

Modernising Rural Delivery – April 2005

This briefing note has been drawn together to update members of the Strategy Group on the latest changes to rural delivery arrangements in the region as part of the wider implementation of the Government's *Modernising Rural Delivery* agenda.

Background

1. Following the Foot and Mouth crisis of 2000-2001 the Government commissioned Lord Haskins to undertake a wide-ranging review of Defra's role and functions. Lord Haskins published his findings and recommendations in November 2003. The Review criticised the over-bureaucracy of Defra and its agencies and called for significant structural changes to ensure clarity for Defra's customers and more efficient use of resources.
2. The Government's response to Haskins was published on July 21 2004 and built on the Haskins Review in detailing wholesale structural changes to Defra and its agencies. These changes have now been part-implemented at the regional level and are outlined below.

Government Office East Midlands (GOEM)

3. GOEM has been tasked with delivering a Regional Rural Delivery Framework (RRDF), which will:
 - Allow clearer targeting to address rural disadvantage
 - Bring about greater alignment and co-ordination of socio-economic, community and rural environment activity and funding
 - Make service delivery more efficient and customer focussed
 - Make clear links to wider public sector investment in rural areas (presumably ref: Local Area Agreements etc)
 - Lead to defined and accountable delivery roles
5. What the RRDF will mean in practical terms is not yet known, as the objectives are very broad brush and generic so far. Some key points that can be gleaned from the Framework document are:
 - There will be a more prominent role for the East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum (EMRAF) in managing delivery of the Framework, and more funding from partners will be needed to ensure that EMRAF has the capacity to take on this role
 - Regeneration programmes to be managed by emda will target the region's 5 'lagging' rural districts (none of which is in Notts) in the first instance
 - GOEM has established a Steering Group to monitor the Framework initiative – representation for Local Authorities through the LGA
 - GOEM is also undertaking a mapping exercise of existing regional strategies with the aim of producing a user-friendly guide and an analysis of any gaps in provision

- Defra funded pilot on rural business support that has been delivered in the Welland sub-region due to report soon
- ENGAGE East Midlands and EMAN (the East Midlands ACRE network) are looking in to the feasibility of delivering a regional rural hub for the voluntary and community sector
- Funding for Regional Market Towns Co-ordinator should be addressed as a priority by partners, otherwise this post will be lost in 2005

The timetable for delivering these and other priorities identified in the Framework is by March 2006 – what happens after that point is not yet clear.

6. GOEM is also leading on the regional 'pathfinder' area recommended as part of the Modernising Rural Delivery Programme. In the East Midlands the area chosen was the Peak District, including High Peak and parts of the Staffordshire Moorlands. During 2004-5, work on the pathfinder initiative has included mapping, analysis and action planning. In 2005-6 pilot actions from this will be taken forward in the pathfinder area and in 2006-7 successful actions will be incorporated into Local Area Agreements.

East Midlands Development Agency

7. The bulk of the former Countryside Agency's programme funding will be transferred to emda from April 2005, along with some of the Agency's regional staff. In addition to its existing rural work (Market Towns initiative, supporting discrete projects with Single Pot funding, funding Sub-regional Strategic Partnerships including Lincolnshire Enterprise and Welland, which is exclusively rural), key new areas of work for emda include:
 - Taking on delivery of rural business support (link to recent review of Business Services East Midlands)
 - Socio-economic programmes from Countryside Agency
 - EU rural development funding (England Rural Development Programme, currently managed by Defra's Rural Development Service) from 2007
 - Delivering on Defra PSA targets – these are:
 - Rural productivity and lagging areas
 - Access to services for rural people
 - Sustainable farming and food
8. A new 'tasking framework' is soon to be launched (April 05) to replace existing Tier 3 outputs. This will include *sustainable transport initiatives and activities* and *new community facilities*, both of which will be relevant for emda-funded projects in rural parts of the region. Emda will initially get approximately £1.3million in former Countryside Agency money. This will not, however, be ring-fenced for rural areas but will be added to emda's central Single Pot funding. The emda argument for this is that it will result in even more money being spent in rural areas.
9. Part of these changes that will definitely impact on the County Council is emda's decision not to continue funding Rural Transport Partnerships (RTPs) post March 2006. The Nottinghamshire RTP is currently undertaking a review

of its options post March 2006 and will present a report on these to the County Council portfolio holder for Environment after May's election.

10. Other priority areas identified by emda for 2005-6 included social enterprise, sustainable development and transport underpinning rural productivity. One final point to note is that emda has decided against devolving any of the Countryside Agency funding/staff to the Sub-regional Strategic Partnerships (SSPs) as was originally envisaged. They will now retain these for at least 2005-6, although given the direction the SSP review is taking it seems unlikely that these staff and resources will be devolved to SSPs in the future.

Commission for Rural Communities [<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk>]

11. This is the new policy/advocacy body that has been formed from parts of the old Countryside Agency. It will be a streamlined commission with a national annual budget of between £8-£10 million and a small team of core staff. The commission will not have a regional presence but they do promise regional 'engagement' – through GOs, RDAs, Rural Affairs Forums and Regional Assemblies.
12. The Commission has some high ambitions, including:
 - Being the voice for rural people, businesses and communities
 - Focussing on the needs of those suffering social disadvantage and economic under-performance
 - Advising Government on rural issues and developments
 - Monitoring and reporting on the delivery of Government policies in a rural context
 - Challenging Government on its own rural policies
 - 'Futures orientated' – with a focus on research, evidence bases and trends
13. The Commission will have fewer priorities than the former Countryside Agency but will focus on 'higher impact' activities including continuing the State of the Countryside series of annual reports, thematic studies, inquiries into rural policy issues and rural proofing.

Rural Social and Community Programme

14. This new programme combines elements of GOEM's social exclusion programmes with the 'social' parts of the Rural Development Service (defra) that are not going to the Integrated Agency. The programme will be hosted by GOEM and its main objective is to 'develop the capacity of the Voluntary Community Sector and of the town and parish councils to empower communities and people'. 2005-6 will see an interim programme being delivered before the new programme begins in April 2006. There's a national annual budget allocation of £15million. Main activities in the interim year will be:
 - Continuing to support Parish Plans and Housing Enablers projects

- Building on the outcomes and investment of the *ChangeUp* programme
- Managing the RCC service level agreements
- Exploring potential for a rural hub for the VCS
- Looking at how to integrate activities with Local Area Agreements

The Integrated Agency

15. The new agency will include all of English Nature, the Land, Access and Recreation division of the Countryside Agency and the majority of the Rural Development Service. The Agency will not become a legal entity until at least 2007 as primary legislation is needed to create it. There will be regional offices and co-location of existing English Nature, Countryside Agency and Rural Development Service teams during 2005-7. Main priorities will be around protecting and conserving countryside but also promoting access and recreation.

No more details on the shape of the Integrated Agency are available at the present time.

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