



meeting	COMMUNITY SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE	
date	25 April 2005	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF RURAL STRATEGY STUDY GROUP

RURAL STRATEGY STUDY GROUP

Purpose of Report

1. This report gives members of the Community Services Select Committee a progress report on the work of the Rural Strategy Study Group and seeks approval for proposals agreed by the Group to be taken forward during the next few months.

Information

2. The Rural Strategy Study Group has been meeting on a regular basis since April 2004. Members will recall that a report provided to the last meeting of the Community Services Select Committee in January 2005 demonstrated the work of the Group to date and summarised reports from the working groups that had been set up to investigate specific issues.
3. Further, more detailed investigations requested from County Council officers and partners were presented to the last Rural Strategy Study Group meeting. These looked at rural transport, local food and procurement, housing and planning and Parish Councils.
4. The Rural Strategy Study Group considered these reports at its meeting on April 15th, agreeing that these areas represent significant potential opportunities for the County Council to take forward in forthcoming months. The Study Group also felt that the Community Strategy is the best place for these priority issues to be highlighted and addressed, given the high visibility of the Community Strategy and the commitment to it of partner organisations.
5. The Study Group also noted changes to rural service delivery in the region and the effect that these will have on the County Council. In particular the Group noted the likelihood that local authorities will be required to rural proof policies and services in the near future to ensure equality of service delivery and access. A copy of the briefing on *Modernising Rural Delivery* is attached at annex A.
6. Copies of all reports and other background papers that have been produced during the year by the Study Group are available on request.

Conclusions

7. The Study Group recommends that:

- a. the Select Committee agrees this report as an update on the work of the Rural Strategy Study Group;
- b. the Select Committee agrees:
 - that the County Council continues to discuss the issues surrounding rural service delivery with the key organisations involved, particularly in relation to Local Area Agreements and changes to funding arrangements;
 - that the County Council seeks to incorporate rural transport, local foods and procurement, Extended Schools and community resources and Parish Council liaison into the development of its forthcoming Community Strategy;
 - that the County Council considers the merits of a separate, stand-alone rural framework that will bring detail and focus to the Community Strategy statements. The County Council will need to identify a lead department and partners would be asked to comment on this work;
 - that the County Council implements action on rural proofing during the next year for all new policies and changes to service delivery
 - that the County Council identifies a key officer to keep a watching brief on rural issues and to liaise regularly with partner organisations
 - that a further meeting of the Rural Strategy Study Group be arranged in due course to consider progress

**Councillor Joyce Bosnjak, Chair
Rural Strategy Study Group**