

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Report

<b>Committee:</b>	Culture Communities and Rural Affairs Select Committee
<b>Date:</b>	22 April 2010
<b>Title:</b>	Rural Delivery Action Plan: Food, Farming and Forestry
<b>Reference:</b>	1553
<b>Report From:</b>	The Director of Culture, Communities and Rural Affairs

**Contact name:** John Tickle

**Tel:** 01962 846000

**Email:** John.tickle@hants.gov.uk

#### 1. Summary

- 1.1. This report updates elected members on progress achieved within the County Council's food, farming and forestry action plan theme within the context of the County Council's Rural Delivery Action Plan.
- 1.2. It briefly describes the overall plan and explains how the food, farming and forestry priorities chosen were identified. It summarises progress and the outcomes achieved to date as well as outlining the anticipated future direction of the programme.

#### 2. Contextual information

- 2.1. 85% of Hampshire's land area is rural (see Appendix 1), with 23% of its population, so it is crucial for Hampshire County Council to identify how it can best support its rural communities. The County Council delivers a number of significant statutory and discretionary services in rural areas, ranging from schools, adult social care, libraries and rights of way, to environmental improvements, waste management, and highways maintenance. It is important that these services, which are delivered both directly and in partnership with others, are delivered in the right way, and achieve the best value for money.
- 2.2. In July 2008 Cabinet agreed a vision for rural Hampshire: "**Rural communities that are resilient and sustainable socially, economically and environmentally.**" At the same time, 11 'early interventions' that could be delivered immediately by Departments from within existing resources were identified and progressed (see <http://www.hants.gov.uk/decisions/decisions-docs/080707-cabine-R0701220147.html>).

2.3. A public consultation in autumn 2008 followed, resulting in priorities for action being identified, and which were agreed by Cabinet in April 2009 (report ref 489):

- Supporting sustainable rural communities, including affordable housing, rural broadband, access to services, supporting volunteering, and community engagement.
- Providing effective rural transport
- Farming, food and access
- Economic development
- Climate change, including renewable energy, and making better use of the county's wood-fuel resource.

The full report is at <http://www.hants.gov.uk/decisions/decisions-docs/090427-cabine-R0420101912.html>

2.4. The programme has been informed by Local Area Agreement priorities, and latterly the Comprehensive Area Assessment, together with feedback from a rural workshop at the Hampshire Senate partnership event of September 2009.

2.5. In terms of the strategic framework and policy adopted by national government, Hampshire County Council continues to be proactive in seeking to address the key issues faced by rural communities. Since its publication in 2004, the County Council has built on many of the priorities highlighted in the Government's Rural Strategy. Building on its leadership of the South East Rural Pathfinder, the County Council has developed a comprehensive programme to tackle the Government's three priorities for rural policy. These are economic and social regeneration, and supporting enterprise; tackling social exclusion and providing fair access to services and opportunities; and protecting the natural environment. The activity identified in this report represents a very significant effort to help address these issues.

### **3. Development of targeted actions, projects and partnerships**

3.1. In April 2009 Cabinet agreed 120 actions to meet its priorities for rural Hampshire. These were identified by Departments, and were funded from within Departments' own resources.

3.2. In addition to these action plans, the Executive Member for Rural Affairs, Human Resources and Skills Development approved £154,000 funding for 6 projects which could not be taken forward without additional resources, and which would test new and innovative ways of delivering rural services.

3.3. £10,000 of this sum was allocated to a Community Challenge Fund to enable parish councils and community and voluntary groups to bring forward small-scale projects for improvements in their communities. Funding was awarded to nine projects and was matched by resources generated locally.

**4. The 'Food, Farming and Forestry' action plan.**

- 4.1. In order to achieve maximum benefit from improved corporate working, a conscious decision was made to develop action plans following cross-cutting themes, rather than follow solely conventional Departmental boundaries.
- 4.2. The Food, Farming and Forestry action plan is one of the seven action plans developed. Although the Culture, Communities and Rural Affairs Department provides co-ordination for the County Council's overall rural programme, the Food, Farming and Forestry action plan is led by colleagues from Economic Development; Property Business and Regulatory, and Environment working together. The full action plan is at Appendix 2.
- 4.3. **Food.** Supporting local food producers is the focus of the programme led by Economic Development and Hampshire Fare. Support for Farmers Markets and the Hampshire Food Festival is well established; these help local producers market their products. Hampshire Fare has worked with Hampshire County Council Catering Services (HC3S) to supply an increasing range of local products in Hampshire school meals, which are also purchased outside the county, and by care homes. Local apple juice, 700,000 eggs, 17 tonnes of Hampshire beef and seasonal produce are now included in the menu. As well as supporting the local economy, 'food miles' are minimised.
- 4.4. This work was recently recognised by the Commission for Rural Communities and included in their publication of best practice case studies for supporting the rural economy. Defra has also funded a DVD which showcases Hampshire's best practice in local food procurement, to be distributed to all local authorities.
- 4.5. Hampshire Fare is currently tackling a further barrier identified by local food producers, which is the reluctance of small businesses to purchase local produce from a large number of suppliers, due to the complexity of administration. To address this, Economic Development and Hampshire Fare is working with a private sector distributor to set up a local food distribution service, so that purchasers of local food only have to deal with a single supplier. This service will initially be targeted at village shops, pubs and B&Bs. The Executive Member for Rural Affairs Funding has provided £40,000 financial support, but a decision on match funding is still awaited from the Loddon and Eversley Leader programme, which has significantly delayed the project.
- 4.6. A further focus of Hampshire Fare is to increase spend on local food by the public sector, supermarkets, and the cruise industry. Two successful 'meet the buyer' events have been held to bring together Hampshire food producers with major buyers from the cruise industry and hotels. Improving access to local slaughter facilities is also a priority, and work by the Economic Development Office and Hampshire Fare has enabled small producers to use a private abattoir at Laverstoke.

- 4.7. A bid for funds for a project to promote local food to disadvantaged communities is currently underway. If the bid is successful, a mobile demonstration unit will promote local food in disadvantaged areas.
- 4.8. **Farming.** Hampshire's County Farms comprise 1,971ha (4,870 acres) in 28 separate locations and 65 different holdings. A review of the County Farms estate is the subject of a report to the Executive Member for Policy and Resources on 14 April 2010.
- 4.9. The purpose of the review was to look at how the estate is currently managed, how policies should adapt to changing pressures, the extent to which the farms can become modern, viable farming businesses, and yet also support other County Council objectives related to education, sustainability and recreation. The review included a lengthy period of stakeholder consultation.
- 4.10. The key recommendations of the County Farms review are:
- The phased establishment of starter and progression units to assist new entrants to farming, and work to enable further progression opportunities beyond the County Farm estate. The Hampshire Rural Forum is assisting with this.
  - Supporting education and learning through better links with colleges and schools, and to enable skills development by existing farmers.
  - Seek to acquire replacement farmland when established county farms are sold for development, or in support of local community initiatives (e.g. allotments, rural housing).
  - Sustainable local food production: Better links with Hampshire Fare and HC3S, promoting local products and investigating the potential for a local food marque.
  - Better collaborative working across the Estate, with farmers assisted with procurement arrangements and diversification proposals.
  - Apply carbon reduction and sustainability criteria, and upgrade farm units to comply with 'nitrate vulnerable zone' criteria.
- 4.11. The biennial Hampshire Farming Study on the current state of farming in Hampshire will be published later this year. It is expected to show a continued contraction in the dairy and livestock sectors. Together with the County Farms review, and the annual Hampshire Farming conference, this will inform an Agriculture and Food Strategy for Hampshire, which will be developed during 2010.
- 4.12. The horticultural sector, and to a lesser extent farming, is now significantly dependent on migrant workers, many of whom are highly skilled and experienced. It is also vulnerable to labour shortages, which is currently an

issue due to depreciation of sterling. Some producers are increasing mechanisation in response.

- 4.13. A perception of an agricultural skills shortage led to a workshop in autumn 2009 in partnership with Sparsholt College and Lantra (the skills council for the land-based sector). Plans are currently under development to support entrepreneurs through sponsorship of a Fresh Start academy, and the EU Enspire programme. Sparsholt College is setting up a one-stop portal for training information. These initiatives will feed into the Hampshire Employment and Skills Strategy.
- 4.14. **Forestry.** Hampshire is one of the most wooded counties in England, but there is a limited market for wood, particularly from woodlands of high ecological value. Wood is an abundant source of renewable energy. The Hampshire Woodland Forum is supporting the development of a wood-fuel market in Hampshire. As a substantial energy user, the County Council is well placed to install wood-fuel boilers in new buildings, or when boilers are renewed, if woodland is nearby. Its first boiler is now operational at Queen Elizabeth Country Park which is now heavily used and promoted as an education and demonstration project. Work continues to overcome barriers and identify solutions for developing a wood-fuel market in Hampshire.

## 5. Overall Performance and impact

- 5.1. With regard to the whole programme, as of November 2009, approximately 90% of the 120 actions being undertaken by Departments from within their own resources were underway, with a significant number on track. Of this figure, five of the 18 actions in the Food Farming and Forestry Action plan were proceeding as planned, but for the remaining 13 actions it was possible that the target would be missed (see Appendix 2). Although steady progress has been made with all of these 13 actions, progress has not been as fast as initially anticipated. Year end reports will be finalised in April 2010.
- 5.2. All but one of the six funded projects is underway: the remaining project – on local food has been held up by delays in approval of the match funding necessary for it to proceed (see 4.5 above). Of the nine community-led projects funded through the Community Challenge Fund, all but one had been completed by March 2010.
- 5.3. Overall, it is estimated that £154,000 of County Council investment will help facilitate a combined investment of £670,000 in rural areas across the County.
- 5.4. Departmental leads report that cross Departmental working engendered by the overall corporate rural programme is achieving savings and efficiencies in other areas of work as this quote describes:

*"The move towards a much more cross-cutting style of working is making a big difference to our capacity to deliver on key work programmes, such as*

*the rural agenda and the Hampshire Model of Personalisation. One issue that keeps coming up again and again is the issue of poor access to transport in rural areas, particularly for older people and other vulnerable groups. We are now working much more effectively in partnership with our colleagues in the Environment Department to look at how to improve transport information and advice and more effective provision."* Richard Ellis - Deputy Director of Adult Services.

- 5.5. Hampshire County Council's rural delivery programme has been assessed in detail by the Government's Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) on behalf of the IdeA, which has written up the County Council's work as a best practice case study <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=16441811&aspect=full>. The County Council was also asked to present its work to an international panel of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in June 2009.
- 5.6. The County Council's performance in supporting rural communities was considered by the Audit Commission as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). Within the 'organisation assessment' report the Audit Commission commented that *"The Council is working hard to protect rural life and provide fair and equal access to services and facilities"* (page 3).

## **6. Future direction**

- 6.1. Cross departmental support for the corporate rural programme remains firm, and the corporate co-ordination group is currently developing the 2010/11 work programme, developing both the priorities agreed by Cabinet and issues identified by the Audit Commission. On 27 April 2010 it is expected to agree the work programme and consider bids for an additional £200,000 funding available to the Executive Member for Rural Affairs.
- 6.2. Specifically, it is anticipated that future support for farming will focus around supporting skills training for land-based industries, together with setting up a comprehensive database of all land-based training courses and their providers in conjunction with Sparsholt College. There will also be work to develop a marketing strategy to promote land-based careers as an attractive career choice. Additionally, support will be given for start-up training for young people, and encouragement of entrepreneurship.
- 6.3. A focus for local food work will be to increase the proportion of private sector funding following the withdrawal of SEEDA funding.
- 6.4. Following the recent County Farms Review there are a number of priorities which the County Council needs to consider and drive forward in conjunction with partners. In a wider context the County Council needs to ensure that it feeds into the developing policies surrounding post CAP 2013.
- 6.5. The 2010-11 priorities for woodland and forestry will need to focus on working with partners to achieve sustainable management of Hampshire's

woodlands and forestry to ensure better resilience to the pressures of a changing climate; and to realise, wherever possible, the potential for future green infrastructure provision and enhancing biodiversity habitats.

- 6.6. It is clear that work undertaken so far has been recognised by the Audit Commission and that they see further challenges ahead for the organisation. It notes: *"Work to address rural access issues in Hampshire is under way but there is no overall plan which all the organisations serving rural communities are signed up to. This is important in making sure that all people can easily access services."* (Area Assessment, p6).
- 6.7. Within the Area Assessment report itself the Audit Commission highlighted some of the ongoing challenges relating to transport, access to services, inequality, skills training and education for young people in rural areas. With particular reference to partnership working the Audit Commission identified the *"need to look for significant larger scale joint services, cross sector management and pooled budgets... not only in delivering value for money but also in making access to services easier and less confusing for the public. This is a key area for improvement."* (page 23).
- 6.8. All the points raised by the Audit Commission align themselves to priorities already identified by Cabinet, and these will be the target for ongoing work and investment.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1. Steady progress has been made with the Food, Farming and Forestry action plan, but is slower than anticipated for 13 of the 18 actions. A decision is still awaited on match funding for a local food project, which has significantly delayed it. Overall, significant progress has been made against the rural delivery plan, together with the separate funded rural partnership projects.
- 7.2. The impact of this work is reflected in the feedback that is being received from organisations operating within rural communities. The profile and reputation of Hampshire County Council and its work in this area has developed very considerably and this has been recognised externally including within the Comprehensive Area Assessment report. The County Council has shown strong commitment to "rural proofing" its activities and in initiating productive partnership working.
- 7.3. Future progress will hinge upon sustaining this activity and continuing to develop innovative ideas both internally and with all those organisations operating in, or supporting, our rural communities. There will be a specific focus on implementing the County Farms Review recommendations (if it is approved), maximising external investment, and on further improving partnership working.

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

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

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Rural Delivery Strategy for Hampshire County Council. Report to Cabinet.	none	7 July 08
Rural Delivery Strategy for Hampshire County Council - Results of Consultation and Future Development. Report to Cabinet.	242	30 March 09
Rural Delivery Action Plan for Hampshire County Council. Report to Cabinet.	497	27 April 09
Rural Delivery Action Plan. Report to Culture and Communities Select Committee.	none	9 July 09
Rural Delivery Action Plan for Hampshire County Council - Progress and Performance. Report to Cabinet.	1127	25 January 10

**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. Please refer to full Equalities Impact Assessment.

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

- 2.1. None noted.

### **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.

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

Adaptation to climate change is a key theme in this strategy.