

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Policy and Resources
Date:	16 June 2017
Title:	Rural Delivery: Rural Grants
Report From:	Director for Culture, Communities and Business Services

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to outline a proposal for a revised Rural Communities Fund, which will combine four existing Hampshire County Council grant schemes currently available to rural communities.
- 1.2. The proposal is based on a need to improve the internal efficiency of delivering these grants, as well as to improve the experience for rural communities seeking grant funding.
- 1.3. The proposal includes a request to allocate £50,000 from the Rural Delivery budget to support the revised grant scheme.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. The revised County Council Rural Delivery priority actions were agreed by Cabinet in March 2014 (report 5684). These include supporting community resilience, rural transport, self-help, communications and economic development.
- 2.2. There are currently four County Council grant schemes that are targeted predominately at rural communities. Three have previously been funded by the rural delivery budget (a-c) and one is funded by the Countryside Service (d). All provide funding towards projects to deliver against the rural delivery priority actions.
 - a) The Community Challenge Fund supports a broad range of community-led projects that deliver against any of the Rural Delivery priority actions. It was originally established in 2009 and was subsequently re-launched in 2014 to reflect the revised priorities of the Rural Delivery Strategy, approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources at his Decision Day in July 2014 (report 5940). The scheme is administered by the Department for Culture, Communities and Business Services (CCBS), however where applicable

Officers from across the County Council are consulted for recommendations towards grant applications.

b) The Flood Alleviation Scheme supports the implementation of small scale community led flood alleviation schemes. It delivers against the community resilience priority action. The establishment of this scheme was approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources at his Decision Day in July 2015 (report 6626), to provide a funding opportunity for those small, locally valuable, projects in rural areas that would not necessarily be suitable, or a priority, for large scale funding programmes. The scheme is administered by CCBS, however Officers from the Department for Environment, Transport and Economy (ETE) are closely involved and consulted for recommendations towards all grant applications.

c) The Rural Retailers and Community Enterprises Grant Scheme (previously Village Shops Grant Scheme) supports projects to help retailers and community enterprises grow, increase their productivity and improve the services that are offered to communities in rural areas. It delivers against the economic development priority action. The scheme is administered by the Economic Development Team (ETE).

d) The Small Grants Scheme Countryside Access, established in 2005, supports projects to improve access to the countryside and delivers against the community resilience and self-help priority actions. It is administered and funded by the Countryside Service (CCBS) and is delivered in partnership with the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum, the statutory Local Access Forum for Hampshire (excluding the New Forest and South Downs), advising on opportunities to improve access to Hampshire's countryside.

2.3. The proposal presented in this report is to combine the four grant schemes (a-d), to become the 'Rural Communities Fund'. This proposal has been reviewed by cross-departmental colleagues, Councillor Edward Heron, the Assistant to the Executive - Rural Affairs Champion, and Councillor Rob Humby, the Executive Member for Environment and Transport, who are supportive of the recommendations.

3. Finance

3.1. The Rural Delivery budget for 2017/18 is £200,000.

3.2. The unspent balance of funding allocated to support grant schemes in previous financial years has been carried forward and is available to support applications in 2017/18. This includes:

a) £3,000 balance from the Community Challenge Fund budget, from the £50,000 approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources at his Decision Day in July 2014 (report 5940).

b) £19,000 balance from the Flood Alleviation Scheme budget, from the £65,000 approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources at his Decision Day in July 2015 (report 6626).

c) £57,000 balance from the Rural Retailers and Community Enterprises Grant Scheme budget, from the £100,000 approved by the Executive Member

for Policy and Resources at his Decision Days in July 2014 (report 5940) and July 2015 (report 6626). This large underspend is in part due to additional funding held by the Economic Development Team, also being available to support applications to this scheme up to the end of 2016/17.

- 3.3. The Countryside Service is continuing to support the Countryside Access Scheme from its own budget with a contribution of £18,000 for 2017/18.
- 3.4. An additional £50,000 contribution from the rural delivery budget 2017/18 is requested towards the proposal for a combined Rural Communities Fund (see 5.8 for a proposed breakdown of this contribution).

4. Rural grants review

Context

- 4.1. A series of five parish and town council consultation workshops, held across the county during September 2016, revealed there is a general willingness to take on greater responsibilities but there was concern over capacity, resource and funding. Resulting from the workshops it was acknowledged that the County Council could do more to improve the accessibility to grants and funding by simplifying the approach and the process. As there are currently four County Council grant schemes aimed predominately at rural communities (see 2.2), combining these four grants schemes will assist in achieving this. As the County Council faces further cuts, there are also recognised benefits of a combined scheme in meeting corporate objectives, especially through its potential to support the culture of self-help and promote collaborative working.
- 4.2. As part of a review of the Community Challenge Fund in 2016, consultation with the Hampshire Association of Local Councils and Action Hampshire confirmed that there is still a demand for funding for community projects in rural areas and of the potential benefits of the scheme in helping to deliver this.

Current performance

- 4.3. In the past two years the four grant schemes have allocated approximately £250,000 to 97 different projects, of which 59 projects (receiving approximately £101,500) have been led by town or parish councils. A founding principle of these schemes has been to attract external investment and the match funding secured towards the 97 projects funded has been approximately £454,000, plus volunteer hours and in-kind support. See Appendix A for a summary of the projects supported and funding allocated for each grant scheme in 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- 4.4. Whilst up-take of most schemes has been limited in the past two years, there has been a renewed interest, in particular in the Rural Retailers and Community Enterprises Grant Scheme and the Flood Alleviation Scheme, and there are a number of potential applications lined up.
- 4.5. The Small Grants Scheme Countryside Access has seen a steady influx of applications in the past two years and there is a continued demand. To support this, the Countryside Service has increased its efforts to work more closely with parish councils, including a pilot project funded by the rural

delivery budget in 2016 (report 7747). This delivered six workshops for parish councils and user groups and was attended by 185 people, of which 66 signed up to be Path Wardens. The Countryside Service is also keen to continue its support for countryside access grants to meet Countryside Access Plan objectives and a more sustainably managed rights of way network in the future. Despite this, the current scheme demands an unsustainable level of officer time, largely due to the application and decision making process. There are additional pressures to meet savings targets and the future of the scheme would be uncertain if steps were not taken to consider alternative delivery options.

- 4.6. The current practice of managing the schemes separately is inefficient and potentially confusing for applicants. All schemes are promoted through the same channels but promotion is done independently and contact information and closing dates are different for each scheme. There is also a degree of overlap between the schemes, primarily due to the broad scope of the Community Challenge Fund. Combining the schemes will eliminate confusion and provide a clearer offer for potential applicants.
- 4.7. The current decision making processes for the schemes are varied and for some schemes overly convoluted. Applications to the Community Challenge Fund and Flood Alleviation Scheme are presented to the Assistant to the Executive - Rural Affairs Champion for initial review and final approval is then sought via a scheduled Executive Member for Policy and Resources Decision Day. Applications to the Rural Retailers and Community Enterprise Grant Scheme are considered by the Assistant to the Executive - Rural Affairs Champion and the Assistant Director Economic Development. Applications to the Small Grant Scheme are presented at scheduled meetings to an independent panel of members from the Local Access Forums for Hampshire and the New Forest.

5. Funding proposal – Rural Communities Fund

- 5.1. It is proposed that the four grant schemes outlined above (see 2.2.) should be combined and presented as the 'Rural Communities Fund'. This will help provide a clear message to potential applicants about the audience. Among the potential applicants will be town and parish councils and the combined scheme will provide an opportunity to strengthen the County Councils relationship with them and encourage joint initiatives.
- 5.2. The priorities of the scheme will be to 'build community resilience and encourage self-help'. Applications will be welcomed to support three specific themes (rural retailers and community enterprises, community-led flood alleviation, countryside access), as well as general projects or initiatives supporting the scheme priorities. See Appendix B for the proposed scheme information.
- 5.3. The combined scheme will be administered by CCBS and applications managed via the corporate grants database. Relevant Officers from across the County Council will be consulted for recommendations on applications when applicable.

- 5.4. To help improve the experience for customers and manage their expectations, the combined scheme will have one point of initial contact, shared promotion, standard closing dates across all themes, standard criteria and a standard application and decision making process. In addition to the standard scheme information, there will also be some step-by step guidance to address the different scheme themes.
- 5.5. To improve the efficiency of the decision making process, it is proposed that decisions on grant applications up to £5,000, should be delegated to the Assistant Director for Culture and Heritage, in consultation with the Assistant to the Executive - Rural Affairs Champion. For these smaller scale grants it is anticipated that this will reduce the Officer time involved in completing this process and reduce the waiting times for applicants in finding out the outcome of their grant application. Grant applications for funding over £5,000 will be presented for approval at a scheduled Executive Member for Policy and Resources Decision Day.
- 5.6. This will replace the current process in place for the Community Challenge Fund and Flood Alleviation Grant, whereby a report is submitted to the Executive Member for Policy and Resources for consideration at a scheduled Decision Day for all applications over £1,000. It is however proposed that following the final round of funding each year all grants awarded will be reported retrospectively to the Executive Member for Policy and Resources for information.
- 5.7. As the Local Access Forum is currently involved in the decision making process for the Small Grants Scheme Countryside Access, it is proposed that countryside access applications will still be shared with agreed members of the Forum for comment, and any comments submitted will be included in the recommendation to the appropriate decision maker (see 5.5). As is current practice, it is also anticipated that a report of successful countryside access grant applications will be provided to the Forum at its quarterly meeting.
- 5.8. To support the scheme it is proposed that £50,000 is allocated from the Rural Delivery budget, to be used only when the existing budgets allocated for the themes are exhausted (see 3.2 and 3.3). This will include:
 - a) A maximum allocation of £18,000 to support the Countryside Access theme (to match the Countryside Service allocation), in recognition of its great contribution towards the overall rural priority actions of promoting community resilience and a culture of self-help.
 - b) A maximum allocation of £32,000 to support general projects or initiatives supporting the scheme priorities and the Flood Alleviation theme.
 - c) Due to the extent of the existing budget, it is not anticipated that this funding will be used to support the Rural Retailer and Community Enterprise theme.
- 5.9. It is proposed that the new 'Rural Communities Fund' is launched by the end of June 2017. This will include promotion via a press release, social media and joint communications with the Hampshire Association of Local Councils and Action Hampshire.

6. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive Member for Policy and Resources:

- 6.1. Approves the proposal to establish a Rural Communities Fund, to open in June 2017, which will combine four existing grant schemes offered by the County Council to rural communities (as set out in paragraph 5 of this report).
- 6.2. Approves the proposal to delegate Rural Communities Fund grant decisions, up to £5,000, to the Assistant Director for Culture and Heritage in consultation with the Assistant to the Executive - Rural Affairs Champion.
- 6.3. Approves the allocation of £50,000 from the Rural Delivery budget to support the Rural Communities Fund.

APPENDIX A

Rural grant scheme funding summary 2015/16-2016/17

Grant scheme	Projects supported 2015/16	Projects supported 2016/17	Amount awarded	Match funding	Example projects
Community Challenge	8	5	£46,650	£147,080	IT help sessions at the weekly market; helping residents identify heat loss hot spots; helping community buildings improve energy efficiency; dementia friendly rural communities.
Flood Alleviation	3	3	£47,750	£46,150	Works to improve drainage; riverbed regrading; catchment modelling; feasibility studies.
Rural Retailers & Community Enterprises	5	2	£72,443	£170,705	The establishment of a shop in the village hall; increasing services such as food to go; internal and external shop improvements e.g. to modernise and make best use of space; new equipment such as chillers and freezers to increase product offers.
Countryside Access	35	36	£83,369	£89,864	Path surfacing; replacing stiles with gates; installation of boardwalks and bridges; map boards and leaflets to promote countryside access.
Total	51	46	£250,212	£453,799	

Rural Communities Fund – scheme information

The Rural Communities Fund supports Parish Councils, groups and organisations in rural Hampshire and small market towns. The priorities of the scheme are to build community resilience and encourage self-help.

Applications are welcome to support three specific themes as well as general projects or initiatives supporting the scheme priorities.

- **Rural retailers and community enterprises** – *we want to help them grow, increase their productivity and ultimately improve the services that are offered to communities in rural areas.*
- **Community-led flood alleviation** – *we want to help rural communities deliver solutions to flooding in their local areas to benefit both people and property.*
- **Countryside access** – *we want to help communities deliver improvements to their local access network.*
- **Other** – *we are keen to support other projects or initiatives that will help build community resilience and/or encourage self-help in rural areas e.g. supporting vulnerable and older people; supporting innovative transport solutions to access services. Contact us to discuss your project ideas before making an application and we can advise if it will be eligible.*

When to apply

Applications for funding up to £5,000:

Accepted throughout the year and decisions will be made within eight weeks of receiving a completed application.

Applications for funding over £5,000:

Application deadline	Decision by
14 July 2017	19 October 2017
1 September 2017	5 December 2017
1 December 2017	8 March 2018

Funding criteria

Applications can be made for over £1,000, typically up to a maximum of £5,000. Larger grants are available to support applications for community-led flood alleviation schemes and rural retailer and community enterprise schemes (typically up to £10,000).

Awards may be for £1,000 or less if this is felt to be appropriate. Organisations seeking funding of £500 or less are recommended to look at [County Councillor Grants](#).

Applicants must have match funding in place from other (non-Hampshire County Council) sources. An element of this match funding can be 'in-kind' (e.g. through volunteer time). Any in-kind contributions must be accounted for as part of the total cost of the project/activity, for example the total cost is made up of expenditure (e.g. materials, contractors) and the value of in-kind contributions.

- **Applicants for rural retailer and community enterprise schemes must** contribute a minimum of 50% of total eligible costs. For commercial businesses, the match funding cannot be sourced from any other grant making authority. For community enterprises, the match funding can be sourced from other grants.

APPENDIX B

- **Applicants for countryside access schemes must contribute a minimum of 50% of total eligible costs. In kind contributions can be made up of volunteer labour** (excluding Community Service Payback Teams) and/or **contributions from landowners.**
- Applications for community-led flood alleviation schemes and all other community projects must include some match funding from district, town or parish councils.

Grant criteria and eligibility

We will fund applications which meet all of the following criteria. It is a competitive process, so grants will be approved by County Councillors on their merits.

- Projects/activities must deliver measurable results against the priorities of the Fund.
- The project/activity must take place in rural Hampshire, a small market town, or directly benefit rural communities.
- Applications must have support from the local community and Parish/Town Council.
- Applicants must have a clear management structure within its constitution or suitable governance/terms of reference.
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate that without the support from Hampshire County Council the project/activity would not be able to proceed at all or to the extent outlined in the application.
- Applicants with significant funds in place or higher levels of reserves must demonstrate why funding from Hampshire County Council is needed.
- Applications must include a project plan or business plan (where applicable).
- If the application is successful, it is expected that you will have a plan to continue the project/activity after the end of the funding period (where applicable).
- Successful applicants must provide appropriate reporting and/or monitoring for their projects/activities.
- Successful applicants must acknowledge the support of Hampshire County Council in all publicity and media coverage relating to the project, and in the organisation's next annual audited statement of accounts.
- Applicants must have appropriate policies, procedures and insurance in place.
- Applications for rural retailer and community enterprise schemes must:
 - demonstrate how they will grow their business and provide value for money;
 - show how they will enhance the local community;
 - prove that they are not in direct competition with another business in the same village;
 - be in an area/village with a population of less than 5,000 residents.
- Applications for community-led flood alleviation schemes must:
 - demonstrate the benefit to people and property, without any increase in risk elsewhere;
 - have the necessary consents from the Environment Agency and Hampshire County Council.
- Applications for countryside access schemes must:
 - deliver improvements identified in the Countryside Access Plan;
 - demonstrate a long term benefit to the local community and access network based on an existing local need.
 - adhere to the detailed scheme criteria.

APPENDIX B

Financial eligibility

Organisations will not normally be eligible for grants where they hold unallocated reserves in excess of one year's running costs. In cases where reserves held exceed this level, a reduced level of funding may be agreed. All charitable organisations are expected to have an agreed reserves policy that addresses their financial risk.

What we can fund

If you are applying for a rural retailer and community enterprise grant, or a countryside access grant please download the scheme specific guidance below to find out more about the eligible activities and any additional criteria.

Rural retailers and community enterprises – scheme guidance

Countryside access – scheme guidance

What we can't fund

- Projects that receive funding from other Hampshire County Council sources (except for County Councillor grants).
- Individuals
- Profit making events/activities (with the exception of applications for rural retailer and community enterprise schemes)
- Projects or activities solely within the unitary authority areas of Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council.
- Non-constituted organisations (though grants via parish councils may be possible instead).
- Projects/work that has already been carried out, you must apply for a grant and receive an offer from us before starting any work or making any purchases.
- General/core running costs of an organisation
- Rural retailer and community enterprise schemes will not fund:
 - Like for like replacement equipment or any general maintenance. We will only fund items that will add new value to the business/enterprise.
 - Standard computer equipment
 - Businesses within population areas of more than 5,000 residents. Priority will be given to smaller settlements with limited services.
 - Non-independent commercial organisations (with more than one outlet)
- Countryside access schemes will not fund:
 - Works/projects that are primarily for nature conservation, the main element of the project must be for access improvements.
 - Fencing projects or works on recreation grounds, unless the land is also recorded as a right of way or open access land.
 - The repair or replacement of stiles, although applications to replace stiles with gates are strongly supported.
 - Work to paved/tarmaced paths
 - Picnic benches
 - Notice boards
 - Dog bins

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	Yes
Maximising well-being:	Yes
Enhancing our quality of place:	Yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Rural Delivery Strategy funding proposals	7747	September 2016
Rural Delivery Strategy funding proposals	6626	July 2015
Rural Delivery Strategy funding proposals	5940	July 2014
Hampshire County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy	5684	March 2014

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

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.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

- 1.1. 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 under the Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

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

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

1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- a) The proposals are expected to have a high positive impact on people living in rural areas. No negative impacts are anticipated.
- b) Revised priorities for the County Council's Rural Delivery Strategy were agreed by Cabinet in March 2014 (report 5684) with priority actions supporting community resilience, challenging rural isolation and loneliness, rural transport, self-help, communications, and economic development. An equality impact assessment of specific projects or funding requests is requested when necessary.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1. Support for more vulnerable groups and the infrastructure and networks to deliver it will reduce isolation and exposure to criminal acts. More vibrant and active communities are likely to suffer less crime and anti-social behaviour.

3. Climate Change:

- 3.1. How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption? Putting effective flood alleviation measures in place would reduce the amount of energy required to alleviate flooding emergencies through measures such as pumping of flood water and reduce the resources needed for recovery after an event.
- 3.2. How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts? The severity and frequency of extreme weather events that often cause flooding is linked to the changing climate. Initiatives to alleviate flooding will take this into account. The initiatives proposed also support the culture of self-help and community resilience in rural areas.