

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

CARLISLE
CITY COUNCIL



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Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting:

27th March 2003

Title: MONITORING RURAL POLICY – PROGRESS ON ‘DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES’ AND ‘HEALTH AND WELL-BEING’ THEMES

Report of: Head of Economic and Community Development

Report reference: ECD.06/03

Summary:

The report presents an overview of the progress made in implementing the Rural Strategy’s ‘Developing Communities’ and ‘Health and Well-Being’ themes.

Recommendations:

The Committee makes observations and comments on these elements of rural policy.

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COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27th March 2003

Monitoring Rural Policy – Progress on ‘Developing Communities’ and ‘Health and Well-Being’ themes

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report is part of a series of position statements on the Rural Strategy Action Plans approved by the Council in April 2002. This report is the second within the financial year and gives an overview of the actions being implemented and considerations for future policy direction and action programmes.

1.2 The new Rural Community Support Officer commenced in post on 13th January 2003, following the secondment of the previous post-holder to the Longtown Investment Partnership. With a full staff complement now in place, the Rural Strategy will be given the profile and priority needed to effectively deliver the actions outlined. This will include the publication and promotion of the Rural Strategy and the pro-active involvement of other agencies in the development and implementation of the action plans accompanying the strategy. Internally within the Council, the corporate regeneration team will play a key role in delivering the Rural Strategy across the authority.

2.0 Overview

2.1 In order to set the actions being delivered through the Rural Strategy in context, there are several overarching policy issues which will influence how, what and when actions will be implemented.

2.2 The Cumbria Rural Regeneration Company, which will deliver the Cumbria Rural Action Zone (RAZ) programme, will have a significant impact on regeneration in rural Carlisle. The board of the company has now been appointed. Charles Woodhouse has been appointed as the Chairman, with Chris Torkington as the Chief Executive and Richard Pealing as Head of Programmes. A first year delivery plan is currently being compiled. Several of the actions and projects in the Action Plans have been proposed to the RAZ for inclusion in the first year delivery plan.

2.3 Community led regeneration which embraces economic, social and environmental issues will be key to the delivery of the Rural Strategy. This approach has been adopted in Longtown through the Longtown Investment Partnership and the Market Town Initiative (MTI). The Countryside Agency provides models for the activity through the MTI and Vital Villages programmes which will need to be adapted and replicated in other areas in order to drive forward initiatives and programmes in the rural areas. Increasingly funding bodies are favouring this approach to area based regeneration. It is likely that the RAZ will prefer to fund packages of projects rather than small individual schemes and where individual schemes are considered the local strategic context will need to be evidenced. It will be imperative to have the infrastructure in place locally to deliver these packages.

2.4 In order to gain the support and commitment of partner organisations to the delivery of the Rural Strategy, a communication exercise needs to be undertaken. This work would involve contacting partner organisations increase awareness of the Rural Strategy and the link to the intensive Rural Voice consultation exercise carried out in 1999/2000 which gained the support of all the major stakeholders in rural Carlisle. This exercise will need to make links with the Carlisle and Eden Local Strategic Partnership and Cumbria Rural Regeneration Company. The Council and the Carlisle Parish Councils Association would lead the exercise.

2.5 An important consideration for the Council will be the introduction of rural proofing for all policies and services delivered by the Council. Rural proofing involves the Council checking all policies and services in terms of their impact on rural areas and ensuring that rural needs are reflected and met through community strategies, local strategic partnerships and public service agreements. The Local Government Association has carried out an inquiry into rural revival which highlights the need for all rural (or part rural) authorities to implement rural proofing to take forward rural

governance.

3.0 Developing Communities issues

3.1 The CPCA continues to play a vital role in encouraging local democracy within the Carlisle District. The local elections in May will see 26 parishes in the district go out for election. The Parish Democracy Programme managed and delivered by Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) continues to provide vital support and training to parish councils. The Parish Democracy Programme will come to an end in 2004. A County Training Partnership has been established, led by CALC, to develop a Cumbria Training Strategy for Town and Parish Councils to build on the work undertaken through the Parish Democracy Programme. Carlisle City Council is represented at officer level on the Training Partnership.

3.2 The CPCA is developing a position statement in response to the debate on regional government, the formation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and the designation of the RAZ. The paper will aim to support individual parish councils through changing situations. The CPCA is now represented on the Carlisle and Eden LSP.

3.3 The formation of a "rural office" within the Civic Centre will allow local rural groups and members of the community to access City Council and VAC services in a central location. The rural office has been agreed and should be established as soon as the Civic Centre alterations are sanctioned and work stations are made available on the 5th floor.

3.4 The Longtown Investment Partnership, with partners including the City Council, has now agreed the action plan for Longtown which is due to be published by end of March 2003. Given that the plan contains over 100 individual projects, there is a need to develop a first year delivery plan which will identify projects which can be implemented in 2003/04. Discussions are taking place with North West Development Agency to develop packages of projects capable of accessing NWDA financial support. The Longtown Market Town Initiative will be one of the most significant elements of the Rural Strategy in terms of initiating the community led regeneration approach in rural Carlisle.

3.5 Brampton Parish Council is commencing the development of an Action Plan for Brampton and the surrounding area. The Parish Council has agreed to seek support through the Vital Villages programme to undertake a similar action planning exercise to that undertaken in Longtown. The project is still at an early stage. The next step is to hold a wider meeting in the Brampton area with the key local organisations and neighbouring parishes. Voluntary Action Cumbria is facilitating this process. The development of the action plan will enable future priorities for the Brampton and surrounding area to be identified and solutions proposed to address these issues. It is hoped that the consultation exercise will be undertaken during summer 2003 with the action plan produced by end of 2003..

4.0 Health and Well-Being issues

4.1 Significant changes are taking place within the Health Action Zone framework, with the abolition of the Local Health Group and the creation of two new groupings, the West Cumbria and East Cumbria Health Groups. Due to the changes within the county and restructuring and staff shortages within the Council, little progress has been made in terms of the health section of the Action Plan. The updating and development of actions within this section will be a priority for the coming year.

4.2 Affordable housing has been identified as a key issue of concern within the rural

parishes. In order to implement affordable housing schemes, rural housing needs assessments must be carried out in parishes to identify the need. The Council retains Cumbria Rural Housing Trust to carry out housing need assessments. The most recent study has been carried out in Castle Carrock. The studies planned for 2003/04 are Longtown, Burgh by Sands and Laversdale.

4.3 The transfer of housing stock to Carlisle Housing Association (CHA) also presents a need to develop a close working relationship between rural practitioners and CHA staff. Again this are will be a priority area for development in the coming year. A possible first step could be to develop regular contact meetings between officers from the City Council, County Council, CHA and Voluntary Action Cumbria. The formation of the rural office will assist to facilitate this process.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 In summary, the recommendations are:

- a) that the updates on the actions being implemented be noted
- b) that consideration is given to rural proofing within the authority