



## **Cabinet**

### **16 September 2009**

#### **Rural Area Working Party**

##### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Cabinet has three specific commitments for Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and the rural area. The commitments for the two towns are overseen by two successful working parties and the Cabinet now wishes to mirror this for its rural area commitment. This paper therefore proposes arrangements for a new working party for the rural area.

##### **2. Role**

- 2.1 The proposed working party would perform a similar role as the two urban working parties, namely to oversee any issues which have a specific impact on the rural area and advise Cabinet accordingly. As with the working parties for the two towns, there is no intention to duplicate the work of the Sustainable Development Panel or the Grant Panel, although there may be occasion when those existing bodies will want the advice of the new working party.
- 2.2 There would, however, be a specific role for the new working party in relation to the Rural Action Plan. It is suggested that the monitoring role performed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be transferred to the Rural Area Working Party, with the agreement of that Committee. This would allow what is now only an annual exercise to have a higher profile. Indeed, one of the main tasks of the working party will be to raise the profile of rural issues locally, regionally and nationally.
- 2.3 Initial priorities would be a matter for the working party to discuss and decide, with reference to councillor and officer capacity, but there are certainly opportunities to focus on the rural aspects of housing, economic development, deprivation, accessibility to services, the built and natural environment and the new 'neighbourhoods' agenda, which is often harder to apply in rural areas. The working party will want to work with partners, notably parish councils, and another key role could be to seek external funding for rural initiatives.

### 3. Terms of Reference and Work Programme

3.1 Reflecting those for the other two working parties, the proposed terms of reference for the Rural Area Working Party are therefore as follows, to:-

- (a) maintain an overview of the issues relating to the wellbeing, economic prosperity and future development of the rural area of St Edmundsbury and to make recommendations to the Cabinet about actions required to promote its success;
- (b) oversee the development and monitor the implementation of the Council's Rural Action Plan (and any replacement) and to make recommendations to the Cabinet accordingly;
- (c) consider service related and other issues which relate specifically to the rural area and to liaise with parish councils and other partners as appropriate;
- (d) appoint steering groups for any issue within the remit of the Working Party, and to co-opt non-voting members to these steering groups in order to provide alternative viewpoints and expert advice; and
- (e) invite interested parties to meetings as considered appropriate.

### 4. Membership

4.1 This Cabinet Panel is not a decision-making body, so the Constitution allows the Cabinet some flexibility in appointing members. There would be the scope to limit membership to rural wards only, but this would require a review of the other two area working parties, which are politically-balanced and have members drawn from outside of the geographical area, recognising the inter-relationships between the rural and urban area.

4.2 It is, therefore, proposed that the working party comprise ten members, with the appropriate number of substitute members, and be politically-balanced.

### 5. Recommendations

5.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that:-

- (a) a Rural Area Working Party be formed, with Terms of Reference and Work Programme as detailed in Section 3 of Report **A214**; and
- (b) the Working Party comprise of 10 members, with the appropriate number of substitute members, appointed by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services upon the nomination of appropriate Group Leaders.

#### Contact Details

Name  
Telephone  
E-mail

#### Portfolio Holder

John Griffiths  
(01284) 757136  
[john.griffiths@stedsbc.gov.uk](mailto:john.griffiths@stedsbc.gov.uk)

#### Lead Officer

Alex Wilson  
(01284) 757695  
[alex.wilson@stedsbc.gov.uk](mailto:alex.wilson@stedsbc.gov.uk)