

CABINET 2004

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REVIEW OF THE LEICESTERSHIRE RURAL STRATEGY 2004-2009

Purpose of Report

1. To present the second draft of the Leicestershire Rural Strategy revised following the public consultation period including previous consideration by the Scrutiny Commission.

Recommendation

2. That the draft Leicestershire Rural Strategy (attached as Appendix A) be recommended to County Council for approval.

Reason for Recommendation

3. To proceed towards the adoption of the draft revised Leicestershire Rural Strategy.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

4. 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."
5. 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.

6. The County Council at its meeting of 11th April 2001 approved the previous version of the Leicestershire Rural Strategy, covering the period 2001-2006. The strategy was subsequently published by the LRP in July 2001.
7. The Strategy was approved for adoption at the LRP Management Board on May 27th 2004.

Resources Implications

8. There are no direct resource implications. The Rural Strategy will, however, set the policy framework within which the LRP will operate over the next five years. This strategic framework will influence LRP project activity and funding allocations.
9. 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 Community Strategy and the revised Rural Strategy

Circulation under Sensitive Issues Procedure

10. None.

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PART B

Background

11. 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.
12. 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 the Countryside Agency, emda and other local authorities.
13. Since the current Strategy was prepared and approved there have been considerable changes to the policy and partnership context in Leicestershire. Leicestershire Together LSP (LSP) and seven district LSPs have been established, as has the emda-funded Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP). The LSPs have prepared, or are in the process of preparing, community strategies with the LSEP having put in place a sub-regional economic strategy. The LRP is well linked into these new partnership arrangements with the LRP Chair being a Board Member of Leicestershire Together and the LSEP soon to be invited to join the LRP Board. In addition the partnership is recognised as a proven and effective delivery partner by the LSEP and is identified in community strategies as the lead body to deliver projects and actions affecting rural Leicestershire. These new arrangements have been taken into account in revising the Strategy.

The draft revised Leicestershire Rural Strategy

14. The development of the draft revised Rural Strategy (attached as Appendix A) has been a collaborative process involving members of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) and a broad range of other partners involved in LRP related initiatives. Following the completion of a 2-month public consultation period, the draft strategy has been amended significantly in the light of these comments and those made by the Scrutiny Commission.
15. At the February meeting, the Scrutiny Commission highlighted three specific issues regarding the draft Rural Strategy, which required further consideration, these were:
 - a. The Strategy has described the key issues facing rural areas but had failed to give any indication of how these might be addressed and the options available to partners;

- b. The Strategy had not identified the added value of partnership working in addressing the problems of rural areas and would benefit if examples of effective joint working successes were included;
- c. Whilst accepting that annual implementation plans would follow the strategy would benefit from the inclusion of some broad targets and performance measures.

These comments have formed a significant basis to the revised draft Rural Strategy and have been addressed through the following points.

- 16. The concerns expressed at the lack of a section exploring how key issues identified within the Rural Strategy will be addressed, have been overcome through the inclusion of a 'Looking Forward' section for each strategic objective within the Rural Strategy. This section outlines initial projects that will contribute towards the implementation of the Rural Strategy.
- 17. In response to the lack of recognition of what has already been achieved through the partnership to address problems within rural areas, the strategy has been expanded to include a series of case studies of projects. These projects have been developed by the LRP since the second Rural Strategy was published in 2001. The ten case studies illustrate how effective joint working has enabled the LRP to tackle issues within each strategic objective.
- 18. The proposal to incorporate broad targets and performance measures within the strategy is considered best approached through the development of the interim action plan 2004-2005 and subsequent annual action plans (2005-2009). These will include detailed targets and milestones for both individual projects and the partnership as a whole. However, the inclusion of the 'looking forward' section does outline initial measures that will take the strategy forward for the current financial year although no targets have been set against them within the strategy.

Additional significant changes

- 19. The second LRP development day held in February 2004 centred on practical and organisational changes that might be necessary to facilitate the strategy's effective implementation. In the light of this, the proposed structure of the LRP has been revised (Figure 1 of Appendix A) but of particular note are the proposed reduction in the number of Programme Teams from 7 to 5 and the addition of the LSEP to formal membership of the LRP.
- 20. The draft rural strategy has been amended significantly to improve grammar and readability.