

East Midlands Councils

Headline response to the European Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and Communication on the future of the Common Agricultural Fund

East Midlands Councils broadly welcomes the 'direction of travel' set out in the two reports and its response focuses only on their overall strategic implications for the East Midlands. To promote faster progress towards achieving the aims of Europe 2020, East Midlands Councils supports greater simplification, efficiency, coherence and the leadership of locally elected politicians in the management of cohesion policy and its associated funding instruments. East Midlands Councils supports;

1. The establishment of an EU-wide **Common Strategic Framework** for investments and funds aligned around the mutually reinforcing targets of Europe 2020
2. The continued **universal availability of structural funds for all regions**, including the East Midlands, and the creation of a new 'intermediate' category of regions, reinforcing the principle of cohesion across the whole EU.
3. **Stronger, more responsive and accountable governance** through the leadership of locally elected politicians, working with economic and social partners, in setting the strategic priorities, approving spending and providing oversight below the national level. Greater local democratic leadership would support;
 - i. informed and accountable decision-making,
 - ii. strong links to local spatial and economic planning
 - iii. greater flexibility and innovation in the use of funds,
 - iv. robust local development approaches that use EU funding effectively alongside other funds, and;
 - v. integrated governance across funds.
4. Building on stronger governance, **greater flexibility, co-ordination and devolution of responsibility** in the administration, use and targeting of funds, including;
 - i. Flexibility for Operational Programmes to be drawn up on the basis of functional economic areas or coalitions of such areas with strong inter-relationships. East Midlands Councils supports tackling high levels of deprivation in urban areas but this should not be at the expense of other types of common economic geography, such as rural, former coalfield, coastal areas or areas with a shared approach to tackling EU 2020 priorities such as deprivation, the low carbon economy and climate change.
 - ii. Minimal further 'conditions' placed on funding, beyond ensuring due probity and the achievement of the democratically determined targets
 - iii. Flexibility to pursue different types of financial investment to achieve the most sustainable improvements.
5. **Streamlined administration, evaluation and monitoring**, building on stronger and more responsive governance. Integrated, simplified application, appraisal and administration procedures and a focus on results rather than administrative compliance
6. **A new approach to CAP** that reinforces the twin pillars of market support and rural development, providing for a sustainable agricultural sector that promotes greater food security, environmental enhancement and vibrant rural communities that provide high quality employment opportunities.