

European Policy and Funding Update

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide the Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee with an update on the development of European policy and funding issues under the current 2014-2020 European programming period.
- 1.2 This update report will cover progress with regard to:
- European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF);
 - Argyll and the Islands LEADER and European & Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF);
 - current discussions at Highlands and Islands European Partnership (HIEP) and West of Scotland European Forum (WoSEF) meetings;
 - recent audit visits and reports; and
 - future meetings and events.
- 1.3 The paper provides a detailed update on the European Structural and Investment Funds which comprise of the following funds:
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
 - European Social Funds (ESF);
 - European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development (EAFRD) which supports rural development and LEADER Funding, and
 - European and Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF).
- 1.4 Overall, there has been a significant delay in the launch of the new European programmes; a culmination of issues at the European level and then at the Scottish Government level. This delay has been outwith the direct control of Argyll and Bute Council officers.
- 1.5 The Council is leading on bids for the following strategic interventions: Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator Programme for Argyll and Bute, Argyll and Bute Enhanced Employability Pipeline and Social Inclusion and Poverty. Applications have been submitted for the Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator Programme and the Enhanced Employability Pipeline programmes, although further development work has still to be undertaken on the Enhanced Employability Pipeline. An application under the Social Inclusion and Poverty intervention will be developed once the Enhanced Employability Pipeline is further developed as it will be designed to complement and support the pipeline.
- 1.6 In addition, an update has been provided on other funding opportunities focusing on the appropriate themes within the EU Territorial programmes for 2014-2020.

- 1.7 The European Team is actively involved in supporting participation of elected in members in HIEP and WoSEF, where the former focuses on European issues relevant to the Highlands and Islands part of Argyll and Bute and the latter to issues that are pertinent to the Helensburgh and Lomond area.
- 1.8 The outcome of recent audit visits has been positive to date, where comments have been made by external auditors on “neat and professional presentation of the project files.”
- 1.9 Future meetings and events at the European level for the remainder of this calendar year have been noted in the report and whether attendance at these meetings will be required or not.
- 1.10 The recommendations for EDI Committee members are as follows:
 - To note the content of this report.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide the Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee with an update on the development of European policy and funding issues under the current 2014-2020 European programming period.

2.2 This update report will cover progress with regard to:

- European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF);
- Argyll and the Islands LEADER and European & Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF);
- current discussions at Highlands and Islands European Partnership (HIEP) and West of Scotland European Forum (WoSEF) meetings;
- recent audit visits and reports; and
- future meetings and events.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The recommendations for EDI Committee members are as follows:

- To note the content of this report.

4.0 DETAILS

4.1 European Structural and Investment Funds comprise of the following funds:

- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- European Social Funds (ESF);
- European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development (EAFRD) which supports rural development and LEADER Funding, and
- European and Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

4.2 Overall, there has been a significant delay in the launch of the new European programmes; a culmination of issues at the European level and then at the Scottish Government level. This delay has been outwith the direct control of Argyll and Bute Council officers.

ERDF and ESF Strategic Interventions

4.3 With regard to ERDF and ESF, local authorities have been charged with the part delivery of three of 11 strategic interventions (outlined in **Appendix 1, Table A1**) for the 2014-2020 programmes. For the new programmes significantly more funding is

available through ESF than ERDF. The Council's Economic Development Service (Business Gateway, Employability and European Teams) are leading on the development of the bids for these strategic interventions, the content of which is as follows:

- **Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator programme for Argyll and Bute.** This intervention will significantly increase the assistance available to accelerate the growth of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Argyll and Bute Council area and contribute to the National Business Gateway approach to supporting growth businesses across Scotland. The overarching vision is to support SMEs with sustainable growth potential from the point of start-up through the growth pipeline towards, where appropriate, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) or Scottish Enterprise (SE) account managed status. In particular, the intervention will complement and extend the scope of core Business Gateway services, with the opportunity to integrate delivery with other local economic development activities to maximise the impact. It is anticipated that the intervention will engage 236 unique SMEs in a range of activities designed to develop their growth aspirations, providing advice and/or financial support with a focus on overcoming sectoral as well as generic barriers to growth.
- **Argyll and Bute Enhanced Employability Pipeline.** This strategic intervention will deliver much needed support and skills interventions to participants who are furthest removed from the labour market and have significant barriers to employment. It is intended to provide a wide array of support mechanisms throughout a participant's journey to sustainable employment, allowing Argyll and Bute Council and appropriate partner organisations to offer interventions through a five stage journey (or pipeline).
- **Social Inclusion and Poverty.** Argyll and Bute Council can work up its own submission, once the Enhanced Employability Pipeline application has been further developed as this application will be designed to complement and support the pipeline.
- In addition to this, Argyll and Bute (excluding the Helensburgh and Lomond area) has been chosen as one of five local authorities to be part of a Big Lottery application for ESF under the Social Inclusion and Poverty Strategic Intervention. The Big Lottery is applying to be a lead partner for the delivery of up to £8m of ESF monies (alongside £10m Lottery resources). Funding for projects will be supported by providing match at source thereby reducing bureaucracy for partners delivering the work on the ground. The Big Lottery Fund is awaiting approval from the Scottish Government.

4.4 The status of the strategic intervention applications is as outlined below:

- The initial Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator Programme strategic intervention application was submitted to the Scottish Government on 27th March 2015 (seeking just over £272k of ERDF funding until the mid-term review in 2018). The application was assessed by the Scottish Government's Scrutiny and Risk Panel (SRP) and feedback provided. The application was updated to include the responses raised by the SRP and anticipated spend re-profiled due to the lack of activity between April to September 2015. The

final application was signed by the council's Chief Executive Officer on Friday, 9th October 2015. It is hoped that this strategic intervention application will be approved by the Scottish Government as soon as possible, given that the operational application (work is underway on this at present), is to be submitted by 2nd November 2015¹.

- Argyll and Bute Enhanced Employability Pipeline was submitted initially in May 2015 and then re-submitted on 26th June 2015 further to comments from the Scottish Government (ability to secure £3.66m of ESF funding that requires 50% match funding). The application was reviewed by the Scottish Government's SRP during the summer and formal feedback was received through a face-to-face meeting with Scottish Government Structural Fund staff on 21st August 2015. As the pipeline is a relative new approach for the Argyll and Bute area the feedback was welcomed. The Operations Manager from the Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team is currently working on developing this strategic intervention further for Argyll and Bute. This new pipeline approach will provide additional support to vulnerable individuals with multiple barriers to employment through internal and external service provision. It is hoped that a finalised application will be submitted in January 2016, further to approval from the EDI Committee meeting on 14th January 2016.

Argyll and the Islands LEADER/EMFF Strategy

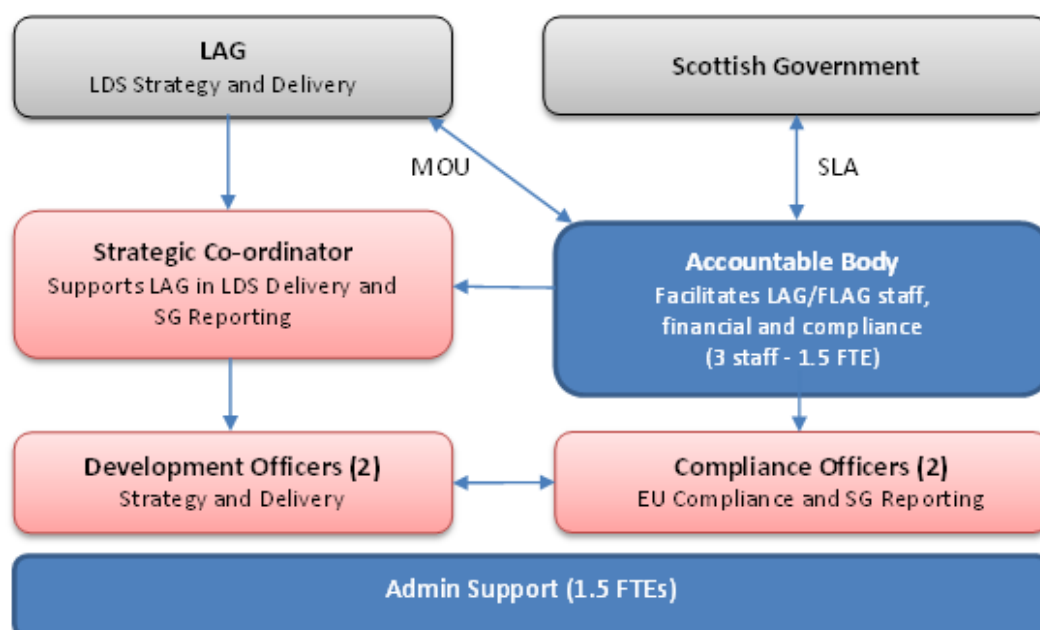
- 4.5 Approval has been given by the Scottish Government for the LEADER element of the LEADER/EMFF Local Development Strategy with an indicative allocation to the Argyll and the Islands Local Action Group (LAG), which also includes the EMFF Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) of £4,886,126. The Scottish Government has also requested that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the government and Argyll and Bute Council is signed. However, the strategy is still incomplete and guidance is still awaited on the development on various elements of the strategy, for example, business support, State Aid, monitoring and evaluation of the programme and the requirement that the new Accountable Bodies Board should be a mechanism for dispute resolution arrangements with regard to specific compliance issues. Further to discussion at a SMT Business meeting on 21st September 2015 it was agreed to sign the SLA subject to conditions. The supporting letter with conditions will also incorporate recent issues raised by COSLA. The final letter will be approved by the Council's Legal Team. A Memorandum of Understanding has also been prepared between Argyll and Bute Council and the Argyll and the Islands LEADER LAG/EMFF FLAG.
- 4.6 The diagram overleaf depicts the proposed governance structure for the new LEADER/EMFF programme and the staffing requirements. The Strategic Co-ordinator and LEADER/EMFF Development and Compliance Officer posts will all be fully funded by LEADER/EMFF monies. The Accountable Body and administration support posts are currently posts that sit within the Council European Team and central Administration for the Development and Infrastructure Directorate that are required to fulfill the function within the Service Level Agreement with the Scottish Government and the council. Due to the availability of transition funding and the

¹ This was the status of the Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator Programme strategic intervention application at the time of writing this report. An update on the submission of the Operational Application will be provided at the EDI Committee on 12th November 2015.

retirement of the previous LEADER Project Co-ordinator, the new Strategic Co-ordinator was appointed in July 2015.

4.7 A short description of each of the roles of the LEADER/EMFF funded posts are outlined below:

- **Strategic Co-ordinator** – responsible for strategic reporting to the LAG/FLAG and other bodies requiring this information; publicity; line management of Development Officers; inspection activities and networking.
- **LEADER/EMFF Development Officer (2)** – awareness raising of the LEADER/EMFF programmes and the Argyll and the Islands area (co-operation projects); project development; pre-approval applicant support; monitoring project activity; and recording project progress information.
- **LEADER/EMFF Compliance Officer (2)** - 100% financial check and recording of all claims; checking procurement; liaising with applicants on claims; close working with the Development Officers.



Note: LAG – Local Action Group. FLAG – Fisheries Local Action Group.

4.8 The new Argyll and the Islands LEADER programme will be delivered by the Local Action Group with Argyll and Bute Council as the Accountable Body responsible for administration and compliance issues.

4.9 The EMFF element (circa £300k) will be delivered by a Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG). Following on from a request from the European Commission for the UK to reduce the number of FLAGs, Marine Scotland has approached Argyll and Bute and the Ayrshire Councils to come together to create a joint FLAG. At a meeting on 24th September 2015, Argyll and the Islands FLAG members have agreed in principle to the proposed merger. At present, this would appear to be a straightforward process and one which would not affect the strategy which is currently with Marine Scotland awaiting approval. Details on the progress of this issue will be updated in the regular Policy Lead, European Policy and Funding update report.

Other Funding Opportunities

- 4.10 The European Team is currently working with Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT) in developing a preparatory bid to submit to the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPAP). NPAP is one of the EU territorial programmes which the Argyll and Bute region is eligible to apply and ACT has potential to secure funding.
- 4.11 With a focus on culture and heritage issues, the European Team is investigating Atlantic Area Programme funding opportunities (another EU territorial programme) with colleagues in Community Services. This project is currently at an early scoping stage.

Highland and Islands European Partnership (HIEP)

- 4.12 The Highland and Islands European Partnership (HIEP) purpose is to pursue a joint approach of engagement within the EU. The partnership consists of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), and seven local authorities – The Highland Council, Argyll and Bute Council, Moray Council, North Ayrshire Council, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The partnership represents the Highlands and Islands region of Argyll and Bute, eligible within the ESIF Highlands and Islands Transition Programme area. The predominant focus is to collectively influence policy and development issues relating to EU funding programmes.
- 4.13 Presently, HIEP is pressing Keith Brown MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities, concerning the Scottish Government's roll out of European Structural Funds. Main issues raised are with the delays in the approvals for strategic intervention applications, lack of meaningful guidance of programmes and governance concerns relating to the Highland and Islands Territorial Committee (HITC).
- 4.14 HIEP is represented in the Highlands and Islands Territorial Committee (HITC), the body appointed by Scottish Government to provide the specific territorial perspectives regarding the delivery of regional funds within the Highlands and Islands area. As it stands, HIEP is concerned with the role of the HITC and lack of communication from Scottish Government. The partnership is currently pursuing the Scottish Government to enforce a change to the terms of reference, which would allow for a more meaningful contribution on how HITC can influence the development of European Structural and Investment funds within the region.
- 4.15 The role of HIEP is also to engage with our Members of European Parliament. On 24th and 25th September 2015, HIEP hosted Catherine Stihler MEP in both Shetland and Inverness. Head of Economic Development and Strategic Transportation, Fergus Murray, attended the workshop held on 25th September, via video conference. The workshop involved a presentation by Highlands and Islands Enterprise on the Digital Excellence Centre and progress on the next generation broadband project. Catherine Stihler, MEP proved to be thoroughly engaged with the digital connectivity subject, and supportive of pursuing the barriers ahead regarding increased broadband coverage.

- 4.16 HIEP will be hosting a further MEP VC meeting on 11th November 2015. Confirmed thus far are Catherine Stihler, Ian Hudghton and David Martin.

West of Scotland European Forum (WoSEF)

- 4.17 The European Team is also actively involved in supporting participation of elected members in the West of Scotland European Forum which focus on European issues that are pertinent to the Helensburgh and Lomond part of Argyll and Bute.

Audit Visits and Reports

- 4.18 **Table 1** below outlines the recent audit visits and reports on European issues.

Table 1: European Audits		
Audit	Date	Recommendation
Argyll and the Islands LEADER Programme 2007-2013, Scottish Government 'On-the-spot' inspection.	15 th -17 th June 2015	Reports are now available for the 'On-the-spot' inspection carried out in June 2015 by the Scottish Government Rural Communities Team. The auditors looked at four projects which had been identified as being a 'risk'. During the inspection, two of the projects were found to have areas requiring further attention. An action plan has been agreed with most now complete. See Appendix 2 for more detail.
Argyll & Bute and South Ayrshire FLAG Strategy (2007-13) Internal Audit	30 th June and 1 st July 2015	There were no recommendations for improvement identified as part of this audit.
Argyll and the Islands LEADER Strategy (2007-13) Internal Audit	15 th July 2015	There were no recommendations for improvement identified as part of the audit.
Kintyre Renewables Hub European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) – Audit Scotland Article 62b check	24 th -27 th August 2015	No report is currently available. However, the auditor did note to staff in attendance, that they were pleased with the neat and professional presentation of the project files.
Kintyre Renewables Hub European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) – European Court of Auditors audit	15 th -16 th September 2015	The European Court of Auditors (ECA) visit was undertaken as part of a trail of audits. The ECA audit was undertaken as part of an audit of the European Commission (EC) to ensure they are undertaking effective audits of all Managing Authorities (MAs). The EC is required to audit MAs to ensure that they are delivering and managing programmes within the relevant EU Regulations. In this case the MA is the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government should receive a report within the next two months. However, the report will contain areas of concern, but these will not be on a project-by-project basis so we are not expecting to receive project feedback.

Future Meetings and Events

4.19 **Table 2** below outlines the meetings and events for the remainder of this calendar year (at the time of writing this report).

Table 2: European Meeting Planner			
Meeting and venue	Date	Attendance	Action required
Open Days – 13 th European Week of Regions and Cities (Brussels)	12-15 October 2015	Not required.	
43 rd CPMR General Assembly (Firenze, Toscana, Italy)	4/6 November 2015	Policy Lead with office support.	A briefing note will be prepared for the Policy Lead in advance of the meeting. A post meeting note will be prepared and key issues included in the regular Policy Lead, European Policy and Funding Update Report.
HIEP Board (Housing Meeting Room booked, VC attendance)	30 November 2015	Council Leader with officer support.	A briefing note will be prepared for the Leader in advance of the meeting.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 This paper provides the members of the EDI Committee with a broad overview and update on the current European policy and funding opportunities for the 2014-2020 programming period facilitated in the main by the Council's European Team.

5.2 For ease of reference a summary page of European Team activity is outlined in **Appendix 3**.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy European funding and policy issues align with the overarching aim of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) 2013-2023 and in particular the requirement to maximise European funding investment throughout Argyll and Bute which could impact on all six SOA outcomes and is a key objective within the Argyll and Bute Economic Development Action Plan (EDAP), 2013-2018 and the four area-based EDAPs.

6.2 Financial Argyll and Bute Council as Lead Partner for the ERDF and ESF strategic interventions and as Accountable Body for LEADER and EMFF will be responsible for administering the funds compliantly within European rules and regulations.

6.3 Legal All legal implications with regard to proposed Argyll and Bute Council actions will be taken into consideration.

- 6.4 HR Once the SLA is signed, and the process for recruiting additional staff for the 2014-2020 LEADER/EMFF programme will commence.
- 6.5 Equalities European policy and funding activities will comply with all Equal Opportunities policies and obligations.
- 6.6 Risk Council officers will need to ensure that Argyll and Bute Council's risks with regard to European funding and compliance issues are proportionate and reasonable to its role, in close liaison with the Council's Legal Services and Internal Audit.
- 6.7 Customer Services None.

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Appendix 1: Strategic Interventions

The 11 strategic interventions under the European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2014-2020 programming period are outlined in **Table A1** below. The interventions in bold are those where Argyll and Bute Council will be the lead partner.

Table A1: Strategic Interventions			
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF)	Strategic Intervention	Lead Partner	Objectives
ERDF	Innovation	Scottish Enterprise Highlands and Islands Enterprise Scottish Funding Council	Increase business commercialisation and investment in Research Technology Development and Innovation.
ERDF	Broadband	Digital Strategy & Programmes Division, Scottish Government	Enhance the opportunity for economic and social growth in areas which currently lack broadband coverage; and alleviate the risk of social exclusion.
ERDF	Business Competitiveness (Argyll and Bute Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator programme)	Scottish Local Authorities Scottish Enterprise Highlands and Islands Enterprise	Increase and support ambition of SMEs to grow and increase employment, including diversification of the business base in rural areas.
ERDF	Low Carbon Travel and Transport	Transport Scotland	Decrease in greenhouse gas emissions through uptake of environmentally friendly transport modes.
ERDF	Low Carbon Infrastructure Development Fund	Low Carbon Investment and Public Sector Energy Efficiency, Scottish Government	Build Scotland's reputation as a good place to invest in low carbon sectors and supply chains, and increase investment levered into Scotland by private and institutional investors Develop low carbon communities to increase sustainability and reduce reliance of remote communities on fossil fuels.
ERDF	Resource Efficiency Circular Economy Accelerator Programme	Zero Waste Scotland	More resource efficient businesses (particularly SMEs and SME clusters) Growth in private-sector re-processing and re-manufacturing industries through the reuse of waste products.
ERDF	Green Infrastructure	Scottish Natural Heritage	Improved environmental quality and utility in urban areas. Improved environmental quality and utility in urban areas.
ESF	Enhanced Employability Pipelines	Scottish Local Authorities	Improve access to and fit with labour market opportunities for long-term unemployed and disadvantaged groups, and minority groups under-represented in the labour market.

Table A1: Strategic Interventions (continued)			
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF)	Strategic Intervention	Lead Partner	Objectives
ESF	Social Inclusion and Poverty	Community-led programme, Scottish Government Financial Inclusion Programme, Big Lotter Fund Scotland Social Economy and Social Innovation Programmes, Scottish Government Supporting Enhanced Employability Pipelines, Scottish Local Authorities	Alleviate inequality, disadvantage and poverty at an individual, family, household and community level.
ESF	Developing Scotland's Workforce	Skills Development Scotland Scottish Funding Council	Support the development of key growth sectors by ensuring the right skills are available in the local labour market. Ensure that both academic and vocational routes into those sectors are available to individuals.
ESF	Youth Employment Initiative (South West Scotland)	Scottish Funding Council Scottish Local Authorities (LUPS only)	Creating labour market opportunities for young unemployed individuals.

Appendix 2: Summary of Scottish Government On-the-Spot Checks 2015: Comments and Responses

Organisation/ Beneficiary Name	LEADER Project Name & Short Description	SG Comments for Action	Response/Remedial Action
North Ayrshire Council (Capital Project)	Holy Isle Gateway Project. The aim of the project: build a proper landing facility that is fit for purpose.	Publicity - Site signage at both Jetty and on interpretation panel needs to be replaced.	Contact has been made with both NAC and the Holy Isle. Currently awaiting confirmation that signs are on-site.
Argyll & Bute Council (Capital Project)	Argyll Coastal Waters. The aim of the project: to develop coastal access sites to assist the economic growth of Argyll and Bute's coastal communities through the improved infrastructure and access to the waterfront.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At all sites the signs were substandard and had disappeared entirely from Arduaine. This was a known fault, so all signs are to be replaced by the end of September and the opportunity would be taken to update them all, with an additional stopover location. 2. At Ganavan, the changing room building looked unfinished and the woodwork appeared not to have been treated. 3. At Arduaine, this was where the sign had disappeared. More worrying however, was the erosion to the underneath of the ramp and remedial work would be urgently required to remedy this. The base of the ramp appeared to have dropped about three inches already. Without the extra work, the ramp could collapse and may be a health and safety issue. 4. At Ardrishaig, the pontoons and bridges appeared to fit in well with existing facilities but unusually the site sign was some distance from the facility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interpretation signs have all been redesigned to ensure that all logos are visible and to show the addition of the new site. These panels will be erected at each site in new, strengthened frameworks. E-mails have been received from the contractor who aims to have this done by Wednesday, 3rd November 2015 and will e-mail photos of the signs once erected at each site. 2. The architect has provided the technical specification for the Ganavan shelter which is attached. It has been built to this specification to the approval of the Architect and Engineer. 3. The remedial work to the ramp at Arduaine has been completed with additional strengthening. 4. Signs of the Logos have been made and attached to the pontoons/bridges.

Appendix 3: European Team Activity

Key European Networks

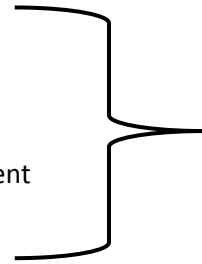
HIEP: Highlands and Islands European Partnership

WOSEF: West of Scotland European Forum

CPMR: Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions

COSLA: Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

SLAED: Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development



To monitor developments in policy and funding topics of interest to Argyll and Bute the Council is a member of a number of European Networks.

Our European Networks have elected member and officer groups, the European Team is actively involved in the work of the officer led groups and supports the participation of Members in the elected member groups.

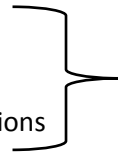
Participating in our European Networks increases the effectiveness of the Council's EU activity.

Main Policy Areas

Regional Policy – Specifically ERDF* and ESF*

Rural Development – Specifically LEADER

Maritime & Fisheries – Specifically Community Actions



Collectively the:
**European
Structural and
Investment
Funds (ESIF)**

These policy areas are maximised by the EU Team to support Economic and Community Development.

*ERDF – European Regional Development Fund *ESF – European Social Fund

Associated Policy Areas

State Aid (including Regional Aid Assisted Area Map)

Transport, Energy and Environment

Social Agenda (including equal opportunities)

These policy areas are monitored by the EU Team and followed up as appropriate or are passed to the relevant Council Service.

Applying For ESIF

LEADER and Maritime & Fisheries Funding – £4.9m

ERDF: Business Competitiveness - £272k

ESF: Employability and Social Inclusion - £4.19m (of which £3.66m has been ring-fenced for the Enhanced Employability Pipeline strategic intervention).

Aspirational Funding Opportunities

Territorial Cooperation Programmes
(Project based, transnational partnership approach)

Thematic Funds
(LIFE +, Citizens for Europe and Youth in Action etc.)

Investigate accessing funds from '*Other Strategic Interventions*'

Ongoing Tasks

- Attending and supporting political attendance at Network meetings,
- Briefings for elected members and senior officers,
- European Update Report,
- Funding Alert,
- European Consultation Forward Planner,
- Preparing consultation responses, and;
- Information management and dissemination.

Monitoring and Compliance

Ongoing monitoring and compliance of the ESIF Funds to ensure the retention of funds and mitigate audit risks.