

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 25TH APRIL 2007**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE****REVIEW OF THE LEICESTERSHIRE RURAL STRATEGY 2007– 2014****Purpose of Report**

1. To seek views on the draft revised Leicestershire Rural Strategy prepared by the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP).

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Medium Term Corporate Strategy 'Improving Life in Leicestershire' states that the County Council will at all times "support effective partnerships to achieve real improvements in the way that services are delivered. We recognise that many other organisations deliver public services to the people who live and work in Leicestershire. A combined and co-ordinated approach will be required between all these agencies to tackle difficult issues concerning safer communities, health, education, transport, the environment and sustainable development."
3. The Leicestershire Community Strategy produced by Leicestershire Together, the Local Strategic Partnership, identifies the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) as the lead body in delivering a number of actions affecting rural Leicestershire.

Background

4. Since 1993 the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP), with the considerable support of the County Council, has co-ordinated the activities of a number of agencies delivering services in rural Leicestershire. This co-ordination has taken place within the context provided by a Leicestershire Rural Strategy jointly prepared and agreed by the members of the LRP.
5. The County Council has consistently taken the role of lead body for the LRP providing the Chair (currently Mrs Pendleton CC) and financial and staffing resources to support LRP activity. This support is matched by funding from partners and other sources, including emda, LSEP, Government Office for East Midlands and other local authorities.
6. Since the existing Rural Strategy was prepared and approved in 2004, there have been considerable changes to the policy and partnership context in Leicestershire and the East Midlands. The advent of the Local Area

Agreements across England, and the completion of changes within the rural policy context have accelerated the need to revise the strategy. These changes include the launch of the East Midlands Rural Action Plan 2007-2013, creation of the Commission for Rural Communities and Natural England, and Government Office East Midlands and the East Midlands Regional Development Agency assuming new responsibilities in relation to rural policy and delivery.

7. It is, therefore, an appropriate time to revise the strategy. The LRP has proven to be an effective delivery partnership and is well placed to take advantage of these changes. However, in order to move forwards the LRP needs to reflect these developments in a revised strategy.

The draft revised Leicestershire Rural Strategy

8. The current Rural Strategy, published in July 2004, covers the period 2004 to 2009. The revised version of the strategy (attached as Appendix A) rolls this forward to cover the period 2007 to 2014.
9. The process of reviewing the Rural Strategy was initiated last autumn when the LRP Management Board agreed a range of proposals, which included reviewing the partnership's structure and membership, and revising the Rural Strategy. In particular, these proposals sought to align the LRP more closely to the Leicestershire LAA.
10. The partnership held its first LRP Forum at Rothley in January to consider the rural priorities, derived from the Rural Action Plan, Local Area Agreement and other key documents and to that have been proposed and feed into the wider development of the strategy. The event provided good input into finalising the Rural Strategy's aims and objectives and developing the identified priorities.
11. The draft Rural Strategy presents the LRP vision for 2026, and sets out the evidence which underpins the thematic chapters and the rural priorities within the document. The strategy also includes a section detailing the LRP's relationship and interaction with the Leicestershire Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Government White Paper 'Strong Prosperous Communities'.
12. The vision set out within the strategy contains a statement that '*all towns and villages will have at least one key community resource (e.g. school, church, pub, shop, post office, village hall).*' This a long term aspiration for the County's town and villages and one which would need to be achieved taking account of the views and needs of residents of the settlements, in line with the reference elsewhere in the vision to Leicestershire being recognised for its 'thriving communities that are empowered to influence and manage their own future '.
13. The five chapters of the revised Rural Strategy cover the following priorities for rural Leicestershire – Stronger Rural Communities, Rural Economic Development, Improving Accessibility and Information, Enabling Rural Services and Facilities and Countryside and Environment. The focus of these chapters reflects emerging priorities, for example the national focus on climate

change and how this can be mitigated in rural Leicestershire and the local focus on neighbourhood management in deprived communities – including several in rural areas.

14. The LRP Management Board and the County Council's Cabinet approved the draft Rural Strategy for a consultation. The consultation period will run for eight weeks between April – June. Following the end of the consultation period, comments received will be considered and changes to the strategy drafted for consideration by the LRP's Management Board (on 28th June 2007), Cabinet (in June 2007). The Strategy will then be submitted to the County Council on 11th July 2007.

Resources Implications

15. There are no direct resource implications. The Rural Strategy will, however, set the policy framework within which the LRP will operate over the next seven years. This strategic framework will influence LRP project activity and funding allocations.
16. The County Council provides significant funding to support the work of the LRP and the allocation of this funding to projects and initiatives will be made within the policy framework provided by the Medium Term Corporate Strategy, the Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement and the revised Rural Strategy

Equal Opportunities Implications

17. There are no specific equal opportunities implications. However, the consultation process will reach out as far as possible to engage those who are considered 'hard to reach' and isolated in rural Leicestershire. The document will be made available in a wide variety of formats to involve those with reading difficulties or without access to a computer.

Recommendation

18. The Commission is asked to comment on the draft Rural Strategy which is attached as Appendix A.

Circulation under Sensitive Issues Procedure

19. None.

Officers to Contact

Tom Gill
Nicole Rickard

email: tgill@leics.gov.uk
email: nrickard@leics.gov.uk