

Rural Area Working Party



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Rural Area Working Party** held on **Monday 26 January 2015** at **5.00 pm** at the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Jim Thorndyke
Vice-Chairman Sarah Broughton

Robert Clifton-Brown	Derek Redhead
Alaric Pugh	Angela Rushen
Dave Ray	Peter Stevens

By Invitation:
Sara Mildmay-White

1. **Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs Paula Wade.

2. **Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. **Rural Youth Work Programme**

The Working Party considered Report No RUR/SE/15/001 which, following the consultation with Members as agreed at the last meeting of the Working Party, proposed a programme for rural youth work in 2015. The proposed programme would involve 54 sessions in six villages from May or July 2015, provided by the YMCA using spare capacity of the Council's 'On the Spot Vehicle' in Haverhill. Before taking into account any contributions from parishes, the proposed programme would cost £18,400, reflecting the roll-over of the underspent 2014/2015 budget and allowing for an element of 'pump-priming' work in the form of targeted volunteer recruitment and training and extra publicity. Additional sessions could also be arranged if funded by the parish councils or locality budgets.

The Working Party considered that, whilst it had served its original purpose, there was now a need to introduce a new approach to the provision and funding of the rural youth work programme, which complemented the Families and Communities Strategy and the work of Locality Officers. The Officers were, therefore, asked to carry out a review for implementation in 2016/2017, with a view to ring-fencing the core budget (£10,600) and any carried forward underspends within a wider Community Chest/Locality Budget system of grants designed to encourage rural communities to innovate around sustainable and locally-led youth initiatives in their villages. It was recognised that some villages would continue to want to access a service like the 'On the Spot Vehicle', but others may have other ideas for engaging young people in positive youth activities.

In relation to 2015, the Working Party noted that, pending their meeting, no formal arrangements had yet been agreed with the YCMA and, therefore, there was some flexibility for Councillors to amend the approach proposed by the Officers, provided it was undertaken quickly.

Therefore, the Working Party requested that a transitional arrangement be put in place for 2015, whereby all parishes were given the opportunity to express an interest in receiving free 'taster sessions' from the 'On the Spot Vehicle', with a view to establishing if this was something they would want to continue with under the new approach from 2016. A condition of receiving the sessions, would be that parishes would publicise them and they would also be encouraged to take up the offer of community volunteer training. When the level of interest was known, the available sessions (provisionally up to 54 as originally planned) would be shared fairly between the parishes. Parishes or Ward Members would also still have the chance to purchase additional sessions.

The Working Party was asked to note that the agreement of the YMCA, as provider, would still be needed to the new approach, and some negotiation may be required over the cost and number of sessions which could be offered on this new transitional basis. Given the urgency of finalising a programme for this Spring, the Working Party therefore noted that the fine detail of the 2015 scheme would need to be agreed with the relevant Portfolio Holder, within the broad framework it had suggested. However, the Working Party asked that any communications be shared with local Ward Members before being sent to parish councils so they could assist in promoting the scheme in their areas. Given the timetable, parishes would also be asked to respond with five weeks to the offer of the sessions.

RECOMMENDED:

That:-

1. The Council's existing funding of £10,600 for rural youth programmes continue to be ring-fenced for that purpose within any new wider approach to grants and commissioning, and underspends in that budget in any year be rolled forward as appropriate;

2. A review of the delivery and funding of the rural youth programme be carried out for implementation in 2016, with a view to enabling rural communities to provide sustainable and locally-led youth initiatives in their villages; and
3. For 2015, Officers to negotiate with the Suffolk YMCA to provide a transitional programme using the 'On the Spot Vehicle', taking into account the steer of the Rural Area Working Party (at its meeting on 26 January 2015) and with the final detail to be approved in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.

5. **Rural Public Transport**

Councillor Peter Stevens, Portfolio Holder with the responsibility for rural areas, provided an update on the county-wide conference for rural transport, which had been held on 16 January 2015.

Councillor Stevens explained that the conference had been well attended, with 50 people from across the whole of Suffolk. It was acknowledged that there were many challenges to be able to make rural transport successful, particularly regarding the legislative requirements. The aspiration from the Conference was to provide a better rural transport service and achievable/positive outcomes were agreed for taking forward. Suffolk County Council would be assisting, through their relevant Portfolio Holder, to ascertain as to how these legislative challenges could be overcome.

6. **Funding of Rural Local Authorities**

The Working Party received and noted the following background documentation which had been provided to assist with the discussion on this item:

- (a) Press release from the Sparsity Partnership for Authorities Delivering Rural Services (SPARSE) 9dated 22 December 2014);
- (b) Letter from SPARSE to Eric Pickles, MP, dated 22 November 2014;
- (c) 'Research into drivers of service costs in rural areas: summary report'; and
- (d) West Suffolk response to Government consultation on provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

The research showed that rural sparsity increased the cost of providing many Council services including waste management, regulatory services and economic development. SPARSE also argued that the findings in the research did not properly reflect the fact that there was low or non-provision of other services in rural areas due to the cost and practicality of doing so. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that residents in urban areas currently received £178 more per head each year in Government funding for Council services than those in rural areas, a gap which would not be closed by Government proposals for 2015/16. The Working Party noted that the Council had already highlighted this disparity in its response to the Government's consultation on the provisional finance settlement in January 2015, but wished the Cabinet to carry out further lobbying and awareness raising.

RECOMMENDED:

That, in supporting the work of the Rural Services Network and SPARSE, the Council raises its concerns with its Members of Parliament, regarding the relative under-funding of rural local authorities.

7. Parish Conference: Thursday 26 March 2015

The Director discussed with the Working Party the arrangements for the next Parish Conference, which was taking place on Thursday 26 March 2015 at Honington and Sapiston Village Hall. Provisionally, it was agreed that the programme would be as follows:

- (a) Leader of the Council – Update on Borough Council related matters
- (b) Presentations:
 - Suffolk County Council - Highways Issues (as previously raised by the Parish/Town Councils, including the maintenance contract and the Speed Awareness project)
 - Affordable Warmth Initiative
 - Community Action Suffolk
- (c) Workshops:
 - Village Hall – good practice, problem-solving, renewable energy and funding.
 - Planning – principally Neighbourhood Plans but, if there was sufficient demand in advance from parishes, the workshop could cover other planning topics too.

8. Work Programme

The Working Party was invited to consider its Work Programme:

- (a) Environmental Enhancement Grants
It was confirmed that the external speaker for a presentation on Environmental Enhancement Grants had confirmed her attendance for the next meeting on Monday 30 March 2015.
- (b) 'Rural Deprivation Interventions' (national good practice)
It was also confirmed that as this item had now been considered, following the discussions held at today's meeting, it would be removed from the work programme.
- (c) Future Items
It was also noted that Officers would schedule items at future meetings in relation to the Working Party's previous requests to consider:
 - (i) Training Grants for Small Business: Rural Aspects
 - (ii) Wool Towns Initiative

These items would be covered within a wider session on rural business and skills and funding initiatives in those regards.

It was also agreed for the following additional new items to be included within the Work Programme:

- (iii) Funding of Rural Local Authorities – a more in-depth look at services which the national data showed were under-funded in rural areas.
- (iv) NPPF and the implications for sustainable development in the countryside.

9. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Working Party had already determined the following date for a future meeting:

Monday 30 March 2015 at 5.00 pm.

The Meeting concluded at 6.50 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
