

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Acting Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration Services)

Community Safety and Environmental Services Committee: 13 June 2007

Subject: Western Scotland European Forum

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report aims to advise the Committee of the establishment of a Western Scotland European Forum and to seek agreement for the Council to become a member.

2. Background

- 2.1** West Dunbartonshire Council has been a member of the West Of Scotland European Consortium (WOSSEC) since 1996. It was established as a Joint Committee of the 12 Local Authorities in the region to develop positive links between the communities of the region and the institutions of the European Union.
- 2.2** With the changing climate concerning particularly the operation of the Structural Funds in the light of the expansion of the EU, there is consensus that WOSSEC is no longer fulfilling a valuable role. Glasgow City Council has taken the lead in the formation of the Western Scotland European Forum to take over the remit of the WOSSEC and further the interests of Western Scotland in Europe. It is proposed to engage with a wider range of organisations than just Local Authorities and to join up the work of WOSSEC's European Officer and the European activities of the Clyde Valley Community Planning Partnership's representative in Brussels.
- 2.3** WOSSEC has at its last meeting agreed to transfer its existing funding balance to the new European Forum

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** There is an acknowledged need for an effective means of lobbying on behalf of Western Scotland on European issues which affect the area.
- 3.2** Recent developments have also highlighted the need for an effective forum and for a "corporate" Western Scotland voice on major issues.
- 3.3** Recently there has been press coverage which confirmed the view that Western Scotland's presence and influence within Brussels had become diluted over the years and that it had to some extent lost its voice in

influencing many policy areas which are of considerable importance to the future development of the area.

3.4 The objectives of the forum would be :

- to identify, and lobby, on EU issues of particular relevance to Western Scotland
- to enable partners to work together to represent Western Scotland interests on EU legislative and policy initiatives
- to promote joint working by forum partners in accessing financial (and other) support from relevant EU programmes
- to form working relationships with other organisations and networks at Scottish, UK and EU levels where by doing so the interests of Western Scotland can be furthered
- to work with regional and national agencies on issues of common interest which are of relevance to Western Scotland
- to lobby on behalf of Western Scotland on issues of relevance to the economic, social, and environmental development of the area
- to agree an overall workplan for the 2 officials who are available to work on behalf of the forum.

3.5 It is proposed that the Forum would be led by the local authorities with

- an inner 'political' group led by the Council leaders to discuss council specific issues; and
- an executive grouping composed of the wider body of interest groups detailed below.

3.6 The Clyde Valley Community Planning Partnership funds the operation of a Brussels office with one officer. WOSEC has one officer funded by existing contributions. It is proposed that these 2 officers will support the new Forum so there is no reason why there should be any increase in costs.

3.7 The full Forum would meet twice per annum, with the proviso that additional meetings could be held to consider matters of urgency where a collective Western Scotland view might be either necessary or required. There would also be scope for specific groupings to be set up to give detailed technical consideration to ongoing issues.

3.8 The initial membership will be likely to include local or regional agencies, including the local authorities within the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Area, Ayrshire and Argyll and Bute, the Higher Education and Further Education sectors, the Health sector, Chambers of Commerce, the voluntary sector, local economic development agencies, and Scottish Enterprise.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The Forum members are expected to contribute at a level still to be identified.

5.2 At the moment the Council contributes £ 4,600.00 per annum to WOSEC. Should the proposed contribution of the Council to the European Forum be at that level, there will be no material financial implications.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 Not joining the European Forum could possibly disadvantage the Council with respect to accessing European funding.

7. Conclusions

7.1 It is considered that there is merit in the Council participating in the proposed Western Scotland European Forum. The Committee is requested to note that should the Council join this body an invitation will be extended to the Leader of the Council to participate in meetings to oversee its activities.

8. Recommendation

8.1 **The Committee is invited to join the Western Scotland European Forum.**

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Appendix: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All