



COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 27th March 2008

Title: MONITORING RURAL POLICY

Report of: Director of Development Services

Report reference: DS.34/08

Summary:

To provide an update report on the implementation of rural policy and programmes in the rural area.

Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:

- Make comments and observations on the policies, programmes and activity outlined in this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the committee:

- Agree the action plan for monitoring the Parish Charter commitments.

Contact Officer: Zoe Sutton/Neil Griffiths

Ext: 7312 / 7124

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: Prepared from: DS.87/07 - Monitoring Rural Policy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is part of the regular periodic reporting arrangements for Monitoring Rural Policy. The report provides an update from the previous report submitted in October 2007 (reference DS 87/07).

2.0 RURAL POLICY BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 With the **Rural Strategy** now incorporated into the **Carlisle Community Strategy** as a cross-cutting theme, rural issues are now being considered under all the individual Local Area Agreement strands. The Rural Support Officer now attends the thematic working groups of the Partnership to facilitate decisions on rural matters and receive feedback on any rural issues from members of the themed groups on a twice-yearly basis. It is hoped that through these mechanisms appropriate actions identified through community planning could be incorporated into specific Group delivery plans. Much of the evidence that is presented to the groups is that which is drawn from the actions contained within all the community / parish plans within the District, this gives thematic group members the opportunity of having a clearer understanding of the value of rural community led planning. This approach also gives communities, through their plans, the opportunity to work through the LSP to see how the Partnership can support community led activity, and presents an opportunity to incorporate those issues and concerns into the forthcoming review of the Community Plan.
- 2.2 **The Parish Charter** is now approaching 12 months since its launch and with regard to the monitoring and review element of the document there is little supporting evidence that many of the commitments signed up to in the agreement are being met. Within the document there are 51 actions that sit with the City Council and currently there is no central recording mechanism on activity on those commitments. There is a continuing need to ensure that individual departments within the Council are aware of the commitments contained within the Charter (refer to Appendix 1). Accepting that this is a tri-partite commitment there are also issues with the other two parties to the agreement in terms of their measurement of its effectiveness. It is fair to say that many of the actions would be difficult to measure and are fairly broad in terms of accountability. Despite this there are examples of where these commitments are being met in relation to the work having been carried out on the production of a Community/Parish Plan Protocol. Other examples include joint City Council and CPCA meetings held twice yearly, Parish Council

representatives sitting on Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Task and Finish Groups and Standards Committee meetings. It may well be that there are other examples of commitments having been met but no firm evidence is available. Therefore in order to improve monitoring and to ensure a manageable process is in place from those 51 commitments six specific actions have been identified for more detailed monitoring (see shaded boxes in Appendix 1). It is proposed to focus on six commitments, and put in place a mechanism for measurement. Progress will be reported back to Overview and Scrutiny in 6 months time and to the inter authority meetings in accordance with the Charter. These six priorities have been agreed with the County, CALC and the Rural Support Group representatives. Identifying these would allow greater focus on those commitments that the CPCA/City Council considers to be of highest priority. For those actions that cannot be 'counted' the action plan will be updated with evidence or examples of where the commitment is being met, or where not being met and the reason where possible as to why not.

- 2.3 **The Community Parish Plan Protocol** has now been completed and has been approved by the Executive. The Protocol will now be taken SMT to ensure that it is recognised across all relevant departments when producing plans.

3.0 CURRENT INITIATIVES

3.1 LAA Theme: Economic Priorities

- 3.1.1 The **Longtown Market Town Initiative** (MTI) programme is now close to being completed. By the time of the Committee all practical development activity will have ceased. The focus of work recently has been to ensure the smooth run down and completion of individual projects and to finish collecting the output data, particularly from follow up visits to businesses benefiting from the expansion scheme. The current newsletter is appended to this report and provides more details and case studies (refer to Appendix 2).
- 3.1.2 The City Council's role as Accountable Body to the programme will continue into 2008/9 as there will be expenditure still to be incurred and claimed from businesses claiming expansion grants. This is typically where a grant has been approved but where there has been delay in the business incurring the expenditure. However, the partnership agreement with the lead body (Longtown & District Enterprise Trust) will end on 31st March along with the contracts of all the staff.

- 3.1.3 The Trust is making progress towards sustaining activities beyond March and has bid for resources for core costs and contracts to deliver specific services.

Rural Business Support.

- 3.1.4 Over the last year a range of programmes have been delivered under the Carlisle Renaissance interim programme.
- 3.1.5 The Cumbria Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been commissioned to deliver a business start up programme to create 120 new businesses. Whilst this is a City wide programme, three of the business start up courses were delivered at Brampton Business Centre and Telecentre to ensure that people from the rural area could access support.
- 3.1.6 The Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency were commissioned to deliver a programme of support for tourism businesses. This included one to one advice, IT advice, three rural business networking days and three IT days held in Brampton and Longtown. The project also included the production of a series of DVD clips designed to help businesses improve their web sites. Take up this service has been particularly good amongst rural businesses.
- 3.1.7 Cumbria Tourism has been responsible for the delivery of a programme of additional support around management and leadership, improving standards and staff training. Again, the take up by rural businesses has been encouraging.
- 3.1.8 Linked to the business start up programme, the City Council has established a grant scheme to help new businesses with their marketing. Some matched funding has been obtained through the LEADER+ programme to help support wider coverage of the rural area included within this programme.

Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)

- 3.1.9 Since the last report a shadow Local Action Group (LAG) has been formed to lead the submission of a bid and the development of a new LEADER programme. A full application for LEADER designation and funding was submitted to the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) in January. A decision is expected by the time the Committee meets and a verbal update will be given.

3.1.10 The programme, which includes the whole of Carlisle District except the urban area is called Solway, Border and Eden. The boundary is crescent shaped (avoiding the Lake District National Park) taking in the communities of Appleby, Penrith and Alston to the east, Carlisle and the Solway to the north and stretching down the west coast from Maryport to Egremont (excluding Workington and Whitehaven). The remaining rural area of the County is included in a separate application following the boundaries of the previous Fells and Dales LEADER+ programme.

3.1.11 The programme runs from 2007-13 and has an overall value of £7.7m grant split between the following activities:

Support to Agriculture and Forestry	Quality of Life in Rural Areas
Vocational training	Agricultural diversification
Advisory services	Business creation and development
Co-operative activities	Tourism
Environmental improvements to holdings	Basic Services
Improving economic value of forests	Rural Heritage
Added value activities	Training
Small scale infrastructure	Skills

3.1.12 Following approval of the Programme the project staff will be recruited and the community based LAG that will oversee the programme will be re-convened, strengthened and formalised. All this is expected to lead to a substantive start of the programme in mid summer this year.

3.2 **LAA Theme: Children and Young People**

3.2.1 **Play for Today; Play for Tomorrow** is the Play Policy and Strategy that has been endorsed by Carlisle City Council and the local Play Partnership. Historically Carlisle City Council's play provision in rural areas is focussed on a programme of open access summer holiday play schemes for 5 to 11 year olds, based in village halls. The Children and Young People's Team also deliver a rural schools programme in the summer term. As a result of the Play Strategy there is a commitment to work towards developing and providing play and positive activities for 5 to 19 year olds all year round, rather than just concentrating on five weeks during the summer holidays. In addition it is anticipated that there will be a move to providing specialist projects and outdoor play experiences. Key to the implementation of these changes will be the appointment of two new 'face2face' Children and Young People's Co-ordinators. These additional staff will increase Carlisle City Council's team of play and youth workers to five, building capacity that

will result in a growth in the delivery of services in both rural and urban areas. These new posts will be funded for three years through the BIG lottery Children's Play Initiative. It is anticipated that the new staff will have been appointed by the end of April 2008. Activities for the summer holidays are currently being developed but will still include village hall based play schemes and the 'Making Time to Play' schools programme.

- 3.2.2 **Rural Sports Delivery- Sports 4 Allsorts** is a family based multi sports session which started in January and is currently ongoing. A number of sporting activities have been on offer in village halls in Dalston, Burgh by Sands and Roadhead with a good attendance at each session. **GO4IT-Rural** is a programme that runs through the school holidays aimed at 10-17 year olds and include a number of activities including trampolining, canoeing, rock climbing, tennis and rowing, and has proved very popular.

3.3 **LAA Theme: Healthy Communities and Older People**

- 3.3.1 Through the Health Communities and Older Peoples thematic group a series of Public Health events have taken place across the District with two having taken place in the rural area (Longtown and Brampton). These events have been co-ordinated by Cumbria CVS and designed to improve the health of local residents. Within this thematic group it is intended that they will produce an action plan which will identify 50% of their funding to be allocated to rural projects.

3.4 **LAA Theme: Safer Stronger Communities**

- 3.4.1 **Community / Parish Plans:** - Currently seventeen parishes are covered by a community or parish plan within the District with a further four parishes currently going through the process of producing of a plan, i.e Cummersdale, and a cluster plan including Arthuret, Kirkandrews, and Kingmoor. However, progress with the remaining parishes is slow. The Task and Finish Group has now completed its work on the production of a Community / Parish Plan Protocol and that has now been approved by the Council's Executive. This is now seen as an opportune time to promote the concept of community planning once more in an effort to encourage take up in the remaining parishes.
- 3.4.2 **Rural Voice:** - Continues to be well supported and recognised as a useful means of informing community groups, partnerships and the authorities of rural issues. Its circulation continues to grow with at present over 250 recipients of the newsletter.

Topics covered included issues such as improving access to services for rural community groups, the pilot asset reviews in Longtown and Brampton, the Post Office network changes and an opportunity to input in the forthcoming Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership Strategic Assessment.

- 3.4.3 **Hadrian's Wall Local Concerns Group:** - The Group has met twice since October 2008 with the main agenda item being the consultation strategy on the update of the Hadrian's Wall Management Plan.
- 3.4.4 The consultation will include questionnaires at, probably 6 locations along the Wall and a number of public meetings. Feedback from these consultations will be fed back into the plan with this due to take place at the beginning May.
- 3.4.5 **Village Halls:** - Following on from the last report on energy surveys of village halls, work has continued with LA21 and Cumbria Waste Management to access grant funding for energy improvements to community buildings. Currently over 20 audits have taken place across the District, which has included 7 village halls. Advice and support has been given to these groups to access up to £10,000 each for improvements on energy efficiency, and to act on the recommendations of the surveys.
- 3.4.6 **Joint City Council/CPCA Meetings:** - The main discussion at the joint meeting on the 3rd December 2007 centred around the implications of the Local Government White Paper. The debate focused on how parishes could be involved in decisions around the implications of the Act, and how it would be delivered in rural areas. Following on from this, a further meeting took place with the City Council's Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, the Chair of the CPCA and the Chief Officer of CALC. This meeting resulted in two pilot areas being identified in urban and rural areas of the District for implementation of some of the White Paper recommendations.

4.0 RURAL POLICY WIDER CONTEXT

- 4.1 **Rural Support Group:** - Continues to meet bi-monthly with full support of the County Council, VAC, CALC and Cumbria CVS. There is still a focus on the issue of rural proofing with work being conducted around the inclusion of rurality as a strand of the equality strategy, closely working with the City Council Performance Officer to identify key rural priorities. The Group has been involved in the consultation

process on the Economic Strategy and activity around the completion of the community planning protocol.

- 4.2 **Carnegie UK:** - Have been carrying out a series of action learning sets in the three rural counties of the Northwest, Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire. This has centred on the inability that community plans currently have in influencing strategy and policy, and focussed on three key areas of influence, Community Strategies, Local Development Frameworks and Local Area Agreements. **Community Led Planning – Why It Matters** is the report published as a result of the three action learning sets and it identifies 10 key areas where progress could be made. These points highlight areas that would help create cohesive, empowered and active communities, which are at the heart of the Government's vision for Britain. This document will be offered to communities, partners and stakeholders to increase awareness of the power of effective community planning.

Community Plans database: - Voluntary Action Cumbria, funded by the County Council are currently creating a database of issues and actions drawn from current community plans across the County. The actions from plans within this District will also be incorporated onto the database which will provide the ability to analyse those actions and identify cross cutting themes. Those cross cutting themes could then be used to help to inform local delivery plans.

5.0 **Recommendation:**

- 5.1 Agree the action plan for monitoring the Parish Charter commitments.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Carlisle City Charter Commitments – Carlisle City Council

Appendix 2: Longtown MTI Newsletter Issue 3

APPENDIX 1

Carlisle City Charter Commitments – Carlisle City Council

SECTION A: MUTUAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Successful partnership working at the parish level can only be achieved if the partners – the County Council, the City Council and the Parish Councils – understand and respect each other's roles and work to complement those roles in serving the community. It is recognised in this Charter that all three tiers of Local Government are equal partners.

CHARTER COMMITMENT	ACTIVITY TO DATE/ACTIONS
The County Council, the City Council and the Parish Councils – understand and respect each other's roles and work to complement those roles in serving the community	Difficult to measure

SECTION B: GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS AND LIAISON

In Cumbria there are three tiers of local government and this makes effective communication between the tiers a major challenge. Securing good communication and liaison between the parish tier and the principal Authorities is a cornerstone of this 'Parish Charter'. This involves communication at the most strategic level – sharing each others' aims – right down to careful liaison on specific local projects.

Host at least one meeting per year with the Parish Councils in Carlisle to discuss corporate aims and other matters of mutual concern.	Joint meetings held twice yearly
Nominate the Parish Liaison Officer, and any other appropriate officers, to participate in the meetings of the Carlisle Parish Councils Association (CPCA)	Rural Support Office performs this role
Give a written response to a written communication (including emails) from a Parish Council within 10 working days or provide a holding reply saying when a full reply will be available and which officer is dealing with the matter.	This, it is agreed is a difficult commitment to measure without a central system of co-ordinating communications coming into the Civic Centre, however with the introduction of the CRM within the next 12 month this should then be achievable.

CHARTER COMMITMENT	ACTIVITY TO DATE/ACTIONS
Encourage the attendance of County/City councillors at Parish Council meetings.	Not known
Facilitate greater electronic communication and sharing of information between Principal Authorities and Parish Councils through the Connected Cumbria Partnership	Not known
<u>SECTION C: GENERAL SUPPORT AND TRAINING</u> Parish Councils have very limited resources available to them and rely, to varying degrees, on the professional support that can be provided by others. Most Parish Councils (over 90%) are members of the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) and receive advice, support and training from the Association. Nevertheless, there are some circumstances where the assistance of Principal Authority officers can be particularly useful to a Parish Council.	
Provide regular training events for Parish Councils on topics that relate to the Principal Authority's statutory functions, notably the Code of Conduct, town and country planning (see section F), financial arrangements and transport/ highways	Not known
Invite new Parish Clerks to attend one of their staff or member induction courses, where appropriate	Not known
Make arrangements for Parish Councils (councillors and staff) to be invited to appropriate training events arranged by the Principal Authority for its own purposes.	Undertake a consultation exercise with Parish Clerks and Councillors as to identifying their training needs. Establish whether those training needs could be incorporated into the Council corporate training programme.
Invite Parish Council representatives to attend the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee when Monitoring Rural Policy and other reports relevant to the rural area are being presented	Evidence of this being met
Invite Parish Council representatives to participate in Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups where appropriate	Evidence of this being met

SECTION D: CLOSER JOINT GOVERNANCE

Town and Parish Councils and Principal Authorities share many statutory functions and share the desire to deliver 'joined up' local government services to the general public. This requires appropriate governance arrangements where all tiers of local government can work together and share accountability. Principal Authorities are concerned to ensure that the services they provide are effective in meeting the real needs of the community on the ground. Parish Councils are well placed to report on whether or not this is being achieved.

CHARTER COMMITMENT	ACTIVITY TO DATE/ACTIONS
Seek Parish Council representatives to sit on the Standards Committee in accordance with statutory requirements	Evidence of this being met
Support Parish Council participation (through Cumbria Association of Local Councils) in the County Strategic Partnership, the Carlisle Local Strategic Partnership and the arrangements for Local Area Agreements	Chair of CPCA involvement

SECTION E: PARTICIPATION and CONSULTATION

Public participation and consultation is one of the cornerstones of open government and can lead to better constructed policies and a more engaged general public. Parish Councils represent the opinions of a particular community rather than a specific interest group and welcome the opportunity to provide views to Principal Authorities on emerging policies and plans. Consultations with Parish Councils require careful preparation if all parties are to get benefits from such exercises.

Seek the participation of and consult with Parish Councils on community strategies and other Principal Authority policies that affect parishes.	Chair of CPCA involvement
Seek the participation of and consult with Parish Councils on the detailed programmes and plans for the implementation of policies that affect parishes.	Not known
Seek the participation of and consult with Parish Councils on any specific scheme being promoted by an Authority that affects an individual parish.	Not known

CHARTER COMMITMENT	ACTIVITY TO DATE/ACTIONS
Invite parish representatives to participate in appropriate committees, working parties and meetings where emerging policies and implementation plans affecting parishes are being discussed	Chair of the CPCA sits within the LSP Deputy CPCA chair sits on LSP sub groups.
Invite Parish Councils to any public meetings and exhibitions about policies and plans affecting the parish	Chair of CPCA
Ensure that all consultation documents, prepared by the two Principal Authorities, sent to Parish Councils are prepared in accordance with the 'Consultation Protocol' (set out in Annex 1 on page 17).	Identify with the CPCA what issues Parish Councils feel they should be consulted on. Identify those corporate policy items that the City Council should consult on, and identify a mechanism for consulting, i.e. through CPCA, directly with Parish Councils, through LSP theme groups.
Discuss with the Parish Council concerned at the earliest possible stage, any Principal Authority promoted plan or scheme that affects that specific parish.	Not known
Take Parish Council views into account before making decisions	Not known
Allow appropriate officers to attend Parish Council meetings to explain and discuss policies and plans	Not known
Meet with the Parish Council when particularly contentious issues cannot be resolved in any other way	Through the joint CPCA/City Council meetings, Chair CPCA holding joint meetings with CEO, Leader
<u>SECTION F: TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING</u> The opportunities to become involved in the town and country planning system are of keen interest to most Parish Councils. Planning policies and decision can have a substantial impact on the future of local communities. Planning policies and procedures can appear very complex to the average Parish Council and this requires active partnership working by Planning Authorities and Parish Councils to ensure community interests are properly served.	
Assist Parish Councils' participation in the statutory planning system	Not known
Ensure that Parish Councils are given full opportunities (beyond statutory minimum requirements, where possible) to participate in the preparation of Local Development Frameworks	Not known

CHARTER COMMITMENT	ACTIVITY TO DATE/ACTIONS
Ensure all planning consultation documents prepared by the two Principal Authorities are in accordance with the Consultation Protocol (Annex 1)	Not known
Consult Parish Councils on all planning applications (including revised plans where relevant) in accordance with statutory procedures and inform the Parish Council which Planning Officer is handling the application	Not known
Respond positively, where possible and appropriate, to any request for a Planning Officer to attend a Parish Council meeting to explain and discuss a planning application or a decision on a planning application	Not known
Invite a Parish Council representative to attend any member site visit held by the Planning Authority	Not known
In all circumstances where the decision of the Planning Authority is at variance to the recommendation of the Parish Council, a letter be sent to the Parish Council fully explaining the Planning Authority's decision	Not known
Respond in writing to enquiries by individual Parish Councils for further information on planning applications and changes in revised plans	Not known
Provide annual training to Parish Councils on planning policy and procedures	Not known
<p><u>SECTION G: COMMUNITY PLANNING</u></p> <p>Community planning is an area where Principal Authorities and Parish Councils are increasingly working together. Several Parish Councils have produced or are undertaking Parish Plans. The challenge is to ensure full community participation in Parish Plans and linkages with Principal Authority strategies.</p>	
Support and give guidance in the preparation and implementation of Parish Plans and/or Parish Design Statements as far as resources allow.	Promote the C/PP Protocol with community groups, identify strategic priorities identified from plans, and analyse the CPP database to identify cross cutting issues.

CHARTER COMMITMENT	ACTIVITY TO DATE/ACTIONS
Adopt an Authority-wide protocol for assisting the consideration and implementation of identified actions in Parish Plans and/or Parish Design Statements	Commitment met
<u>SECTION H: CONCURRENT FUNCTIONS AND FINANCIAL AWARENESS</u> Some statutory powers are available to both Principal Authorities and Parish Councils – these are known as ‘concurrent functions’. In order to avoid confusion and duplication it is necessary to agree locally which Authority is actually going to be responsible for which service. It is also necessary to agree financial arrangements between the Authorities, including arrangements to overcome the problem of “double taxation”. (Double taxation arises when council tax payers contribute towards the cost of a service (via the parish precept) which is being provided by their Town or Parish Council and also contribute (via the District Council precept) to the same service being provided in other parts of the District).	
Collect and pay over by the end of April in the relevant financial year any precept levy requested by Parish Councils	Not known
Operate and keep under review the financial arrangements with Parish Councils with respect to concurrent services as set out in Annex 2	The concurrent services grant is monitored on a annual basis under existing arrangements, being subject to review by parishes in accordance with both letter and spirit of the charter.
Operate a concurrent services grant scheme as may from time to time be agreed with the Carlisle Parish Councils Association and pay over by the end of June in the relevant financial year.	Not known
Operate the Parish Council and village hall grant schemes which offer annual grants towards capital projects within the parish.	Managed by RSO officer
Meet the election expenses of Parish Councils where the timing of these coincide with Carlisle City Council elections.	Not known
Provide annual play area inspections free of charge	Communities

CHARTER COMMITMENT	ACTIVITY TO DATE/ACTIONS
Provide village hall condition surveys free of charge on a five year rolling programme.	Not known
Provide IT helpdesk and technical support, access to the internal e-mail system and IT training free of charge	Evidence that Parish Councils regularly use the IT system
Review the recommendations from the Commission for Rural Communities report on the use of council tax received from second home owners	CPCA has been in discussions around this issue.
<u>SECTION I: DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP</u> The Local Government White Paper ('Strong and prosperous communities' – 26th October 2006) clearly shows that strong community or neighbourhood governance is a theme that will be taken forward. This will require increased emphasis on closer partnership working between local government tiers, now and in the future. Capable and effective Parish Councils will be a cornerstone of that process; those already with a high standard of best practice will need to maintain it and those wishing to improve will need to be encouraged, supported and given the tools to achieve it.	
Support the implementation of the Cumbria Training Strategy for Town and Parish Councils	Not known
Arrange meetings (at least once a year) between "Quality" Councils and the City Council's relevant portfolio holder to discuss service delivery in the District.	I believe this is done by Cll Bowman
Offer "Quality" councils the opportunity to receive a level of IT service similar to that received by City Councillors subject to terms being agreed	Not known
Offer "Quality" councils and those councils that are actively working towards "Quality" accreditation, the opportunity to enter into joint/agency arrangements for the delivery of certain services.	Meetings have taken place between the City Council and the one Quality Parish within the District, with the offer to be made to other councils considering quality council status.

CHARTER COMMITMENT	ACTIVITY TO DATE/ACTIONS
Promote the benefits of joint working via Neighbourhood Forums and the Carlisle Parish Councils Association.	Evidence of this through NF minutes and CPCA Exec meetings
Maintain the current arrangements with individual Parish Councils for the devolution of services.	Not known
<u>OPTION J: MONITORING AND REVIEW</u> It is important that this document is maintained as an up-to-date statement of the partnership arrangements between the three tiers of local government in Carlisle. The following arrangements will be followed:	
A report on the implementation and effectiveness of Parish Charter for Carlisle District will be on the agenda of the annual inter-Authority meetings described in B2. This report will be based on feedback obtained from Parish Councils, through the Carlisle Parish Councils Association, and Principal Authority Departments. The Rural Support Group (which is an officer group made up of representatives from organisations working in rural Carlisle) should also be consulted as part of the report preparation.	Did not happen at the last joint meeting in December