

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee	Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Committee	23rd June 2005
Report Title	Rural Policy and Rural Services
Summary	Cabinet on 11th December 2003 resolved that the approach of the Council to policy and the delivery of services in rural areas be reviewed by the Environment and Rural Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Group on 11th January 2005 agreed that this scrutiny should be joint with the Employment and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee. At your meeting on 8th March 2005 you agreed that a working group of Members from this Committee should to join a similar group from the Environment and Rural Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Committee to carry out the task. In view of the changed Overview and Scrutiny Committee responsibilities, Members are asked to reconsider the process for taking forward this review.
For further information please contact	John Ridgley Regeneration Projects Manager Tel. 01926 412072 johnridgley@warwickshire.gov.uk
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?	Yes/No
Background Papers	None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- *Details to be specified*

Other Committees	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cabinet 11th December 2003. Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Group – 11th January 2005. Environment and Rural Affairs Committee – 15th February 2005. Employment and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 8th March 2005
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Local Member(s)
(With brief comments, if appropriate)

Other Elected Members Councillor F P Barnes)
Councillor M J Jones) for information
Councillor R P L Morris-Jones)

Cabinet Member Councillor C J Saint - for information
(Reports to The Cabinet, to be cleared with appropriate Cabinet Member)

Chief Executive

Legal I Marriott – comments incorporated

Finance

Other Chief Officers

District Councils

Health Authority

Police

Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION **YES/NO** (If 'No' complete Suggested Next Steps)

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS :

Details to be specified

Further consideration by this Committee Future action by this Committee in the Autumn.

To Council

To Cabinet

To an O & S Committee

To an Area Committee

Further Consultation

**Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee –
23rd June 2005**

Rural Policy and Rural Services

**Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and
Economic Strategy**

Recommendation

That Members reconsider the process for taking forward the review of rural policy and rural services.

1. Scrutiny of Rural Policy and Rural Services

- 1.1 Cabinet on 11th December 2003 resolved that the approach of the Council to policy and the delivery of services in rural areas be reviewed by the Environment and Rural Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Group on 11th January 2005 agreed a Draft Corporate Review Programme for 2005/6 which suggested that this scrutiny should be joint with the Employment and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 This Committee at its meeting of on 8th March 2005 agreed the principle of identifying a working group of Members to join a similar group from the Environment and Rural Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider what a joint scrutiny of rural policy and rural services should cover, how it should be carried out, to undertake the scrutiny and report back to the two Committees. It was agreed that the identification of Members to join the working group should be deferred until after the elections.
- 1.3 At its annual meeting on 17th May Council made a number of amendments to Overview and Scrutiny Committee areas of responsibility. One change was to include rural affairs within the brief of this Committee. In the light of this change, Members are asked to reconsider the process for taking forward this review.
- 1.4 The report to the Committee in March included an appendix describing current County Council policy for rural areas and the services delivered by the County Council in the rural areas. It also gave an initial view of current issues and opportunities. Members of the Committee identified HGV routing, the apparent

lack of progress on the Freight Quality Partnership and public transport in rural areas as issues of particular importance. For the information of Members of the Committee the paper is attached at **Appendix A**.

JOHN DEEGAN
Director of Planning, Transport and Economic Strategy
Shire Hall
Warwick

7th June 2005

**Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee –
23rd June 2005**

Rural Policy and Rural Services

1. Rural Policy

- 1.1 There are various definitions of urban and rural. Broadly in Warwickshire 40% of the population lives in the rural area and 80% of the land area is outside the seven major towns.
- 1.2 The County Council has no rural policy. It has tended to concentrate on geographical communities and communities of interest that suffer from social exclusion. A County Council Rural Action Plan was approved in 1998 as part of the then Community Development Strategy. The Action Plan was not published and has not been formally reviewed. A number of the actions have been achieved.
- 1.3 The Social Inclusion Strategy 2001 includes an 'Accessibility of Services to Rural Communities Action Plan' approved in 2002. The Strategy is currently being updated.
- 1.4 The County Council Regeneration Strategy 2001/5 contains a number of activities which are relevant to rural areas. It will be reviewed later this year.
- 1.5 The Warwickshire Strategic Plan 2002/5 has a number of rural targets and rural actions. It is currently being updated.

2. Rural Services

- 2.1 Relatively few services are provided only to rural areas or only in rural areas. Most other services are provided to all, but a significant number have a rural dimension or a particular interest to those who live in, work in or visit the rural areas.
- 2.2 Services to rural areas are delivered by all departments and sometimes by several groups or teams within a department. Rural services cover all six corporate strategic objectives.

3. Services delivering Lifelong Learning and Personal Development

- 3.1 Education is delivered across the board. In the past there have been concerns about the closure of village schools and some concerns about the quality of education in smaller rural schools. Rural Secondary schools face the same issues as their urban counterparts.

- 3.2 A rural Children's Centre is planned for Stratford. All the children's centres will have outreach services. There are occasional problems in securing rural nursery places. Issues around free transport to school can have a higher profile in rural areas.
- 3.3 There are 14 rural Youth and Community Centres. They face similar issues to urban centres. Funding for voluntary youth initiatives in rural areas is a regular issue.
- 3.4 Rural libraries and rural schools like their urban counterparts are venues for lifelong learning. There are some rural areas where the nearest library or school is at some distance. The mobile libraries are a largely rural service. There are plans to increase the services available from them. The Extended Schools initiative has been used in other rural areas to focus community services in village schools.
- 3.5 The Rural Housebound library service developed with Age Concern now covers all areas. The Community Histories material provided by Libraries and Heritage is often of particular interest to rural communities.

4. Services for Health and Social Care

- 4.1 County Council health and social care services are largely provided across the board. Travelling costs and recruitment are issues in some services in rural areas.
- 4.2 Voluntary sector provision is more obvious in rural areas and is supported by various budgets. There can be issues arising from the small scale of the provision. The recruitment of new volunteers is a current issue. The County Council works with the five Councils for Voluntary Service and the Warwickshire Rural Community Council through the Warwickshire Compact.
- 4.2 Support for the South Warwickshire Promoting Inclusion and Enterprise (PIE) Programme covers a number of rural projects several of which are addressing social exclusion.
- 4.3 Countryside Recreation is a multi faceted service providing a range of healthy outdoor recreation and learning opportunities for all. By definition the service is largely provided in the rural areas.

5. Services to Improve the Environment

- 5.1 The big issues are wider than rural although they may have a rural/urban interdependence – air quality, waste, carbon reduction, location of new development. Some can or may have a rural dimension. Landfill sites are in rural areas. Rural areas could provide tree planting for carbon sequestration or for biomass. Developments for minerals and aggregates are usually in rural areas. Greenfield development is rural or rural/urban fringe and the Greenbelt is largely a rural issue.

5.2 County Council services associated with protecting and enhancing the natural environment, visual environment and historic environment tend to be more rural.

6. Reduce Crime and Improve Safety

6.1 The crime initiatives that the County Council is involved in are largely across the board.

6.2 A number of Planning Transport and Economic Strategy services to improve safety by reducing accidents have a higher profile in rural areas. They are:-

- (i) Winter maintenance.
- (ii) Speeding traffic.
- (iii) HGV routing and the Freight Quality Partnerships.
- (iv) Road, footway, verge and sign maintenance.

6.3 Where the quality of street lighting in rural areas is an issue it is often street lighting provided by the parish council. There are some concerns about light pollution from new highway lighting in rural areas, this is being dealt with.

6.4 Flooding associated with the highway is more a concern in rural areas. The causes and solutions are often complex and may involve several landowners and a number of agencies.

6.5 Ragwort can grow on any recently disturbed land but the majority is found in rural areas and the danger is to horses and farm animals.

6.6 The County Council is concerned about the risks in growing genetically modified (GM) crops in our countryside and officers have been asked to look at seeking 'GM free' status for Warwickshire. Genetically modified food is a wider issue on the consumers' side and is dealt with by County Council policy.

6.7 The Trading Standards team are regularly active on animal health issues and are prepared for incidents like Foot and Mouth disease. Many Parish Councils are networked with the Emergency Planning Unit.

7. Services to support a Vibrant Local Economy

7.1 Most services to support business investment, competitiveness and enterprise and to help people into work are county wide. Currently a number have an urban or northern emphasis. Initiatives with a rural focus include the Market Towns programme and support for:

- (i) The South Warwickshire PIE Programme economic development projects.
- (ii) The balance of the Vital Villages Rural Retail and Community Services Programme and hopefully its continuance at least in part.

- (iii) The Rural Forum for Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire and the Rural Hub, a rural producers organisation.
 - (iv) Farmers Markets.
- 7.2 Local farmers regularly raise the issue of the local procurement of produce for school meals and more recently the daily piece of fruit.
- 7.3 The County Smallholdings Estate with its 55 farms covering 2064 hectares can give new entrants to farming a start in the industry and can contribute to strategic land acquisition.
- 7.4 Access to broadband became a rural issue two years ago. We are assured that broadband through the telephone wires will cover virtually all rural areas by June 2005. A small number of rural customers will need special provision. Support for higher speed broadband for businesses and promoting the benefits of the internet to businesses are across the board activities.
- 7.5 The benefits of the visitor economy to rural areas and to the small market towns are being taken forward through the Sub Regional Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan. The walking and cycling routes developed and promoted by the Countryside Recreation group can bring spending visitors to rural areas.

8. Access to Services

- 8.1 Access to services is a major rural issue. Public and commercial services in both urban and rural areas have sought to benefit from the economies of scale. Increased access to personal transport has allowed many people in both urban and rural areas to exercise choice. The result for rural areas is that village commercial services such as shops, post offices, pubs, banks and petrol stations have closed in large numbers. The County Council with partners has supported village shops and post offices with advice and capital grants for the last six years.
- 8.2 Relatively few services delivered by the County Council are met by individuals visiting a local office or facility. These include schools, some aspects of Social Services, libraries, household waste sites and youth and community centres. The closure of a number of small rural schools was the last major loss of county council facilities in rural areas. One stop shops for a variety of public services are being considered in some small market towns.
- 8.3 Where public or commercial services are not available in the local community people have to travel to them. Car ownership has increased in rural areas and bus services have declined. Particular groups of people are affected - old people, young people, disabled people, those less well off. The County Council delivers a wide range of support for public and community transport in rural areas. Accessibility planning is a requirement of the next Local Transport Plan.
- 8.4 Where services or information about services is not available locally people increasingly expect quick access by other means. A number of recent County

Council initiatives benefit those in rural areas with access to a phone or the internet including.

- (i) Aspects of e-government.
- (ii) The call centres.
- (iii) The Community Information Database.
- (iv) The Warwickshire Maps service which identifies local facilities.
- (v) Support in developing Community Web Sites.

8.5 Access to governance in some rural areas benefited from Electoral Division Panels and rural communities appear to take more advantage the public access element of some of the Area Committees.

9. What are the issues for rural areas

9.1 In addition to routine concerns with operational services, contact with rural communities and a review of current Community Plans identifies a number particular issues of importance to rural communities.

- (i) Access to services is an issue including:-
 - (a) Public and community transport.
 - (b) Young people.
 - (c) The future of remaining local service points e.g. Shops, Post Offices Village Halls.
 - (d) Potential of one stop shops/village information points.
- (ii) Pockets of deprivation in rural areas remain an issue.
- (iii) Several issues concerned with 'Liveability' including:-
 - (a) Crime.
 - (b) Nuisance.
 - (c) Speeding Traffic.
- (iv) Sustainability issues identified are:-
 - (a) The changing rural economy and support for rural businesses.
 - (b) Affordable Housing.
- (v) Governance issues appear to be about the relationship between rural communities and various partnerships including:-
 - (a) Local Strategic Partnerships.
 - (b) Market Town Partnerships.
 - (c) The role of Parish Plans.

10. What are the current opportunities?

10.1 There are a number of opportunities for service delivery to rural areas.

- (i) Under access to services there are the opportunities of:-
 - (a) More E Government.
 - (b) One stop shops/village information points in schools and libraries.
 - (c) Stronger involvement with Market Towns/Rural Service Centres.
- (ii) There are also a number of opportunities around governance especially:-
 - (a) Developing our relationship with Parish Councils and Quality Parish Councils.
 - (b) Stronger involvement in Parish Plans.
- (iii) For sustainability especially in economic terms there are opportunities in:-
 - (a) The visitor economy.
 - (b) Local food.
 - (c) Energy crops.