

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Countryside and Rural Affairs
Date:	13 June 2019
Title:	Rural Affairs – Rural Programme update and future priorities
Report From:	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Executive Member for Countryside and Rural Affairs on the progress of the Rural Programme (RP). Information on both past and existing commitments is included, with recommendations that maintain current capacity and target medium-term programme needs and opportunities. Consideration is given to ensure the RP can also provide an effective response to the Hampshire 2050 Commission of Enquiry (CoE) in the ongoing delivery of services to our rural communities.
2. The report provides an update on the progress of the Rural Communities Fund (RCF) and the new Parish and Town Council Investment Fund (PTCF). It highlights the value of both initiatives and makes recommendations which reflect their importance to the County Council's relationships with local council's and communities.
3. Further recommendations are made concerning Hampshire County Council's ongoing engagement and support for key partnerships including; The Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC), the Hampshire Rural Forum (HRF) and the Rural Services Network (RSN).

Recommendations

That the Executive Member for Countryside and Rural Affairs (EMCRA):

4. endorses the programme commitments (as set out in Appendix 1) as the most prudent way to maintain ongoing programme capacity and support development opportunities;
5. recognises the early strength of applications to the PTCF and endorses the sustained governance via the Programme Board, and current promotional activities through District Associations;

6. in response to the growing demands upon the RCF from rural communities (as set out in Appendix 2), supports a temporary increase of the funds current annual award limit from £85,000 to £120,000 for 2019/20;
7. welcomes the initial outcomes of the Col and on the evidence presented for the Rural Theme, and approves further work including the continued support to the National Rural Strategy with the RSN;
8. supports the current negotiations with HALC in establishing a three-year agreement which will set out the formal relationship between both organisations starting 2020/2021;
9. supports ongoing discussions across the Rural Forum Steering Group in developing the groups profile and influence whilst also addressing a future funding gap.

Executive Summary

10. The RP is overseen by the EMCRA as a key tool in the County Council's approach to tackling challenges in the delivery of rural services and on the relationship with Parish and Town Councils (PTC's). This includes decision-making responsibility for both the Parish and Town Council (PTC) Investment Fund and Rural Communities Fund (RCF) together with the County Council's partnerships with the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) and the Hampshire Rural Forum.
11. This report updates the Executive Member on progress in these areas and makes recommendations for future funding commitments which maintain current programme capacity. Further areas are also identified which sets out how the medium-term targeting of reserves can develop the programmes ability to respond to both current pressures and future opportunities.
12. The importance of external partnerships is highlighted with recommendations that look to position the RP to respond to the outcomes of ongoing engagement through the HRF and the Col.
13. Future direction will focus upon maintaining efforts to build local capacity and progress sustainable projects that meet local needs and respond to the growing pressures on County Council services.

Contextual information

14. The EMCRA role, with primary departmental links with Culture, Communities and Business Services (CCBS) includes functional duties for the Rural Affairs Development Fund (RADF) and its use to support activities through the County Council's Rural Programme (RP). This includes the County Council's associated relationships with Parish, Town, District and Borough Councils. It also includes the partnership with HALC, decision-making responsibilities for the Rural Communities Fund (RCF), and those for the new £500,000 Parish and Town Council Investment Fund (PTCF).

15. The annual commitment to the RADF of £200,000 has enabled investments which specifically target challenges identified by the County Council's Rural Priorities. Appendix 1 includes a summary of these activities over the last two years. Notable examples include; the RCF, Parish Lengthsmen and Village Agent schemes, which all look to increase a community's local capacity, resilience and ability to self-help.
16. Despite the popularity of these activities with partners and local communities, the RADF did not fully utilise available budget in previous years. This was attributed, at least in-part, to a lack of capacity to promote and expand the RP which has led to an inability to fully respond to need.
17. Moves to address the capacity issue were instigated in February 2018 with the recruitment of a Programme Manager, which has proved effective. There has since been a notable increase in uptake of the RCF. The successful launch of the PTCF and closer working relationships, both across departments and partner organisations demonstrates a positive impact.
18. The RCF continues to offer support to Hampshire's rural communities by providing small grants and support for locally led initiatives. There has been an increased uptake with the last year awarding 27 projects investments ranging between under £500 up to £10,000.
19. The current RCF annual award limit is set at £85,000. Trend data from the last 12 months suggests a possible demand upon the Fund for the current financial year of £100,000 to £120,000 (see Performance section 28 for more details).
20. The new PTCF of £500,000 seeks to encourage innovation in response to growing pressures upon County Council Services, by investing in locally led initiatives which build community capacity and resilience.
21. Since its launch in November 2018 the PTCF there has been a strong early uptake with 100 enquiries and with 23 applications in progress. The existing governance and support to the EMCRA, through the Programme Board, continues and the early uptake also highlights the effectiveness of current promotional and engagement activities. Ongoing monitoring is in place, using enquiry rates to gauge interest and inform any response as necessary.
22. Further Programme capacity was introduced with a temporary Programme Support Officer role in Sept 2018. This was primarily to provide additional capacity in supporting the growth of the RCF and in the launch and delivery of the PTCF. To meet the current pressures on the RP's capacity to support both Funds, the Programme Board agreed to extend this role for a further 6 months to September 2019.
23. The Programme Manager role will continue to expand to meet the growing demands upon existing RP led initiatives. Existing engagement with external partners will also continue including through the HRF, and as a result of the outcomes to Col.
24. The evidence provided on the Rural Theme to the Col was collated with significant support from the Programme Manager and the HRF, together with evidence and expert witnesses from regional partners and national experts.
25. The contributions of the RSN at the Rural Theme Commission Hearing provided further evidence on the challenges in delivering rural services. It also gave an early

insight to their work engaging with Central Government on the need for a National Rural Strategy.

26. Agreement in April 2019 by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources of a further one-year extension for HALC's infrastructure grant of £57,000, enables discussions between both organisations to determine the formal relationship between both organisations. The option of a three-year medium-term agreement from 2020 is currently under consideration. It is expected any such agreement would adopt a twin track approach for County Council funding and support HALC's core purpose in parallel to specific activities which support relevant initiatives of the County Council.
27. The HRF provides the County Council with the necessary channels to engage and consult collectively with our rural partners. Ring-fenced funds held by the County Council are sufficient to meet Forum needs for the current year. However, a longer-term option is required, with contributions from Steering Group members as the current most viable option. Consideration of a 30% contribution from the County Council's RADF as a means to encourage contributions from other members is still a possibility.

Finance

28. The RADF operates at £200,000 per year with current reserves of £256,000. Delivery against Hampshire County Councils Rural priorities is channelled through the RP and includes direct support of the RCF. This fund provided a total award of £73,000 through 2018/19, with four to five times match funding achieved. Uptake by rural communities increased in the latter half of the year (attributed partly to wider promotion, support and simplification of the application process) setting a trend which is expected to continue, with forecast awards for 2019/20 at £100,000 to £120,000.
29. Other significant commitments channelled through the RP within 2018/19, included; a £35,000 investment in the Highways and Countryside Service Parish Lengthsmen Scheme, £20,000 with Adults Service's 'Hitting the Cold Spots' programme and £20,000 to the Village Agents scheme.
30. A summary of these commitments through the RP is included in Appendix 1. This also identifies recommended RP commitments going forward, together with areas for the targeted investment of reserves. A level of flexibility is incorporated to maintain the RP's need to be able to respond to future opportunities and demands.
31. The PTCF of £500,000 offers both capital and revenue investments to local councils and community groups of amounts usually up to £30,000. Established in November 2018, upwards of 23 projects are already in development which draws on funding expected throughout 2019/20 (see Appendix 2 for further details).
32. Grant infrastructure funding from Policy and Resources of £57,000 for the year 2019/20, looks to support HALC in the continuation of their existing arrangements and in their commitment to support the delivery of the PTCF. The HALC Policy and Resources annual grant has historically been £70,000 per year, but annual reductions of 10% were introduced from 2018 to reflect pressures on County Council Resources. This reduction was realised in the £63,000 grant awarded for 2018/19 and the £57,000 for the current year. Similar savings will be incorporated in any further agreements.

33. Annual secretariat and facilities costs of the HRF over the last two years have been approximately £7,000 per annum. Whilst ring-fenced funding held by the County is sufficient to meet costs for 2019/20, discussion across the HRF Steering Group membership will take place to look at collective contributions. A 30% contribution of these costs from the RADF has been tabled at the RP Programme Board in March and is pending further consideration.

Performance

34. The total award from the RCF for 2018/19 was £73,000, with match funding achieved at four to five times the investment made by Hampshire County Council. Considering the recent trends (summarised in Appendix 2), forecast awards for the current year are estimated at between £100,000 to £120,000.
35. Since its launch the PTC Fund has received approximately 100 enquiries within its first quarter of operation, with 23 projects in active development. A further 15 applications were steered towards other existing County Council grants and funds, including the RCF and Recreation and Heritage Community Fund (a summary of this activity is provided in Appendix 2).
36. The strong uptake of both funds is largely attributed to the RP's community engagement activities through Local Council District Associations and Parish cluster groups. Equally the simplification of the application process, and the added capacity to support applications by the Programme Manager and Support Officer has contributed to this success.
37. The RP supported the County Council's commitment to external partnership and consultation throughout 2018/19. The Programme actively participates in the Hampshire Rural Forum, which includes over 50 Stakeholder groups, and continues to provide valuable feedback on programme activities and initiatives.
38. Further developments in 2018/19 for the Forum included its additional role in taking on the Wessex Farming Group (advising DEFRA on rural issues in Hampshire and across the region). The Forum's Steering Group also participated in a Workshop to collate and provide evidence to the Rural Theme for the Hampshire 2050 Vision.
39. The collation of evidence for the Rural Theme, as part of the Hampshire 2050 Vision, provided further opportunity for wide stakeholder and partnership engagement. This work also encompassed internal and external expertise to facilitate a well-received hearing for the Col's Rural Theme. New partnerships were established throughout the process with national experts from academic, local government and rural sector backgrounds.

Future direction

40. In recognition of shared outcomes between both organisations, the close County Council partnership with HALC is expected to continue. The PTC Investment Fund and RCF provide the financial means to develop new and innovative ways of working. They also provide the opportunities to address local needs and respond to increasing pressure on County Council services. Priority will be given to projects that directly support pressures in key service areas and to initiatives that draw in partnerships and resources in a sustainable manner.

41. The financial infrastructure grant of £57,000 to HALC will support the ongoing partnership and provide a valuable period to develop a future agreement. This will be linked closely to outcomes of the PTCF.
42. Continued investments through the PTCF and RCF will see tangible benefits in Hampshire's local communities. Both workstreams are expanding in reach and capacity and rely on significant levels of development and support for success. It will therefore be necessary to commit appropriate and proportionate levels of programme support and direct project management in future.
43. The work associated with the Rural Theme as part of the Col was effective in identifying the 'rural reality' within Hampshire. It also recognised the drivers for change and the actions the County Council must consider in addressing rural issues, in both the short, medium and long-term. The evidence and developed partnerships will help inform the direction for the RP. It will also shape the core activities and targeted investment of current reserves.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
EMPR Report - Town and Parish Council Investment Fund	26.09.2018
EMPR Report - Update on the Parish and Town Council Investment Fund and Associated Rural Issues	25.04.2019
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment - No negative impacts are anticipated

Appendix 1:

Table 1. Financial commitments of the Rural Affairs Development Fund 2017 to 2018/19, including recommendations for further commitments from 2019.

Rural Affairs Development Fund; investment summary 2017/18 and 2018/19 (£200,000 limit per year)		
Year	Project/Initiative	Amount Invested (£)
2017/18	RCF (awarded)	61,000
	Parish Lengthsman	35,000
	Hitting the Cold Spots	20,000
	Village Agents	20,000
	Fly-Tipping	4,000
	Men's Shed's	4,000
	RSN subscriptions	3,000
2018/19	RCF (awarded)	81,000
	Parish Lengthsman	35,000
	Hitting the Cold Spots	20,000
	Village Agents	20,000
	RSN subscriptions	3,000
Future investment areas; ongoing, plus medium and short-term targeting of reserves 2019> (£200,000 per year, with £256,000 in reserves)		
Commitment	Amount (£)	Recommended Duration
Ongoing core activities and commitments		
Rural Communities Fund (grant based with targeted awards)	120,000	Ongoing (with annual cap review)
Programme Management	51,000	Ongoing
RSN Annual Subscriptions	3,000	Ongoing
Parish Lengthsman	25,000 to 35,000	Duration tbc.
Hampshire Rural Forum	0 to 2,500	>2019/20 duration tbc.
Short & medium-term targeted investments		
Joint initiatives with Adult Services (see previous years above for potential areas)	20,000 to 30,000 (est.)	Short-term (annual review)
Rural Communities Fund (potential growth)	10,000 – 20,000 (est.)	Annual review based upon demand and availability of resource
Programme Project Support	22,000	Medium-term (12 to 18 months)
Programme development including opportunities and direction from the Col (likely areas including; partnership development, engagement, communications and promotional activities)	10,000 to 20,000 (est.)	Short-term development

Appendix 2:

Table 1. Rural Communities Fund (RCF) – performance since 2017.

Rural Communities Fund awards 2017 to 2019 (award limit variable – subject to annual review)			
Year/Quarter	Number of Applications	Total Value of Applications (£)	Percentage of Match Funding (%)
2017/18	26	63,000	130
2018/19	27	73,000	450
Projects in development for 2019/20			
First Quarter	13	83,000 (estimate.)	200 (estimate)

Table 2. Parish and Town Council Investment Fund (PTCF) – uptake since November 2018.

Parish and Town Council Investment Fund – summary of applications (£500,000 total award capacity)		
Applications in active development		
Service Area	Approximate Value (£)	Number of Applications
Countryside Services	27,000	7
Adults' Health & Care	105,000	8
Fly-Tipping	3,000	3
Highways	tbc	2
Children's Services	20,000	1
Applications approved/at final approval stage		
Adults' Health & Care	34,000	2
Totals	£189,000	23
Other more suitable HCC grants or funds identified		15
Application still at early enquiry stage		24
Application not suitable/more work required		37
Total number of applications/enquiries		99