



INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 22 JANUARY 2009

Title: EAST CUMBRIA COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT (ECCP) & RESIDUAL SERVICES

Report of: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Report reference: CS / 04 09

Summary:

This report outlines the options presented to Executive on 18 December 2008 following the decisions taken by partner Councils to withdraw their grant funding for ECCP from the end of the current financial year.

Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:

The Committee is asked to comment on the proposed future role of the residual integrated service.

Recommendations:

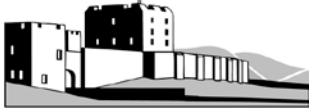
The Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the decisions taken at Executive of 18 December 2008 report reference CS / 99 08 attached namely:

1. That option 2 of the report be approved.
2. That the Director of Community Services is authorised to progress the dissolution of ECCP.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CS / 31 08, CS / 58 08, CS/ 99 / 08



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Date of Meeting: 18 December

Public

Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan:

Yes

Inside Policy Framework

Title: EAST CUMBRIA COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT (ECCP) &
RESIDUAL SERVICES

Report of: Director of Community Services

Report reference: CS 99/08

Summary:

This report outlines the options available to the City Council following the decisions taken by partner Councils to withdraw their grant funding for ECCP from the end of the current financial year.

Recommendations: It is RECOMMENDED that:-

1. The Executive approves Option 2 with the assimilation of 2 posts (1.6FTE) from ECCP into the Green Spaces team based at Bousteads Grassing
2. The Executive authorises the Director of Community Services to progress the dissolution of ECCP.

Contact Officer: Phil Gray

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CS 58/08 CS 31/08

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

- 1.1 East Cumbria Countryside Project (ECCP) was established in 1985 as a partnership between Carlisle City Council, Eden District Council and Cumbria County Council with financial support from the (then) Countryside Commission.

In August 2008, Eden District Council announced that it intended to withdraw its funding from the partnership with effect from 1 April 2009. In the light of this decision the County Council has also given notice of its intention to withdraw funding at the same time.

In CS 31/08 the Executive dealt with an initial package of action on 2 redundancies associated with the reduction of funding from ECCP at that time and asked for a review of the remaining services within 6 months. This review has been shaped by the decision of the other funding partners and is presented to Executive for consideration.

The current report seeks to establish which of the services currently supplied by ECCP, if any, can be retained within Carlisle City Council as a continuation of the work carried out by ECCP in Carlisle's rural area.

- 1.2 Since its launch in 1985 ECCP has carried out a wide range of services across east Cumbria, including Carlisle's rural area. In that time the organisation has worked closely with parish councils and community groups on a large number of projects and services – a short summary is given at Appendix 1. The culture of the organisation has been working with a minimum of bureaucracy and at the grass-roots level to find practical solutions on the ground.

Support for this approach was backed-up by the willingness of the 3 local authority partners to support ECCP financially and administratively, with Carlisle City Council acting as accountable body and employing authority.

This initiative has always been popular with the Parish Councils in Carlisle's rural area. Following the announcement of Eden DC's decision to withdraw, 5 parishes have written to the City Council to express their hope that a residual service can be continued in some form. Four parishes make specific reference to the maintenance of public rights of way in the rural area as a service that they have found particularly valuable. Letters from individual residents have highlighted the value of organised walks, especially those with a 'healthy lifestyle' theme.

- 1.3 A number of options have been assessed for the future and these are set out, but it is important to emphasise that ECCP as an entity will cease to exist at the end of the financial year. A decision is required now to enable actions to be taken to complete the relevant actions prior to the end of the financial year.

1.3.1 Option 1 – Complete Cessation of the Service

In this option ECCP is wound up at 31 March 2009 and all 5 remaining staff are made redundant. Redundancy and close-down costs are shared between the 3 local authorities proportionally to their contribution. The current estimated cost of making all these staff redundant is approx. £160,000 (this may vary slightly subject to finalisation of pension calculations). This may be reduced once the final operating position is known at the end of the financial year. In accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement the City Council's proportion of this cost would be up to £68,000.

Benefits – this option creates a clean line underneath ECCP and allows the 3 partner authorities to pay their share of the residual costs and dissolve the partnership. The staff are entirely clear about their short-term future. Significant revenue savings are achieved.

Disadvantages – rural areas lose a valuable service-provider and the expertise is lost or dispersed. There is no continuation of the projects initiated by ECCP that are still relevant to the Carlisle district. High risk that the rural public paths will not be maintained and promoted to the same level. Loss of services to the people of Carlisle including environmental learning, events, wildlife and landscape conservation, healthy countryside activities.

1.3.2 Option 2 – Continuation of residual services

In this option the key services provided by ECCP are identified and the staff who currently deliver them are incorporated into the Green Spaces team at Bousteads Grassing. There is no net cost to the City Council going forward as the revenue funding is already within the Council's budget as a contribution to ECCP.

The remaining staff are made redundant under the terms of the City Council's policies. The costs of redundancies will be divided proportionally between Eden District Council and Cumbria County Council.

Benefits – there is continuation of those services that are most valued by the City Council, parish councils and rural communities. Expertise and knowledge is kept within Carlisle and can be put to wider use within the City Council. Retention of the revenue-generating projects initiated by ECCP and still in operation. Support for rural areas within Carlisle district. No net cost implications as revenue funding already in place.

Disadvantages – not all staff and services can be retained due to cost implications so a decision is required on which to retain. No direct revenue savings are achieved.

The services and posts to be retained within Green Spaces team would be:-

Key Service 1 - Rights of way maintenance

Funding for the maintenance works is provided directly by the County Council, in the region of £40,000 annually. It is proposed that this function, together with the officer currently in post (0.6FTE) is retained and added to the Green Spaces team establishment.

The cost of this proposal would be approximately £18,000 p.a. (salary and on-costs, subject to Job Evaluation).

Key Service 2 - People and places

In the past 5 years ECCP has been closely involved in developing a programme of Health Walks for Carlisle residents. With the increasing interest in healthy lifestyles, including outdoor recreation, this service could be extended to cover more wards and benefit more residents.

The cost of retaining this post, with a brief to provide opportunities for residents and visitors to take part in countryside events and activities would be £38,000 (subject to Job Evaluation) plus a small operational budget of £5,900.

Costs and assimilation

Net contribution from City Council	68,900	
Booklet sales	3,000	
Total		71,900
Cost of employee 1 (rights of way)	20,500	
Cost of employee 2 (people & place)	40,500	
Supplies & Services, Transport etc	5,000	
Operational budget	5,900	

Total

71,900

Discontinued service – Woodlands and landscape

If Option 2 is chosen, the service to be discontinued would be the landscape and woodland advisory role. While this has been an important role in the rural areas and the postholder has organised planting and management of thousands of trees over the years, the Green Spaces team already contains a number of individuals with the qualifications to provide this expertise in-house. If additional help is required for specific tasks, it can be bought in as required.

- 1.4 Whichever option is chosen, ECCP as a stand-alone operation will cease to exist from 31 March 2009. This has a further knock-on effect in regard to the central overheads that have been charged to the organisation (£39,800 in the current year, of which Corporate Services' share is £29,600). The Director of Corporate Services' comments include a response to this position.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Consultation to Date. ECCP Executive Cumbria County Council, Eden District Council, employees.
- 2.2 Consultation proposed. As above.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is RECOMMENDED that:-

1. The Executive approves Option 2 with the assimilation of 2 posts (1.6FTE) from ECCP into the Green Spaces team based at Bousteads Grassing
2. The Executive authorises the Director of Community Services to progress the dissolution of ECCP

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The services identified for continuation are those which directly contribute to the City Council's corporate objectives (Cleaner, Greener and Safer; Learning City) and have direct benefits for residents.

A further advantage of keeping the rights of way maintenance service is that the work on the ground is 100% funded by the County Council.

These services have particular impact in the rural wards, where local footpaths and by-ways provide an alternative mode of transport to school, shops and work.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – Should option 1 be preferred this would result in 5 employees being made redundant. Option 2 would retain 2 employees (defined through the Councils Assimilation Policy) and 3 redundancies.

- Financial –

One off costs

The costs of the options recommended are as follows:-

Option 1 – total redundancy costs £160,000 of which the forecast contribution for Carlisle City Council would be up to £68,000

Option 2 – no one-off costs to the City Council

Should the Executive wish to pursue option 1 then a supplementary estimate of up to £68,000 would need to be approved by Council.

Recurring costs and savings

It is stated in the report that there will be no additional recurring revenue costs nor savings arising from implementing Option 2.

The 2008/09 net cost to the Authority is £108,600, £39,800 of which are for support services and the balance of £68,800 are for direct staffing costs which it is proposed will transfer to the Green Spaces Team in the Community Services Directorate.

The majority of the support services costs are for IT recharges(c£20k), and People Policy and Performance recharges (c£8k.) If the costs of the recharged services are not reduced or saved the recharge will go elsewhere in the Council. The proposed Shared ICT Services with Allerdale will limit further IT savings being made available, however the proposed Shared Management or internal restructure initiatives could consider delivering savings in the remaining service areas making recharges.

- Legal – The dissolution of the ECCP must be in accordance with the terms of the partnership agreement and in agreement with the other partners when the said terms are less than clear. The content of this Report indicates that such an agreement has already been reached in relation to both Options 1 and 2. Any redundancy must be carried out in accordance with the statutory regime which covers the said action and also in accordance with the Council's own adopted policy.
- Corporate – The contribution the residual service provides to corporate priorities, particularly in the rural area, needs to be balanced by the potential financial saving's.
- Risk Management – Option 1 would have a negative impact on access within the rural area. Option 2 is fully funded from within the current base budget and is not reliant on grant funding although this can be pursued on a 'one-off' basis.
- Equality and Disability – The selection of option 2 would sustain the access opportunities in the rural area.
- Environmental – The activities of a residual service would provide a positive impact, particularly to the rural area.
- Crime and Disorder – N/A
- Impact on Customers – The current services of ECCP are highly regarded by members of the community and many Parish Councils. Option 2 provides a continuation of key activities.

ECCP projects and services, Carlisle district.

1. 'Eden Benchmarks' sculptured seats – completed in 2001, the Eden Benchmarks project created 10 landmark stone seats along the length of the River Eden including Wetheral, Bitts Park and Rockcliffe.
2. 'Discover Eden' – 90% funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, a series of discovery trails following the rivers Eden, Petteril and Caldew. Full-colour guide booklets to accompany the routes
3. Health walks – weekly walks held in Carlisle's parks and green spaces to help people enjoy the health and social benefits of walking.
4. 'Doorstep Walks' – a pack of leaflets for Carlisle with details of routes suitable for all abilities designed to encourage people to take individual action to improve their health.
5. 'Woodland Walks' – a free booklet with maps and details of walks through woodland in Carlisle, suitable for all the family.
6. 'Hadrian's Wall Path Links' – a series of illustrated leaflets with maps showing short, circular walks linking with the Hadrian's Wall national trail.
7. Open Access Maps – outdoor information panels to show the areas of Open Access land available to the public.
8. Forest of Geltsdale – major landscape restoration project in partnership with Forestry Commission and RSPB to plant thousands of native trees and hedgerows in the North Pennines AONB (Gt Corby and Geltsdale ward)
9. Public Rights of Way maintenance – a £40,000 annual programme of works funded by the Highway Authority to bring rural public paths into useable condition.
10. Events & Activities – annual programmes of events and activities for families and young people. Country walks, cycle rides, wildlife watching, traditional crafts etc. A popular programme is Rock Detectives for young fossil-hunters, with 60 local families on the mailing-list.