



## Cabinet 20 May 2014

### Recommendations from the Rural Area Working Party: 26 March 2014: Rural Action Plan Monitoring Report (May14/04)

#### 1. Summary and reasons for recommendations

- 1.1 On 26 March 2014 the Rural Area Working Party considered a substantive item, the Rural Action Monitoring Report, which sought a recommendation on how underspends arising from the Rural Action Plan 2011 to 2014 were to be utilised.

#### 2. Recommendations

2.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that:

- (1) the completion of the St Edmundsbury Rural Action Plan 2011 to 2014 and the statement of how rural issues are being taken forward within the new strategic framework, as contained in Appendix 1 to Report E332, be noted; and
- (2) any remaining underspends from the delivery of the Rural Action Plan 2011 to 2014 be used for future rural initiatives in addition to the Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme and any Locality Budgets allocated to Rural Members.

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### 3. Strategic priorities

3.1 The recommendations meet the following, as contained within the West Suffolk Strategic Plan:

- (a) Priority 1: *'Increased opportunities for economic growth'*; and
- (b) Priority 2: *'Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active'*

### 4. Key issues

#### **Rural Action Monitoring Report (Report E332)**

4.1 Report E332 was considered which gave an update on the Rural Action Plan 2011 to 2014 and what it had delivered and where areas of activity identified in the report now sat in relation to the new staffing structure and strategic policy framework. A decision on how remaining underspends from the Rural Action Plan were to be utilised was also sought.

4.2 The 2011 to 2014 Rural Action Plan had 37 projects which aimed to help the Borough Council achieve its vision for the rural area: *'Active, sustainable and thriving communities in peaceful and unspoilt countryside'*. These projects were what rural communities had told the Council they wanted at that time and, as such, were a 'snap-shot' of rural issues four years ago. The projects came under four headings:

- (a) Empowerment: enabling communities to help themselves (projects 1-8);
- (b) Environment: improving both the built and the natural environment (projects 9-16);
- (c) Prosperity: to generate a healthy economy (projects 17-23); and
- (d) Well-being: actions which improve the quality of life of individuals and communities (projects 24-37).

4.3 Some of the projects had been carried out on an annual basis, whilst others had been one-off projects due to be completed by the end of March 2014.

4.4 Attached at Appendix 1 to Report E332 was a table outlining progress to date on the delivery of the 37 actions. The table identified the action, whether or not it had been completed and any budget remaining from the original allocation. It indicated where the activities described now sat under the new staffing structure and updated strategic policy framework. The Appendix indicated that:

- 27 Projects had been completed;
- 3 had been partially completed;
- 3 were ongoing until the committed funding was used; and
- 4 were not completed as envisaged – see Appendix 1 to Report E332, for details.

4.5 The Working Party was asked to note that, overall, good progress had been made against the Action Plan. However since its adoption, the Council had been

restructured, adopted new strategic priorities and new ways of working and carried out extensive consultation on new policy documents, most notably Rural Vision 2031 and the Families and Communities Strategy. As a result there were now other ways in which the kinds of initiatives previously drawn together in the Action Plan were being delivered. The final column of Appendix 1 indicated where these kinds of activities were being taken forward under the new structure, and nearly all would or could continue in some form, as desired by rural communities.

- 4.6 On 25 March 2014 the Cabinet had considered a paper on the option of introducing Locality Budgets for Councillors on a trial basis with effect from 1 April 2014. The decision had been to introduce this trial and that it would initially be funded from reserves. Many of the projects in the 2011 to 2014 Rural Action Plan would be suitable for funding from locality budgets in future. To assist in its implementation, the Working Party was asked to consider whether any underspends from the delivery of Rural Action Plan should be put towards the cost of piloting Locality Budgets for rural wards, to ensure this money was used for its original purpose.
- 4.7 In considering the report the Working Party noted that in relation to Paragraph 4.8 there were 18 rural wards and this had consequential amendments of the figures quoted, ie. £45,000 for £47,000 and £135,000 for £148,850. The Working Party received the progress report on the list of schemes contained in Appendix 1. Some typographical and minor textual errors were also noted and officers advised that these would be corrected and an amended Appendix 1 would be provided on the rural pages of the Council's website in due course. The Working Party, in considering the use of underspends which had arisen from the Rural Action Plan, was of the view that these should be retained for future rural initiatives in addition to any Locality Budgets for Councillors agreed and the Rural Initiatives Grant Fund (an item of Capital expenditure).

## **5. Other options considered**

- 5.1 See Report E332 to the Rural Area Working Party.

## **6. Community impact**

- 6.1 See Report E332 to the Rural Area Working Party.

## **7. Consultation**

- 7.1 See Report E332 to the Rural Area Working Party.

## **8. Financial and resource implications** (*including asset management implications*)

- 8.1 See Report E332 to the Rural Area Working Party.

## **9. Risk/opportunity assessment** (*potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives*)

- 9.1 See Report E332 to the Rural Area Working Party.

## **10. Legal and policy implications**

- 10.1 See Report E332 to the Rural Area Working Party.

**11. Wards affected**

11.1 All Rural Wards.

**12. Background papers**

12.1 See Report E332 to the Rural Area Working Party.

**13. Documents attached**

13.1 None.

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