

Scrutiny Review of the Rural Economy

1. Purpose of the Item

The purpose of the session is to generate discussion and feedback from RAF members on the current regional scrutiny review looking at the rural economy. Ecotec will facilitate a discussion based on the following 3 questions, which relate to the key areas of the review.

- **Growing new businesses** – which programmes, policies and interventions of Yorkshire Forward have been successful in enabling new business start ups in the Region and what have been the key success features of these programmes/policies?
- **Supporting existing businesses** – which programmes, policies and interventions have Yorkshire Forward made that have been successful in supporting business growth and diversification in rural areas?
- **Creating the right setting for investment** – how has Yorkshire Forward created the right conditions to attract investment to the rural areas of the Region?

The following information has been provided to give a brief background to scrutiny, the current review and more details relating to the key areas of the review.

2. Background to Regional Scrutiny

Regional Scrutiny is about ensuring Yorkshire Forward and partners deliver the Regional Economic Strategy effectively, ensuring that the activities of Yorkshire Forward are the right ones for the region.

Scrutiny is led by a Scrutiny Board made up of 6-8 Assembly members and is a statutory function of the Assembly. The Board undertakes two scrutiny reviews per year and each review highlights new ways of creating and encouraging better economic performance in Yorkshire and Humber.

3. The Rural Economy Review

The Rural Economy review is the 12th review the Assembly has undertaken. Following the production of baseline statistical information and details of current Yorkshire Forward programmes and activity, the Scrutiny Board have agreed the key areas that they wish the review to concentrate on. These 'lines of enquiry' have been identified to ensure the review is focused and offers effective recommendations.

This scrutiny review will therefore consider Yorkshire Forward's economic development activities in the rural areas of Yorkshire and Humber. This does mean however, that the review will not explicitly consider areas outside Yorkshire Forward's remit, such as housing, health and land management. However, it is recognised that any specific issues relating to these areas may need to be highlighted during the review.

4. The Lines of Enquiry

The Scrutiny Board is keen to explore whether the region is creating the right conditions for growing the rural economy, and whether the region is undertaking the right activities to ensure a sustainable economic future for rural areas in the long-term.

It needs to be noted that the Renaissance Market Towns (RMT) programme is one of Yorkshire Forward's key initiatives and the effectiveness of the implementation of the Market Towns Initiative and the Renaissance Market Towns Programme was reviewed in the Assembly's fifth scrutiny enquiry in August 2004. There is therefore a general consensus that the scrutiny review of the Rural Economy should not re-evaluate the findings and recommendations from Scrutiny Enquiry 5 however, the scrutiny review may assess the impact that specific Renaissance Market Towns projects and activities have had on rural communities.

The 'lines of enquiry' for this review have therefore been agreed as:

- **Making rural areas more enterprising**
- **Regenerating rural town centres**

Making Rural Areas More Enterprising

This line of enquiry will cover the initiatives and activities by Yorkshire Forward that create the right conditions for businesses to start-up, trade and grow in rural communities. It will take stock of the existing projects focussed on rural areas and assess the impact and outcomes achieved, identify any gaps in support and infrastructure, and highlight exemplars of good practice. This line of enquiry may include the following:

- a. Projects and programmes to support new business starts in rural areas and their impact and outputs (eg. Growing Routes, ROSE and the rural business Support Package)
- b. Encouraging rural and land-based businesses to grow and diversify (eg. WiRE project, development of new products, development of new cultural and tourism services, seeking new and different trade partners, using rural businesses to deliver key services in local communities)
- c. Existing and planned infrastructure that allows businesses to operate in rural areas (eg. access to ICT infrastructure, access to transport networks)

Regeneration of Rural Town Centres

This line of enquiry will cover policies, strategies and regeneration activities to

generate new sources of income for the rural economy. It will assess how financial investment in rural areas is supported by Yorkshire Forward, and how regeneration is delivered with and through partners. This line of enquiry could include the following:

- a. Projects and programmes to support the regeneration of rural town centres
- b. The development of property and sites that will increase the availability of appropriate workspace and which will support the creation of employment opportunities in the future (eg. bringing redundant buildings back into use, creation of new industrial units)
- c. Efforts and activities to reduce the social and economic disparities between rural and urban centres

5. Next steps and Further Information

During September and October views and observations relating to these lines of enquiry are being gathered. These views and observations will form the basis of the scrutiny report and key recommendations will be identified.

As well as the comments made at the Rural Affairs Forum on the 25th September you can also submit your views to scrutiny@yhassembly.gov.uk by the 12th October. You can also attend the public discussion meeting on the 11th October. If you are interested in attending please email scrutiny@yhassembly.gov.uk by the 28th September.

The Yorkshire and Humber website is also being updated regularly throughout the review and you can access further information by going to www.yhassembly.gov.uk

Kelly Jevons,
Scrutiny Manager
September 2007