



European Union

European Structural
and Investment Funds

**European Structural and Investment Funds
2014 - 2020**

Growth Programme for England

ESI Funds Growth Programme Board

Partnership Working Review: Progress Report

Purpose:

To provide the Board with information on the progress of the Partnership Working Review and to update members on plans for wider engagement of partners through regional events, telekits and an online questionnaire.

Recommendation:

That the Board:

- Note the contents of the report and progress made with the Review.

Summary:

Ministers committed to undertake a review of partnership working arrangements following the first year of the 2014-2020 ESI Fund Growth Programme implementation in England. To date, the Review Steering Group has met three times to shape and agree the Review's engagement plan and a set of guiding questions for the Review. Two stages of engagement were agreed, firstly with MA teams at national and local level, and secondly, with partners active across a range of LEP area ESI Fund sub-committees.

1. **Stage 1:** From February the Review team has held a series of meetings with representatives from Managing Authorities (MA) for ERDF, ESF and EAFRD as well as BIS local teams across England to discuss how partnership arrangements are working. Feedback from MAs has been informative and constructive – some early headlines are set out within the paper below.
2. **Stage 2:** Engagement with partners is currently on-going (the first stage 2 meeting was held in Cornwall on 25th February). Currently, the Review team is confirmed to visit up to 20 LEP area ESI Fund sub-committees by mid-April. Key points emerging from early feedback with partners are outlined within the paper below.

In addition, members are asked to note that a range of methods will be used to maximise the contribution of partners to the review. For example, sub-committee members unable to attend scheduled events will have the opportunity to submit written comments, partners will also be able to provide feedback by attending one of the four regional events being organised, through telekits or in writing via an online questionnaire. Finally, progress in meeting milestones and timelines for the Review is summarised at the end of the paper.

1. Ministers committed to undertake a review of partnership working arrangements following the first year of the 2014-2020 ESI Fund Growth Programme implementation in England. The agreed Terms of Reference for the Review were shared with the Growth Programme Board in September 2015. The review will consider whether partnership working arrangements are delivering the level of partner input and influence intended and whether any measures or best practice can be identified that may help deliver and improve upon this objective.
2. The Review Steering Group set up to oversee this process has met on three occasions and agreed the guiding questions and an engagement plan for the Review. The engagement plan identifies two key stages involving firstly, structured consultation with national and local Managing Authority Teams and secondly a broader consultation with partners and members of LEP area ESI Fund sub-committees.

Stage 1: Engagement with Managing Authority teams (February - early March)

3. The Review team has met with local Managing Authorities (MA) and BIS teams across the country and with the Greater London Authority (as an Intermediate Body) to discuss their views on how partnership arrangements are working in practice and any areas for improvement. These meetings have been well attended by LEP area leads in DCLG Growth Delivery Teams responsible for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as well as DWP and Defra MA representatives for the European Social Fund (ESF) and, where appropriate, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Discussions also took place with central ESF and EAFRD Managing Authority teams in early March.
4. Early headlines from these discussions include the following observations:
 - Representation on local ESI Funds sub-committees is in line with guidance and EU partnership principles and Code of Conduct.
 - In some cases membership for particular sectors has been adjusted as the nature of committee business has evolved, e.g. some local authority elected members have asked for officers to attend in their place or CEOs have been replaced by Directors of Economic Development.
 - Participation by members in discussions is mixed. Some evidence that where members have been confirmed through a competitive selection process they are more participative.
 - Members with experience of previous EU programmes providing informed perspective is balanced by fresh insights from some members new to this work.
 - Inductions held for committees by MAs are helpful in building member understanding of roles and responsibilities.
 - Partner Chairs (often private sector) performing well in organising discussions and encouraging contributions from as many members as possible.
 - Member knowledge of local economic priorities, opportunities for alignment and complementary activities is proving helpful in shaping decisions on calls and funding applications.

- No examples to date of partner advice not translating into MA decisions on calls and funding applications.
- Limited evidence of cross-LEP area working at this stage.
- Partner advice on ESF Opt-in organisations is mixed. Some examples of where this is working well, e.g. in London and Liverpool City Region. In some cases the role of Opt-in organisations and interface with local ESI Funds sub-committees has complicated member engagement and influence.
- Generally good working arrangements between MAs though some evidence of mixed experience for committee members, in terms of quality of assessment and appraisal, contributions at committee and in associated documentation.
- Pre-meetings across MAs in some instances helping to join-up and improve support, providing a useful planning mechanism and scope to support Chair.
- Mixed views on information and communication. GOV.UK working well for some though less clear for others, particularly in relation to the visibility and accessibility of call content.
- Partner updates have limited profile and awareness in a number of areas.

Stage two: Consultation with partners (March – early April 2016)

5. Discussions with partners began at the end of February and are ongoing. The intention has been to engage with a range of areas and geographic / thematic characteristics. Under current plans, the Review team aims to visit up to 20 ESI Fund sub-committees across England to hold discussions on partnership working arrangements. Areas to be visited include:
 - nine urban areas (8 Core Cities and London).
 - five areas with rural interests (with further discussions with partners planned during Rural Development Programme PMC in March).
 - six of the eight Community Led Local Development areas.
 - eight more developed regions, two transition regions and the only less developed region.
 - six of the seven areas with mixed categories of region.
 - ten areas with large (<200m€), five areas with medium (200 -75m€) and five with small (>75m€) ESI Fund allocations.
 - Range of areas, some of whom have been more (or less) actively engaged in previous ERDF programmes.
6. Key points emerging from early Stage 2 discussions with partners include the following observations:
 - a. Partners felt that the volume of paperwork received by ESI Fund sub-committees can militate against effective decision-making and partner participation.
 - b. It was commented that currently members found it difficult to digest the volume of information contained in assessment and appraisal forms and that these should be summarised to better support the ability of local partners to provide MAs with relevant advice.

- c. Partners would welcome more consistency in the quality of assessments, contributions and information tabled to local ESI Fund sub-committees across the MAs.
 - d. There was also a need to ensure 'joined-up' working across Managing Authorities at national and local level as partners felt that this would help to strengthen our collective ability to meet single growth programme objectives and to maximise the opportunities of a joint programme based approach.
 - e. Going forward partners were keen to ensure the availability of tailored information on the potential impacts and results of investment decisions in their locality to support them in their local ESI Fund sub-committees role.
 - f. A number of partners commented that the use of summary progress reports (including early stage management information on calls, applications, outputs etc.) for each fund will help to support advisory role of local ESI Fund sub-committees.
 - g. Broadly the management of conflicts of interest within ESI Fund sub-committees was considered to be robust.
 - h. Partners were keen to emphasise that representative role played by them on behalf of their sector is a valuable source of intelligence and local understanding for ESI Fund sub-committees.
 - i. It was felt that the ability of sub-committee members to maintain engagement with their respective networks in support of their ESI Fund role would be critical to retaining expertise on local economic priorities and ultimately in supporting better local investments.
 - j. Partners pointed to evidence that the use of sub-committee members as ESI Fund 'ambassadors' helps to promote pipeline development, for example, the use of local call sponsors - working in close collaboration with local MA teams - helps to inform strategic content of local calls and to raise awareness of wider funding opportunities.
7. In addition to the Review team visiting LEP area ESI Fund sub-committees, partners will also be able to contribute to the Review through a series of bespoke regional events planned for March / April – for example:
- South West – 14th March, Bristol.
 - South East – 30th March, London.
 - Midlands – April, Nottingham (location and date to be confirmed).
 - North West – April Warrington (location and date to be confirmed).
8. Finally, members are asked to note that a range of methods will be used to maximise the contribution of partners to the Review. For example, sub-committee members unable to attend scheduled events will have the opportunity to submit written comments; partners will also be able to provide feedback by attending one of the four regional events being organised, through telekits or in writing via an online questionnaire to be launched at the end of March.

Progress on milestones

9. The Review team is able to report good progress in meeting milestones set out in the Terms of Reference and Engagement Plan. All stage 1 Managing Authority consultation meetings were completed by the 7th March.

10. By the 24th March, a number of Stage 2 consultation meetings with LEP area ESI Fund sub-committees, including the first regional event, will also have taken place. Members are asked to note that DCLG, DWP and Defra/RPA teams have undertaken to work together to supplement the central review team resource to ensure that there is capacity to cover all Review meetings planned.

Timetable for the Review

Autumn 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop terms of reference (ToR) for the review
Sept 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update GPB on review plans and ToR (24 September)
Oct - Dec 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministerial agreement to TOR Provide update for GPB (16 December)
Jan 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Steering Group meeting (8 January) Agreeing engagement plan and steer for questions (share engagement plan with local MA teams/GDT heads) Organisation of consultation with local MAs and partners begins
Feb 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreement as to how feedback will be collected and organised Consultation with local MAs continues Organisation of consultation with local partners Review Steering Group meeting (22 February) Consultation process with partners begins
Mar 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation process with partners continues Online feedback survey launched (end-March) Review Steering Group meeting (21 March) Update and discussion with GPB (24 March)
April 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final partner consultations efforts and regional events Online feedback survey closes (date tbc) Analysis of feedback begins Review Steering Group meeting (22 April)
May 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of feedback and drafting of final report Present conclusions and recommendations to RSG (23 May)
June 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present conclusions and recommendations to GPB (16 June) Agree final report with Ministers (across Departments)
July 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish final report

1 March 2016

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