

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	6 February 2015
<b>Title:</b>	Hampshire County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy
<b>Reference:</b>	6410
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Culture Communities and Business Services Director of Economy Transport and Environment

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#### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to update Cabinet on progress achieved in delivering the County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy since Cabinet's approval of revised priorities in March 2014 (Report 5684), and to set out a three year financial strategy.
- 1.2. This paper seeks to
  - update Cabinet on progress achieved since March 2014.
  - considers the resources available for delivery of the strategy.
  - highlights the impact the project is making on the performance of the County Council.

#### 2. Contextual information

- 2.1. Revised priorities for the County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy were agreed by Cabinet in March 2014 (Report 5684) with priority actions supporting community resilience, challenging rural isolation and loneliness, rural transport, self-help, communications, and economic development. Following review by Cllr Andrew Gibson and Departmental colleagues in December 2014 it is proposed to maintain these priorities.
- 2.2. Good performance has been achieved, which is detailed below.
- 2.3. Funding proposals totalling £320,800 were approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources in July 2014 (Report 5940) and December 2014 (Report 6282). Outline proposals for the unallocated balance of £65,000 are set out below, which have developed in consultation with Departments. These will be put forward for formal approval by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources in 2015.

### 3. Progress

- 3.1. Cabinet in March 2014 agreed that progress reports on the following would be brought back to Cabinet later in the year:
- 3.2. Sustainability of rural communities. Phase 1 of a pilot study in four villages looking at key issues and drivers for community engagement and self-help was completed in summer 2014 in partnership with Test Valley Borough Council. The Assistant on Rural Matters was updated on progress. Following on from this, a bid has been made for Government funding through the 'Delivering Differently' programme, but unfortunately this was unsuccessful.
- 3.3. The conclusions of the current Passenger Transport Review, with implications for rural transport services, were considered by the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment at his Decision Day on 27 October 2014 (Report 6029). Following that decision the County Council continues to provide around £850,000 of community transport support annually, predominantly benefiting rural areas. This support includes approximately 70 County Council owned group hire minibuses, and the grant stream is also available to other groups, such as Community Associations. In consultation with Passenger Transport colleagues and the Executive Member for Economy Transport and Environment, the corporate Rural Co-ordination Group is now considering the scope for supporting trials of new community transport initiatives such as local car-based schemes.
- 3.4. Initial meetings have taken place with Winchester Diocese to explore potential opportunities to link more closely with church volunteers in support of elderly and vulnerable members of the community. For example, there would be potential for closer working between church volunteers and the Village Agents initiative. Further work on this will be undertaken during 2015.
- 3.5. The LEADER<sup>1</sup> programme of European funding for rural areas has been reviewed nationally during 2014. The priority for Hampshire was to fill in the gaps in LEADER coverage in parts of rural Hampshire, in order to maximise external European investment. With the support of Hampshire County Council and the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), LEADER groups made proposals to Defra to reconfigure and rationalise the distribution of LEADER groups in the county, to achieve full coverage. Outline Government approval for the revised geography has been given, and details of funding allocations are expected in early 2015.
- 3.6. Research on cost of delivering services in rural areas. The County Council was one of 25 authorities to participate in this research programme for Defra and CLG to quantify additional costs incurred by rural councils. It was also selected for supplementary interviews, fielding a cross-Departmental panel at Assistant Director level. Interim findings were presented to Government

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<sup>1</sup> LEADER ("Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale" is an EU funding programme supporting grass-roots development in rural communities. It is administered in England by Defra.

during autumn 2014 with a view to influencing future Government funding decisions. The report has not yet been made available.

- 3.7. Hampshire Rural Forum. The Hampshire Rural Forum is a constituted County Council body, with its Chair, Cllr Andrew Gibson, appointed by the Leader of the County Council. Its purpose is to act as a rural sounding board for the County Council. For example, it was engaged in developing the County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy. The Forum holds a legacy budget of £23,000, which originated from SEEDA, and which is held by the County Council on behalf of the Forum. This is used to pay for conferences and events.
- 3.8. A review of the Forum has been initiated in consultation with its Steering Group and key external partners. A potential direction of travel has been identified, for which endorsement from Cabinet is sought at this stage.
- 3.9. Both Enterprise M3 LEP and Wessex Rural and Farming Network would support moves for the Forum to take on a greater role as a Hampshire sounding board for them. This would be similar to the arrangement already established in Surrey, where the Surrey Countryside and Rural Enterprise Forum supports Enterprise M3. They anticipate the lead officer role would continue to be provided by the County Council's Rural Programme Manager. Neither organisation is in a position to offer budgetary support to the Forum, however, there would be an opportunity for a private sector business representative from the Forum to join the Rural Group of the Enterprise M3 LEP. The Director of Enterprise M3 will be meeting with the Chair of the Hampshire Rural Forum to discuss.
- 3.10. In support of the potential new focus for the Forum, it would be proposed that the rural economy sector membership on the Forum is boosted further, for example inviting additional former members of the ex Hampshire Economic Partnership Rural Task Group to join the Forum. Should Cabinet agree this approach, it would be proposed to make the same offer to the Solent LEP, which includes some rural areas.
- 3.11. In previous years, the County Council has run both a Hampshire Farming Conference and a Hampshire Rural Forum conference. Reduced County Council resources meant that it was not possible to run either conference in 2014. As there is still demand for the conferences it is proposed to explore how a combined conference might be run in future in partnership with external organisations.

#### **4. Performance**

- 4.1. Good progress has been made in delivery of the revised priorities for rural Hampshire following approval by Cabinet in March 2014:
- 4.2. Action to address rural isolation and loneliness and support community resilience is focussed around additional resources to expand the network of volunteer Village Agents. Additional resources had been identified to expand the network from 32 to 45 volunteers. An additional £30,800 funding from the rural budget enables this to be expanded further, to 60 Village Agents. Discussions with Winchester Diocese and its network of church volunteers

aim to identify additional synergies in support of self help and support for older people in Hampshire's rural communities, potentially linking to the Village Agents network.

- 4.3. The rural economy is being supported through an additional £50,000 funding for grants to village shops. These lie at the heart of many rural communities, and this grant scheme allows shops to modernise and develop, and introduce new models such as community ownership. Additional funding of £30,000 is supporting the transfer of business knowledge from market towns to rural communities. Town centre managers are now working with communities and businesses to support the rural economy.
- 4.4. Rural isolation project. £100,000 funding for Adult Services will focus on understanding and addressing social isolation among older people, through using new technology. Benefits may include reductions in GP / community health visits, improved management of medical conditions and improved self-reporting of health. This project would play a part in providing early help in slowing down demands upon more expensive council-based services. One of the main aims of the project is to secure long term funding from health and other organisations.
- 4.5. Hitting the cold spots rural extension. This £50,000 project takes steps to tackle the higher than average levels of fuel poverty in rural areas, where households are spending more than 10% of income to stay warm. Energy costs for rural households, off the gas grid, are higher, and rural houses are often older and harder to insulate.
- 4.6. The County Council is working with the Enterprise M3 LEP and LEADER groups to target additional investment in support of the rural economy where it can make the greatest impact. The County Council supports the Rural Group of the Enterprise M3 LEP, ensuring that synergies and opportunities are maximised.
- 4.7. Community resilience is supported through Community Challenge Fund grants of up to £5,000 to local community groups and organisations. Many grant applications have been received, but not all have been approved, often due to applicants applying to multiple County Council funding sources at the same time, requiring significant inter-departmental liaison.
- 4.8. An example of a successful grant is one awarded to support a volunteer-run computer help desk at the Stockbridge weekly village market. Residents, who are often elderly, are supported to get online, access services online, and reduce isolation through services such as Skype. The market has also received grant support from Test Valley Borough Council.

## **5. Finance**

- 5.1. Funding proposals totalling £320,800 were approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources in July 2014 (Report 5940) and December 2014 (Report 6282). Outline proposals for the unallocated balance of £65,000 include consideration of the scope for trialling a community transport initiative aimed at improving the ability of communities to self-

organise transport according to their local needs. A summary of key projects and approved budget allocations is set out at Appendix 1.

- 5.2. Rural Delivery Strategy funding enables Departments and external partners to identify and push forward innovative projects over and above their normal business functions, and test new concepts. The nature of pilot projects is that not all succeed, but of those that do, they play a part in providing early help in slowing down demands upon more expensive council-based services.
- 5.3. A good example is the Village Agents programme, run by Adult Services in partnership with Age Concern Hampshire, which started as a Rural Delivery Strategy project. It was the first village agent initiative in the country run on a volunteer model basis, anticipating today's financial climate by several years. It helps elderly and vulnerable residents to live independently for longer, with the County Council's modest investment resulting in significant costs avoided. It also raises the County Council's profile in rural communities and has very high public satisfaction levels.
- 5.4. There is currently a £200k recurring annual revenue budget for the Rural Strategy. Future plans and proposals are being developed and will be presented as part of the overall Transformation to 2017 programme due to be presented to Cabinet in June and Full Council in July 2015.

## **6. Future implications**

- 6.1. Hampshire's rural population is ageing faster than that of the county as a whole, which is expected to increase pressure for public services. Some of the key initiatives supported by the Rural Delivery Strategy are part of the package of measures to slow the rate of increase of cost pressures, and to take full advantage of new technology.
- 6.2. Spending reductions mean that it is increasingly difficult to sustain subsidised public services in rural areas, as many public services cost more per capita to deliver in the countryside, due to greater population sparsity. This has been anticipated through the corporate Rural Delivery Programme, working with communities and partners to support them to deliver local solutions, such as community-led transport. As with many new ways of working this requires further focus and work with communities to embed these new approaches and maximise volunteer engagement.
- 6.3. The roll-out of superfast broadband to Hampshire's rural communities offers opportunities to access services online, even if these services are not physically available locally. The internet reduces rural isolation in many ways, and it is proposed to build on previous initiatives funded through the Rural Delivery Programme such as computer training for older people.
- 6.4. Projects to date have aimed to support and boost volunteering and self help, to create stronger and more resilient communities in line with the commitment made by the County Council in this area.

## **7. Recommendations**

### 7.1. That Cabinet:

- i) Endorses the impact and progress made against the revised objectives for the Rural Delivery Strategy, agreed by Cabinet in March 2014.
- ii) Fully supports the roll-out of currently funded projects listed in the report (Appendix 1).
- iii) Notes the recurring revenue budget committed to support rural initiatives and the intention to consider any future projects within the context of the overall Transformation to 2017 programme due to be presented to Cabinet in June 2015.
- iv) Endorses the proposal for a new focus for the Hampshire Rural Forum including a supportive role for the M3 and Solent LEAs where requested.

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

<b>Hampshire safer and more secure for all:</b>	yes
<b>Maximising well-being:</b>	yes
<b>Enhancing our quality of place:</b>	yes

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>		
Rural Delivery Strategy funding proposals	6282	December 2014
Rural Delivery Strategy funding proposals	5940	July 2014
Hampshire County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy	5684	March 2014
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
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>		
<u>Title</u>		<u>Date</u>
None		

**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. Equality Duty**

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

**Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:**

- a) The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c) Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### **1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:**

Revised priorities for the County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy were agreed by Cabinet in March 2014 (Report 5684) with priority actions supporting community resilience, challenging rural isolation and loneliness, rural transport, self-help, communications, and economic development and it is proposed to maintain these priorities. An equality impact assessment of specific projects or funding requests is requested when necessary.

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/ccbs/rh-equalities.htm>

### **2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:**

2.1. Support for more vulnerable groups and the infrastructure and networks to deliver it will reduce isolation and exposure to potential criminal acts. More vibrant and active communities are likely to suffer less crime and anti-social behaviour.

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

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

Through supporting local facilities it would reduce the need to travel.

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

The initiatives proposed support the culture of self-help and self-reliance which are critical following severe weather such as blizzards, gales and flooding, when communities may become inaccessible to external support, and may lose access to mains services such as electricity. Climate change is expected to increase occurrence of severe weather.

## Appendix 1 – Summary of current approved projects and budget allocations

Project Name	Project description	Funding agreed
<b>2014/15</b>		
Village Agents	Volunteers support older people to live independently for longer in their communities, through offering advice, support, and access to services	£30,800
Supporting older people	The application for Government funding for this project was not successful, so the funding was re-applied to the social isolation project under below.	(£10,000)
Community Challenge Fund	Small grants of up to £5,000 are offered to community groups and organisations to support local initiatives in support of the rural priorities. 8 grant applications received by December 2014.	£35,000 (plus £15,000 contingency)
Funding for village shops	This grant scheme helps village shops to modernise and develop, and introduce new business models such as community ownership.	£50,000
Thriving villages	This funding supports transfer of business knowledge to rural communities around New Milton, in Hart district, and in southern Winchester district, using the expertise of the town centre managers.	£30,000
Social isolation pilot scheme	Three pilot projects across Hampshire are focussing on understanding and tackling social isolation among older people, Benefits may include reductions in GP / community health visits. One of the main aims of the project is to secure funding from health and organisations.	£100,000
Hitting the cold spots	This project is focussing on reducing excess winter deaths among elderly and vulnerable rural residents, by offering advice and practical help. Rural properties tend to be older, less well insulated, and harder to insulate.	£50,000
Potential Rural transport initiative	Under development	£65,000 tbc