

HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

30 November 2007

HAMPSHIRE RURAL PATHFINDER

Report by Rosalind Rutt, Hampshire Rural Pathfinder Project Manager

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the report be noted; and
 - (2) That Members agree that the establishment of a Hampshire Rural Partnership be considered as an important part of the governance debate within the HIOW area.
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INTRODUCTION

1. The Hampshire Rural Pathfinder is one of eight Rural Delivery Pathfinders – one for each English region. They were an innovative government initiative to tackle head-on the challenge faced by all levels of government in making rural service delivery more efficient, effective, customer focused and locally accountable.
2. The programme, which was launched in March 2005 and reported to the Association on 31 March 2006, has now come to an end. This report summarises the achievements, learning and recommendations from the Hampshire Pathfinder. Further details are provided in the final report, ‘Setting the Pace’, which was launched at a major regional conference on 25 September 2007. Full technical reports on the individual projects will be made available on the Pathfinder website: www.hants.gov.uk/ruralpathfinder/

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

3. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has commissioned a national report on behalf of all the eight Pathfinders (under preparation) with key messages and recommendations. Although this is not a statement of government policy, DEFRA sees the recommendations as consistent with what the government is trying to achieve and intends to play a key role in responding and setting the direction of future travel at the national level.
4. The national report records the substantial achievement by the Pathfinders in:
 - Influencing current and future policy and delivery – at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels – by identifying blockages to effective rural service delivery and demonstrating new approaches to overcoming these
 - Developing practical tools and resources, which can be applied more widely, such as ‘how to do’ guidance or toolkits, information resources and joined-up service delivery.
 - Generating learning and good practice which can be acted on by policymakers, service delivery managers and solution facilitators.

5. Achievements by the Hampshire Pathfinder (examples only) include:
- An integrated service for land managers in North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty giving environmental advice and support
 - Showing how procedural and institutional obstacles to local food sourcing by the public sector can be overcome given the engagement of the right partners and sufficient commitment
 - Moving resources between government agencies, reducing bureaucracy and improving stakeholder involvement in granting permission for land management works in the New Forest (3,200 hectares of wildlife habitat enhanced).
 - Streamlining procedures for the plethora of types of consent in coastal areas, tested for Chichester Harbour and the Hamble
 - Demonstrating how the costs of affordable rural housing could be brought down by using modern methods of construction and improving planning and procurement processes
 - A Parish and Community Planning Toolkit that meets the needs of both the statutory and community sectors and can be adapted for the future (taken up nationally)
 - An accessible way for parish and town local community plans to feed into the Community Strategy, Local Development Framework and district council service planning
 - An electronic parish library giving parish and town councils online access to information and best practice, now rolled out nationally.
6. Although there were different starting points and circumstances, several common themes recurred across the Pathfinders which were reflected by the experience in Hampshire:
- Partnership working is critical to success.
 - Local authorities can be the catalyst for solutions, if they show leadership and are ready to innovate.
 - Structure and process are important.
 - Engaging communities directly in defining what they want and how to deliver it provides valuable bottom-up input to plans.
 - “Mainstreaming rural” into policies, programmes and services is the way forward but it carries risks.
 - Access to services is not just a transport issue.
7. The impetus for innovative local solutions generated by the Pathfinders needs to be sustained and broadened. To exploit the value of what has been achieved, action is recommended across three fronts:
- Mainstreaming the successes and good practices generated by the Pathfinders, both within the Pathfinder authorities and more widely across local government

- Improving the pathways for effective delivery by building on the achievements of the Pathfinders and by responding to the factors that hindered delivery.
 - Capturing the learning from the Pathfinders and making it easily accessible to those who would benefit from applying it in the future.
8. The recommendations for action in the national report – which are about seizing existing opportunities rather than proposing new initiatives – are spread across all tiers of government and agencies. For local government they include sustain and develop, developing a leadership role – political and managerial – in rural delivery, by:
- Making full use of the changes set out in the 2006 Local Government White Paper and the lessons from the review of sub-national economic development and regeneration, particularly the plans for enhancing the roles of local authorities as strategic leaders and place-shapers, working through the strengthened Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements (LAAs) with the full involvement of elected members.
 - Building effective and confident partnerships with the organisations responsible for implementing major spending programmes such as the Rural Development Programme for England – Regional Development Agencies, Natural England and the Forestry Commission.
 - Supporting these aims by drawing on the learning and achievements of the Pathfinders and recognising that innovation and managed risk-taking can be the key to finding the best delivery options.

CONCLUSION

9. Feedback from a number of sources, including the Regional Conference, supports the view that the Hampshire Rural Pathfinder has been very successful in meeting its objectives. There have been substantial practical achievements as well as useful lessons learnt about the processes and structures.
10. The challenge now is to ensure that the lessons are not lost, that practical successes and techniques are widely communicated and that the impetus to joint working on rural issues is maintained and, if possible, enhanced. Inclusion of appropriate rural themes and targets within future LAAs will be key to this.
11. There is widespread support for the development of a Hampshire Rural Partnership to take these tasks forward. The HIOW members are asked to agree that the establishment of such a partnership be considered as an important part of the governance debate within the HIOW area.

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Date: 2 November 2007
 Annex: None
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Rural Pathfinder report/reports