Northwest
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Single Programme Review and Development

Egremont Market Town Initiative

Management Systems 'Healthcheck' Report

Report produced by
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Executive Summary

Background

1.1 Market Town renaissance is a Key Objective in the Regional Economic Strategy. The Egremont scheme covers the rural communities of Bigrigg, Moor Row, Haille and Thornhill and is one of the seventeen Market Town Initiatives listed in the RES Action Plan. The MTI programme proposes to halt the decline of Egremont and its surrounding area by developing a reinvigorated and competitive community and local economy. This will be done by providing a range of interventional projects, which will provide the infrastructure to enhance the economic, social and environmental prospects for the area, therefore encouraging sustainable regeneration and investment.

1.2 The Egremont scheme received approval for £871,385 of NWDA funds for programme activity and £128,226 for a Market Town Project Manager, over a three-year period from 2005 to 2008. The overall value of the scheme is £1,771,008.

The 'Healthcheck'

1.3 The purpose of the Management systems 'healthcheck' is to look at the documentation of a partnership's management systems and the operation of those systems. The format of the test is a discussion about systems that have been set up by the partnership and an examination of the documentation for a sample of delegated projects. Whilst this process cannot provide the same assurance that a full Management Systems Audit might, the results provide a good general indication of whether the management systems comply with current Single Programme guidance.

1.4 I conducted a visit to the Accountable Body's office in Whitehaven on 20th July 2005. My visit included a discussion around proposed scheme management systems and associated documentation and the following staff were in attendance:

- Brian Kirkbride, Principal Project Officer, Copeland BC
- Julie Finlay, Senior Accountancy Officer, Copeland BC
- Simon Walker, Egremont MTI Project Manager
- Ruth Parker, NWDA
- Lynsey Reid, NWDA

Conclusion

1.5 The scheme is in the early stages of operation and systems have therefore yet to be embedded. The Accountable Body has prior experience of managing a Single Regeneration Budget scheme and they are therefore able to adapt previous management systems to suit Single Programme needs.

1.6 It will be necessary to undertake a further visit in 12 months time to review project and scheme level monitoring processes once fully operational.

Recommendations

1.7 Following the review my recommendations are as follows:

Strategic Management

- In line with best practice it would be advisable to add the declaration of interests as a standing item at all meetings as this acts as a useful prompt for members. It may be of further benefit to establish and maintain a register of members' interests (para 2.5).

- The conflicts of interests procedure and Memorandum of Agreement between the Egremont & Area Partnership Board and the Accountable Body should be signed off as soon as possible (para 2.8).

Project Appraisal and Approval

- The Partnership will need to ensure that Board members taking part in the appraisal do not take part in approval decisions and that this is clearly recorded in the minutes of meetings (para 3.4).

- To enable Partnership Board members to be able to make an informed approval decision, members should be presented, as a minimum, with an appraisal summary containing details of how the project contributes to overall scheme objectives, its associated outputs, level of leverage or any potential risks, or alternatively, with the appraisal form containing the appraisers recommendations (para 3.6).

- It will be necessary to draw up specific criteria which all community pot and business grant applications have to meet in order to obtain funds. This will provide assurances that all requests have been treated fairly and ensure transparency in decisions. (para 3.13).