

## **Council Meeting**

**20<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

### **Motion submitted by Councillor Steven Leigh MBE under Council Procedure Rule 14**

#### **Backing Rural Businesses and Communities**

This Council notes:

- The vital role played by local farmers and rural businesses who work tirelessly to drive our economy and enrich our communities in Calderdale.
- Rural communities face many challenges - from poor connectivity and transport links to limited access to key services and lower productivity rates compared to urban areas.
- The rural economy is a lifeline for many residents and businesses, making it imperative to support it for a healthy and prosperous borough. Businesses in rural areas are diverse, and many are not agricultural or land-based.
- Whilst Calderdale does have large rural areas, under current government funding the authority does not qualify for a Rural Services Grant which provides non-ringfenced funding in recognition of the additional costs of delivering services in sparsely populated areas.
- The Conservative Government's Rural Fund, as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), has been available to local authorities since April 2023. It funds capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure that will provide a wider benefit to the local economy.
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority has been allocated £2,567,601 to distribute for the whole of West Yorkshire, with individual grants of up to £50,000 for micro and small businesses. This will facilitate the much-needed diversification of income streams for farm businesses.
- Calderdale Council has played a vital role in helping businesses and communities in rural areas to benefit from the Rural Fund, which is available for applications until March 2025. Officers have worked hard to publicise the scheme and assisted 18 businesses to apply for grants. Three have been successful, securing grants totalling £117,600 to date with further projects in the pipeline.
- Additional funding from the Rural Fund is welcomed, but rural businesses and particularly farmers remain under great financial pressure. As part of ongoing cost-of-living work by officers from Calderdale Council's Business Engagement Team, rural businesses have highlighted factors such as utility cost increases, rising

prices of raw materials including animal feed, reduced demand for products and services, and wage increases.

- Prior to Brexit, the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) provided financial support to farmers for more than 40 years. In 2019/20 farmers in England received over £1.8 billion in direct payment subsidies.
- There has been frustration and anger from British farmers about delays to implementation of replacement schemes for EU funding such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive, which is aimed at balancing food production and environmental goals. However, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs has confirmed that it is providing £2.4bn of financial support into the farming sector each year throughout this parliament.
- In 2022, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs confirmed “58% of domestic consumption came from UK production... 23% from the EU and the remaining 19% from the rest of the world.”
- Recent free trade deals with Australia and New Zealand have paved the way to undercutting British farmers through food produced to lower environmental and animal welfare standards. Any future free trade deals, especially, with the US need to ensure that British farmers are protected, while also not eroding environmental, animal welfare and food standards.
- Calderdale Council works closely, positively and innovatively with rural landowners and tenants on a range of initiatives which are crucial to the borough including our commitment to net zero. These include flood alleviation and tree planting.
- In line with our priorities of Reducing Inequalities, building Thriving Towns and Places and dealing with the Climate Emergency, we want our marginal upland areas to support communities and a range of successful businesses.

This Council resolves to:

- Ask officers to continue their hard work to support and empower rural communities and businesses, ensuring they continue to thrive and contribute to the success of Calderdale.
- Support our farmers and rural businesses, by committing, where possible, to sourcing food from local suppliers for council-organised events.
- Continue building strong partnerships with farmers, landowners and rural businesses to enhance our countryside and provide opportunities for diversification and the promotion of local produce.

- Encourage residents to shop locally wherever possible, making the most of the affordable and nutritious food available in our region. By doing so, we can help our rural communities to thrive while supporting the growth of the local economy.
- Continue to promote the Rural Fund and other sources of financial support for rural businesses, providing assistance to those who want to take advantage of these opportunities.

**Seconded by Councillor Blagbrough**