

## **Cabinet**

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**Date of Meeting:** 12 March 2019

**Report Title:** Rural Action Plan

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Janet Clowes, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Integration

**Senior Officer:** Frank Jordan, Executive Director Place

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### **1. Report Summary**

1.1. The Council has identified 'rural matters' as a strategic priority and has undertaken to build a strong and resilient rural economy with strong, supportive rural places and communities. The purpose of this report is to present a Rural Action Plan for the three year period 2019/20 - 2021/22 (attached as an Appendix to the report). This builds upon previous work following the publication in 2015 of Cheshire East's strategic document 'Where Rural Communities Matter', providing an update on achievements to date and identifying actions proposed for the next three years.

### **2. Recommendations**

2.1. That Cabinet:

2.1.1 Approve the Rural Action Plan.

2.1.2 Delegate authority to the Executive Director - Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Integration, to update the action plan as necessary.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

3.1. The Rural Action Plan is a significant contributor to achieving the aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan in a predominantly rural area.

3.2. As the Rural Action Plan relates to the whole borough and deals with matters across a number of portfolios, this is a key Cabinet decision. By the nature of

rural affairs, the action plan needs to be able to reflect changes in national policies and local priorities.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

4.1. There are no other options to consider.

#### **5. Background**

5.1. Just under 180,000 people, live in rural communities in Cheshire East, including the rural towns. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that delivery of our corporate outcomes meet the needs of rural communities and continue to support Cheshire East's quality of place. Cheshire East is a member of the Rural Services Network defined under its SPARSE rural classification as a Council considered predominantly rural, while the Defra Rural Classification for the Borough is 'urban with significant rural'.

5.2. 'Where Rural Communities Matter' was a local action plan produced by Cheshire East Council in 2015 that provided a statement on the value of the rural area and outlined a number of actions. Building on this approach, Cheshire East Council's rural action plan is set in the context of how existing strategies deliver on the rural agenda and at the same time, helping to identify those gaps that need to be addressed in the future. There is also a need to look at the role of the rural agenda in the Council's Economic and Environment Strategies and at future funding arrangements, including the Shared Prosperity Fund or environment and agricultural funding. The overall aim of the plan is to help inform strategic choices and identify priorities regarding the rural area, based on the Council's strategies and plans along with their related an evidence base.

5.3. A number of Council strategies and plans that relate to the rural principles or priorities have been identified and their contribution audited against four themes of connectivity, life chances and choices, environment and economy. This plan does not replace those strategies and plans, but rather provides a rural focus to help decision makers ensure that the rural dimensions are understood and to help to co-ordinate actions.

5.4. It is hoped that this plan provides a framework that will allow further consideration of policy and strategic direction, positioning the Council to be able to respond to changes at national level. This is part of an ongoing process that needs to be able to adapt to reflect changes.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

6.1.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report but CEC Legal Services has been consulted and will support in relation to any specific legal issues that arise in the future.

### **6.2. Finance Implications**

6.2.1. Actions covered by the rural action plan will be delivered within existing service budgets, normally related to the lead service identified in the plan. While the future of funding arrangements for agriculture and rural development is currently unclear, it is hoped that the plan may still provide the Council with an approach to what shapes the character and nature of the rural area, in preparation for any future changes to policy and funding.

### **6.3. Policy Implications**

6.3.1. Cheshire East is defined by the Rural Services Network 'SPARSE classification' as a council considered 'predominantly rural', while the Defra Rural Classification for the Borough is 'urban with significant rural'.

6.3.2. Cheshire East Council's rural action plan is set in the context of how existing strategies deliver on the rural agenda and at the same time, helping to identify those gaps that need to be addressed in the future. A number of Council strategies and plans that relate to the rural principles or priorities have been identified and their contribution audited against four themes of connectivity, life chances and choices, environment and economy. The economy in rural areas and its contribution to 'quality of place' play an important role in Cheshire East, contributing to economic well-being.

6.3.3. It is hoped that this framework will allow consideration of policy and strategic direction. The Rural action Plan will also provide a framework for consideration of future policy and strategic direction in the context of changes in national policy and related funding.

### **6.4. Equality Implications**

6.4.1. Given that the proposal does not represent any change of policy an EIA has not been conducted. There are no direct implications for equalities.

## **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1. There are no direct implications for human resources.

## **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1. There are no direct implications for risk management.

## **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1. Half of the Cheshire East population live in rural communities including the rural towns. The action plan will help to ensure that delivery of our corporate outcomes meet the needs of rural communities and the economy in rural areas.

## **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. The action plan includes proposals that relate to strong, supportive rural places and communities, including life chances and choices that may relate to children and young people.

## **6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. The action plan includes proposals that relate to strong, supportive rural places and communities, including life chances and choices that may relate to public health.

## **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. All wards.

## **8. Access to Information**

8.1. Supporting information related to previous rural actions is reviewed in an appendix to the Rural Action Plan.

## **9. Contact Information**

9.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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