

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

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| 1. | Meeting: | Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Environment |
| 2. | Date: | 21st February 2011 |
| 3. | Title: | Employability Partnership project with Cluj (Romania) |
| 4. | Programme Area: | Environment and Development Services |

5. Summary

To update the Cabinet Member with progress on the joint project with Cluj-Napoca (Romania) working on engaging with people from the Roma and Disabled communities and assisting them back into employment

6. Recommendations

- **To note the report.**
 - **To endorse continued work on the project**
 - **To request regular updates on the progress of the project and issues of interest which arise from it.**
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7. Proposals and Details

During July 2009, Cluj – Napoca Council contacted Rotherham MBC, with whom they already had linkages, to ask if we would work with them as a partner on an European Commission funded project for supporting people back into employment; from the disabled and Roma communities. A further Romania partner, Arad, would also be involved.

It was agreed that the proposal needed further investigation and two RMBC officers visited Romania to discuss the prospective bid in more detail.

Following these discussions it was agreed that RMBC would be a partner in this project and a Partnership agreement, to submit and further develop the project was signed by all parties.

There has subsequently been a delay in implementing the project, due to some questions over whether the funding would be available to deliver it. However, these issues have now been resolved and the project is scheduled to commence on 1st April 2011, with a lifetime of 3 years. The title of the project is “Together for a secure beginning!”

The overall objective of the project is “to develop an integrated social and professional inclusion model for Roma people and persons with disabilities.” This is underpinned by three more focused objectives of:-

- 1) Ensuring access to information, mediation and to professional counselling services for 3415 Roma persons and 1585 disabled persons, over 36 months in the North Western and Western regions of Romania
- 2) Facilitating access to professional training programmes (qualification/re-qualification) for 900 Roma and disabled persons
- 3) Informing up to 72 public and private managers, NGO representatives and local public administration employees regarding the issues faced by Roma and disabled persons.

Details of the project have still to be agreed, and a scoping meeting between all partners is scheduled to be held within the first two months of the project start. However, it seems likely that during the lifetime of the project the Romanian project team will make annual visits to Rotherham to look at relevant activity being delivered in the Borough and surrounding area. Identified “experts” from Rotherham will then undertake twice yearly visits to Cluj and/or Arad to hold seminars and moderate workshops on this activity, ensuring sharing of experience and good practice on both sides.

A number of Rotherham experts, people and organisations, have been identified as potentially working on the project. A list is below, although it is expected this will be revised as the project progresses and areas of particular interest are identified.

Simeon Leach – RMBC, EDS (Project Co-ordinator)
Peter Butters – Phoenix Enterprises
Bev Booker – RMBC, CYPs
Anne Ferguson – Speak up
Neil Baxter – Bramalls & Chair of Work and Skills Board
TBC – Job Centre Plus

8. Finance

Funding for the project will come from the European Regional Development fund (ERDF), with Cluj-Napoca as the Accountable Body for the project. Potentially up to £156,000 of funding may be available, dependent on exchange rates and the ability to evidence that level of expenditure on the project.

The activity will be of nil cost to Rotherham MBC as the costs of all eligible activity can be claimed from the project subject to provision of required levels of receipts and evidence of spend. Cluj-Napoca is the main project sponsor and as such has overall control and responsibility for the project budget.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The main financial risk to RMBC is that activity claimed for under the project may be ineligible to receive European funding support. Project management by the Regeneration Team, in EDS, will ensure this is not the case.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The project will meet the following priorities of the Community Strategy:-

- Maximise employment opportunities for all by supporting disadvantaged people into work.
- Improve access and remove barriers to employment.
- Increase the number of young people in education, employment or training.
- Support people on incapacity benefits to manage their condition and get back into employment where possible through the Condition Management Programme (CMP) and Pathways to Work.
- Address the disadvantage that individuals experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion or belief. (All themes)

11. Background Papers and Consultation

A project summary provided by the Cluj-Napoca Council is attached as Appendix 1

A copy of the signed Partnership agreement for the project is available on request.

Colleagues in Finance and Chief Executive's were consulted on this report.

Cllr. Hussain will be kept informed of project progress in his position as Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion. This paper will be taken to his Delegated Powers meeting on 28th February 2011 for information.

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