

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## Cabinet

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> November 2013
<b>Report of:</b>	Executive Director of Strategic Commissioning
<b>Subject/Title:</b>	Rural Proofing and Creating Resilient Rural Communities
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Rachel Bailey, Children and Family Services and Rural Affairs

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### 1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals to implement Rural Proofing, and seeks approval to develop a Rural Statement and regular Rural Summits.
- 1.2 'Ambition for All', our Sustainable Community Strategy, sets out how we will ensure that Cheshire East continues to prosper, for the benefit of **all** residents, businesses and visitors. It identifies our priorities for action, and the recommendations in this report develop one element of Our Vision, which is to ensure that our "Rural communities are thriving".

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the Rural Proofing Checklist (Appendix 1) as an effective means of rural proofing for key decisions, and embed Rural Proofing into the Council's Commissioning Cycle and Impact Assessments.
- 2.2 Develop Rural Summits as a mechanism which enables partners to work collaboratively on rural priorities.
- 2.3 Develop a Rural Statement, which identifies the Council's rural priorities and joint action.

### 3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To adopt Rural Proofing to ensure rural areas get the best and fairest deal from Cheshire East Council policies and decisions.
- 3.2 To develop regular themed Rural Summits, which enable partners to work collaboratively on rural priorities and maximises our potential to attract external funding for our rural communities. The Summits would develop the local ecosystem to make things happen, stimulating new initiatives by developing a network of rural champions and experts.
- 3.3 Develop a Rural Statement, as part of our joint approach with partners to address rural issues. The purpose of the statement would be to articulate our rural priorities and joint action, as part of our wider work on defining our identity.

#### **4.0 Wards Affected**

- 4.1 All wards.

#### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

- 5.1 All Members.

#### **6.0 Policy Implications**

- 6.1 The proposals are all in line with the Council's three year plan and all 3 recommendations contribute to the achievement of all 5 community outcomes.
- 6.2 The proposals support the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy (2010-2025), 'Ambition for All'.

#### **7.0 Financial Implications**

- 7.1 The proposals are designed to help to secure significant new investment to address rural issues across Cheshire East, supporting the Council's key community outcomes. Support and resources will need to be harnessed from across the public, private and voluntary sectors, through the Rural Summits (if approved) and our Local Area Partnerships.
- 7.2 The Action Plan, which underpins the Rural Statement, is likely to have some degree of financial implication for the Council and its partners. There will be individual assessments and approval of each project via the appropriate project and financial management processes at the appropriate time. It is expected that the Council's actions will be managed within existing budgets.

#### **8.0 Legal Implications**

- 8.1 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, which although still subject to some constraints under Section 2 of the Localism Act 2011, provides the Council with a general power of competence, intended to be wider than that conferred by the 2000 Act, and allows local authorities to do anything that individuals generally may do. The actions proposed in this report are likely to fall within this power but individual assessment of each one will be required at the appropriate time.

#### **9.0 Risk Management**

- 9.1 The purpose of adopting Rural Proofing is to eliminate the risk of adversely affecting our rural areas when making decisions. The aim of developing Rural Summits and a Rural Statement are to ensure we have a strategic approach to addressing the needs of our rural communities and making the most of opportunities. There are strategic risks in not having these in place, as they will enable us to manage local expectations and maximise opportunities to attract partnership and external funding to meet local rural priorities.

## 10.0 Background and Options

### National Position on Rural Issues

- 10.1 Rural communities face challenges that are specific to the rural locations they live in and rely upon. Isolated rural locations, sparse population figures and lower levels of infrastructure in rural areas can leave some rural communities feeling cut off, disengaged and overlooked.
- 10.2 The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, reported in July 2013 that rural communities suffer from a “rural penalty” as they face higher house prices and council tax bills, but receive less government funding for services like schools. They are urging government to ensure more is done to achieve fair, practical and affordable outcomes for rural residents, businesses and communities. In response to this report, Cheshire East Council (CEC) has written to our MPs, asking them to support a Government review of the local government finance settlement, so that it fairly recognises rural areas in comparison with their urban counterparts. In their report, the Select Committee welcome the [Government’s Rural Statement 2012](#), which is described as a contract with rural areas and have requested that when it is next updated, it contains some key performance measures so that rural communities can hold government to account.
- 10.3 The Government’s Rural Statement is intended to underline Government’s commitment to rural England. It sets out what they are doing to put rural interests at the heart of Government, and highlights the ways in which policies are already benefiting rural areas, and presents further measures intended to secure a brighter future for rural people. It reflects their vision of successful rural businesses and thriving rural communities in a living, working countryside, and is based around three key priorities:
- **Economic Growth** – rural businesses to make a sustainable contribution to national growth;
  - **Rural Engagement** – engage directly with rural communities so that they can see that Government is on their side; and
  - **Quality of Life** – rural people to have fair access to public services and to be actively engaged in shaping the places in which they live.
- 10.4 National Government has developed [rural proofing guidelines](#) which were updated in July 2013 to ensure that all their policies do not adversely affect rural locations and communities.

### Creating Resilient Rural Communities in Cheshire East

- 10.5 Cheshire East Council is a predominantly rural Borough and our rural areas are an asset; they contribute massively to the quality of life of residents and contain important industries that contribute heavily to Cheshire East’s economy. Our rural areas also face very specific issues such as distance, population sparsity, ageing, social isolation

and market structure which can significantly influence the lives of people who live in these places and the long term survival of rural areas and communities.

- 10.6 Work is underway to set out our commitment to rural areas and to ensure that our policies and approach to service delivery always include and support the rural areas. This work needs further developing to highlight the current challenges facing rural areas in Cheshire East. A joint approach needs to be agreed with partners to ensure that rural areas are able to progressively and sustainably develop, making the most of all the benefits they have to offer.
- 10.7 Cheshire East Council held a Rural Summit in April 2013 to engage with local representatives from rural areas to discuss our key rural priorities. We are currently planning a follow on event to continue developing our collaborative work to address joint priorities.
- 10.8 In addition to our local work Cheshire East Council is a member of the newly established Rural Unitary Group, as recommended through the Local Government Association (LGA), which is a special interest grouping within the SPARSE Rural Group. The group is working together on joint key issues which will include finance to rural areas.

#### Rural Proofing in Cheshire East

- 10.9 To ensure that rural issues are firmly on Cheshire East Council's agenda, appendix 1 is a draft Rural Proofing Checklist, which is based on the national guidelines and examples of best practice at other predominantly rural local authorities.
- 10.10 The checklist is designed to be used by decision makers to rural proof our key decisions to ensure rural areas get the best and fairest deal from Cheshire East Council policy. The list of questions can be used as a prompt (rather than filling in a form) to consider how potential projects, decisions or funding applications will affect rural areas. The questions need to be considered in the initial phases of the decision making process to start discussions early on into how key decisions will affect rural areas. This should also provoke discussion and consideration into whether plans could be altered or adapted to better suit rural areas and the communities in them. The proposal is to incorporate Rural Proofing into our Commissioning Cycle and Impact Assessments.
- 10.11 The checklist can also be used as a helpful tool and completed as a form. If concerns are raised regarding a proposed project/policy/funding decision, which may have an adverse impact on rural communities, then a fuller assessment would be required. This would again enable consideration and provide evidence as to why plans are altered or adapted.

10.12 Currently our Planning Team Rural Proof decisions but others do not have a defined process for rural proofing.

#### **11.0 Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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