

# The East Wales Partnership and the Consultation Exercise

## The Partnership

An open meeting was held in October 1998 to which 69 organisations were invited; these included all the major organisations with interests in East Wales, from the three sectors:

- *Public Sector* (including the National Assembly and Local Government, the Development Agencies, Enterprise Agencies and the Training & Enterprise Councils)
- *Private Sector* (including private companies (eg BT Wales, Railtrack), employers' federations (eg CBI Wales, Federation of Small Businesses, Mid Wales Manufacturing Group) and trades unions (eg farmers Union of Wales, National Farmers Union)
- *Voluntary Sector* (including Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Wales Association of County Voluntary Councils, Community Enterprise Wales)

At the inaugural meeting, the East Wales Partnership adopted Terms of Reference and set up three Working Groups:

- *Core Group* to support and assist the Partnership and co-ordinate the work of the other Working Groups.
- *Statistical Group* to undertake collection and presentation of statistical and other data.
- *Rural Group* to produce a Regional Assessment report on the rural part of the territory and propose priorities, measures and appropriate actions.
- *Urban/Industrial Group* to produce a Regional Assessment of the urban/industrial part of the territory and propose priorities, measures and appropriate actions.

It was foreseen that the Regional Assessments would inform, and contribute to, the East Wales draft SPD.

Membership of the Working Groups was cross-sector, drawn from within the organisations comprising the Partnership.

It was agreed that the Partnership would operate in a totally open and inclusive way and that new members would be welcome to join at any time. Membership of the East Wales Partnership currently stands at 79 organisations.

To date there have been 4 meetings of the full East Wales Partnership, with attendance at each meeting being around 60 persons. Although relatively few meetings of the full Partnership have taken place, there has been a large number of meetings of the various sub-groups and working groups which have been set up during the preparation of the draft SPD.

For each of the Priority areas in the SPD, a sub-group was established. Each sub-group was cross-sector in representation and was tasked with preparation of initial drafts of Priority and Measure texts, for presentation to and consideration by the full Partnership. Each sub-group nominated a *Lead Author* who, together with members of the Core Group, constituted a Partnership *Steering Group*. The Steering Group accepted responsibility for overseeing the drafting and re-drafting of the various sections of the SPD.

## **The Public Consultation**

The consultation process consisted of:

- Preparation and distribution of a Consultation Document and Questionnaire; these were produced by the East Wales Partnership bilingually, in both English and Welsh. The Consultation Document was a shortened version of the draft SPD, but included the Priorities and Measures sections in full. The Questionnaire was designed to facilitate responses.

In the region of 800 copies of the Consultation Document and Questionnaire were distributed to organisations across the East Wales area. Further copies were circulated to individuals and companies who telephoned, wrote in or e-mailed requesting copies as a result of the Press Notices (see below).

Distribution was by e-mail where possible, otherwise by post.

- In Powys, three open public meetings were held early in March. These were advertised in advance in the press, drawing attention to the chance to influence how European funding might be utilised.

The three locations were chosen for maximum accessibility (at Welshpool for the northern part of the area, at Llandrindod Wells for the central part, and at Brecon to serve the southern part of Powys). A workshop was also held in Cardiff.

## **Response to the Consultation**

81 Questionnaires were returned; 46% were from the public sector, 23% from private companies, 11% from individuals and 20% from the voluntary sector.

## General opinion on Consultation Document

Overall, 94% of those who responded expressed a "positive" opinion of the Consultation Document. 32% were "very positive" and 62% were "fairly positive". Only 6% were "fairly negative" and none expressed a "very negative" opinion.

## Appropriateness of Strategy and Objectives

97% (57 respondents) of those expressing a view agreed generally with the proposed strategic areas of intervention and the objectives of the programme. Only 3% (2 respondents) did not agree.

## Appropriateness of Key Issues identified

Similarly 97% agreed with the summary of the Key Issues for the East Wales area. 97% also agreed that the proposed themes of the strategic framework adequately addressed the strategic needs of the East Wales Objective 2 and Transitional Area, either "fully" (14%) or "generally" (83%).

## Appropriateness of proposed Priorities

98% of respondents thought Priority 1 (*Business Competitiveness and Enterprise*) was appropriate as one of the four priority areas; 93% thought Priority 2 (*Regenerating the Agrarian Economy*) was appropriate; all respondents agreed that Priority 3 (*Urban Community Regeneration*) should be included, whilst 98% thought Priority 4 (*Tackling Rural Peripherality and Developing Communities*) was appropriate as one of the four priority areas.

## ESF

Support for including ESF within the Objective 2 programme was less than overwhelming, with 81% of respondents saying ESF should be at the minimum level and 14% saying it should be more significant at either 10% or 20% of the total programme's value. No suggestions or proposals were forthcoming giving examples of well integrated ERDF and ESF projects.

## Annual Spend Profile

Regarding the annual spend profile, a majority (51%) thought the profile should be "even" (ie broadly similar expenditure each year), with a significant 27% saying that it should be "front loaded". 20% of those responding said they had "no opinion" on the spend profile.

## Variation in Grant Rates

There was some support for having variation in grant rates: 25% of respondents thought grant rates should vary by "Type of Action", whilst 19% thought any variation should be by programme " Measure" and 11% thought it should be at the "Priority" level.

## Conclusions

Overall the responses to the Consultation Document were very positive and indicated a very high degree of support for the proposed strategy, themes, priorities and measures.

In order to take account fully of the detailed comments and suggestions in individual questionnaires, the individual Lead Authors (of each of the four Priority sections of the draft SPD) were tasked with examining the individual responses, identifying any comments/issues which needed to be addressed within the context of that Priority and finally producing a proposal for changes to the draft SPD text which were considered by the Steering Group.