

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Member for Economic Development and Rural Affairs
<b>Date:</b>	16 April 2013
<b>Title:</b>	Rural Delivery Strategy: review of progress 2009-2013
<b>Reference:</b>	4835
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services Director of Environment, Transport and Economy

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#### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report summarises progress of Hampshire County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy from 2009 to the present. Future challenges and opportunities are outlined within the changing context faced by Hampshire's rural communities.
- 1.2. It recommends actions to ensure that the successes and lessons learned from this work are both recognised and can be used to underpin future work.

#### 2. Contextual information

- 2.1. Cabinet agreed the County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy in 2009. It is focussed around improving the County Council's service delivery in rural areas. Priorities were developed based on the outcome of a targeted public consultation and with the objective of improving the County Council's own corporate approach to service delivery in rural areas. The Strategy has been updated regularly since then in light of changing circumstances, most recently in November 2011 (Decision Report 3372). Regular progress reports have been made to the Executive Member for Economic Development and Rural Affairs and Cabinet.
- 2.2. The current priorities focus upon:
- 2.3. **Economic prosperity** through: rural broadband, access to services, effective rural transport, the land-based economy, energy from biomass, and access to the countryside.
- 2.4. **Sustainable and resilient rural development and communities**, partnership, community engagement, and supporting affordable housing.

### 3. Finance

- 3.1. Over the last four years, the County Council has invested £200,000 per annum in support of the Rural Delivery Strategy. This, plus additional investment from other County Council projects and programmes, and substantial external match funding (some of this is 'in kind') has generated significant overall investment in rural Hampshire.
- 3.2. Approximately five times 'gearing' of the County Council's investment was achieved in 2011/12<sup>1</sup>; 5.4 times gearing in 2010/11; and 4.3 times gearing in 2009/10. Figures for 2012/13 will be finalised after year end.
- 3.3. The distribution and mix of projects supported is shown at Appendix A.
- 3.4. There is an annual funding allocation of £200,000 for rural projects from the Policy and Resources budget through to 2014/15. These resources will offer an opportunity to target the ongoing challenges and opportunities faced across Hampshire's rural areas.

### 4. Performance and Outcomes

From the outset of the programme the Executive Member was determined to secure:

- A range of tangible and successful outcomes and improvements 'on the ground' driven by the key issues identified
- More genuinely joined up corporate working across the organisation in support of this agenda
- An effective external partnership approach that generated productive collaboration and gearing of resources at all levels

4.1 It is fair to say that these objectives have been delivered as is demonstrated by, not only the financial gearing achieved, but more particularly the range, breadth and geographical penetration of the projects supported. A number of highlights are outlined below.

4.2 **The volunteer-led Village Agents programme** supports older and vulnerable rural residents, making communities more resilient and sustainable, and reducing dependence on public services. Additional resources have recently been committed in response to this programme's overwhelming success. The partnership with Age Concern Hampshire, which delivers the programme, has been highly successful, providing excellent value for money, as the programme is volunteer-led.

a local resident wrote: *"After phoning round everywhere trying to find some form of help after being discharged from hospital with no care plan, I called my local Village Agent. Without their help, kindness and understanding and*

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<sup>1</sup> This exclude resources set aside to support the establishment of the Wessex Rural and Farming Network.

*that of the volunteer from the local care group sent out, I would have been left with no help and no food over Christmas.”*

- 4.3 **The Little London broadband project** has been completed, demonstrating how County Council resources and community leadership can combine to deliver super-fast broadband to a rural community. This has supported at least one local business to remain and expand in the locality. Further support has been provided to the M3 Local Economic Partnership to deliver super-fast broadband to rural businesses. A county-wide grant scheme has supported local residents to adopt innovative technologies in places where there was no broadband. These pilot programmes have helped the County Council target its future investment under the BDUK national programme and respond constructively to one of the most strongly advocated issues across all sections of our communities, particularly in rural areas.

The Chair of the Little London broadband group wrote *“Without the foresight and support of HCC, we would not have the superfast broadband we now enjoy. ... HCC is to be congratulated for supporting such a far-reaching and innovative scheme.”*

- 4.4 **Supporting access to services.** Services are supported through village shops grants, and support for rural communities to identify new ways of providing community transport, working in conjunction with the voluntary sector. The Village Halls Advisor post at Community Action Hampshire was supported for three years following withdrawal of Government funding. It is now proving sustainable with a reduced level of County Council support, and increased financial contributions from the communities themselves. Equally significant matched funding has contributed to an extension of the Community Buildings programme, so improving community infrastructure targeted in rural areas.

- 4.5 **Financial and in-kind support from parishes and community groups** has been instrumental in delivering projects across the County. The small scale ‘community challenge’ fund approach has been particularly effective in supporting a broad range of diverse and community generated projects throughout the county. A good example of work with the parishes, and a project subject to commendation by the Hampshire Association of Local Councils, is the County Council’s ‘stiles to gates’ programme, making the countryside more accessible to people with reduced mobility and supporting the County Council’s tourism and health and wellbeing objectives.

Godshill parish council wrote: *“The parish is enormously grateful for the help financing the gates. Given our location our network is very heavily used and the new gates have resulted in many positive comments from users, especially those in wheelchairs.”*

- 4.6 Other targets have proved more challenging. Adopting alternatives to rural bus services has challenged rural communities – further support is being given to the Hampshire Association of Local Councils to help increase uptake of the County Council’s ‘rural transport self-help kit’. Although the County Council provides resources in support of the Hampshire Alliance for

Rural Affordable Housing, and many new houses have been built, demand still exceeds supply.

- 4.7 Other early programmes such as the partnership between Adult and Children's Services to use a mobile 'children's centre' bus out of hours to deliver services to adults were discontinued due to low take up and high costs. It did, however, enable the Village Agents programme, which has been far more successful. Although ultimately successful, the Little London broadband programme took substantially longer to deliver than initially envisaged due to the obstacles, hurdles and technical issues that needed to be overcome. It is acknowledged that pilot approaches are intended to test and develop ideas with an inherent level of risk associated with such an approach. The programme has attempted to both innovate and work with others to influence change and improvement in rural communities.

## **5. Future direction**

- 5.1. Good progress has been made but some key challenges remain if we are to deliver sustainable rural communities in the future. Some of these challenges are long standing and are intensifying through the combination of economic and demographic influences. This will require the County Council to identify priority areas for intervention, partnership, and support so as to maximise the use of combined but scarce resources.
- 5.2. Services are more costly to deliver in rural areas and access to some rural services such as shops, buses and community facilities are disappearing. Financially, it is becoming challenging for the County Council to continue to support these services within the context of public funding overall. However, there are opportunities to improve support for volunteers, and to deliver services online, including 'tele-care', but the lack of fast broadband and mobile phone signal across much of rural Hampshire poses significant challenges. The recent contract with BT to provide super-fast broadband to 90% of the county's population by 2015 is a major achievement and will make a good start on addressing this. Of the remaining 10%, the majority will receive speeds over 12mbps leaving approximately 3,500 premises, usually in the most rural areas, likely to require some form of alternative technology. The contract makes provision for this.
- 5.3. The Wessex Rural and Farming Network covers the counties of Dorset, Wiltshire, West Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and the Isle of Wight. It was established in March 2012 and along with other networks and groups forms an important part of collaborative working across the sector. The RFN is to be reviewed after its first full year of operation and it would be useful to review the operation of all the key groups.
- 5.4. Other emerging issues include continued engagement with Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) to support rural businesses and the skills agenda, and to address perceived barriers in the planning system for affordable housing and business diversification. European rural funding is likely to be delivered through LEPs, which may welcome the County Council's continued support

in identifying priorities, an area that would benefit from more detailed consideration.

- 5.5. Emerging census data shows an ageing population in rural Hampshire; which increases demand for County Council services. When considered against evidence of increasingly elevated house prices in rural areas, there are likely to be significant challenges around securing sufficient locally-based workers to support services like domiciliary social care in rural communities. This, plus the impact of Universal Benefit, and work to integrate public health, are likely to become challenges for the County Council in support of sustainable rural communities.
- 5.6. The impact of the current financial environment, both directly and indirectly, is likely to have a disproportionate effect upon some rural communities and it will be important to establish a revised and effective evidence base to track such impacts. The recent census data, together with other information sources, offer a platform upon which to establish this as a monitoring tool and help target future resources and interventions.

## **6. Recommendation(s)**

- 6.1. That the Executive Member for Economic Development and Rural Affairs endorses the effective impact and progress made against the original objectives set for the Rural Delivery Strategy and the need to maintain a focus upon the key issues still faced across Hampshire's rural communities by:
  - a. giving authority to officers to prepare a briefing for incoming elected Members on key rural issues and the impact of changing demography on rural communities.
  - b. reaffirming the need for ongoing collaboration and partnership to address these issues through the review of engagement and support for existing networks and groups such as the Wessex RFN, Hampshire Rural Forum, and the Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) so as to secure the most effective collaboration across the sector.
  - c. delegating authority to the Assistant Director of Culture and Heritage to initiate exploratory discussions around support for rural programmes arising from changes in European funding, and in particular the role of the LEPs.
  - d. Sustaining the effective cross departmental working and approach developed over recent years with emphasis upon developing the best possible evidence base upon which to guide collective action and the effective targeting of resources.

**CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:****Links to the Corporate Strategy**

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

**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.)**

Document

Location

None

## **IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:**

### **1. Equalities Impact Assessment:**

- 1.1 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:**

- 2.1 No direct impact on Crime and Disorder.

### **3. Climate Change:**

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

More resilient and sustainable rural communities should have less need to travel, thus reducing their carbon footprint and energy consumption.

- ii) 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.