

# Merseyside Network for Europe



## Newsletter

March 2011

### Welcome!

Welcome to the March edition of Merseyside Network for Europe's newsletter, reporting on European issues relating to the Voluntary Sector.

### European Co-operation Group

This group (part of NW-REP) met again on 1st March and there were discussions around the uncertainty of funding for many organisations. The group will be continuing with a strong focus on transnational programmes. The UK's response to the Fifth Cohesion Report was discussed. The next meeting will be on 31st May.

### City Employment Strategy

The City Employment Strategy Board met on 1st March, with a presentation on the Labour Market, with information both static (how many are unemployed, how many are young people, etc) and dynamic (how the figures change, people moving in and out of work). There was also a presentation on Project Signpost - the new online directory of employment, skills and support provision which is being launched (see [www.esf-works.com/projects/projects/401228](http://www.esf-works.com/projects/projects/401228)). There was an update on future governance, on the Future Jobs Fund, and a verbal update on the Work Programme. The next meeting will be on 4th May.

### ESF PMC

National ESF Programme Monitoring Committee met on 3rd March. There were progress reports on Co-Financing from the DWP, Skills Funding Agency and from National Offender Management Service. The Terms of Reference for the PMC and the

English Operational Programme were then amended, to retrospectively confirm the abolition of the Regional Sub-Committees and to reduce the frequency of the meetings. A revised Technical Assistance Strategy was agreed and the papers from subcommittees were noted (Innovation, Equal Opps, Sustainable Development). The next meeting is on 21st September.

### NW REP

The NW Regional European Partnership met on 7th March and heard updates from the Committee of the Region members and information on the FP8 consultation (Framework Programme - research and innovation). It heard a report from the Cohesion Forum at the end of January (for the Fifth Cohesion Report) noting that the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (not due until June) was the elephant in the room and that there was discussion about whether funding for the Transition regions (perhaps Merseyside, Cumbria and Lancashire) would come from the Convergence or Competitiveness Funds. There was also a discussion about how to ensure the valuable role of the NW-REP could continue. The next meeting is on 28th June.

### Steps to Success

As part of the Steps to Success ESF ITM project, two further visits have been made to Barcelona to develop the links already made, and to attend a trade fair.

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## NWIP

North West Infrastructure Partnership held a meeting with a presentation on Big Society from Hazel Blears (Nick Hurd had addressed the January meeting). There were reports from the partners, and concern about the low involvement of the Voluntary Sector in the four Local Enterprise partnerships (only Cheshire and Warrington so far, but Greater Manchester is hopeful). The next meeting is arranged for 23rd June.

## Joint NW VCS Learning and Skills Network & NW Third Sector SPV

This group met on 24th March in Preston. Presentations to the members of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) included information from the Skills Funding Agency on their future provision, a presentation from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and an update on the activities the SPV is currently involved with.

## ChangeUp Merseyside

ChangeUp met on 15th March with a depressing report from the organisations around the table faced with staff reductions and severe cuts. There were reports on the Development Exchange Project, Prince2 course, TaPS Project (Tendering and Procurement Support) and GRIPP online benchmarking tool. While the existing funding for the consortium ceases at the end of March, it was agreed that there remained good value in being able to work together on Merseyside issues - the organisation will therefore continue, but at a reduced level.

## PMsc

The ERDF Performance and Monitoring sub-committee met in Salford on 16th March. It endorsed a proposal to encourage firms to reduce energy consumption (£1m ERDF, £36k in Merseyside) and £1m for land remediation in Wigan. A proposal to help develop green infrastructure solutions for projects was deferred. There was an update on the continuing issues around match funding (following from the loss of NWDA Single Pot and other Public Sector reductions). Significant amounts

of funding had been allocated to projects, although outputs and results were not yet all as good as had been hoped and JESSICA had still not started. There was an update on projects, including calls for proposals, and monies remaining, across all four priorities. The next meeting is 25th May.

## Social Innovation Launch



Innovation is one of the flagships for Europe 2020. MNE has been working with Euclid for some time in supporting the development of Social Innovation (which is what the Voluntary Sector does!). SIX (Social Innovation eXchange) and Euclid have been working with the European Commission and on 16th and 17th March Social Innovation Europe was launched. MNE was there, along with colleagues from Poland and across Europe. José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission gave a very positive presentation, as did Mercedes Bresso, President of the Committee of the Regions. The room overflowed with more participants than expected - we look forward to the next steps.

## European Transitions

After several cancellations the European Transitions Project Board held its final meeting on 22nd March. This was a disappointing meeting as there were no final recommendations for the PMC the following week and no clarity on the future of the NW-REP. There was agreement that there should be maximum local involvement with ERDF.

## Tech Group

The Merseyside ERDF Technical Group met again on 29th March, with a presentation from the Epicentre Project in Knowsley, and the Big Enterprise in Communities project by Social Enterprise North West and the NWDA (start up and business support). The low attendances at the Merseyside Phasing In sub group were discussed and there was information presented about the Local Authority bid under Priority 4.2. It was noted that for the Sub-Regional Partners Technical Assistance (not Voluntary Sector) this would be rebranded as LESN (Local European Support Network) - in Merseyside's case the existing underspends would allow the TA to be extended at no additional cost. The next meeting will be on 28th April.

## PMC



The ERDF Programme Monitoring Committee met on 30th March at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry. This was the last meeting chaired by Liz Meek as Government Office North West was closing the following day. Philip Cox from DCLG attended - he will be chairing future meetings and we wish him well. With the ending of the European Transitions Board there were no proposals to agree for the next meeting of the PMC which means that a decision on the Deputy Chair, changes to representation on the PMC and on the sub-committees and the possible creation of a new Strategy sub-committee was delayed until the June meeting (so won't come into effect until the September meeting). Meanwhile, it was confirmed that the EPE ERDF Secretariat would complete their transfer from the NWDA to DCLG by the beginning of July. There were the usual reports on Programme Performance and the Annual Implementation report was noted, as were the reports from sub-committees. There was a useful presentation on The NW Fund which is now open for business and was launched on 11th February - the website is now fully functional, Fund Manager contracts signed and many applications and enquiries have already been received. It was agreed to make minor changes to the Investment Frameworks to allow others to bid. A consultant is appointed to work with the partners to make further revisions to the Investment Frameworks.

## Consultation on Workless Families

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is looking to commission employment-focused provision for families with multiple problems, supported through its European Social Fund Co-financing arrangements.

It is DWP's intention that Local Authorities will be the primary route to identify families who would benefit from the provision, and it is likely that providers and Local Authorities would work closely together.

DWP would welcome input on a number of areas of policy design.

This call for evidence will close on **6th May 2011**. A response document will then be published later in May, setting out the chief points raised.

This call for evidence is specifically aimed at Local Authorities and other interested parties.

To contribute to the discussion, please download the document from the web page at:

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2011/esf-support-for-families.shtml>

Add your comments to the document, then return it to:

[ESF.Engagement@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ESF.Engagement@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

You do not need to complete every section of the form in order to return it.

If you want any part of your completed form to be treated in confidence, and not to be mentioned in the response document DWP will publish, please state this clearly at the beginning of each relevant answer. DWP expect a broad range of opinions to be expressed and cannot guarantee that your input will be reflected in the final policy design.

## Fourth Freeze date of ACTOR

The Fourth freeze of ACTOR will take place at 17:00 on Friday 13 May 2011. All organisations seeking funding for the provision of education and vocational training services must be registered on ACTOR for at least one of the programmes funded by the Skills Funding Agency. To be registered on ACTOR, colleges and training organisations must have passed a due diligence pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) and must submit at least one on-line Invitation to Tender (ITT). This is done through the Skills Funding Agency's e-Tendering portal.



Please note that in previous Guidance Notes the Skills Funding Agency has set out its intention to introduce a Minimum Contract Level which is intended to create efficiencies within the Agency and economies of scale across the sector.

The Minimum Contract Level threshold for 2011/12 has been set at £500,000. This means that organisations that are interested in applying to become providers under ACTOR need to be able to run contracts of at least the value of the minimum level. For smaller organisations there are opportunities to sub-contract or become partners in the delivery of larger contracts.

For further information on ACTOR please visit:

<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/programmes/actor/>

Alternatively you get in touch with Angeliki Stogia at Merseyside Network for Europe: [angeliki.stogia@mersenetwork.com](mailto:angeliki.stogia@mersenetwork.com)

## Staffing

March was a very busy month for MNE with lots of changes taking place both internally and in the wider sector.

First of all, as reported in our last newsletter, MNE's sister organisation North West Network is winding down. MNE has pledged to do whatever we can to widen our area of coverage to include the rest of the North West, ensuring that Voluntary Sector organisations continue to benefit from opportunities emerging from the EU.

There have also been changes within MNE. Firstly we said goodbye to Julie Gibson as she left MNE to take up employment elsewhere. Julie was instrumental in delivering MNE's Working Links contract and both staff and board would like to pass on their thanks and best wishes to Julie for her hard work over the past few years.

Secondly MNE would like to welcome two new members of the team. European Officer Angeliki Stogia and Senior European Officer John Hacking have joined us recently - both have a wealth of

experience of the Voluntary Sector in the region and are looking forward to working with our members.

The end of March was a milestone for many organisations with some closing their doors entirely. Having worked originally with officials from Government Office Merseyside, and then as it expanded into Government Office North West, MNE is sorry to see the organisation close and the officials move onto other things. We would particularly like to thank Shay O'Rourke for his help and support in recent years and wish him and his colleagues the best for the future.

## New England ESF Website



In line with wider Cabinet Office plans to rationalise the number of Government websites the England ESF website has moved and now sits within the Department for

Work and Pensions (DWP) site. The website has a new look homepage and navigation style but all content from the old site has been transferred across, including guidance manuals, case studies, news items, reports on ESF evaluations, support for implementing the cross-cutting themes of equal opportunities and sustainable development. To view the new website please visit: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/esf/>

## TSEN event

On 30th March, TSEN (Third Sector European Network) the support organisation for ESF in the regions, held an event in London to publicise the role of the Voluntary Sector and ESF.

## ERDF Priority 4

Bids are still being worked up for Priority Four (worst off areas) as well as the 4.1 proposal by Social Enterprise North West, a group of Voluntary Sector Organisations, lead by a consultancy are preparing a bid, and a further bid from the Local Authorities, working with the Voluntary Sector is underway.

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## Contact Us

Contact MNE if you want copies, or links to websites for any documents mentioned in this Newsletter, including the North West Operational Programme, Evaluation, Investment Frameworks, and the European Commission's publications, including the Fifth Cohesion Report.

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