

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

MEMBERS' SERVICES AND CIVIC CEROMONIAL SUB-COMMITTEE 28 JANUARY 2004

ALLIANCE FOR REGIONAL AID – LOBBY OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS IN BRUSSELS

Report by Director of Development Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this Report is to inform the Committee that the Alliance for Regional Aid has invited the authority to be involved in a major lobby of the European Institutions in Brussels during March, 2004.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Alliance for Regional Aid brings together 4 local authority associations:-

- Coalfield Communities Campaign (CCC)
- European Industrial Regions Association (EIRA) – The UK wing
- Leading Action for Textiles Clothing and Footwear (LATCF)
- Steel Action

The Alliance was formed in 1997 and is a lobbying organisation. It provides a framework for addressing the issues of unemployment, regional aid and regeneration that are shared by nearly all of Britain's industrial heartlands. It seeks to influence policy in Whitehall, Westminster and Brussels and in the new devolved administrations. It operates on an all-party basis.

- 2.2 Proposals for EU Regional Policy after 2006 are currently under active discussion and the proposed reforms are likely to pose a major challenge to regeneration funding in many parts of Britain.

The Alliance Steering Group has therefore decided that it would be appropriate to mount a major lobby of the European Commission and Parliament in March 2004.

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE LOBBY AND ITS PROPOSED FORMAT

- 3.1 Currently, the lobby has 2 purposes:-

- To flush out the full implications of the Commissions new proposals for Britain as a whole and for individual authorities.
- To get the message across that, whatever progress may have been made in recent years, the parts of Britain represented by the Alliance still need substantial EU support to further their regeneration.

- 3.2 It is proposed that the lobbying will primarily take the form of "set-piece" events rather than individual one-to-one lobbying. Proposals include:-

- A major meeting addressed by the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Michel Barnier.
- An event targeted at all British MEPs.
- An in-depth session with leading British MEPs on Regional Affairs.
- A meeting addressed by senior representatives of DG Competition, who control the “state aid” rules that are also up for review and will govern many aspects of domestic regional policy after 2006.
- A meeting with senior representatives from industrial regions in other member states, to explore the possibilities of developing a common position.

In addition it is expected that the programme will include a dinner for the whole delegation plus invited guests.

4. DISCUSSION

- 4.1 East Ayrshire Council has strongly supported the Coalfield Communities Campaign both at Regional and National Levels and through the CCC has supported the activities for the Alliance for Regional Aid.
- 4.2 East Ayrshire Council has participated fully in the debate to date on the proposals for EU Regional Policy after 2006. In July, 2003 a response was sent to the UK Government on its publication entitled “A Modern Regional Policy for the United Kingdom”. In addition a copy of that response was forwarded to the Scottish Parliament to inform its Inquiry entitled “Repatriation of European regional development funding and the UK Government’s proposals: An Inquiry into the impact in Scotland”.

These responses have been prepared in association with the West of Scotland European Consortium and the Coalfield Communities Campaign as appropriate.

- 4.3 The issue of the future of Regional Policy is of great significance to East Ayrshire Council. European Funding has contributed greatly to efforts to regenerate the area both through mainstream programmes such as the Western Scotland 2000-2006 Objective 2 Programme and the Scottish ESF Objective 3 Programme 2000-2006 as well as Community Initiatives such as RECHAR. It is vital that the area continues to have the ability to access significant European Funding to assist regeneration post 2006.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Details of the costs are not available at the present time. It is anticipated that the lobby will straddle 2-3 working days. The Alliance for Regional aid will try to arrange discounted block bookings at one or more hotels. Participants are likely to be expected to make their own travel arrangements.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no immediate legal implications from the recommendations contained in this Report.

7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is recommended that the Sub-Committee consider authorising one member to participate in the lobby in Brussels to be organised by the Alliance for Regional Aid.

Stephen Chorley
Director of Development Services

DAH/PM/22/12/03

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (1) Advance Notice: Brussels Lobby – Alliance for Regional Aid – 10th December, 2003.

Any person wishing to inspect the background paper listed above, or discuss this Report should contact David Hewet on 01563 554608.

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