

Minutes of the fifth Rural Development Programme for England 2007-2013 Programme Monitoring Committee held on 25 November 2008 at Defra, Ergon House, London

ATTENDING:

John Robbs	Director, Wildlife and Countryside, Defra (Chair)
Peter Barfoot	English National Parks Authorities Association
Richard Britton	Forestry Commission
Fiona Bryant	Regional Development Agencies
Ian Fugler	Natural England
David Fraser	Government Offices
Rebecca Frost	Commission for Rural Communities
Peter Gaskell	Heritage Link
Andrew Clark	National Farmers Union
Aileen Kirmond	Environment Agency
Dan Osgood	Environmental Land Management, Defra
David Stewart	Chairs of the Regional Rural Affairs Forums
Steven Trow	English Heritage
Allan Williams	Action with Communities in Rural England
Ian Woodhurst	Wildlife and Countryside Link

IN ATTENDANCE:

Jean-Bernard Benhaiem	European Commission
Simon Carne	European Commisison
Brian Bibby	Food and Farming Group, Defra
David Lees	Rural Development Programme for England, Defra
Rebecca Frost	RDPE Network
Jill Wordley	Rural Development Programme for England, Defra
John Allsopp	Rural Development Programme for England Division, Defra

APOLOGIES

Sue Armstrong Brown	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
David Fraser	Government Offices
Andy Ashcroft	Local Government
Andrew Shirley	Country Land and Business Association
Food and Drink Federation	

Agenda Item 1: Introductions

1. John Robbs welcomed attendees to the fifth meeting of the Rural Development Programme for England Programme Monitoring Committee (RDPE PMC).
2. John Robbs asked if there were items that members would like to be considered under agenda item 8, Any other business. David Stewart asked Defra to comment on the progress towards the Programme's outcomes. Andrew Clark asked for issues related to the Energy Crop Scheme to be considered. Graham Garbutt asked for commentary on regional capacity to deliver the Programme.

Agenda item 2: Minutes of the last meeting

3. The PMC members confirmed they were content with the minutes of the previous meeting (RDPE PMC 5-2).

Agenda item 3: Progress in RDPE implementation

RDPE - Programme Managers report

4. Jill Wordley introduced this item and expanded on items set out in paper RD PMC 5-3.
5. Picking up on David Stewart's request for information relating to RDPE outcomes Jill Wordley advised that it was always the intention that the PMC should have information on Programme outcomes to help them carry out their role. Paper RDPE PMC 5-3a had been prepared to assist the PMC in oversight of the Programme but advised that it was still early in the life of the RDPE for outcomes to be identified and reported.
6. Turning to the conclusions of the CAP Health Check negotiations Jill Wordley advised that a key element for the Programme's funding was the changes that would be made to compulsory (CM) and voluntary modulation (VM) requirements. Rates of VM would be reduced as the CM rates increase but there the Commission would have to put forward further details regarding what this would mean in practice. However, unlike the situation in other Member States, there would be no new source of rural development funding for the England programme. Andrew Clark asked if there would be implications agri-environment schemes related to revised cross compliance obligations. Dan Osgood confirmed that there could be an impact and his team were assessing the implications. Jean-Bernard Benhaïem advised that the revised Implementing Regulations, which had yet to be agreed, could impact on the current RDPE agri-environment schemes.

7. Jill Wordley gave a brief summary of the activity that had been undertaken regarding the Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP) advising it would not have been sensible to partition the Programme to fit with BSSP prescriptions but there was merit in exploring areas to improve customer's experience.

RDPE – Report on RDPE implementation

8. John Robbs introduced this item. He asked the PMC for their views on RDPE PMC 5-3a, the report on RDPE implementation.

9. Peter Barfoot noted that the report was useful. He suggested Defra could consider the RDPE's core objectives and future reports could address progress against these. Graham Garbutt suggested it would be useful to have an indication of financial forecasts and commitments. Andrew Clark noted some differences between commitments reported in answers to recent Parliamentary Questions and those reported in RDPE PMC 5-3a. John Robbs noted that, in reporting RDPE progress, there would always be a tension between providing a concise report and a sufficiently comprehensive one.

10. Following further discussion on the scope and detail of information that should be presented John Robbs concluded discussion advising that it would be necessary to capture information relating to the RDPE to inform PMC discussions, response to Parliamentary Questions and the RDPE Annual Report. He asked the RDPE Team to provide an updated version of the report for the PMC's next meeting (**Action RDPE PMC 5-1**).

11. Responding to Graham Garbutt's question related to the level of regional capacity available to deliver the programme Fiona Bryant outlined the processes Regional Development Agencies use to deliver Axes 1, 3 and 4 of the RDPE. Ian Fugler advised that the target of agri-environment target would be challenging outlining the steps Natural England is putting in place to meet this challenge. Richard Britton reported that the Forestry Commission (FC) had regional capacity for delivery of forestry schemes under Axis 2 of the Programme but this would need to expand. The FC also had a strategic interest in elements of Axis 1 delivery.

Agenda item 4: Notification of changes to the Programme

12. The PMC discussed paper RDPE PMC 5-4a which detailed a number of proposed changes to the Programme. The Committee approved the proposal to amend the Programme.

13. John Robbs asked PMC members to be prepared to consider a second proposal to amend the RDPE to allow the introduction of Uplands Entry Level Stewardship (**Action RDPE PMC 5-2**). It was likely that this would be done by correspondence early in 2009.

Agenda item 5: Committee consultation on selection criteria

14. Jill Wordley introduced this item which the PMC had considered on two previous occasions. She reported that, at a recent meeting, the European Commission had advised that we had yet to give sufficient information on the selection criteria particularly those which related to Axis 1 activity. Jean-Bernard Benhaiem clarified the distinction between eligibility and targeting with which the Commission was broadly content and selection criteria.

15. Following discussion Jill Wordley undertook work with the Regional Development Agencies to clarify selection criteria for activities funded under Axes 1 and 3 of the RDPE (**Action RDPE PMC 5-3**).

Agenda item 6: RDPE Communications

16. John Robbs introduced this agenda item referring to paper RDPE PMC 5-6 asking them to consider the communication objectives and the key themes.

17. Following discussion John Robbs asked the Defra Programme Office to consider the points put forward by PMC members, including those on wider audience, signposting and key facts. He asked that these be taken forward as part of the RDPE communications strategy (**Action RDPE PMC 5-4**).

Agenda item 7: National Rural Network Arrangements

18. Rebecca Frost introduced this item and advised that the role of the Network was to support implementation of the Programme. She reported that there had been strong support for the network from a range of stakeholders including all of those represented on the RDPE PMC.

19. PMC members discussed how the network could interface with existing networks, aid implementation of the RDPE and provide linkages with the RDPE communications activity. Rebecca Frost reported she had commissioned market research to identify where there was the greatest potential for the network to benefit implementation of the programme. This work would be completed in early 2009 and would inform the Network's action plan in future years.

Agenda item 8: Any other business

20. The PMC discussed the benefits of holding some meetings in the regions to give members the opportunity to visit and investigate RDPE supported activities and asked the RDPE team to take this forward (**RDPE PMC 5-5**).