



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

11 June 2019

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Dear ██████████

EASTERN AGRi-TECH GROWTH INITIATIVE: GRANT SPENDING - FOI CA63

I write with reference to your request received on 31 May 2019 (our reference CA63) regarding grant payments made under the Eastern Agri-Tech Growth Initiative.

Please find the response provided below.

Question 1:

Can I check what follow ups the Agri-Tech board does/did after approving these funds? Does it visit the sites of all the projects to see how the money has been spent or ask for reports?

Response:

The main task of the Eastern Agri-Tech Programme Board is to take decisions about whether to approve grant applications. Responsibility for monitoring the outcomes of projects is now with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

All grant payments are paid in arrears against defrayed expenditure incurred and paid for by each successful applicant. This means that no grant payments are made until each supplier/contractor has been paid, by each successful applicant, before claiming grant from the Agri-Tech scheme. As well as completing the claim form, the successful applicant must also provide supporting documents that confirm that the project costs have been defrayed. This will usually include invoices, time sheets and confirmation that payment has made to suppliers/contractor (eg bank statements/remittance advice notices).

The successful applicant will show the total amount of eligible project costs incurred in that particular claim period and seek reimbursement of the appropriate level of grant eg for Growth projects it is 25% of total project costs incurred and for R&D projects it is 50%. The Grant Offer Letter received by each successful applicant will confirm the total amount of grant awarded for the duration of the approved project.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority's claim and monitoring forms require each claimant to confirm the progress made in a particular claim period. The information provided enables The Combined Authority to consider what remedial action may be necessary if the project is behind/outcomes are not being delivered. The Grant Offer letter allows for the recovery of funding (an extract of the relevant clause is given below) if:

- a) In our opinion, the funding recipient is failing or has failed to make satisfactory progress in implementing the project including progress towards the agreed milestones;
- b) In our opinion, whether through delay, poor project management or otherwise, the costs of the project are escalating or seem likely to escalate to an extent that, they are unacceptable;
- c) In our opinion, the future of the project is in jeopardy;
- d) In our opinion, the funding recipient ceases to work on the Project or fails to make any progress against agreed milestones for a period of more than 3 months;
- e) In our opinion, the funding recipient persistently fails to submit monitoring information on time;
- f) In our opinion, any information the grant recipient has given in relation to the Project changes substantially during implementation or is shown to be incorrect or misleading or any claim for grant is based on misleading information;
- g) The grant recipient fails to comply with any conditions of the Grant Offer letter.

For the full scheme Guidance Notes please click on link: <http://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/assets/Uploads/Agri-Tech-Funds-guidance-notes-FINAL-5.docx>

Not all sites are visited as part of the monitoring process.

Question 2:

For example, two payments were made in 2017 to Hirst Farms Ltd to grow blueberries. It was given £21,000 in February 2017 and another £60,000 in September of that year to further this work. I understand no blueberries have ever been grown at its farm in Norfolk so what was this £81,000 spent on?

Response:

We can confirm that Hirst Farms Ltd was awarded grant funding of £81,768.90. The two projects in question were not about the growing of blueberries but about investigating the feasibility of whether it might be possible to grow blueberries and what factors and conditions would be required to grow blueberries. Based on the evidence we have seen, we are satisfied that Hirst Farms Ltd has complied with the terms and conditions of its Grant Offer letters and that the costs incurred are in accordance with the company's application forms and with the Grant Offer letters.

The money awarded has been used to undertake work on the feasibility of growing blueberries in East Anglia.

Question 3:**Secondly, how are conflicts of interests managed on the board?****Response:**

This is set out in the Terms of Reference. Please click on link for document:

<http://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/assets/Uploads/Programme-Delivery-Board-FINAL-TOR.pdf>

For ease of reference conflicts of interests are managed as follows:

Applicants are provided with the names/organisations of all Programme Board Members and asked to confirm if any Board Member is conflicted, before any project proposal is taken to the Programme Board. If any Board Member is conflicted, those affected Board Members do not have access to the relevant project papers. In the event that the applicants have not recognised that a Board Member(s) is conflicted, Board Members must declare at each meeting if a conflict of interest arises, especially where an application is received from a competitor business or from a Board Member's own organisation. In either of these circumstances, the Board Member(s) is not asked for their views about the application in question and refrains from commenting on that particular application. It is left to the other Board Members to take the appropriate decision about whether to approve or reject the application.

Question 4:

When these payments to Hirst Farms were approved one of your board members was John Shropshire of G's Group. Hirst Farms is one of G's Growers so did Mr Shropshire have to exclude himself from discussions about this funding?

Response:

The applications from Hirst Farms Ltd were approved on 23 February 2017 and 27 September 2017, which was after Mr Shropshire had left the Eastern Agri-Tech Programme Board in July 2016. As Mr Shropshire was not a member of the Agri-Tech Programme Board at the time that Hirst Farms Ltd applied for grant funding, the issue of managing a potential conflict did not arise.

There were no other conflicts of interest declared or identified at the time that Hirst Farms Ltd applied for grant funding.

Question 5:

One of the biggest beneficiaries of the Agri-Tech's funds has been NIAB. One of the board members when these funds were approved was Dr Tina Barsby who is chief executive of NIAB. Again, how was this potential conflict of interest managed?

Response:

The National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) had applications for funding approved by the Agri-Tech Programme Board on 22 April 2014; 20 November 2014; 10 March 2015 and 23 June 2015. These applications were processed before the establishment of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

Dr Tina Barsby was a member of the Eastern Agri-Tech Programme Board from January 2014 to June 2014. Dr Barsby was succeeded (in turn) by NIAB colleagues Dr John Hutchins, Dr Effie Mutasa-Gottgens and Dr Lydia Smith. Dr Smith is the current NIAB representative whose name is shown in the Terms of Reference.

Each of the applications received from NIAB were subject to thorough, independent appraisal before consideration by the Agri-Tech Programme Board. Because NIAB was conflicted, Drs Barsby, Hutchins, Mutasa-Gottgens and Smith were excluded from the discussions and decision taken on each of the applications. For each application, it was left to the other Board Members to take the appropriate decision about whether to approve the applications. NIAB continues to be represented on the Board and contribute valuable technical expertise to the Agri-Tech Board.

Question 6:

I understand there have been some major changes to the board since the departure of chairman Mark Reeve in 2017. Could you please confirm who is now on the board making funding decisions?

Response:

The Terms of Reference for the Agri-Tech Programme Board contains the names of the Board Members. Please click on link for the Terms of Reference: <http://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/assets/Uploads/Programme-Delivery-Board-FINAL-TOR.pdf> Membership of the Programme Board includes experts with experience and knowledge of agriculture and the food industry, including research, farming and food processing. For ease of reference the Board Members are:

William Haire (Chair)	(CPCA Business Board & East of England Agricultural Society)
Dr Jonathan Clarke	(John Innes Centre)
Cllr Ian Bates*/Cllr Mathew Shuter	(Cambridgeshire County Council)
Dr Belinda Clarke	(Agri-Tech East)
Mike Burrows	(New Anglia LEP)
Dr Dave Hughes	(Syngenta UK)
Dr Lydia Smith	(National Institute for Agricultural Botany)
Cllr Beverley Spratt	(Norfolk County Council)

Question 7:

Finally, what changes, if any, have been made to the Agri-Tech's policies since Mr Reeve's departure regarding how funds are allocated and transparency?

Response:

There have been some important changes to governance and transparency. These new requirements took effect from 1 April 2019 following the Government's approval of the Assurance Framework for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority in March 2019.

These new arrangements are set out in the agenda for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Board Meeting in November 2018:

Link to the agenda of the Combined Authority Board meeting November 2018 (agenda number 4.2)
<https://cambridgeshirepeterboroughcagov.cmis.uk.com/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/915/Committee/63/Default.aspx>

Link to the Minutes of the Combined Authority Board meeting January 2019 (minute number 275)
<https://cambridgeshirepeterboroughcagov.cmis.uk.com/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/864/Committee/63/Default.aspx>

The key changes are given below:

- The Eastern Agri-Tech Programme Board is now a sub-group of The Business Board (The Business Board has been approved by Government as the new Local Enterprise Partnership);
- A member of the Business Board chairs the Agri-Tech Programme Board;
- The Terms of Reference for the Agri-Tech Programme Board were approved by the Combined Authority Board at the November 2018 meeting following their review by the Business Board. There have been no changes to the Terms of Reference other than some changes in membership. An example has been the change of representative from Norfolk County Council, which took effect from 5 June 2019; Councillor Beverley Spratt has replaced Councillor Fabian Eagle. The Terms of Reference have been amended to reflect this change;
- The agenda and any non-confidential documents for meetings of the Agri-Tech Programme Board will be made public and published on the Combined Authority's website (starting with the meeting held on 30 April) 5 working days before each Programme Board meeting. The names of the Agri-Tech grant applicants are not divulged until the outcome of the applications is known (see bullet point below);
- The note of the decisions taken by the Agri-Tech Programme Board will be published on the Combined Authority's website within 5 working days of the Programme Board meeting, taking into account the withholding of confidential/sensitive information such as applicants names and amounts of grant awarded, until the respective funding agreements from the Combined Authority have been issued and terms and conditions accepted by the successful applicants;
- Each of the Agri-Tech Programme Board members are required to complete a register of interest and code of conduct form.

The Agri-Tech Programme Board will continue to consider applications based on the different assessment criteria depending on whether the application is a Growth project or a Research & Development project. The Board will also take into account the independent appraisals undertaken on each project proposal.

I hope this information is helpful but if you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint or request a review, you should write to us via our contact us email address – contactus@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk or write a letter to Complaints, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Incubator 2, Alconbury Weald Enterprise Campus, Huntingdon, PE28 4WX within 40 days of the date of this e-mail.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, or via their website: <https://ico.org.uk/>

Generally, the ICO will not undertake a review or make a decision on a request until the internal review process has been completed.

Yours sincerely



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The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority can be contacted via The Incubator 2, First Floor, Alconbury Weald Enterprise Campus, Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon, PE28 4WX. This email and any attachments are intended solely for the use of the addressee only, and is considered confidential. Any views or opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority or The Business Board. If you are not the intended recipient of this email, you must neither take any action based upon its contents, nor copy or show it to anyone with prior permission from the creator. Please contact the sender if you believe you have received this email in error.