

Proposal to Establish a West Suffolk Rural Taskforce

Report No:	CAB/WS/19/006	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	25 June 2019
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Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i>	<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<i>The decisions made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is not included on the Decisions Plan.</i>		

Wards impacted: All Wards

Recommendation: It is **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet:

- (1) **Agrees to the establishment of a Cabinet Taskforce to make recommendations on West Suffolk Council's approach to supporting rural areas; and**
- (2) **Approves the Terms of Reference for the Taskforce (attached as Appendix A to Report No: CAB/WS/19/006).**



1. Background / Context

- 1.1 The landscape, population and economy of West Suffolk are diverse and changing, including for example, busy town centres, more suburban residential areas, villages and more sparsely populated countryside areas. On the one hand, this diversity is a strength of the area, but it also presents challenges to residents, businesses and public bodies alike.
- 1.2 West Suffolk Council's vision is "supporting and investing in our West Suffolk communities and businesses to encourage and manage ambitious growth in prosperity and quality of life for all." The new Council is therefore committed to ensuring that this vision is achieved across all of West Suffolk's areas, whatever their rural or urban character.
- 1.3 The creation of the new Council, with a larger and even more varied geography is a timely opportunity to explore the different challenges and opportunities facing its diverse communities, and to ensure that the Council's ways of working are established in such a way as to provide the right support.
- 1.4 Research has shown that 'rural' areas can fare less well than more urban areas in terms of: access to services (including health and social care); personal financial management; transport; access to affordable housing; integration with social networks; access to skills and training; and business infrastructure. Work is therefore needed to understand what the position on these issues is in West Suffolk and what measures might be put in place to help address barriers to all areas achieving their potential.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 It is proposed that Cabinet establish a Rural Taskforce to review the qualitative and quantitative evidence base relating to rural areas, and to identify the key issues, assets and challenges. This review should encompass all of West Suffolk's areas, in order to understand the issues and opportunities that all rural or all urban areas have in common, as well as those facing specific localities.
- 2.2 The review will draw on existing evidence and research produced by other bodies, for example, the Rural Services Network and the House of Lords Select Committee on the rural economy.
- 2.3 In response to this evidence review, it is proposed that the Taskforce develops options both to directly address some of the issues identified and also to ensure rural considerations are taken into account in future Council processes and decision making.
- 2.4 The proposed outputs from the Taskforce are expected to be interim recommendations to Cabinet in September 2019 for how taking forward the lead options identified for addressing rural challenges and embedding rural considerations in the Council's ways of working. This may include the



commissioning of further work. The Taskforce would then make a final report to Cabinet in November 2019.

- 2.5 Draft terms of reference for the Taskforce are attached at Appendix A.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 The alternative option is to not establish a West Suffolk Rural Taskforce. However, this could mean that the needs and priorities of West Suffolk's more rural areas are overlooked in future decision making and strategy formulation.

4. Consultation and engagement

- 4.1 As well as receiving input from all Councillors, with their diverse experiences of working in their Wards, the Taskforce will take evidence from other stakeholders, for example, public sector partners, town and parish councils, third sector organisations and community representatives, in order to ensure a comprehensive range of views are taken into account.

5. Risks

- 5.1 There is a risk that a Taskforce focusing on rural issues will be perceived as overlooking the issues and challenges facing more urban areas of West Suffolk. However, as outlined in paragraph 2.1, the intention is that the review of evidence will encompass all areas of West Suffolk in order to ensure their differing needs are fully understood.

6. Implications arising from the proposal

- 6.1 Any new proposals developed as a result of the review will be subject to Equality Impact Assessments.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 **Appendix A** – Draft Terms of Reference for the West Suffolk Rural Taskforce

8. Background documents

- 8.1 Not applicable.



Appendix A: Draft terms of reference for West Suffolk Rural Taskforce

1. **Title of group:** West Suffolk Rural Taskforce
2. **Purpose of group:** To make recommendations to Cabinet on how best to ensure the different issues facing residents, communities and businesses in more rural areas (villages and outlying dwellings), as opposed to more urban areas, are taken into account by West Suffolk Council in all of its future activities and decision making.
3. **Background:** West Suffolk covers a varied area, ranging from medium-sized towns to open countryside. As such, it is important that the differing circumstances of all its places are taken into account. Research has shown that 'rural' areas (in West Suffolk, this means the areas outside the 5 main market towns) can fare less well than more urban areas in terms of: **access to services (including health and social care); personal financial management; transport; access to affordable housing; integration with social networks; access to skills and training; and business infrastructure.**
4. **Terms of reference:**
 1. To **review** the evidence base relating to:
 - a. the issues, opportunities and challenges facing rural areas, including information from the Rural Services Network and Parliament; and
 - b. the specific issues, opportunities and challenges facing West Suffolk's rural areas, including published data (for example, the Index of Multiple Deprivation), operational data and feedback from our communities including knowledge of local ward members.
 2. Use the evidence to **identify** the key issues, assets and challenges characterising:
 - a. all rural areas across West Suffolk; and/or
 - b. specific rural localities within West Suffolk.
 3. To **develop options** for:
 - a. how best to address the findings from 2 above; and
 - b. how rural considerations can best be included in future council processes and decision making.
 4. To **make recommendations** to Cabinet for how to take forward the preferred options from 3 above.
5. **Timescale:** In order for the Taskforce to shape the direction of the Local Plan; Strategic Framework; and Medium Term Financial Strategy, initial findings and feedback will be presented to Cabinet in September 2019. Final recommendations will be made to Cabinet in November 2019 in order to ensure that community and member feedback can be fully taken into account.
6. **Governance:**

The Chair and Taskforce members will be appointed by the Leader of the Council. It is anticipated that the Taskforce will be run in such a way as to include a wider group of Members and other stakeholders.



7. Officer support:

An Assistant Director will be appointed to provide overall support for the Taskforce. The Corporate Policy Team will provide research and policy development support, drawing on evidence and advice provided by a range of other teams to support the Taskforce's work, for example, Growth, Housing, Families and Communities, Parks and Leisure.

8. Consultation and engagement:

The Taskforce will take evidence from Councillors and external stakeholders, including town and parish councils, partners, stakeholders, community groups, residents and businesses as it considers appropriate

9. Example evidence resources:

Published reports

- State of Rural Services reports
- House of Lords Select Committee report on the Rural Economy
- NFU Mutual Rural Crime Surveys
- Journal of Nature - 2019 research on Rural Obesity

Data and statistics

- Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (forthcoming)
- Analysis of Defra rural / urban classifications
- Comparison data between market towns and West Suffolk's rural areas
- Analysis of data by settlement (size, deprivation, access to services)
- Ageing population data by Ward
- Broadband coverage in rural areas

