

2004 RURAL STRATEGY

Report By: Director of Policy and Community

Wards Affected

County-wide.

Purpose

To update the Economic and Social Development Scrutiny Committee on the recent Rural Strategy published by DEFRA in July 2004.

Considerations

1. In 2002 the Government asked Lord Haskins to undertake a review of rural delivery mechanisms across the Country, then known as "The Haskins Review". Lord Haskins reported his recommendations in mid 2003, which were based around simplifying rural delivery funding streams and making a differentiation between policy development and local delivery. He also emphasised devolved delivery mechanisms to local levels.
2. In response to these findings, the Government updated and refreshed the Rural Strategy, which was first published in 2000. The revised strategy sets out future policy direction for rural services and incorporates recommendations from the Haskins Review. This strategy has been received relatively well, with quite a number of Lord Haskins recommendations acted upon.
3. The Rural Strategy is based on 3 chapters – economic and social regeneration; social justice for all; and, enhancing the value of our countryside. A number of significant recommendations are outlined in the strategy, including:
 - The move to a smaller and more focused Countryside Agency
 - The development of an Integrated Land Use Agency pulling together the remit of the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Rural Development service;
 - A greater divide between policy development and delivery;
 - Devolving rural delivery to the region and local level; and
 - The rationalisation of rural funding streams from 100 current schemes to 3 major funding programmes.
4. The strategy highlights the role of Local Authorities as community leaders and their role in delivering joined up services. Greater clarification is now being requested on what additional or alternative roles Local Authorities could become involved with at a local level.
5. To test possible local approaches, DEFRA is asking for one area within each region to act as a "pathfinder", to explore practical ways of joint working and testing different approaches at local levels. For the West Midlands Region Shropshire has been identified as the pathfinder area. We hope to gain valuable feedback from Shropshire as their Pathfinder approach is developed and implemented.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified.