

Addressing current economic challenges

The Joint Economic Commission for the Northwest (JEC) has been set up by the Government to ensure the region's economy emerges from the current downturn stronger than before.

Membership comprises key regional bodies including the NWDA, 4NW, the CBI, Greater Manchester Chambers of Commerce, the Northwest Business Leadership Team, Private Sector Partners, GONW, the NHS, Jobcentre Plus, the Highways Agency, the Homes & Community Agency, the Learning and Skills Council, the Voluntary Sector and the TUC.

The JEC is focussing on five current economic challenges:

- ▶ The Labour Market
- ▶ Support for Business
- ▶ Public Infrastructure and Investment
- ▶ Impact on Communities
- ▶ Preparing for the Upturn



The Northwest ERDF Programme is also focussed on addressing these challenges. Our programme of investments is providing enhanced support for businesses; supporting investment in key infrastructure and gateway projects across the region, as well as supporting sector development and encouraging the uptake of environmental business practices to prepare businesses for the upturn.

In addition, we are currently investigating further opportunities to guide the region through this challenging economic climate, including investing in land remediation and public realm to prepare sites for future development.

We have also commissioned a research study to look at the potential of energy efficiency in social housing, as a result of recent European Commission flexibilities on ERDF spend, the results of which will be published shortly.

Programme performance

The Northwest ERDF Programme is enhancing the competitiveness of the region's economy by supporting the creation of the right conditions for growth in employment and enterprise.

It is a large and complex programme that will make a lasting difference to the economy and people of the region.

Excellent progress has been made to date on programme delivery. As at 31 May 2009, 33 projects totalling £51.3 million have been legally contracted, with a further 25 projects, worth £150.4 million being in the final stages of contract negotiation. Another 42 projects totalling £92.2 million are currently progressing through the project application process with a view to contracting within the next few months.

A key early priority of the Northwest ERDF Programme is to generate sufficient project delivery activity to achieve European Commission expenditure targets in 2009 and 2010, thereby avoiding the decommitment of funds.

Based on the current exchange rate, the decommitment target for 2009 is £140m and for 2010 is £263m. We are making significant progress towards achieving these decommitment targets and ensuring the delivery of a successful ERDF programme for the region.

Projects

The following ERDF projects have now been contracted:

Business Support

Business Start Ups Phase 2

Northwest

£8.4m

Business Start Ups; Phase 2 follows on directly from the previous Northwest Business Start Up provision, which ended in March 2009.

Managed by the NWDA, the focus of the project is to provide intensive and specialist services and support for people considering setting up in business, improving survival rates and contributing towards improved levels of enterprise activity in the region.

The project will aim to ensure that individuals who are in need of support to start a business possess the relevant skills, confidence and receive practical assistance to set up their business, as well as ongoing support to improve business survival and growth rates. The nature of the support provision will include enquiry handling, business diagnostic service, direct training, and trading/aftercare support for businesses once they start trading.

Funding for the project is also coming from the NWDA. The total investment in this project from all partners is £35 million.

Science and Innovation

Medilink UK: Innovate to Grow

Northwest

£0.4m

This project supports new and existing businesses in the biomedical sector, enabling health technology products to reach the market quicker, thus generating earlier income, jobs and improving regional growth and GVA. The specialist support provided by Medilink includes support for all elements of the innovation route, including advice on standards and packaging rules, SME access to clinicians, effective collaboration and design.

Funding for the project is also coming from the NWDA. The total investment in this project from all partners is £816,000.

IDEAS @ Daresbury

Northwest

£0.38m

IDEAS (Innovation Design Entrepreneurship and Science) @ Daresbury is an exciting new partnership between the three leading Business/Management Schools of the Northwest – from the universities of Manchester, Liverpool and Lancaster – along with Imagination Lancaster, Lancaster University's creative design research lab. The partnership is further supported by the Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC) and Daresbury Science & Innovation Campus (Daresbury SIC).

The mission of IDEAS @ Daresbury is to promote effective knowledge exchange at the interface of SMEs, large corporations, universities and strategic government-funded science. The programme will drive innovation into 40 regional SMEs over a 16-month period. This will enable businesses to benefit from the knowledge, research and expertise of the region's top universities, providing a competitive edge for small high-tech businesses in the current economic climate.

Delivered at Daresbury SIC, the programme is free of charge and will consist of three interactive workshop programmes on the critical issues facing high growth, high-tech SMEs: Customer Focused Innovation; Internal Resources and Competencies; and Networks & Collaborations.

Funding for the project is also coming from the NWDA. The total investment in this project from all partners is £769,827.



Projects

Tourism

Blackpool Tower Festival Headlands

Lancashire

£2.75m

This project creates a large and flexible events space in front of Blackpool Tower designed to accommodate a huge diversity of events and up to 20,000 people. It will provide all the technical/infrastructure support envisaged now and in the future within a level, safe, comfortable and unobstructed space.

The Tower Festival Headland project is part of a wider programme to remodel Blackpool's Central Seafront that will: improve coastal defences; connect new promenade spaces to the foreshore with 3km of 'Spanish Steps'; and create five new headlands linked together by parades. The five new headlands create new places, all with different function, form and identity responding to the particular needs of their adjoining neighbourhood community. The Tower Festival Headland is the focal headland that connects Blackpool's festival and events zone, the town centre and community, including the Winter Gardens and Grand Theatre, via Blackpool Tower with the new seafront, North Pier and Central Pier.

Funding for the project is also coming from the NWDA. The total investment in this project from all partners is £14.3 million.

Major Exhibitions Programme: TATE

Merseyside

£0.88m

The major exhibitions programme at TATE Liverpool will deliver three major international summer exhibitions, one per year for three years. Starting in 2009, the programme is working with MOMA, New York, to bring 'Colour Chart' to the UK.

The programme will generate an additional £22.5 million in economic benefit for the region from 2009/10 to 2011/12 (excluding press and PR Values).

The total investment in this project from all partners is £5.1 million.



Transport

City Centre Bus Corridor (A59)

Merseyside

£1.4m

This project will upgrade a significant bus corridor connecting Liverpool city centre with St Helens to improve access into the city centre. It will create improved transport routes in and around the city centre to connect with the radial routes on the major corridors including Brownlow Hill, Pembroke Place, London Road, Lime Street and Upper Parliament Street.

Funding for the project is also coming from the NWDA. The total investment in this project from all partners is £2.88 million.

James Street Underground Station

Merseyside

£0.68m

This project will enhance the gateway station to Liverpool's waterfront and the western areas of the city centre, including Liverpool One.

The scheme includes the creation of a new station entrance/exit, the extension of the concourse area allowing incorporation of extra automatic ticket gates, the introduction of a landmark canopy outside the station entrance and new lighting and signage.

Funding for the project is also coming from the NWDA. The total funding for this project from all partners is £1.7 million.

Cross Cutting Theme – Equality & Diversity

Setting the standard for women's business in the Northwest

The Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR), (now the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS)), has commissioned Prowess – a UK-wide advocacy network that supports the development and growth of women's business ownership – to develop a Quality Standard & Performance Framework for Women's Business Centres. The pilot for the Quality Standard is happening here in the Northwest, supported by the NWDA enterprise team. A number of business support providers involved in the Northwest ERDF Programme are included in the first stage of the pilot.

The standard aims to support and drive the growth of women-owned enterprise in the UK, helping business support organisations deliver the best possible service to female entrepreneurs. The Quality Standard will provide an organisational development tool to measure, benchmark, and improve services for women. The Quality Standard identifies key characteristics that help a business support organisation effectively deliver to women. It aims to provide a generic framework for all organisations that support women, regardless of their specific focus.

A total of 15 business support providers are being assessed against the Women's Business Centres Quality Standard in the first phase, which includes providers from the Business Start Ups project as well as organisations currently developing business support projects. For those organisations that are successful, achieving the award will be recognition of real achievement against a rigorous standard.

Results of the independent assessment panel will be announced in September. There will then be a second pilot phase involving eight organisations later in the year, followed by a programme of activity to promote the Quality Standard in the autumn. The European Programme Executive are working with Prowess and the NWDA Enterprise team to ensure that ERDF business support projects are engaged with and can benefit from this new initiative.

Sarah Carling, ERDF Equality and Diversity Manager, said:

“ Working with the standard at this early stage will give the Northwest ERDF Programme the opportunity to be at the forefront of promoting best practice; helping ensure ERDF-funded business support reaches the highest standard for female entrepreneurs. ”

Yvonne Sampson, NWDA Strategy Manager (Enterprise), said:

“ As a pilot region of the National Enterprise Strategy, the NWDA recognises the importance and potential of Women's Business Centres across the region. The introduction of Women's Business Centres in the Northwest will help ensure that women can access advice and support to build their confidence, skills and knowledge in a supportive environment – helping bridge the regions enterprise gap. ”

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Cross Cutting Theme – Environmental Sustainability

Guidance Documents Published

Four guidance documents have been published to support applicants in incorporating environmental issues in the design and delivery of ERDF-funded projects. The documents cover four key topics: Carbon Management; Green Infrastructure; Sustainable Procurement; and Sustainable Travel. The documents are available at www.erdfnw.co.uk.



Online Carbon Calculator Launched

A new online carbon calculator has been developed to replace the Excel-based version currently used for ERDF-funded projects.

The objective of the carbon calculator is to enable the European Programme Executive to collect accurate and reliable data to allow them to:

- ▶ Assess the impact of ERDF-funded projects on regional carbon emissions prior to project approval
- ▶ Continuously monitor the carbon impacts of the project
- ▶ Calculate the final carbon footprint of the project
- ▶ Calculate the overall carbon impact of the Northwest ERDF Programme

Available at www.nwdacarboncalculator.com, the online version should be used for all ERDF projects over £250,000 to provide an initial estimate, followed by the ongoing quarterly reporting of actual carbon impacts.

All existing projects that have already completed an Excel-based calculator will automatically be transferred to the online version by the project sponsor.

The new online calculator will be an essential tool in delivering the 25% carbon reduction target set for the Northwest ERDF Programme. The calculator will enable the European Programme Executive to measure progress in reaching the carbon caps associated with each Action Area. Each Action Area has had a weighted carbon total attributed to it that reflects the GVA impact of that area.

Further information and guidance on using the online carbon calculator is available at www.erdfnw.co.uk.

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Action Area	Carbon Cap in Tonnes
1.1	17,164
1.2	42,896
1.3	-71,922
2.1	72,754
2.2	31,404
3.1	3,407
3.2	28,848
3.3	16,949
4.1	8,530
4.2	2,389
4.3	53,146
VCLF	247,501
Total:	453,066

News and Events

Brussels Open Days

Organised by the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission, the Brussels Open Days are the premier networking event for all those interested in the latest political thinking about European policy.

Running in venues across Brussels between 5 and 8 October 2009, the four-day event will see around 5,000 delegates attend over 150 free seminars.

As a region, the Northwest are hosting two Open Days seminars, including Climate and Demographic Change: Debating Solutions to Multiple Challenges, which will take the form of an interactive debate between the audience and a panel of expert commentators to look for practical solutions to our common challenges. This event will be delivered in partnership with eight other European regions, including Central Denmark and Castilla y Leon, in Spain.

Registration for Brussels Open Days events opens on 6 July 2009 at www.opendays.europa.eu. Spaces will be allocated on a first come, first served, basis so if you plan to attend any of the Open Days events please make sure you register your attendance promptly.

Investment Frameworks

Following extensive consultation with partners, revised Investment Frameworks – the documents underpinning the allocation of funding from the Northwest ERDF Programme – have been published.

The Investment Frameworks now include a single common section detailing all common information, which has streamlined the documents and removed duplication. The selection and prioritisation criteria for each Framework have been drawn out. Also, the commissioning process for all Frameworks has been reviewed and a justification provided if open bidding has not been chosen.

The revised Investment Frameworks are available at www.erdfnw.co.uk.

Call for Expressions of Interest under Action Area 1.3

We are currently inviting Expressions of Interest under Strand 5 of Action Area 1.3.

We are looking to provide funding to support individual projects to install low carbon technologies, resource efficient infrastructure, recycling services, and renewable energy at locations that provide for, or are used by, SMEs – such as business parks and incubation units – or that will provide exemplars in the integration of low carbon technologies or processes.

Further information regarding eligible activity, the assessment criteria, and the application process is available at www.erdfnw.co.uk.

The deadline for Expressions of Interest is 1 September 2009. As this is a competitive call, applications will only be reviewed after the closing date.

We are unable to consider applications for funding that do not deliver the requirements of the relevant Investment Framework.

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