

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Decision Report**

Decision Maker:	Cabinet
Date:	24 March 2014
Title:	Hampshire County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy
Reference:	5684
Report From:	Director of Culture Communities and Business Services Director of Environment Transport and Economy

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to propose new priorities for the County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy following a review of the previous work undertaken. This has been carried out under the direction of the Lead Member for Rural Affairs and has involved representatives from all Departments. The paper also highlights the key areas where future work and funding allocations are likely to make the most impact in terms of dealing with the issues faced by rural communities.
- 1.2. This paper:
 - sets out the background to the Rural Delivery Strategy
 - proposes new parameters and a revised focus for the programme, reflecting the changing economic context and challenges faced by our rural communities
 - considers the resources available for delivery of the strategy
 - highlights the potential impacts, and how the key proposals will contribute to the County Council's performance in rural Hampshire.
 - Sets out a suggested outline timeline and priorities for the work
- 1.3 In addition, two other areas of work around the sustainability of rural communities, including the development of a new rural transport strategy and the impact of rural isolation and relative deprivation on outcomes for children will be followed up by the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Environment, Transport and Economy.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. Since its inception in 2009 the Rural Delivery Strategy has supported communities across rural Hampshire, tackling isolation and access to services, and supporting the culture of self-help and self-reliance characteristic of so many of Hampshire's rural communities. Appendix 1 provides a summary of initiatives to support rural communities, ranging from large scale interventions to 'parish pump' initiatives.
- 2.2. Cabinet agreed the scope of the Rural Delivery Strategy in 2009. It has been revised and reshaped since that time through reports to Cabinet and to the former Executive Member for Rural Affairs. That programme met many of its targets – in particular the range, breadth and geographical penetration of the projects supported, together with the strong level of financial gearing achieved.
- 2.3. This report sets out new parameters in response to the changing context faced both by the rural communities themselves and the services they depend upon. It underlines the County Council's on-going commitment to supporting rural communities in the most cost effective and innovative ways possible.
- 2.4. The priorities identified are evidence-based, identifying areas of greatest need and challenge, and the greatest potential for both influence and impact. Colleagues in Economy, Transport and Environment (ETE) are supporting the development of that evidence base utilising census and similar data. Current census data shows an ageing population in rural Hampshire, which inevitably increases demand for key County Council services. Around 30%¹ of the population of some rural communities is over 65, and the rural proportion is ageing faster than the county as a whole². As an example, rising rural house prices may lead to challenges around securing sufficient locally-based workers to support services like domiciliary social care in rural communities, or support services such as village shops. High house prices are thought to be affecting volunteering through more households needing a dual income to live in rural areas.
- 2.5. Commuting patterns are becoming more complex as jobs are scarce in rural areas and people drive further to work³. Census data also shows declining school age population in many rural areas, and there are a number of indicators suggesting that rural and urban areas are becoming more polarised. Key demographic data used to inform this report is detailed in Appendix 2.

¹ 2011 census. Highest rural population aged 65+ is Milford on Sea - 43%. Typical examples include Owslebury 19%, Rockbourne 29%, Stockbridge 32%.

² HCC's 2010 based 'small area population forecasts', at 'lower super output area' level

³ Office for National Statistics is expected to publish data later in 2014.

3. Policy parameters and identification of priorities

3.1. Since appointment in May 2013 the Lead Member for Rural Affairs has reviewed priorities around six main themes:

- Transportation
- Economic development
- Communications
- Community resilience
- Challenging rural isolation and loneliness
- Housing strategy

3.2. Within the current financial and transformational context faced by the authority it is proposed to focus on a smaller number of key priorities over the next year where action by the County Council is likely to deliver maximum benefit to Hampshire's rural communities. These take into account both the challenges faced by Departments as well as learning from the previous programme.

3.3. Some future challenges are long standing and intensifying through a combination of economic and demographic influences. This requires the County Council to identify priority areas for intervention, partnership, and support so as to maximise the use of combined but scarce resources. It also requires the further development of appropriate policy direction linked to the impacts of such influences in areas such as housing provision, transport, and rural schools.

3.4. Services are more costly to deliver in the countryside, they are further away, with key facilities closing and often difficult to access for people without a car. This programme will look at opportunities to mitigate these impacts both realistically and cost effectively.

Good progress was made with the previous programme – for example the Village Agents programme, which has generated high community support. The proposed revised priorities build on this.

3.5 It is also proposed to continue offering small community grants through the Community Challenge Fund. The grants are match funded by communities. They support community self help, and enable residents to deliver projects which are high priority in their communities. While these are not strategic interventions they support small initiatives and serve to provide wide support right across the County. They also highlight the commitment of the County to support 'parish pump' initiatives and overall awareness of elected member support in these communities.

4. Proposed priority actions

4.1. Following consultation with the Lead Member for Rural Affairs, and senior colleagues from all departments including public health, it is proposed to focus on five key initiatives:

4.2. **Community resilience.** Originally established with a Rural Delivery Strategy grant, the Village Agents programme is highly valued by residents.

Volunteers, recruited locally, provide advice and assistance to elderly and vulnerable residents. Run by Adult Services, and delivered by Age Concern Hampshire, coverage is currently restricted by limited resources. Currently covering 23 villages, and costing £56,000 p.a., additional funding would enable the programme to be expanded to more villages and for consideration to be given to the potential complementary role of the Parish Lengthsmen. There is scope also to build on existing links with district and parish councils, many of which have paid staff and volunteers operating in villages. It would also be proposed to strengthen ties with the Church and other religious organisations, whose valuable role is recognised.

- 4.3. The recent LGA peer review visit to Hampshire identified the Village Agents programme as an excellent example of support for rural communities, and effective partnership working. This links in well with the County Council's public health programme.
- 4.4. **Rural transport.** In combination with a new rural transport strategy under development by Environment Transport and Economy, further support would be given to rural communities to help them tailor existing transport options to better meet the needs of residents without cars. Despite previous initiatives such as the 'Rural Transport self-help kit' and support from the Hampshire Association of Local Councils, both supported with grants from the rural fund, communities are still struggling to make sense of the full range of opportunities on offer.
- 4.5. Links would be further developed with the Village Agents programme to maximise awareness of information on both existing and potential transport opportunities, tailored to local need.
- 4.6. **Self help.** Volunteering is higher in rural areas⁴, and self reliance often a hallmark of village life. Public services are often more costly to deliver in rural areas, and staff harder to recruit. It is proposed to offer additional support for self help and volunteering, and to continue to build links with external partners to facilitate this.
- 4.7. The impact of extreme events such as the current flooding and associated impacts across Hampshire is further highlighting the need for the best possible co-ordination of resources whether they be public, voluntary or private to prepare for such challenges. Work is underway across the organisation to see how we can get the very best from our community support resources and also the utilisation of the wide range of staff and expertise that we could bring to bear effectively in such temporary and yet very demanding situations.
- 4.8. Whether the community impact is caused by natural events such as the recent flooding or less immediate socio-economic changes, it is clear that the County Council will face major on-going challenges in service delivery and support. Often such communities have the ability to identify and deliver

⁴ A Scottish study showed that levels of volunteering are 2.5 times higher in the countryside than in large urban areas. Economic and Social Research Council - 06 Nov 2013.

appropriate solutions if given the freedom, opportunity and basic support to do so. From this perspective the Authority needs to further develop support and opportunities for such communities to harness the inherent energy, skills, expertise, and goodwill that may enable them to tackle some of these challenges locally and under their own steam. Work to take this forward will involve even closer working with the voluntary sector, looking for best practice elsewhere and being prepared to pilot new initiatives.

- 4.8. Although Government 'extended schools' funding has been withdrawn, the majority of Hampshire schools and colleges work with local community groups. There are over 30 'community schools' offering sports facilities, supported by Sport England funding. Through its Adult Learning offer, the County Council supports the delivery of community learning in 12 schools.
- 4.9. **Communications.** Clearly broadband is a particularly high profile issue in rural communities and the County Council has a dedicated team tackling this project robustly. Work to make Superfast broadband (SFBB) services available to 90% of premises in Hampshire by the end of 2015 is underway and, in January, the delivery programme was ahead of the contracted schedule. The Executive Member for Policy & Resources has approved the release of further funding of up to £9.2 million to extend the availability of SFBB to 95% of premises by the end of 2017. Government is making some £250m available to support the extension of SFBB to 95% (the national Superfast Extension Programme or SEP), but has not yet made any announcement about how this will be allocated to local delivery bodies or the procurement and administrative processes to be adopted. An announcement on the SEP is currently expected on 25th February 2014. The County Council continues to make preparations for a further contract using the existing framework that was put in place by BDUK (Broadband Delivery UK) and is one of a small number of local authorities in discussion with the Government's commercial team about completing a new procurement for the extension programme by the Summer of 2014. Bids for funding from the RCBF (Rural Communities Broadband Fund) have been submitted in relation to Test Valley and the New Forest and the timetable indicates that decisions will be made in March.
- 4.10 The County Council is also working with Defra in support of its Mobile Infrastructure Project, which is building new masts in areas currently with no mobile phone coverage. In some areas of rural Hampshire this is as, if not more, important than broadband roll out.
- 4.11 **Economic development.** Strong links are being forged with the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), which offers opportunities for funding synergies, such as support for rural businesses through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Support will be given to Defra's current review of another European rural development programme –

‘Leader’⁵, and its links with LEPs. Consideration will also be given to funding requests from rural businesses or networks that demonstrably support the County Council’s Economic Development Strategy.

- 4.12 Links will be made with the County Council’s work in partnership with Test Valley Borough Council on a project to look at the long term economic and social outlook for four specific villages, with a view to potentially developing a key settlement approach to long-term planning. This work has also been highlighted by the recent LGA peer review as an example of best practice.

5. Performance monitoring

- 5.1. Projects will be assessed on outcomes achieved against the revised priorities, the degree of challenge and stretch, and Departmental and external match funding realised, including ‘in kind’ support. The Community Challenge Fund grants have been successful in this regard, attracting a high level of match funding. It is proposed to make them available again from April 2014.

6. Resourcing and partnerships

- 6.1. Since 2009, £200,000 has been devolved annually from the Policy and Resources budget to support delivery of the Rural Strategy. The County Council’s investment has brought in high levels of match funding from Departments and the community, of up to 5 times the initial funding. While match funding will not be a sole determinant of support, there will be an on-going focus on maximising match funding, with a minimum target of 2x gearing.
- 6.2. It is proposed that, subject to bids for funding received, both from Departments and external partners, that funding is prioritised on the basis of fit with the identified priorities, degree of stretch and challenge anticipated, expected outcomes, and match funding engaged.
- 6.3 The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services will bring forward a three year financial plan in the summer.
- 6.4 Building on partnership working will be essential for successful on-going delivery of the programme. Current partners include Age Concern Hampshire, Community Action Hampshire, and the Hampshire Association of Local Councils.
- 6.5 It is proposed to review the membership and focus of the Hampshire Rural Forum, and to consider its potential role in support of the Enterprise M3 and Solent Local Enterprise Partnerships. The County Council will consult with the Forum as its plans develop.

⁵ ‘Leader’ is a Defra-led European funding programme under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). It delivers funding through six Local Action Groups in Hampshire appointed by Defra.

7. Next steps and timeline

- 7.1. Subject to agreement of the approach set out above, it is anticipated that the revised Rural Delivery programme will commence in April 2014.
- 7.2. The priority areas listed in the report will be worked up in more detail for consideration and approval by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources during the year. Current proposals would see early priority given to launching the further development of Village Agents, followed by a rural transport initiative supporting the ETE Transport workstream, and a community support/volunteering project later in the year. The Community Challenge Fund grants scheme would be re-opened from April 2014.
- 7.3. The high profile issue of rural broadband referred to in section 4.9 will continue to be delivered through the dedicated project team, funding and programme management already and separately agreed by members. The Government's Mobile Infrastructure Programme will be promoted to Districts to improve mobile phone coverage. In some areas this is as, if not more, important than cabling options.

8. Recommendations

That Cabinet endorses the 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 set out in this report by:

- 8.1. Agreeing the five priority actions set out in section 4 and the detailed planning and evidence base to deliver them following consideration and decision by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources.
- 8.2. Carrying forward the 2013/14 budget allocation of Rural Programme funding to 2014/15, so confirming a budget of just under £400,000 until the end of the current programme.
- 8.3. That the Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services brings forward a three year financial plan in summer 2014.
- 8.4. Seeking to maximise partnership working and additional match funding realised through the County Council's investment, seeking a minimum of 2x gearing of investment.
- 8.5. Giving authority to officers to review the membership and focus of the Hampshire Rural Forum, and to consider its potential role in support of the M3 and Solent Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- 8.6. Continuing to offer small community grants through the Community Challenge Fund and to re-launch it from April 2014.

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

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

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
Rural Delivery Strategy: review of progress 2009-2013	4835	April 2013
Funding for Rural Delivery Strategy projects: performance against 2011/12 and project proposals for 2012/13	4048	June 2012
Rural Delivery Strategy - progress and future direction	3372	Nov 2011
Funding for Rural Delivery Strategy projects	3001	June 2011
Funding for Rural Delivery Strategy projects	1799	July 2010
Rural Delivery Action Plan for Hampshire County Council – progress and performance	1127	Jan 2010
Rural Delivery Action Plan	865	Aug 2009
Rural Delivery Strategy for Hampshire County Council – consultation and development		March 2009
Rural Delivery Strategy for Hampshire County Council		July 2008

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.)

DocumentLocation

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.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1. Indirect impact on crime and disorder: vibrant communities are likely to suffer less crime and anti-social behaviour.

3. Climate Change:

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, reducing energy consumption.

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 external services, which can be disrupted by adverse weather such as floods and snow.

Summary of Key Projects and areas of funding supported by the Rural Delivery Strategy 2009 - 2013

1. **The volunteer-led Village Agents programme** supports older and vulnerable rural residents, making communities more resilient and sustainable, and reducing dependence on public services. Working closely with Adult 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 that of the volunteer from the local care group sent out, I would have been left with no help and no food over Christmas."
2. **Local broadband project** was completed, demonstrating how County Council resources and community leadership can combine to deliver super-fast broadband to a rural community. This pre-dated the BDUK programme but helped inform the County Council's approach. 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 also 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.
3. **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. **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."*