

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

DRAFT Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Economic Development and Rural Affairs
Date of Decision:	4 November 2011
Decision Title:	Rural Delivery Strategy – progress and future direction
Decision Reference:	3372
Report From:	Director of Economy Transport and Environment Director of Culture Communities and Business Services

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to review progress with the County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy and to respond to Cabinet's request in January 2011 that 'there should be an extension and development of our rural policy objectives' (Open for Business – report by the Chief Executive).
- 1.2. This paper seeks to review the County Council's priorities for rural Hampshire and proposes future direction and priorities. The Culture Communities and Business Services department is charged with providing corporate leadership of the County Council's rural programme, so a review is timely following the departmental merger and change of Corporate Management Team sponsor.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. Cabinet agreed in January 2011 to *“an extension and development of our rural policy objectives involving a review of housing related activity, economic activity and social and wellbeing matters. ... Creating a (revised) set of rural objectives would be a starting point ”*.
- 2.2. The County Council's existing rural policies were initially developed in 2009, following consultation, and agreed by Cabinet. The programme has been strongly led by the Executive Member for Economic Development and Rural Affairs since its inception. Progress has been reported to Corporate Management Team and Cabinet in 2009 and 2010.

3. Performance to date

- 3.1. The focus of the programme is to improve the way the County Council delivers services in rural Hampshire – 85% of its total area, with 23% of the population. It had two strands:
 - Working collaboratively to gain best use of resources.
 - Supporting small rural projects that could not be unlocked without extra resources.
- 3.2. For financial year 2011/12, as at 4 October 2011, 17 projects were underway supported with investment of £141,700 (Executive Decision Record 3001, 28 June 2011). Revised figures predict that this funding will attract a further £196,000 from Hampshire County Council departments, plus additional external match funding of around £494,000. Combined, this gives a total gearing of 4.9 times initial investment. Appendix 1 provides a detailed project update.
- 3.3. 21 projects, involving all Departments, were funded in the first two years (2009-2011). Despite the challenging economic climate, gearing increased from 4.3 in 2009/10 to 5.4 in 2010/11. £179,900 investment in 2010/11 facilitated a combined investment of almost £1 million in rural Hampshire (the remainder was kept back for contingencies and some unfunded staff costs). Of this, £605,000 was external investment, plus an additional £190,000 match funding from Departmental budgets.
- 3.4. For example, five village halls have been restored; 110 village halls have received advice through Community Action Hampshire; 'gifted and talented' children at 40 rural schools in east Hampshire have improved provision for more able children; there is a County Council strategy for faster rural broadband, the first 'not spot' village going online in spring 2012; and a 'village agents' scheme is being set up, helping elderly residents better access services, increase independence and community resilience.
- 3.5. Some funding has been made directly available to communities through a 'Community Challenge Fund' as match funding for projects which meet local needs. Projects supported include a village market; a scheme supporting young people providing activities in their own community, reducing anti-social behaviour; supporting six countryside learning days for schools; grants for enhancing wildlife sites; support for democratic engagement on parish councils; and new village allotments. The County Council has received some very positive feedback from communities assisted.

4. Impact of organisational working

- 4.1. A key benefit of the programme is significantly improved cross departmental working, which is delivering improved savings and efficiencies and increased impetus in tackling difficult issues, and not just around the rural agenda. For example, much more effective partnership working between Adult Services and Economy and Transport and Environment is considering how the County Council can support tackling the challenging issue of poor access to transport in rural areas for older people in the future with a much reduced budget.

- 4.2. Improved data analysis is helping assess and mitigate the impact of proposed cuts on rural communities, for example the reviews of libraries.

5. Review of priorities within new context

- 5.1. The response of the County Council to present pressures such as the reduced capacity to deliver new initiatives calls for its rural policy to be re-aligned with current resources so that the high level of performance can be maintained.
- 5.2. Reflecting the need to streamline priorities and take account of the 'Open for Business' report, the Executive Member is requested to consider the proposal to revise the rural priorities agreed by Cabinet in 2009 as follows:
 - **Economic prosperity**, rural broadband, access to services, effective rural transport, the land based economy, energy from biomass, access to the countryside.
 - **Sustainable and resilient rural development and communities**, partnership, community engagement, affordable housing.

Rural needs are embedded in the recently approved Economic Development Review which provides a key framework for the future vitality of Hampshire's communities.

- 5.3. It is proposed to develop new principles around these priorities for Executive Member funding: involving others to lead and deliver on projects; a continued focus on maximising leverage of County Council investment, build on outcomes of pilot projects; ensure continued support for small community-based project partnerships; and ensure that sufficient capacity is available for successful implementation.
- 5.4. The focus for funding will be on commissioning and transformation, with continued emphasis on partnership and working with external partners.

6. Partnership working and support for rural communities

- 6.1. The County Council has responded to a Defra initiative for Rural and Farming Networks by leading the development of a major partnership proposal which would cover the counties of Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, West Berkshire, Surrey and West Sussex. Excellent sign up from a wide range of partners was achieved in a very short timescale. Initial feedback from Defra has been positive and work is currently underway to refine the proposal in line with that feedback.
- 6.2. The Hampshire Rural Forum is an external partnership which is a sounding board on rural affairs for the County Council. Reflecting staffing reductions, the County Council's support for the Hampshire Rural Forum will be reduced by 25%, and Forum members have been asked to take a greater role in delivery.
- 6.3. The Community Challenge Fund, funded by the Executive Member, is a platform which helps deliver the County Council's response to the Big Society by generating community capacity to deliver grass-root initiatives. There is scope to focus the Fund to assist transformation in

service delivery in rural communities where current funding levels cannot be sustained.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. Significant progress has been made with the County Council's rural delivery plan since 2009. In response to current pressures and the 'Open for business' Cabinet report in January 2011 it is proposed to re-focus priorities and develop new principles so that the high level of performance can be maintained. These priorities will help underpin the Economic Development Strategy which is being developed and will be adopted by Hampshire County Council.

8. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive Member for Economic Development and Rural Affairs:

- Agrees the revised priorities and principles for the County Council's rural programme (paras 5.2 – 5.3) in direct support for the Economic Development Strategy which is being developed and will be adopted by Hampshire County Council.
- Approves efforts to secure the Greater Wessex Rural and Farming Network as the key partnership development in support of rural priorities and partnership initiatives.
- Endorses the performance information presented and supports efforts to secure the maximum external gearing in terms of partnership project funding.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	

Other Significant Links

Links to Previous member decisions:		
Title	Ref	Date
Rural Delivery Strategy for Hampshire County Council	Item 5.a1 – 5.a5	July 2008
Rural Delivery Strategy for Hampshire County Council – Consultation and Development	Item 8(i) – 8(ii)	March 2009
Rural Delivery Action Plan for Hampshire County Council Decision Report	Item 7 865	April 2009 August 2009
Rural Delivery Action Plan for Hampshire County Council – Progress and Performance	1127	January 2010
Funding for Rural Delivery Strategy projects	1799	July 2010
Funding for Rural Delivery Strategy projects: performance against 2010/11 and project proposals for 2011/12	3001	June 2011
Direct Links to Specific Legislation or Government Directives		
Title		Date

Section 100 D – Local Government Act 1972 – background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- a) Successful implementation will reduce inequalities by improving service delivery in rural areas and increase access to services. Full Equalities Impact Assessment at <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/rural-strategy.pdf>

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- a) Some projects have a focus on reducing crime and disorder. e.g. through working with Accredited Community Safety Officers the Tile Barn climbing tower will help tackle boredom and anti-social behaviour.

3. Climate Change:

- a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?**

More effective and efficient service delivery is expected to reduce the County Council's carbon footprint and energy consumption. E.g. the 'rural transport initiative challenge fund' will help rural communities improve travel options, giving people the option to reduce their dependence on private cars.

- b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?**

These projects help communities to become more resilient and self-sufficient, and less dependent on services delivered from outside, which can be disrupted by adverse weather such as floods and snow. Extreme weather is predicted to increase under climate change. e.g.s of projects supported: community buildings fund, older driver skills, rural transport challenge fund.