

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL RDPE IMPLEMENTATION GROUP MEETING

22 April 2008 – SWRDA Offices, Sterling House, Exeter

Minutes of meeting

Present:

Andrew Slade – Chair, GOSW
Paul Shand – GOSW
Tim De-Winton- Environment Agency
Matthew Woodcock – Forestry Commission
Peter Hardaker – Cornwall Agricultural Council
Gerry Hamersley – Natural England
Rob Hatt – SWRDA
Paul Clark – SWRDA
Tim Wheatley – SWRDA
Ian Piper – SWRDA
Bruce Douglas – SWRDA
Lucy Macaulay – Secretariat, Natural England

Phil McVey – SWRDA (for the commissioning and communications and stakeholder engagement items)

Welcome

Approval of minutes from 24 January 2008.

1. Minutes of the 24 January 2008 meeting were approved subject to one amendment.

Delivery Partner updates (*using new RIG reporting template)

Natural England update

3. All programmed agreements were completed by the end of the financial year but with a short fall in spent funds due to a late in year virement of funds from HLS. NE is already 92% committed for 2008/09 and 82% committed for the following year 2009/10. Gerry Hamersley said that NE is still getting to grips with the potential reporting capacity of Genesis. Further work is needed to be able to present information to the RIG in the most useful format.

4. The Group asked what impact the recent Defra budget announcements had on NE and agri-environment schemes. The Chair explained that although Defra had suffered a significant hit to its overall budget, NE and FC programme budgets were largely unaffected. The impact on the RDA is still to be understood

but is expected to be minimal overall.

5. Gerry reported that further work across all the deliver partners was still needed to ensure there is a good level of synergy across the axes.

Action: Gerry Hamersley to update the Group at the July meeting on the review of Environmental Stewardship

Forestry Commission update

6. The end of year spend for 2007/08 related to commitments already made from EWGS applications received before the end of 2006. Looking forward virtually all the 2008 - 09 spend was complete and efforts had been made to ensure RDPE spending was deferred until later in the Programme. Matthew Woodcock reported that the 2008 English Woodland Grant Scheme Prospectus was due to be published in late May. It will encompass grants that FC would pay out during 2009 -10. Work is needed to determine the amount of financial headroom for new business, taking account of any year end adjustments.

7. The priority for 2008 onwards would be grants covering woodland SSSIs currently in unfavourable conditions.

South West Regional Development Agency update

8. Rob Hatt reported that there had been considerable progress since the last RIG in rolling out Axis 1 & 3. The SW Rural Development Gateway is fully operational and responding to enquiries. The RDA has agreed a 15 month period of funding. Since the start of the Programme there has been a good level of enquires and feedback from customers has been positive.

9. Rob said that the Gateway would be key to delivering Axis 1 and 3 by providing advice and support and signposting to other RDPE support mechanisms. He said that there were limits to the level of engagement that Business Links would have with clients so the RDA were working with the Cornwall Agricultural Development Team to develop a project facilitation service to fill the gap between business diagnostic assessment function provided by the Gateway and the wider private sector.

10 Matthew Woodcock asked what the general level of awareness was of the Rural Development Gateway and how it interacts with forestry and wider environment sectors. Rob said that the Gateway was very well established and had been supporting rural sectors in the SW for the last four years, but further work would be needed to maximise opportunities from other parts of the Programme. Matthew suggested that the Forestry Commission would be willing to provide additional training to Gateway staff (other partners made similar offers).

Action: Matthew and Rob to develop training opportunities for SWREG, and NE and EA colleagues to advise on training that they could offer.

11 Rob said it was important to understand how the public view the service provided by REG and that access is as simple as possible. He said it was necessary to have feedback loops at local and sub-regional level.

12. A notice had been published in the European Journal inviting tenders for the administration of grant services in relation to RDPE Axis 1 and 3. Tim Wheatly said that the RDA was anticipating a significant number of tenders would be received by 23 April from both regional partners and from the private sector. Rob said the tender covered many of the back-office functions for the delivery of RDPE which the RDA was unable to accommodate in-house. The contract for the administration of grant service was expected to last the life of the Programme, but with a break for review, and would be funded from the RDAs admin budget rather than the RDPE budget.

South West RDA – Local Action Update

13. Bruce Douglas informed the meeting that call for expressions of interest was launched in October 2007. The RDA had provided feedback to a total of 35 LAGs. Potential local action groups were now in the process of developing full bids which were due by 23 May 2008. The RDA had held a number of workshops around the region to help the process and to support the written feedback sent to applicants.

14. A meeting was held on 28 March to scope the selection process. The selection panel would be chaired by Sir Harry Studholme (RDA Board member) and made up of representatives from the RDA, NE, FC and Government Office.

15. Rob Hatt informed the Group that the Commission for Rural Communities was developing a National Rural Network to support the Programme. He said there were opportunities through this network to forward some of the Leader objectives e.g. trans-regional and trans-national cooperation. It would be important to help influence this work as it develops. Paul Shand suggested inviting Rebecca Frost who is leading this work for the CRC to a future RIG meeting.

Action: Paul Shand to look at inviting Rebecca Frost, CRC to a future RIG meeting.

16. Tim De-Winton mentioned that there had been a lot of useful information about local action posted on the SWRDA website and that feedback about the process so far had been positive.

17. Rob Hatt said that with 35 expressions of interest we would expect a number of applicants to be unsuccessful and it would be a shame to lose a lot of good work being carried out to identify the rural development needs of specific areas.

Action: Bruce Douglas and Paul Shand to consider how we might capture and make use of the input made by the unsuccessful LAGS.

Useability of reporting templates

18. Overall the Group felt the reporting arrangements worked well and provided the right information for the group to consider. Matthew Woodcock said there should be a mechanism for monitoring progress against the RIP priorities.

19. Rob Hatt said that although RDAs report back to Defra by measure rather than investment there is merit in the RIG looking at projects and investment themes and was therefore content with the general approach.

20. Ian Piper said we will need to look again at the way the financial information was presented so that the RIG was able to have an overview of progress and able to identify any potential problems.

Action: Paul Shand to look at developing the template further to take account of RIP priorities and financial accounting.

Review of live action points

Action: Gerry Hamersley to update the RIG on the Isles of Scilly special project application and the Uplands work at the July meeting.

Action: RIG members to look again at Liz Bailey's email ref farm buildings and feedback any comments to Tim De-Winton.

Action: Paul Shand to discuss further RIP updates with Rob before submitting the final version to Defra.

Strategic Issues

SWRDA Commissioning: Axis 1 and 3

21. Tim Wheatley explained the process map for translating the project idea into delivery. It was agreed that the technical appraisal would take place after the method of tender had been agreed and tendering activities carried out.

22. Matthew Woodcock raised a concern over the time the commission process would take to translate idea into delivery, particularly given it takes a long period of time for projects to get going. Peter Hardaker added that there was even

greater expectation in Cornwall as there wasn't an issue with existing project commitments

22. Ian Piper explained the Commissioning approach was an attempt to mirror other RDA processes. He said that it should be possible to simplify and shorten the overall process by merging the idea and concept stage.

Action: Tim Wheatley to circulate to RIG any refinements to Commissioning flowchart.

23. Ian Piper emphasised a desire from the RDA to engage external expertise in driving forward the commissioning of RDPE activity and emphasised there was still further work to be done and that the pre-commissioning process would still allow for others to contribute. He said it was important to engage relevant RIG members in the appraisal process to help identify the right linkages and to sustainability-proof projects.

24. Tim De-Winton said there was a need to engage key stakeholders in the process including the environmental sector. Rob Hatt said this was the first time the RDA had been able to paint the full picture. There was a need to keep the RIG up-to-date so members would help to spot any gaps and identify the appropriate individuals to consult. All agreed there was a need for better two way engagement between the RDA and other RIG members to ensure the right people are engaged. Further work was needed to ensure the RIG is engaged at key points and there is a mechanism for ensuring linkages are identified and followed-up.

25. Andrew Slade said that the RIG needed to be mindful of the demands on the RDA as well as the need to involve partners in the commissioning process. He said that we needed a process that could satisfy partners but with which the RDA would feel comfortable.

Action: Tim Wheatley to update the Commissioning table for future RIG meetings and update the Group as projects advance

Action: Rob Hatt and Tim Wheatley to consider a framework for ensuring RIG members can contribute to making the linkages.

Action: RIG members to review the commissioning table and feedback any gaps/opportunities/risks before 13 May 2008.

Action: Rob Hatt to circulate A4 summaries of projects to RIG members.

26. Rob Hatt updated the Group on latest developments with some of the projects in the Commissioning table. He announced that the first RDPE Axis 1 & 3 project has been approved by the RDA. £2million has been allocated to

extending the SW Rural Enterprise Gateway contract to July 2009.

27. The Duchy College is looking to extend their vocational training scheme (under the skills investment theme) in Cornwall and beyond the sub-region. Peter Hardaker informed the group that he was the Vice Chair of Duchy College and therefore was minded of a potential conflict of interest should discussions proceed into detail. Rob Hatt mentioned there is a lot of a change within the further and higher education sectors and that the land-based colleges were set to merge. Andrew Slade agreed to find out who within the region has an overview of the land-based colleges.

28. Rob said that as we move into the warmer summer months there was a real need to progress the blue tongue and animal health projects.

Following further discussions a number of specific action points were agreed:

Action: Simon Trehane to speak to Mark Prior about the inclusion of venison within the scope of the SW Meat Infrastructure Initiative.

Action: Tim Dart to map key groups potentially involved in the delivery of the animal health and welfare project and report back.

Action: Paul Shand to talk to Helen Thompson about the opportunities for integration of RDPE in Upland areas, particularly around business support (including new owners).

Action: Andrew Slade to explore oversight of land-based colleges.

Action: Bruce Douglas to discuss with Sue Rees (GOSW) the potential for a community and social enterprise project and the links to government policy.

28. Andrew Slade concluded the session on commissioning by saying that discussion with other regions suggested that the South West was already quite well joined-up in its approach. He noted that all parties were committed to taking forward Programme integration, as this was a key priority for the Group.

Communication and Stakeholder engagement

29. Paul Shand provided a presentation on the group's aspiration for joint communication and stakeholder engagement, which included a review of how the RIG had performed to date and identified some of the opportunities for future activity. The RIG was asked to consider next steps.

28. The group agreed that given the difficulties and delay in getting to the start of the Programme partners had done a reasonable job, however it was timely to

assess what needed to be done within the limited resources available.

63. Andrew Slade asked how we would tell the story of how RDPE fits together in the region, for example how to access Rural Enterprise Gateway. Peter Hardaker said that we need to be careful to manage expectation and not set ourselves too challenging targets that cannot be met with existing budgets.

65. Ian Piper suggested that we separate out the communications outputs into three categories: strategic communications (which the RIG owns), operational communication (projects and how to access support) and tactical communications (e.g. ensuring advisors/project officers are aware of all the opportunities provided by the Programme).

68. Tim De-Winton asked if the delivery bodies can delegate some responsibility for communications to those organisations that are commissioned to deliver parts of the Programme. Rob Hatt said that there are opportunities as well as risks. He said that one of the biggest challenges would be to ensure consistent messages are given out. He said there was also a challenge to communicate a regional Programme while NE and FC are delivering nationally run elements.

69. Rob advised the Group that under the new Programme there wasn't the opportunity to access technical assistance to support joint communications. The Chair asked that this point be double checked with Defra. It was agreed that the Task and Finish Group should consider activities that could be met with existing resource and those that may require additional support.

Action: the Communication and Stakeholder Engagement Task and Finish Group to consider the issues raised and produce an assessment of joint activities to promote better communications and engagement and based on available resource provide a recommendation of the key priorities for the RIG to consider. [First meeting held on 29 April; follow-up meeting to be arranged]

Action: Paul Shand to confirm the latest position with Defra on technical assistance.

Action: RIG members to notify Rob of the need for any additional RDPE RDA prospectuses.

Forward look and future business

70. It was agreed that the following agenda items would be taken at the next meeting on 24 July 2008:

- Communication and stakeholder engagement (follow-up)

- Terms of reference (review)

Land use, review of environmental stewardship and local action and the National Rural Development Network would roll forward to a subsequent meeting

Any Other Business

75. Tim De-Winton reported that a cross-cutting environment group (chaired by Richard Creswell Regional Director EA) has been set up to advise the RDA on the development and implementation of EU Programmes in the context of Convergence and Competitiveness. The Group agreed that the RIG would need to consider how the RIG and the cross-cutting environment group interrelate.

Action: Andrew Slade to raise with the Defra SW Core Group.

Date of next meeting: 24th July 2008