



Impact of Local Government Reform on SMEs

Rural Council Perspective

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Context

- The Rural Challenge
- Local Government Reform Opportunities
- Responding to the Rural Challenge –Lisburn &Castlereagh City Council

The Rural Challenge – NI Wide

- Agriculture remains a volatile market
- Education & skills gaps
- Unemployment & depopulation
- Lower average earnings
- Lower level of business start ups
- Poor access to key services
- Poor quality of broadband coverage



Local Government Reform Opportunities

- Taking the baton from central government
- Transferring Functions:
 - Planning
 - Local Economic Development
 - Urban Regeneration & Community Development
 - Local Tourism
 - **Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020**



 ? **Rural Proofing Bill**

Responding to Planning Challenges

- Planning devolved to Councils – April 2015
- Planning Act 2011 – Local Development Plans

Opportunities

- Council will have more decision making powers
- ‘Place Shaping’ Plan Led approach – Can make real impact on SME development

Challenges

- Changing Role for Elected Members
- Meeting Application Processing Expectations



Responding to Local Economic Development Challenges

- Transfer from Invest NI
- NI Lead Council – Business Start Initiative

Boost for Rural SMEs in helping to:

- Address the rural SME skills gap
- Develop young rural leaders and entrepreneurs
- Encourage rural women to become business leaders
- Better co ordinate funding streams for rural SMEs



Responding to Community Planning & Rural Proofing Challenges

Community Planning

Opportunities

- Rural SMEs will be more involved in local decision making
- Council will have 'General Power of Competence'

Challenges

- Most statutory functions still exist outside Councils
- More comprehensive Central Government guidance required



Rural Proofing

Opportunities

- Fair and equitable treatment of rural dwellers
- Rural SMEs could benefit from targeted resources & interventions for rural

Challenges

- Not adopted as a statutory duty anywhere else in UK or ROI
- Council could act as a 'Rural Champion' for SMEs?

Responding to Regeneration & Tourism Challenges

- Urban Regeneration & Community Development (DSD transfer, 2016)
- Local Tourism (transfer from Tourism Northern Ireland)

Opportunities for Council to:

- Utilise an annual DSD budget of circa £2 million per annum
- Identify priority rural & urban areas for regeneration and to do business
- Encourage tourists to 'explore rural' whilst visiting key urban attractions
- Improve co ordination across the rural tourism sector to make it more competitive



Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council – What we can already build on

- Economic Driver of the Eastern Economic Corridor (Belfast – Dublin)
- 4,300 VAT Registered Companies
- Progressive, Can-Do Council
- Quality Services
- Rural Areas with Suburban Characteristics
- Unlimited Infrastructure to Support SME's



Impact of Rural Development Programme (Lisburn / Castlereagh)

- £7.3 million grant investment for rural
- Funded 151 projects in total
- Created 91 new rural jobs
- Created 28 new rural businesses
- Developed 45 existing rural business
- Completed 19 rural tourism schemes
- Completed 11 rural heritage schemes
- Completed 14 village renewal schemes
- Principle funder of major strategic projects
 - Moira Demesne Regeneration
 - Lock keeper's Lagan Lighter Scheme
 - Rural Play Park Scheme



Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020

Further Opportunities for Investment

- Overall budget investment of £2.6 million
- Rural Business Investment Scheme - £1.2 million
- Improving Community Infrastructure - £680,000
- Village Renewal Scheme - £352,000
- Cross border & EU Co operation - £180,000
- Rural Broadband Scheme - £100,000
- Two Strategic Tourism Bids to DARD – circa £1m
 - Investment in Lagan Canal
 - Investment in Hillsborough Masterplan



Lobbying DARD for involvement in:

- Local Artisan Food Production Scheme
- Local Food Processing and Investment Scheme

Conclusion

- **Local Government Reform Ethos – To improve quality of service to rural SMEs**
- Challenge to obtain final and fair budgets re: transfer of functions
- Co ordinated central / local government approach required
- Rural SME sector will be expectant
- **BUT**
- We can embrace opportunities of transferring powers
- Rural Development Programme – Key economic driver
- Council can be an advocate for both the rural & urban SME sector