



meeting **COMMUNITY SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE**

date **31 JANUARY 2005**

agenda item number

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REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE

Rural Issues

Interim report of the Rural Strategy Study Group, January 2005

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents the interim findings of the Rural Strategy Study Group and outlines potential ways forward for the Group's work on rural issues. It contains a brief update on what the Group has achieved to date and on the findings of the Working Groups.

Background

2. In September 2003, the Community Services Select Committee (CSSC) received a report outlining relevant issues affecting the rural parts of the County and requested that an examination of these issues, insofar as they might affect the County Council, be undertaken.
3. Following a period of desk-based research and internal discussions into the context and issues facing rural communities, a report was received and debated by the CSSC in January 2004. It was agreed following discussion that a further and more detailed examination of rural issues be undertaken by a Study Group. Draft terms of reference and a work programme for the Study Group were established before the inaugural meeting of the group in April 2004.
4. Membership of the Group consisted of seven County Council members: Cllrs Barsley, Bennett, Bosnjak, Hemsall, Smith, Walker and Woodhead. Acknowledging the range of knowledge and expertise of partners and stakeholders in the County, the Group invited representatives of other organisations (including District and Borough Councils, the Rural Community Council, the Countryside Agency and the Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils) to participate in the work programme.
5. The initial meeting of the group agreed the terms of reference and work programme and in addition compiled a list of potential visits and presentations to the group. Appendix A outlines the presentations given to the Study Group

between April and December 2004 and also visits to relevant conferences and best practice examples that members undertook.

6. The meeting of the Study Group held on 24 May 2004 recommended the establishment of four themed sub-groups to take forward specific areas of work. These groups were:
 - Governance including parishes and other tiers of government
 - Economy, including enterprise, employment and training
 - Access to services – transport, health, social care and leisure
 - Land use and communities

The primary objectives of the Working Groups were:

- To undertake research and critical analysis of rural activity in the County;
 - To look at shorter and longer term priorities that the County Council and partners might wish to pursue with rural communities, and;
 - To make recommendations about the direction and scope of any future Rural Strategy for the County.
7. The Working Groups fed back to the wider Study Group on 26 January 2005. This meeting also reviewed the range of information collected through presentations to and information collected by the overall Study Group. A summary of the Working Groups' findings is attached at Appendix B. All of the groups remarked on the wide range of activity taking place across the rural County area and with rural communities across Nottinghamshire. Good practice examples featured highly and all of the groups referred to work being undertaken by partners in different parts of the County and in neighbouring areas such as the Derbyshire Peak District, South Holland in Lincolnshire and in rural Leicestershire.
 8. In spite of this, there was a consensus in the Working Group reports and at the meeting of the Study Group that this work is often patchy in terms of County-wide coverage; that there is a lack of co-ordination between partners and stakeholders and that there is potential for duplication due to a lack of information and the sharing of best practice.
 9. There were key areas that one or more of the Working Groups highlighted as having a significant impact on rural communities. These are:
 - Rural Transport
 - Housing and planning
 - Parish Council liaison and the Quality Parish Council Initiative
 - Extended schools and other community resources
 - Local foods and public procurement

The Study Group agreed that these areas in particular should be investigated further in terms of existing activity, best practice and future County Council and partner approaches.

10. In addition, access to broadband, rural tourism and support for rural businesses were also discussed as key areas of concern. Broadband and tourism are currently being investigated separately by the CSSC and it was agreed that the rural dimension should be fed in to this work. In terms of support for rural businesses, it was agreed that the Group would monitor this in the light of forthcoming changes to Business Link, the Countryside Agency and the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (defra).

Conclusions

11. The above and the associated appendices outline the progress of the Rural Strategy Study Group to date. Recognising the contributions of members and partners to the Study Group and the work achieved since April 2004, it is proposed that final recommendations from the Study Group are presented to the Community Services Select Committee in April 2005.
12. In the meantime, it is recommended that the Scrutiny Team take the lead in co-ordinating the respective County Council Departments along with partner organisations in investigating the issues raised at paragraph 9 and prepare summary reports back to the Study Group in time for the April meeting of this Committee. It is proposed that these will then be collated into a working partnership document for future rural work in the County, linked to the Community Strategy and other relevant strategic documents.
13. In addition, as part of this process, it is proposed that the Scrutiny Team undertake a review of best practice activities in other counties in the East Midlands to further inform the conclusions of the Study Group.

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