

## **LOCAL ECONOMIC FORUMS**

### **AYRSHIRE ECONOMIC FORUM RESPONSE TO DRAFT NATIONAL GUIDELINES**

#### **DRAFT OBSERVATIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Ayrshire Economic Forum welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the draft national guidelines for the formation of local economic forums. Each of the members of the Forum will also be contributing to responses submitted by other bodies to which they are affiliated but the Forum members believe that there is validity in an Ayrshire response that reflects the experience of a local economic forum that has been active since 1995.

We support the underlying principles contained in the guidelines, those of value for money, eradication of duplication, the setting of targets to meet objectives, a clearly defined implementation plan with accepted responsibilities and delivery mechanisms – all set within a shared vision for the economic development of the area.

Whilst accepting that some areas are further advanced than others we are disappointed in the relatively narrow view of the appropriate tasks proposed for LEF's although we do acknowledge that a wider dimension for local economic development delivery is accommodated beyond the initial year. In Ayrshire's case we feel that the guidelines do not go far enough and we intend to build on the more positive aspects of the existing economic forum for incorporation into the proposed forum. Partnership working within the members of the Forum is well established and is evidenced in the way that Ayrshire strategically approaches Inward Investment, through the Ayrshire Location Service, Strategic Sites & Premises, through an agreed strategy plan and support to local business development through Small Business Gateway. We recognise that improvements can be made and we are confident in our ability to build upon the advances already made within Ayrshire.

#### **Response to the Specific Questions posed by the Scottish Executive**

##### **1 Is the approach proposed for the Forums realistic/achievable?**

Yes, although greater emphasis should be placed on the core task to establish a shared vision and purpose of what needs to be done to realise the economic potential of the area. Without this vision and agreement to work towards it's achievement by all partners it is doubtful if there will be a positive outcome. The setting of objectives and targets is essential along with the allocation of responsibility and accountability.

The proposal to have Forum boundaries and LEC boundaries conterminous is correct as is the recognition within the guidelines that there are a number of cross boundary activities that will have a bearing on local forum activity.

It will be vital to ensure that the organisational infrastructure set up to oversee the forums does not act as a constraint on their development.

The role of the Scottish Executive Central Support Unit could be crucial and more information in the final guidelines will be welcomed. It will be expected to provide more than facilitation at performance measuring seminars and be the vital link between 'national and local'. In addition the staff and financial resource to be allocated to the Forum by all the partners may be considerable and merits noting.

**2. Is the proposed forum representation and involvement appropriate to achieve the rapid progress we seek to achieve outcome based solutions.**

The proposal for a tight core membership appears appropriate. The challenge for each of the Forums will be to ensure that there are wider consultative mechanisms in place that ensure broader stakeholder involvement. Care needs to be taken on the composition of membership to ensure an appropriate balance. Consideration needs to be given to flexibility of core membership to reflect/represent the local economic position. Regular attendance by Scottish Executive Ministers or officials should be encouraged to provide a channel for linking national programmes for the delivery of the Framework for Economic Development with local development strategies.

**3. Should organisations be represented on Forums at executive or non executive level?**

Representation needs to be at whichever level is appropriate to allow the Forums to move ahead as effectively and efficiently as possible. Irrespective of representation, the core body will require to be underpinned by support group mechanisms to co-ordinate and progress activity, prepare reports and the implement forum decisions.

**4. Are the tasks proposed for the local economic forums appropriate?**

The answer to question one, and remarks in the introduction, goes some way to answer this. The guidelines strongly focus on overlap/duplication eradication particularly in the provision of local business development support and while this is a good starting point the vision and implementation plan will be necessary to place the broader range of activity in a context of both national policy (Framework for Economic Development) and build on local needs, opportunities and the capabilities of local partners.

**5. How do we best engage the wider business community in the work of the Forums bearing in mind the time considerations?**

Local Enterprise Company involvement, business representation from Chambers of Commerce of Industry on the core group should achieve this. In addition it will be necessary to involve the business community in specific project and programmes along with their involvement in any specific task group.

**6. Can the community planning interface be best made to work?**

Community Plans provide a mechanism to include community involvement. Community Plan preparation and implementation is the responsibility of local authorities and with the participation of local authorities as core members of the Forum this will provide a bridge to the community planning process.

**7. Are the processes for monitoring and evaluating the performance of local economic forums appropriate?**

The guidelines are light on precision for proposals relating to monitoring and evaluation. A monitoring and evaluation framework is essential and obviously must relate to its strategic action plan but care needs to be taken to ensure that the activity of monitoring and evaluation does not become overly bureaucratic and expensive to operate. Independent assessment, possibly through Audit Scotland, of the targets and monitoring procedures established by the Forum would be consistent with best practice.

**8. The streamlining of partnerships – specifically should local learning partnerships and local rural partnerships be integrated with local economic forums?**

In principle the streamlining of partnerships is appropriate where necessary. However, it should be acknowledged that the engagement of a wide range of organisations in promoting economic development depends on partnerships at all levels. Partnerships which can demonstrate achievement in supporting local economic development should not generally be subsumed by the Forums. Streamlining of partnerships needs to be a continuous process in which the Forums will play a part. The Forums, nor the Scottish Executive, should be overly prescriptive in establishing a pre-determined model for local partnership arrangements.

We trust you find these comments both supportive and constructive and although there are still a number of issues to be answered we are looking forward to meeting the challenge for Local Economic Forums.

**AGENDA**