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| REPORT TO EXECUTIVE | | | |
| PORTFOLIO AREA: PROMOTING CARLISLE | | | |
| Date of Meeting: | | 29th September 2003 | |
| Public | | | |
| Key Decision: | No | Recorded in Forward Plan: | No |
| Inside Policy Framework | | | |

Title: **PROPOSED NATIONAL RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORK & CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN CARLISLE IN OCTOBER 2004**

Report of: **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Report reference: **CE 16 03**

Summary:

This report informs members of a project proposal being drawn up by the Rural Women's Network. The project is two-fold (a) the development of a National Rural Women's Network (NRWN) and (b) a Conference, held over 3 days, which will officially launch the NRWN, to be held in Carlisle in October 2004.

Recommendations:

This report requests Members to:

- Endorse the Project
- Note the 'in kind' contributions which the City Council will make as a contribution to the Project.
- Note that some funding may be requested by the Rural Women's Network as the Project progresses.

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1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

1. Members will already be aware of the work of the Cumbria Rural Women's Network, which was established 2 years ago and now has a membership of over 2,100 members.
2. The Network is very successful and over 40% of women participating within it are drawn from word of mouth.
3. The Network's remit includes support for women wishing to become self-employed, including localised networking groups across the County; one-to-one business advice for new and already established businesses and women-centred training courses ranging from confidence building, IT and Business Skills.
4. In addition to providing grass root support for rural women, the Network has a wider appeal which is its ability to make visible the issues and concerns that women face and which go beyond job-related concerns.

1.5 These activities provide much needed support for women living in rural areas who not only face the traditional barriers of lack of childcare, flexible employment opportunities and training, but are often faced with rural isolation. In Cumbria, the barriers increased following the impact of Foot & Mouth and the need for farmers to search for alternative employment opportunities.

2 The Proposed Project

2.1 The Co-ordinator of the Cumbria Rural Women's Network supported by Voluntary Action Cumbria is currently drawing up a project proposal which will require significant funding. The Conference alone has been costed at approximately £222,000. Potential funding streams have been identified and these are being pursued. At this early stage of development the City Council is being asked for 'in kind' support and the Executive Director has agreed to support the project development as a member of the Steering Group. In addition, the Economic & Community Development Business Unit gives support, and colleagues are looking at how the network can be extended to support women entrepreneurs living and/or working in the City of Carlisle.

2. As outlined above the project has two elements:

1) Development of the National Rural Women's Network (NRWN)

This will be an organisation for all rural women across the UK and its aims will be centred upon providing grass root support to rural women and

improving their representation on rural-based decision-making and on influential organisations. In essence it will take the models of good practice already established by the Cumbria Rural Women's Network, especially the networking model which will be an essential element across the entire organisation.

The project proposal for the NRWN also identifies the need for a quarterly magazine and the provision of transnational links. The latter will bring existing international networking, including Australia and New Zealand (the networks have been running for nearly 20 years), close to the NRWN and with the potential for women living in rural UK communities to join forces to provide a significant international force that can help to view rural issues within a global context.

2) National Rural Women's Conference – October 2004

This aspect of the project proposal will be the vehicle to officially launch the NRWN. The event will be held over 3 days and it is hoped to attract 500 delegates from across the country.

The event will have national and international speakers and the overarching themes of the Conference will include:

- International co-operation
- The role of rural women in agriculture and sustainable rural development
- Leadership and involvement of rural women
- Diversification and new patterns of employment
 - Dynamics of demography - migrations, ageing, depopulation and changing population.

The location for the event will be Carlisle, which is a rural city and fulfils all the criteria to host a conference of this size, whilst retaining strong links with rural communities surrounding it. Clearly for the city to stage this conference, the first of its kind in the country, it will bring positive benefits and will undoubtedly help to promote Carlisle

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report requests Members to:

- Endorse the Project
- Note the 'in kind' contributions which the City Council will make as a contribution to the Project.
- Note that some funding may be requested by the Rural Women's Network as the Project progresses.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To inform Members of this project driven by the Cumbria NRW which, if successful, will help to give much needed support for women living in rural communities across the County. Members' endorsement will also help to publicise this key area of work and to confirm the City Council's commitment to its rural communities.

5 IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – there will be 'in kind' implications which will involve the Executive Directors' time and will be part of the Council's cross-cutting and partnership work.
- Financial – there are no financial implications at this stage of the project development, but the Council may be asked for a contribution at a later stage of the process.
- Legal – there are no legal implications.
- Corporate – there are no corporate implications at this stage.
- Risk Management – there are no risk management implications.
- Equality Issues – clearly the development of this project will bring significant benefits to women living in rural communities, not just in Cumbria, but across the country.
- Environmental – there are no environmental issues.
- Crime and Disorder – there are no crime and disorder implications.