

# Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 06-10 (p1) : 4 March 2010

## Inquiry into Structural Funds: Implementation of the 2007 - 2013 Programme

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Building the Future Together 80203

### Introduction

The Council has been pleased with the financial support and assistance it has received from WEFO in developing and delivering the Project. As with all such Programmes both the funder and the grant recipient have learnt from the process and there are examples of good practice along with procedural issues that have needed to be addressed. We are therefore, grateful for the opportunity to assist the Enterprise and Learning Committee in scrutinising the Structural Funds Programme. The comments made in this report are intended to be constructive and to assist the Enterprise and Learning Committee to further enhance, what we consider to be in RCT, a worthwhile funding programme.

### Background

The Building the Future Together Project aims to provide a comprehensive suite of options and interventions to develop the skills needed for learning and future employment, raise aspirations, and support the emotional and social needs of 11 - 19 yr olds in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council is the project lead and Coleg Morgannwg is a joint sponsor. The total project value is £13,971,773, of which £6,361,745 is match funding and £7,609,208 is grant money. The project runs until the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012.

### Project Summary (Interventions)

This project builds on current good practice developed through the Community Schools programme and provides a participant centred approach to tackling the major issues of disengagement of 11 - 19 year olds in RCT. The engagement of young people will be facilitated through 12 geographic clusters and will include all secondary schools and special schools in RCT, Coleg Morgannwg and other sectors.

The new infrastructure takes full cognisance of the Reconfiguration and Transformation agenda (11-19 Learning) and enables the delivery of strategically cohesive yet flexible range of services for young people, which are necessary to achieve the key aims of the project. Support interventions within the project are:

Literacy, numeracy emotional intelligence assessment

Catch Up and Spotlight

Detached Youth Work provision

E3+ programmes

11 - 16 World of Work programme

Work based learning

Alternative curriculum

Interventions for Looked after children

Work experience and work placements for care leavers

Teenage parent advisor & educational support

School based Youth Coaches

These were all developed after extensive consultation with a wide range of local stakeholders.

### Project Targets

The project sits under ESF Priority One; therefore our target participants are age 11 - 19, and a resident or attending school/FE College in RCT. Specific targets, developed following extensive research of need, and in line with ESF Priority One targets are:

Female Participants

Teenage parents

## NEETS

Looked After Children and Care leavers

Young people disengaging from learning

Young people with literacy and numeracy problems

Young carers

## **Consultation undertaken in project development**

Extensive consultation has taken place at national, regional and local level during the development of the project.

Local and regional collaboration and discussions include:-

Stakeholder events within RCT:

Regular meetings held within the Fframwaith Partnership Convergence group

Regular meetings with Secondary head teachers within RCT

Regular updates to RCT's Economic Regeneration department

Monthly reports also written, discussed and endorsed at the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate's Senior Management Team meetings (SMT).

Extensive collaboration has also taken place on a regional and national scale:

Consultation undertaken nationally with Community Focused School Coordinators

Regular attendance and discussion of project at the Heads of the Valleys Lifelong Learning Group

Regular attendance and discussion of project at Six Valleys Convergence Group (RCT, Caerphilly, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent)

Positive discussions have also taken place with the University of Glamorgan about synergy with their Convergence proposals.

Careers Wales have been consulted at each stage of development of this project.

The project liaised with YALO who have commented on its development. A copy of the Business Case was sent to Marcus Hill and Natalie Charlton in YALO.

## **Application Process**

The project's application process progressed as follows:

PIF posted on WEFO website 29<sup>th</sup> February 2008

Receipt of manual EOI form 20<sup>th</sup> March 2008

Submission of EOI 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008

Initial feedback from WEFO 11<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Version 2 of EOI submitted 4<sup>th</sup> July 2008

WEFO confirmation of 'proceed to baseline of EOI' on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2008

Business Plan template received 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Business Plan (without finances) sent 24<sup>th</sup> October 2008

Version 2 of Business Plan submitted 14<sup>th</sup> November 2008

Version 3 of Business Plan submitted 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008

Version 4 (by hand) submitted 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009

Updated version 4 submitted 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2009

Revised costs submitted 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009

Version 5 submitted 6<sup>th</sup> May 2009

Baseline of Business Case letter received 28<sup>th</sup> May 2009

Project approval letter received 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2009 (dated 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009)

We recognise that this Project was one of the first considered by WEFO under this Priority and Theme and that both parties, the Council and WEFO, have had to learn from the application, assessment and approval processes. The timescale above indicates that the application and assessment process was long and at times difficult. Early in the application process it was evident that not all WEFO's systems were in place, in particular WEFO online. This has now been addressed with the whole WEFO application process now online.

### **Support from WEFO during process**

We have had regular and positive contact with our Project Development Officer (PDO) and support from our local SET team.

As explained above, WEFO officers have also had to develop their own understanding, not only of the relevant processes but also the individual projects. For example, European funding has never before covered young people of school age (eligible participants are 11 - 19). It has taken some time for WEFO to understand this market and the issues that surround it as it is so different to the age groups they have traditionally dealt with. It has taken time to get responses to guidance on a series of procedural issues such as types of consent needed for engaging with participants. However, our PDO is happy to listen to our issues regarding the delivery to secondary school age pupils and negotiate solutions wherever possible.

Since the project has been approved we have dealt with a number of staff at the Merthyr office covering areas such as monitoring and evaluation and cross cutting themes.

### **Progress To date**

Since the Project approval we have been working to get all the agreed interventions in place. RCT now has an enhanced Detached Youth Team to support young people who are disengaging from learning, and Youth Coaches delivering Learning Coach support in Secondary Schools. Targeted literacy and numeracy interventions are now in all secondary schools as well as additional support and educational opportunities for teenage mothers. Eligible out of school e3+ activities are now being delivered in all cluster areas with out of term provision being planned to give young people the experience of Creative Industries. The project's Project Officers are now in schools working with staff to ensure that young people receive the support they need from this project.

The next few weeks will see the rest of the support interventions starting to be delivered including the supported work placements for looked after children and enhanced alternative curriculum services.

Issues we have come across since approval are:

As the project was approved at the start of the school summer holidays, project delivery was initially difficult as many of our stakeholders were not available in July and August.

Recruitment has also been difficult. Feedback seems to suggest that people are unwilling to move from permanent to temporary contracts. Furthermore, we have struggled to appoint Welsh speaking Learning Coaches. This has delayed progress on starting a number of interventions. Due to these and other issues there is currently an under spend on the project which we are working to resolve.

### **Sustainability of Project**

One of the underpinning principles of this proposal is to introduce a change in the learning environment in schools in RCT. This project seeks to address the barriers to learning that are currently ingrained and systemic.

A key criterion in the development of this project has been to ensure that young people will continue to benefit from it post Convergence Funding. The continuation strategy will involve the cessation of certain interventions, the development of self-financing opportunities and the securing of ongoing revenue from other sources. If we are successful we will have changed the way a number of service areas engage with young people and how they contribute to local partnerships. Early signs are very encouraging that this is beginning to work.

The continuation strategy will be developed over the lifespan of the project and informed by the annual reviews, ongoing monitoring and formal evaluation processes.

The project was initially planned for four years but WEFO communicated that all projects would only be approved initially for three years (although WAG projects were able to apply for longer). We hope that we will be able to receive this additional year's funding as it is very important to the project.

### **Procurement**

Initially we did experience problems in fully understanding the Sponsorship, Partnership, Procurement and Grants guidance released by WEFO. Despite the best efforts of WEFO officers, sometimes we were unable to get clear definitive guidance on queries which led to delays in the project's assessment. We do understand that there were procurement and contractual issues being discussed on a

Programme wide basis that had implications for their application to the determination of individual projects.

This situation has now been resolved and we are moving forward with procuring interventions where necessary. RCT's procurement department has worked with WEFO to ensure that our systems are compliant with WEFO requirements for projects.

### **Potential impact of tighter public sector budgets in the next few years (issue of match)**

The Council has a number of key service priorities which it focuses its attention and resources, and which to date it has either invested additional resources or minimised the impact of tight budget settlements. Educating Children Out of Poverty, which this Project contributes to, is a key priority for the Council and one it will continue to prioritise and continue to support.

Nevertheless, we have to be realistic and that if future reductions in public sector budgets are significant, we will have to scale back our ambitions in respect of all the Council's services. This could have a negative impact on this project. WEFO have verbally acknowledged this situation and have informed us that if this happens they would review the size and delivery of the project.

However, until such time as we clear as to the potential size of any reduction in the Council's long term finances, this Project remains a priority for the Council.

### **Impact of increased intervention rates (July 2009)**

Although we are aware of this, our project was unable to benefit from this additional support as the project was approved with the old intervention rate.

**Clare Manning**  
**19<sup>th</sup> February 2009**