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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**Title: STRUCTURAL FUNDS****Fast Track Projects**

Thirty six applications were received at the end of July, requesting a total grant of £94 million (£60 million ERDF, £20 million ESF and £14 million EAGGF). Some of these are large, quite complex and exciting. A number of applications are now ready for formal approval and these will be given once the Programme Monitoring Committee has given any necessary guidance on the appropriate level of commitment at measure level and approved the all important Programme Complement at its meeting on 16 October. The Programme Complement must also be delivered to the European Commission by 20 October.

The Programme's commitment profile is running according to plan.

Local and Regional Action Plans

These plans were all submitted on 29 September. They will be closely scrutinised by WEFO to ensure that they comply with the guidance issued earlier this year and to ascertain areas of duplication and any gaps in the coverage of the SPD Measures.

In parallel with this the Programme Monitoring Committee commissioned WEFO to enter into discussion with planners and other interested parties with a view to better defining the interrelationship between the plans and addressing areas of overlap. One emerging possibility is reduction in the number of Regional Plans and a consequent re-ordering of their scope, in order better to ensure that the combination of spatial and thematic plans delivers the required outcome in the SPD.

The aim is to have achieved any necessary rationalisation by the end of the year. Meanwhile it is important to recognise that an enormous amount of valuable work has been done by all Regional and Local Partnerships and this must be further developed although some reconfiguration of its deployment may be necessary in order to ensure a properly integrated approach to delivering the required outcomes.

The Establishment of WEFO

WEFO commenced operations on 1 April 2000. It currently has 87 staff in post and, subject to final budget agreement, this is likely to rise gradually to approximately 170 by the end of February next year. Recruitment is already under way from both within and outside the Assembly.

WEFO is organised into four divisions and has offices in Machynlleth, Cwm Cynon, the newly established location in Colwyn Bay and Cathays Park (the latter containing payment and former URD staff inherited from the National Assembly). The four divisional Heads comprise 2 women and 2 men and are located in each of WEFO's offices. Three are Welsh speakers.

Helen Usher took up her appointment as Head of the WEFO Private Sector Unit in mid September. Helen is based in Cwm Cynon and is currently recruiting her team, expected to total five people. An early priority will be to establish a portion of the WEFO website, dedicated to Small and Medium sized enterprises. This unit will deal with individual enquires on a wide range of topics, including the facilitation of individual projects.

The Single Programme Document requires that a dedicated Equality Unit be set up within WEFO. This is in process of establishment with an initial staff of four and also has responsibility for the sustainability and information age cross cutting themes. WEFO is receiving guidance from various Equal Opportunity and Environment Agencies and possible secondees are on the agenda.

PMC Meeting 16 October 2000

An oral report will be provided.

PMC Minutes

The meetings are open to the Public but the PMC recognises that minutes are anxiously awaited. Consequently short form bullet point minutes are published on WEFO's website within 4/5 days of the meeting. Fully detailed minutes take somewhat longer and the PMC has yet to set down a timescale and methodology for their publication.

Meeting between Monitoring Committees and the EDC

The First Secretary is currently considering the membership and appointment of a Chair for the Objective 2, Leader and Rural Development Plan, Urban, Equal and Interreg Monitoring Committees. Once these are in place, WEFO will arrange a meeting of minds as soon as diaries permit.

The September Round

On 29 September, virtually all Action Plans submitted a further battery of projects all capable of starting in calendar year 2000. WEFO are collating and assessing these and a verbal update will be provided.

WEFO

4 October 2000