East of England Brussels Office Business Plan 2013-14

1 Introduction

1.1 The current business plan for the East of England Brussels Office covers the financial years 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14. This annual business plan updates and refreshes the current plan for the final year in preparation for the work that will emerge with the next generation of EU funding programmes for 2014-2020.

1.2 A refresh and focussed annual business plan was considered appropriate to reflect the various changes to the East of England European Partnership and the new relationships that the Brussels Office enjoys with its partners. The business plan will continue to ensure that the detailed work set down in the Action Plan of the East of England European Partnership (based on the European Commission Work Programme) is delivered efficiently and effectively by the Brussels Office on behalf of partners.

3 Vision for Service

The Brussels Office in 2013-14 focuses on giving local partners a voice in key debates on the next generation of EU funding programmes (2014-2020) in order to ensure maximum take up. The Brussels Office will remain efficient, ensuring that income generating opportunities are maximised while continuing to provide a high quality, intelligence-oriented service.

4 Who we are and what we do

4.1 The East of England Brussels Office funded by East of England LGA, and a number of other partners from a variety of sectors, to represent the views of the East of England European Partnership vis-à-vis the EU Institutions.

The office’s principle aim is to assist partner organisations improve their access to EU funding, through:

- Finding a path of opportunity for partners through the EU institutions and legislation
- Providing intelligence and advance warning of EU policy and funding developments
- Raising the profile of individual partners in particular and the East of England in general with key policy makers in the EU and organisations across the EU
- Creating links through networking and partner searches with other European regions in support of transnational project development

4.2 Governance and stakeholder engagement

4.2.1 The Brussels Office is steered by the Europe and International Forum (EIF) which provides strategic guidance to the work of the Brussels Office, and is the voice of the European Partnership on issues relating to European and International Affairs. It meets quarterly and has a broad
stakeholder engagement including local government (East of England LGA), international trade, business, social and environmental stakeholders, representatives from Local Enterprise Partnerships, Members of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. The terms of reference and membership are set out at Annex 1. The Brussels Office provides the secretariat to the EIF and reports quarterly to it.

4.2.2 Having only a small team of policy officers, the Brussels Office relies on excellent relations with local partners who are able to promote or take advantage of the EU funding intelligence and information provided by the Brussels-based team. The office uses a range of communication tools to give timely information to the network of officers across the partnership. It produces regular information newsletters (policy snapshots, funding and partner search monitor) as well as detailed briefings when key EU funding calls are expected or announced. The expertise of the team is best exploited by partners coming forward with specific queries and detailed requests. It maintains a detailed member-only website which acts as a repository for a broad range of policy and funding briefings. The website is password protected giving exclusive access to subscribing partners.

4.2.3 The Brussels Office provides the secretariat for the European and International Affairs Officer Group (EIAOG) which meets quarterly. This network, open to European officers as well as officers dealing with economic development or external funding and provides a forum for exchange of good practice and experience on funding applications. The Brussels Office uses this forum to obtain input in the development of policy positions, which are ultimately signed off by the EIF, taking advantage of the insight of experienced practitioners. Currently EIAOG members are focused on the preparation of the EU growth programme and different aspects of this will continue to shape the agenda over the coming year.

4.2.4 The Brussels Office uses a number of additional forums to communicate key policy and funding intelligence and information. The list of organizations include, but are not limited to; East of England LGA’s portfolio holder networks, Regional Transport Forum, Strategic Transport Sub-Group, LSPs and county officer networks, the Strategic Migration Partnership and Local Enterprise Partnership boards and sub-boards as well as frequently updating the ERDF Local Management Committee (LMC). In recent times and in preparation for the EU Growth Programme, the Brussels Office has initiated stakeholder fora for LEPs and local partners to engage directly with relevant government officials to shape and steer the next generation of programmes.

4.2.5 On request, the Brussels Office team delivers 1-2-1 meetings with partners as well as tailored presentations for individual officers or politicians from member authorities, e.g. local authority cabinet briefings or presentations to management teams.

4.2.6 Other key partners –

EU Connects: The Brussels Office successfully bid to Improvement East in mid-2011 to establish a support programme for local authorities, the voluntary sector and LEPs to increase awareness, and ultimately take up of EU funds. This service which has now been extended by East of England LGA until April 2014 thanks to its success to date, promotes the uptake of EU funds and supports bid development. The Brussels Office is working closely with the EU Connects associates to ensure a streamlined provision of information, and support across the partnership.

4.2.7 Local Enterprise Partnerships:

The Brussels Office has developed strong working relationships with a number of Local Enterprise Partnerships. Over the past two years the office supported the LEPs by building an understanding of the key EU funding streams and key policies where their voice can help shape EU policies of
relevance to their local partners. Now with LEPs taking a leading role in the future direction of the European Structural and Investment Funds for 2014-2020, the Brussels Office is offering to support the LEPs take on this role. To date the Brussels Office has supported LEPs by organizing discussions with stakeholders and dialogue directly with key representatives of the relevant ministries. This year the LEPs will prepare their investment strategies and nurture a pipeline of quality local projects, therefore the Brussels Office will continue to offer support such as advice on EU regulations on the ESIF as well as support for ongoing dialogue with stakeholders and ministries.

5 Funding and management of the Brussels Office

5.1 Line management and hosting of the Brussels Office continues to be provided by Essex County Council in close collaboration with the East of England Local Government Association (East of England LGA). The principle contributor to the Brussels Office budget is still the East of England LGA. However additional income comes from a number of other partners and external sources.

5.2 The challenge for the Brussels Office in 2013/14 is to formalize its relationships with new local organizations with whom a strong working relationship have developed over the past two years, eg LEPs, NHS. This will ensure that the Brussels Office service can strengthen and be a better resource to all partners. The facilitation of cross LEP dialogue on the future European Structural and Investment Funds and dialogue between LEPs and the broader stakeholder group is an area where the Brussels Office has uniquely enabled productive discussions which, in the long term, will be to the benefit of all local partners.

5.3 Current subscribers to the Brussels Office service include:

- East of England LGA
- Association of Colleges of the Eastern Region
- University of East Anglia
- University College Suffolk
- Anglia Ruskin University (Ashcroft International Business School)
- University of Essex

5.4 The Brussels Office hosts:

- European Port Community Systems Association (EPSCA),

5.5 The Brussels Office has sublet part of its office space to:

- Manchester Brussels Office
- Merseyside Brussels Office
- North of England EU Health Partnership
- Kent Brussels Office

5.6 Staff Structure 2013-14
5.7 Budget and staff
The budget for the Brussels Office for 2013-14 is £291,990, of which £167,400 comes directly from the local authorities via the East of England LGA. Other income comes from partners and sub-letting as described above.

Through a service level agreement with the University of East Anglia, the Brussels Office hosts a number of graduates providing them with EU public affairs work experience to boost their employability.

6 Priority policy areas of activity

6.1 The East of England Brussels Office in 2013-14 will focus its attention on the following policy areas based on partners interest and needs:

- **Employability and Skills**: From the European Social Fund (ESF) to the Erasmus for All Programme, the EU plans to focus its investments over the coming 7 years on boosting employment through a better skilled workforce. The Brussels Office will support its partners understand the changes between the current programmes and help them access funding to address local needs and opportunities.

- **Health and Social Care**: With the new local authority responsibility for public health, as well as the significant research and business opportunities in delivering solutions to the health societal challenges, the Brussels Office will focus on funding opportunities that fit the needs and opportunities of its partners and clients. There is a large range of EU funding streams which address different aspects of health; from research into solutions to support active ageing (Horizon 2020/Ambient Assisted Living Programme/ERDF) to opportunities to share good practice on public health and social care (health for growth programme).

- **Transport**: With the new Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) coming into operation in 2014, the East of England will sit on both core and comprehensive routes, as well as a number of TEN-T maritime ports and airports. Unlocking future investments (including financial instruments) via the new TEN-T financing instrument the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), will
be critical to sustaining economic development and growth. In addition, improving urban mobility and addressing road safety issues remain key challenges for East of England partners.

- **Environment**: With waste and air quality reviews planned for 2013, the Brussels Office will monitor the likely impact of potential changes to existing legislation on behalf of local authorities and act accordingly. These are both areas where early preparation and/or action can prevent costs for local authorities in the longer term. Following successes in previous years, there will also be a focus on seeing how the new energy and environment funding programmes can continue to help partners meet their low carbon objectives.

- **Enterprise and Entrepreneurship**: With many local partners committed to supporting SMEs become more innovation-oriented and competitive, there are a number of EU funding programmes of relevance; Horizon 2020, the successor programme to FP7 and CIP, along with ERDF are designed to boost the competitiveness of the EU through research and Innovation. Priority sectors and businesses with high growth potential in the East of England are well placed to take advantage of such funding streams. The take-up generally in the East of England of these programmes is good but more can be done to make the programmes more suitable for SMEs and encourage technology transfer and commercialise research.

- **Financial Instruments**: The use of financial instruments using EU funds is now a major tool for investment in support of competitiveness. In addition to the use of ERDF to develop financial instruments as part of the EU Growth Programme for England, almost every policy area and funding stream from 2014 will use financial tools to maximise the impact of EU funds. Building relations between partners and the European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund will be crucial. Equally the Brussels Office will work to demystify these new tools and communicate appropriate opportunities to partners.

- **State Aid**: The Brussels Office will continue to work with local partners and engage with both the European Commission and UK government departments to ensure the best outcome in the review of the Regional Aid Guidelines. Given the importance of the sectoral state aid guidelines to the ability to support business, the Brussels Office will follow relevant state aid reviews closely, for example GBER.

---

East of England Brussels Office Business Plan 2013-14: priority areas of activity

- **Grow the visibility of the East of England as well as individual subscribers.** The Brussels Office will continue to use key thematic weeks (eg Open Days) and bespoke events to showcase East of England partners. Visibility vis-a-vis policy makers in the European Commission and European Parliament can help influence policy making and helps establish fruitful relationships. Showcasing excellence acts as a marketing tool to attract the best partners when preparing competitive EU funding applications. However the Brussels Office will no longer organise Open Days events due to the capacity constraints on the team.

- **Improve Communication channels with partners** to ensure that the service in known and understood and opportunities for EU funding are taken up. Following from the Holden review of East of England LGA in 2012, the Brussels Office was found to be valued by local authorities who have engaged with it. However those local authorities who were not aware of the Brussels Office questioned its value. By Autumn 2013, the Brussels Office will have a new mini website as a part of the new East of England LGA website which will be better able to meet the needs of partners and clients. Finally, to ensure local authority members understand the opportunities unfolding for 2014-2020, the Brussels Office is planning the organisation of a member masterclass on EU funding in the Autumn.

- **Secure access for partners on key EU funding sources to be determined by the Multiannual Financial Framework (EU Budget 2014-2020).** Co-ordinated engagement will be required to position East of England partners in key debates on the future of structural funds (ERDF/ESF) and the Connecting Europe Facility (TEN-T). While the Brussels Office will concentrate action on the main EU Institutions, partners will equally be supported in their engagement with the lead UK government departments responsible for negotiations with the EU (eg BIS/DCLG/DEFRA, DfT).

- **Prepare partners and individual clients for the next generation of EU funding programmes.** Working closely with the EU Connects associates based in the East of England, the Brussels Office will provide early intelligence on the EU funding programmes to come on stream in early 2014. In addition to the briefings on the changes to the EU funding programmes, the Brussels Office and EU Connects will organise several events in the region. Here local partners can develop project ideas, engage with national contact points and be in a strong position to bid early and often for the 2014-2020 programmes.

- **Strengthen the Brussels Office budgetary position and consequently its service to partners and customers.** The Brussels Office has developed strong relationships with several Local Enterprise Partnerships and other new organisations over the past two years and this year seeks to formalise these relationships. This will ensure that the Brussels Office service can strengthen and be a better resource to all partners.

- Equally where the Brussels Office can secure income through contracts with non East of England partners this should be explored. Care will be taken to ensure that any additional contract is complimentary to existing work and does not distract from core service provision to partners. Already a contract has been secured to provide the information services to Greater Manchester, more effort will be made to finding further such clients.

- **Information Services:** The Brussels Office will continue to deliver high quality information services to partners including the regular policy snapshots and the funding monitor newsletters and more in-depth briefings as and when required.
- **Policy Watch**: While the main focus for the Brussels Office staff will be the policy areas and funding programmes prioritised under section 7, other EU policy areas will continued to be scanned for opportunities of relevance to partners and reported on as and when necessary.

8 **Summary**

The Brussels Office in 2013-14 is;

- planning to work on both funding and policy issues of key interest to partners including transport, enterprise and entrepreneurship, health and social care, environment, structural funds, and state aid
- aiming to ensure optimum visibility in EU policy debates with the EU Institutions – working closely with the region’s MEPs - in the above areas for the East of England European Partnership in general and key partners in particular,
- focussed on preparing partners to be able to draw down from the 2014-2020 EU funding programmes to address their challenges and opportunities
- aiming to broaden the list of service subscribers to strengthen the budget position with a view to reducing the dependency on East of England LGA in the long term.