



European Union
European Structural
and Investment Funds

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

Growth Programme for England

ESI Funds Growth Programme Board

Progress on EAFRD Growth Programme

Purpose:

To provide the Board with an update on the current position on the EAFRD part of the EU Growth Programme.

Recommendations:

The Board is invited to note the information set out in this paper and to comment on the key issues set out in annex 2.

Summary:

Defra Ministers announced additional RDPE Growth Programme funding worth £75m on 29 July. £30m of this funding is allocated to a new Rural Infrastructure Broadband offer and the budget available under the current open offers will be increased by £45m to £165m.

The total amount of EAFRD funding committed under the 2015 Growth Programme offers now stands at £9.6m. Claims for £2.91m have been paid to date, with 7 projects completing all activity, creating 24 jobs.

As at 17 August, the RPA had received Expressions of Interest requesting £87.5m under the national offers launched in January 2017. Under the revised assessment process, 95% of these applicants are receiving a response from the RPA within 30 days. Projects requesting £60.4m of funding have been invited to submit full applications, and projects totalling £10.5m have now done so. One contract has been signed already, committing £0.41m under the food processing offer.

EAFRD GROWTH PROGRAMME UPDATE

1. Defra Ministers announced £200m of new RDPE offers on 29 July. This included £75m on additional offers under the RDPE Growth Programme. These offers comprised £45m to top up the £120m of business development, food processing and tourism infrastructure offers opened in January 2017; and £30m for broadband infrastructure.

2. The £45m top-up announcement effectively means that the full £177m budget originally allocated to the EAFRD Growth Programme has been opened for business. The RPA will be holding discussions over the coming weeks with the LEPs to determine how the funding will be allocated between the food processing, business development and tourism infrastructure offers in their areas.
3. The £30m Rural Broadband Infrastructure offer utilises money from elsewhere within the RDPE, and so effectively increases the overall size of the RDPE Growth Programme to £207m. The offer has been developed in collaboration with Broadband Delivery UK and will be open to Local Authorities seeking to extend superfast broadband provision of 30Mbps in hard to reach rural locations. To be eligible, the provision must benefit rural businesses by supporting economic growth but may also benefit the wider rural community in these areas. It is expected that all applications will be in line with ESIF Strategies and Strategic Economic Plans. The RPA will also establish a process which ensures that ESIF Sub-Committees are notified of applications received. As the funding for this offer is on top of the original Growth Programme budget, LEPs who have previously ring-fenced EAFRD funding for broadband provision will be invited to re-allocate this funding into the other currently open offers.
4. The RPA continues to advise and monitor the 91 projects offered funding under the food processing, business development and tourism offers launched in 2015. Claims worth £2.91m have been paid to date, which equates to 30% of the £9.6m committed to these projects. Included in this funding are final payments made to 7 beneficiaries who have completed all project activity. The beneficiaries have confirmed the creation of 24 jobs as a result of these projects.
5. The RPA has received more than 400 Expressions of Interest under the offers opened in January 2017, requesting £87.5m of funding. Invitations to submit full applications have been issued to more than 230 projects requesting £60.4m of funding. Full applications have been received for support totalling £10.5m from these projects.
6. The number of jobs expected to be created by projects with funding agreements in place is currently 470. Of these, 453 are expected to be created by projects receiving support under the calls launched in 2015.
7. The work undertaken by the RPA to streamline the full application and assessment process has been successful in reducing the time it takes for applicants to receive a decision. For example, 95% of applicants are now receiving a decision within 30 days, and one project seeking support from the January 2017 food processing call has already been issued with a grant agreement worth for £0.41m. In this case, the revised referral process allowed the RPA to complete the initial application assessment, consult Greater Lincolnshire LEP ESIF Sub-Committee and issue an invitation within 13 working days of receiving the EoI. The RPA received a good quality application 26 working days after the invitation was issued, and the full assessment was then completed within 3 months. The RPA is currently reviewing the contributing factors which were of particular benefit in this case to see if they can be implemented more widely.

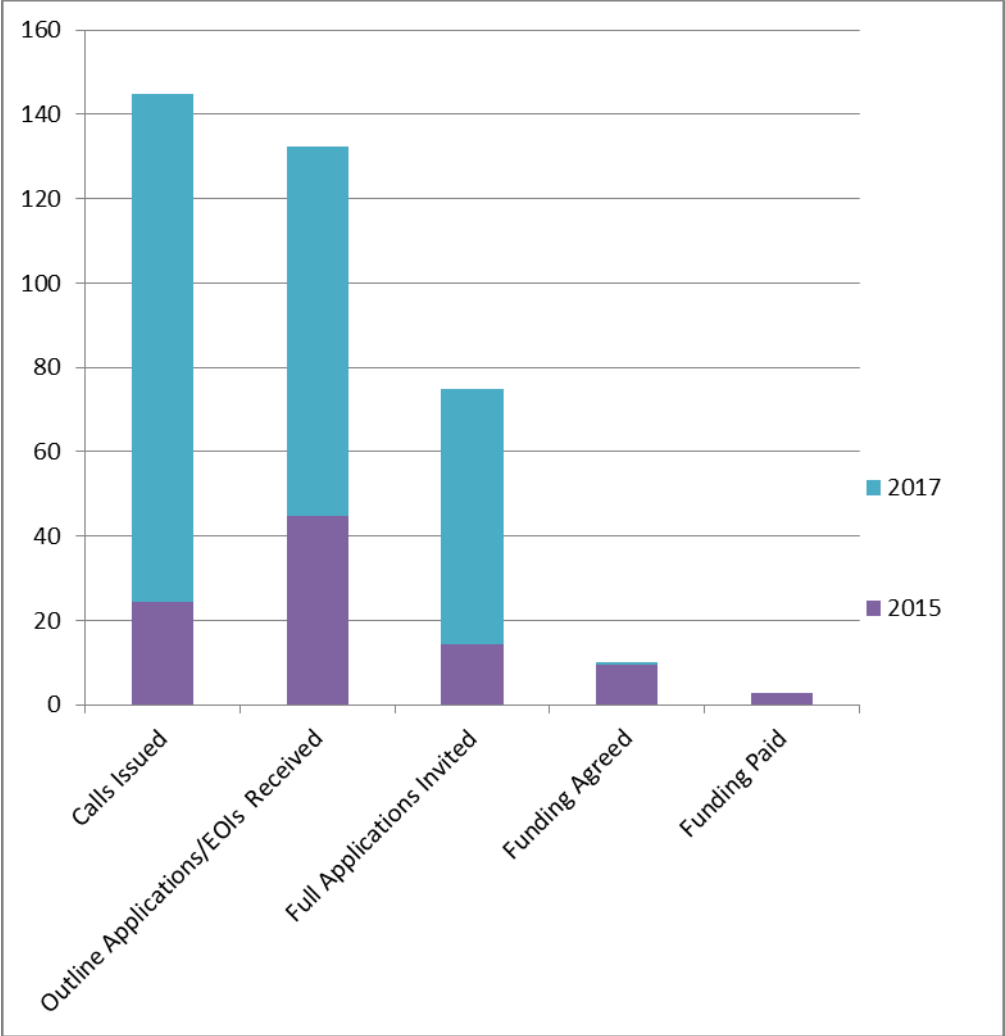
8. Following the success of the LEP workshops earlier this year to promote the RDPE Growth Programme, plans are being finalised to enable further workshops to take place in the autumn. Experience indicates that a higher number of applications are received from LEP areas which are proactive in promoting the open calls through both these workshops and on other platforms such as social media.
9. Details of current scheme progress are shown in Annex 1, while Annex 2 sets out some key issues for Programme Board consideration.

30 August 2017
Andrew Robinson

Annex 1

EAFRD GROWTH PROGRAMME UPDATE

Calls Progress Chart (March 2015 to August 2017)



Annex 2

EAFRD GROWTH PROGRAMME UPDATE

Progress on Programmes – Key Issues

- Our current ‘top challenge(s)’ and how we are addressing them:
 - We are looking to make the most of the opportunities presented by the existing and new offers. This includes:
 - Working with LEPs to review current allocations and, where appropriate, revise these to reflect experience;
 - Working with LEPs to increase promotional activity in order to encourage more and better applications;
 - Reviewing current offer closure dates to ensure that as many projects as possible can benefit from the available funding.
- Challenges in different areas of the country?
 - The main geographical disparity in the scheme relates to degree of local promotion that the LEP is able to undertake. We are looking to enable more local level workshops to be held in order to encourage more and better applications.
- Can we learn from delivery in different areas?
 - LEP areas with dedicated rural resource, for example a rural sub-group to the main ESIF Sub-Committee, tend to be more effective partners in delivering EAFRD spend.