- 2.5 These are complemented by what are known as 7 Flagship Priorities:
- Innovation Union;
  - Youth On the Move;
  - A Digital Agenda for Europe;
  - Resource Efficient Europe;
  - An Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era;
  - An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs; and
  - European Platform Against Poverty.
- 2.6 Europe 2020 will guide all future EU activity, including funding programmes and unlike its predecessor (the Lisbon Agenda), it sets targets for Member States on the key priorities. As negotiations on future funding priorities progress, it is important that we consider at a local level how our priorities as identified within the Falkirk Area Strategic Community Plan 2010-2015 align with those of 2020.
- 2.7 We believe that for Europe 2020 to be realised, public policies and funds also need to be delivered in a way which is smart, sustainable and inclusive. Our proposed strategy sets out how by aligning our local priorities with those of Europe 2020, we can make a real contribution to its vision and continue to be a key player in the delivery of the European agenda. This should help to ensure the Council is in a position to maximise potential funding opportunities.
- 2.8 We acknowledge that future funding should be directed towards more disadvantaged EU areas. However the restrictive geographic targeting applied to the Lowlands and Uplands Scotland Programme 2007-13 has resulted in the Council area having very limited access to additional ESF and ERDF funding.
- 2.9 Whilst we understand the need to target more limited EU resources we do not consider the geographic approach to be the most effective way to distribute funds as this can create unnatural barriers to project development. Rigid geographical targeting also reduces the scope to take advantage of areas of opportunity and support for projects that deliver on outcomes. We will be making a strong case to limit geographical targeting during the discussions on future programmes, specifically in relation to Cohesion Policy. Where targeting is being applied for example, in terms of Regional Selective Assistance, we will make sure that the case is made to sustain eligibility for the Falkirk area.
- 2.10 Table one below, illustrates the strong alignment between the priorities of 2020 and the local themes and outcomes as set out in the Falkirk Areas Strategic Community Plan

2010-2015. Although there is a degree of overlap between priorities, this table demonstrates the areas the Council can make a tangible contribution. The alignment is further explored within the draft Strategy which outlines the EU policy, indicates sources of funding and proposes a range of local actions which could be taken forward.

**Table one – Alignment of Europe 2020 and The Strategic Community Plan**

EU 2020 Strategy		The Falkirk Council Area Strategic Community Plan 2010 – 2015	
<i>Main Priorities</i>	<i>Flagship Initiatives</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Local Outcomes</i>
Smart Growth	Innovation Union Youth on the Move A Digital Agenda for Europe	Young People Who are Confident & Successful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our area will be recognised as having a culture &amp; ethos of aspiration &amp; ambition</li> <li>• Our young people will achieve their potential through learning and creativity, developing skills and knowledge</li> <li>• Disadvantaged communities will benefit from better services</li> </ul>
Sustainable Growth	Resource Efficient Europe  An Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era	Sustainable Falkirk  Growing Businesses & Prosperous People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will be greener</li> <li>• We will improve the built environment</li> <li>• Our open spaces will be attractive, accessible &amp; safe</li> <li>• The quality of our infrastructure will help promote the growth of the local economy</li> <li>• Our profile will reflect our area as a destination of choice</li> </ul>
Inclusive Growth	An Agenda for New Skills & jobs  European Platform Against Poverty	Fairer Falkirk  Safer Communities  Healthier People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our Workforce will be highly skilled</li> <li>• The wealth &amp; prosperity of our area will increase</li> <li>• People will have equitable access to local health support &amp; care</li> <li>• Our housing continues to meet the needs of people who live &amp; may wish to live in our area</li> <li>• Our citizens continue to access critical services that meet their needs</li> <li>• Our citizens will be protected</li> <li>• Vulnerable children will be protected</li> <li>• Our citizens &amp; communities will be encouraged to take responsibility for their own health &amp; wellbeing</li> <li>• Our citizens will be supported to make positive health choices &amp; lifestyles in order they can live longer</li> </ul>

### **3. CONCLUSION**

- 3.1 We believe our European Strategy fits well with the direction, priorities and aspirations of Europe 2020. We also take the view that this offers significant opportunities for Falkirk Council, its partners, citizens and local businesses in helping us to realise our vision for the local area. European communities and citizens can also benefit from our history, culture and approach to improving the lives and wellbeing of the people who live in the Falkirk Council area.
- 3.2 Once the strategy is approved, we would look to work with partners to ensure its implementation. We would also look to report back to Members at regular intervals on progress.

### **4. FALKIRK COUNCIL'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE EAST OF SCOTLAND EUROPEAN CONSORTIUM (ESEC)**

- 4.1 A recommendation to renew Falkirk Council's membership of ESEC was approved by Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 8 March 2011. This was referred from Economic Strategy and Development Committee at its meeting 22 February 2011.
- 4.2 The annual membership fee for ESEC remains at £6,750 and over the past 12 months following the renewal, Falkirk Council has received EU policy expertise and support in relation to the development of the draft European strategy.
- 4.3 ESEC has also provided advance information on important changes to future EU funding programmes which could have an impact for the Council area. In addition, they have facilitated dialogue between the Council and Scottish Government on proposals relating to the reform of Regional Aid Guidance which will help to ensure that the Council's position is put forward.
- 4.4 Negotiations on future European funding programmes will gather pace during 2012 and it is important that the interests of Falkirk Council are represented, both singularly and collectively via membership organisations such as ESEC to ensure we can maximise on future funding opportunities. It is therefore proposed that Falkirk Council renews its membership of ESEC and continues to review this on an annual basis in relation to its relevance, representation of Best Value and the existence of other viable options.

**5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Committee refers to Council approval of:

5.1 The appended draft European Strategy; and

5.2 The proposal that the Council renew its membership of ESEC.

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**DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

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