



To: Growth Programme Board, local ESIF sub-committees, PDR, & LEP Network.

Responding to COVID-19

The response to the COVID-19 crisis creates significant challenges for us all. We are in an unprecedented situation with very wide-ranging impacts across the wider community.

We know that this is affecting the way in which the European Structural and Investment Funds programmes are being delivered. MHCLG, DWP and Defra are committed to working flexibly and pragmatically with all of our project stakeholders to ensure we maintain stability in the short term, respond positively to the challenges we face as a nation and to ensure capacity is in place to support economic recovery once the current situation subsides.

We recognise that the current situation creates immense uncertainty and significant challenges to the delivery of existing projects and the development of projects in the pipeline. We recognise that you and your stakeholders will have a number of questions regarding how to proceed.

We are discussing this as a top priority across Government and are also in discussion with the European Commission about potential ways of responding to the situation and the impact on ESI Funds programmes. As part of this, we are reviewing existing project activity and the case for adjusting provision to meet current circumstances, in line with ESI Funds objectives.

We will be working with our Performance and Dispute Resolution sub-committee for ERDF and ESF, to engage partner representatives across sectors and geographies to provide advice to MHCLG and DWP on the steps that we can take. Defra is also working with its stakeholder groups to consider options.

In the meantime, we ask that you and your stakeholders continue to deliver ERDF, ESF and EAFRD projects as fully as you are able within the context of Government guidance, and submit claims and applications as normal. Any organisation experiencing difficulties should contact departments to discuss further. We are also preparing an initial list of the most common questions and this will be published on gov.uk.

The ERDF and ESF Reserve Funds and live calls

With the current circumstances, both MHCLG and DWP have also taken the decision to defer the ERDF & unpublished ESF Reserve Fund calls that were due to launch in the coming months. This decision will allow our partners and our teams to focus on the immediate tasks to respond to COVID-19 and to review the focus of the ERDF & ESF Reserve Funds in line with emerging priorities.

For ERDF, we recognise that a number of partners have been preparing applications, and this work will not be lost. We intend to work across Government and with our partners to redesign the Reserve Fund to enable ERDF to support businesses to recover and grow once the current crisis subsides – ready for project activity from 2021.

For ESF, we recognise that there are still a number of proposals awaiting appraisal and the Managing Authority and its Appraisal Team will be in contact with the relevant parties in due course to discuss those proposals in more detail. Live calls will continue. As with ERDF, we will be working across Government and with our partners to redesign the Reserve Fund so that we can support society in key areas once the crisis subsides.

We will update you all further as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,



Julia Sweeney

Director, European Programmes and Local Growth

Ministry of Housing, Communities,
and Local Government
3rd Floor SW, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Tel 0303 444 3157
Julia.Sweeney@communities.gov.uk