

# Cabinet

14 November 2019

## Rural Services Network's Campaign for a Rural Strategy

### Recommendation

That Cabinet approve Warwickshire County Council support for the Rural Services Network campaign to ask government to produce a national Rural Strategy.

### 1.0 Key issues

- 1.1 Warwickshire County Council are members of the Rural Services Network (RSN) which supports the interests of rural communities.
- 1.2 Rural areas are facing exceptional demographic and technological challenges as well as changes in access to services. The RSN is running a campaign to improve lives in rural communities by seeking to secure government support for a cross-departmental and comprehensive, funded Rural Strategy as set out on the "It's Time for a Rural Strategy 2019" document.
- 1.3 The key points of the campaign are summarised in attached in Appendix 1 and the full report can be accessed at <https://www.rsonline.org.uk/time-for-a-rural-strategy>
- 1.4 This report seeks to secure Warwickshire Council Council's support for this campaign, and specifically the call to government to create a national Rural Strategy.

### 2.0 Key points

- 2.1 The RSN state that the call for a Rural Strategy is backed by the recent reports from the House of Lord Select Committee on the Rural Economy and the Independent Commission on Food, Farming and the Countryside.
- 2.2 Within Warwickshire we have mainstreamed rural business support into our county-wide programmes by ensuring appropriate and effective provision that meets the needs/issues of our rural areas. A National Rural Strategy would potentially complement this work and enhance specific elements of strategy, notably:

- **West Midlands Local Industrial Strategy** – The County Council has work with colleagues at the WM Combined Authority (WMCA) and the Coventry & Warwickshire local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) to ensure the rural economy and town centres in featured in the recently approved Local Industrial Strategy for the West Midlands
- **Warwickshire Rural Growth Plan 2017-2020** – The County Council currently operates a rural growth plan which focuses effort and attention on rural communities. The plan highlights the challenges faced by the County’s rural economy. These range from addressing productivity, to improving information networks to addressing rural isolation.

For example, difficulties in attracting and retaining skills staff can be an issue in both urban and rural areas, whereas in urban areas the underlying issue may be lower educational attainment and skills, in rural areas the underlying issues may be affordable housing and accessible transport. Similarly, social isolation exists in both urban and rural areas, but the solutions to tackle these issues may be very different, depending on their location.

The Warwickshire Rural Growth Plan is the Council’s commitment to consider rural-proofing its policies and services to ensure impacts on rural areas are considered.

- **Rural Broadband project** – Warwickshire County Council is the lead partner on the Connecting Solihull, Warwickshire Broadband Project (CSW Broadband Project) which has the ambition to ensure 98% of the Solihull / Warwickshire population has access to superfast broadband services by 2021. To date, approximately 63% of the area’s population can connect to the fibre network.
- **Brexit** - Brexit preparations within Warwickshire have reflected the specific impact on the rural economy and communities within Warwickshire and as part of these preparations, WCC have directed funding to the Coventry & Warwickshire Growth hub to focus specific resources on the needs of rural businesses.

2.3 A national rural Strategy would support and potentially amplify this work at a local level.

### **3.0 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps**

3.1 The initial deadline of October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 has passed, but subject Cabinet to approval Warwickshire CC’s support will be added to the campaign.

3.2 WCC Officers will subsequent participate in the regional roadshows being offered as required.

3.3 The work will be ‘housed within the Infrastructure Service within the communities Directorate and integrated into related activity

## 4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications to supporting the campaign.

## 5.0 Environmental implications

5.1 There are no financial implications to supporting the campaign.

## Background papers

None

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The report was not circulated to members prior to publication:

Local Members: N/A

Other Members: Councillors Roodhouse, Chilvers, Singh Birdi, Warwick, Butlin, Chattaway, Boad and O'Rourke