

REPORT OF THE LEADER**RURAL SERVICES NETWORK – REVIEW OF MEMBERSHIP****Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek approval for the County Council to renew its membership of the Rural Services Network.
2. Subject to 1 above, to seek approval for the nomination of a County Council representative to the Rural Services Network.

Information and Advice

3. The Rural Services Network (RSN) was set up in 2014 to bring together rural local authorities and service providers and to share information on key rural issues, including best practice. It is a special interest group of the LGA and operates through two sub-groups: the Sparse Rural special interest group, and the Rural Assembly, with an annual conference each September, held in partnership with the LGA.
4. Membership provides access to a range of services including e-newsletters, networks and best practice relating to housing, economic development, health, environment, community and crime, in addition to seminars for officers and Members. The County Council's membership of the RSN also gives parishes in Nottinghamshire access to the Rural Services Community, including the Neighbourhood Planning Evidence Base.
5. Nottinghamshire County Council agreed to join the Rural Services Network in 2014. The initial cost of joining was £495 for 2014/15, with an increase to £1,800 per year (for a minimum of three years) if the Network's efforts could be demonstrated to have achieved additional grant funding of £8,000 or more for the County Council. It was also agreed that the Leader would be the County Council's representative on the Network in the first instance, and that membership and representation would be reviewed annually.
6. Membership of the network is beneficial to the authority and it is recommended that this continues. The Rural Services Network has identified the following benefits to the County Council as a result of its efforts:
 - In 2016/17, £1,979,632.64 in transitional relief received by the County Council through the efforts of the RSN in support of the Rural Fair Share Group of MPs.
 - Over £500,000 a year of Rural Service Delivery Grant from 2013/14 onwards, as a result of the RSN's work with DCLG to change the weighting given to sparsity in the local government funding formula. This is 25% of the total gained following the

application of the new weighting, the remainder being lost due to “damping” by Government.

Work on alternative distribution methods for the Rural Service Delivery Grant has been commissioned from LGFutures and the RSN is continuing to fight for the full amount to be paid.

7. Officer support is provided through the County Council’s Conservation Team. It is suggested that the representative for 2016/17 be nominated by the Team Manager, Democratic Services after consultation with the Business Manager of the Labour Group.

Other Options Considered

8. The authority could decide not to renew its membership of the Rural Services Network, but would thereby lose the opportunity to influence debate or share good practice.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

9. To enable the County Council’s continued participation in the Rural Services Network special interest group.

Statutory and Policy Implications

10. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

11. The cost of renewing membership of the Network is £1,800 for 2016/17 through to 2018/19. The cost of membership can be met from the budget for membership subscriptions.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the County Council renews its membership of the Rural Services Network.
- 2) That, subject to Recommendation 1 above being agreed, further discussions take place with the Labour Group Business Manager to enable a County Council appointment to be made to the Rural Services Network.

Councillor Alan Rhodes
Leader of the County Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (LMc – 1/7/16)

12. The recommendations in the report fall within the Terms of Reference of the Policy Committee.

Financial Comments (RWK – 4/7/16)

13. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 10 of the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

- None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All