

REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM THE RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF ESSEX

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 A request has been received from the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) for financial support for a Rochford District Field Officer post.

2 DETAILS OF THE REQUEST

- 2.1 RCCE employs a team of field officers who work with local community groups in Essex to facilitate the preparation of community-led plans. The field officers have been funded from the lottery but this is due to expire and new funding is required to sustain the service beyond 2006/07.
- 2.2 Field officers provide support for local groups to assist the preparation of parish plans, village/town design statements and market town plans. Community plans can make contributions to community strategies and local development frameworks.
- 2.3 In Essex, the RCCE field officers have helped 56 parishes to prepare plans and a further 63 are currently being progressed, with support being required for between 18-24 months.
- 2.4 In addition to lottery funding, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has recognised the importance of developing community capacity building and has made some funding available for two years from 2006/07 through its Rural, Social and Community Programme (RSCP). However, this funding only covers 20% of the total cost of the project in 2007/08.
- 2.5 The RCCE request is for the Council to commit 45% of the costs for the time a field officer works within the district in 2007/08, which amounts to £4,535.

3 DISCUSSION

- 3.1 A parish plan has been prepared by Rawreth Parish Council and Hockley Parish Council is well advanced in preparing their plan. A market town plan has also been prepared for Rochford with the assistance of the RCCE and it is known that other Parish Councils are contemplating preparing plans.
- 3.2 There is no doubt whatsoever that the process of community engagement that results from preparing parish plans can be extremely beneficial for local communities since the plan process requires a high level of consensus.
- 3.3 Parish plans can be lodged with District Councils as one of the documents included in the Local Development Framework folder and this can enable

some of the initiatives, ideas or proposals in the plan to be followed through in the preparation of development plan documents.

- 3.4 The preparation of community plans is a lengthy process and the requirement is that it is representatives from the local community that manage the process. This is why the help and advice from the RCCE's field officers is very often so important.
- 3.5 In principle then, the value of the field officer network is recognised. There is, though, no detailed information in the request regarding the work likely to be carried out by a field officer in Rochford. Further details have been requested from the RCCE and will be reported to the Committee.

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 In principle the local nature of community plans can help identify environmental issues of significance to the local context but which may merit broader attention through the Local Development Framework.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The RCCE is seeking a contribution of £4,535 towards the provision of a field worker in Rochford District.

6 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The RCCE field worker will assist parishes in the preparation of parish plans, village design statements and/or market town initiatives.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RECOMMENDS TO THE POLICY, FINANCE & STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE**

Whether or not to provide financial assistance to the Rural Community Council of Essex to fund a field worker for Rochford District in 2007/08.

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Background Papers:-

None

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