

ANGUS COUNCIL**PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY COMMITTEE
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE****15 OCTOBER 1998
27 OCTOBER 1998****SUBJECT: RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ANGUS RURAL PARTNERSHIP****REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORT**

Abstract: This report discusses the Government's Framework Document "Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland" including possible implications for the Angus Rural Partnership and makes recommendations on future support for the Partnership taking account also of the future development of Community Planning.

1 RECOMMENDATION**1.1 It is recommended that the Committees:-**

- i) note the contents of the Government's Framework Document "Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland" in which the Government suggest it is premature to make a final pronouncement on the most appropriate structure for Rural Partnerships;
- ii) agree to continue to support Angus Rural Partnership (including signing, in due course, the Partnership Memorandum of Agreement) by continuing to fund the Rural Development Officer post and give in-kind support for a further year until 31 March 2000; and
- iii) agree to review the position with regard to Angus Rural Partnership as part of the development of a Community Plan for Angus by September 1999.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Last Autumn the Government issued a discussion paper "Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland". This was the subject of Report No 291/98 which was approved by the Planning and Transport Policy Committee on 12 March 1998 as Angus Council's response to the discussion paper.

2.2 After considering over 280 responses to the discussion paper the Government have now issued their "Framework for Rural Policy - Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland".

The document has two main objectives:-

- to set out a framework within which the principles for rural development identified in the consultation can be delivered;
- to respond to the detailed concerns about the rural component of national policies by showing what the Government are doing now to make sure that policies are responsive to rural need.

- 2.3 A copy of the Framework Document is available for reference in the Members' Lounge, The Cross, Forfar.

3 THE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

- 3.1 The Framework Document is divided into three main parts:-

- 1) Rural Development: Principles
- 2) Rural Development: The National Policy Context
- 3) Delivering Rural Development: Partnership

This is followed by two further sections:- a conclusion and a detailed Annex - analysing the responses to the discussion document.

Part 1: Rural Development: Principles

- 3.2 The guiding principle in the earlier discussion document that **“the overall aim of all our policies for rural Scotland is to foster and enable the sustainable development of rural communities”** gained general assent.
- 3.3 In addition four key principles were identified as necessary for the formulation and delivery of rural development strategy namely it must:-
- not set rural Scotland apart;
 - reflect the diversity of rural Scotland;
 - work through an integrated approach;
 - facilitate community involvement.
- 3.4 In terms of not setting rural Scotland apart it was recognised that the basic concerns of the people in rural Scotland are the same as those of the rest of Scotland ie the opportunity to make a decent living, access to good educational provision, healthcare, a safe environment, mobility. Correspondingly separate policies for rural areas were not called for and the Government recognise that the requirement is to adjust policies and delivery mechanisms to take account of rural conditions.
- 3.5 As regards diversity cognisance was taken of strong views expressed that there is no one rural Scotland and the document states **“the aim should be, not to develop one blue-print for rural development centrally, but to build the framework within which strategies for rural development can evolve at the right level.”**
- 3.6 If sustainable development of our rural communities is to be achieved then the inter-dependence of the three components of sustainable development - environmental, social and economic must be recognised. This must be followed through in terms of integrated policy development and integrated working of agencies who deliver policy. The Framework document calls for this to work in terms of European and national policy and local delivery.
- 3.7 Community involvement was seen as necessary for the process and the Government welcomed this recognition.

- 3.8 To assist the whole process the Government is working with the National Rural Partnership and Scottish Homes to find ways to access existing data to generate information on rural Scotland at smaller scales. In addition the new Scottish Household Survey may prove to be a very useful source of information for rural data. Allied to this is the need to measure success or progress of rural development strategies. The Government intend to work with the National Rural Partnership to build on work they have already undertaken on indicators **“to develop a comprehensive set of indicators for rural areas.”**

Part II: Rural Development: The National Policy Context

- 3.9 There is recognition of the call for a robust context for policy at national level as part of a framework to assist the development of rural development strategies. This is acknowledged as a major challenge and one which will ultimately fall to the Scottish Parliament. In considering concerns raised by consultees the Government **“recognise that the delivery of services can be more expensive in rural areas,”** and the document states that **“Government agencies are expected to take account of this in delivering services on behalf of Government in rural areas.”** This increased emphasis on rural areas is welcomed but how this is to be achieved, resourced or measured is not addressed.

Part III: Delivering Rural Development: Partnership

- 3.10 The Government believe that it is partnerships, operating at the appropriate level, which should have the main responsibility for formulating and delivering rural development strategies. However many respondents raised concerns about current partnership working - the main issues being **“there are too many partnerships and the role of too many is ill-defined.”**
- 3.11 In order to achieve effective partnership, the Government believe the following principles must apply. Partnerships must:-
- be inclusive and command assent;
 - have clear remits and clear and achievable objectives;
 - be sufficiently resourced to achieve their objectives.
- 3.12 There are three developments of major significance which will influence the future of rural partnerships. These are the Scottish Parliament, the introduction of Community Planning and the reform of European policies encompassed within Agenda 2000. No final pronouncement will be made by the Government on the structure for rural partnerships in advance of these developments. However a structure of partnership at national, strategic and local level is suggested to deliver the objectives emerging from the consultation namely:-
- to be sensitive to the **diversity** of rural areas;
 - **integration** of those who have a contribution to make;
 - **empowerment** of locals to ensure their views are built into rural development strategies.

- 3.13 The role of the National Rural Partnership (NRP) would be expanded to act as an interface between national government and partnerships established at national level and rural partnerships. Its role would be to:-
- advise Government on policies of importance to rural Scotland;
 - generate innovative ideas;
 - liaise with other national partnerships;
 - provide feedback from rural partnerships to Government;
 - support the development of rural strategies;
 - contribute to the planning process of EC funded programmes;
 - advise Government on the allocation of funding to rural development objectives.
- 3.14 Key elements of the proposed **Strategic Rural Partnerships** (SRP's) is the Government's belief that they should be formed at local authority level for all areas of rural Scotland and that they should be integrated in the Community Planning process. Suggested organisations who should be involved in SRP's include local authorities; Scottish Homes; Local Enterprise Companies; Scottish Natural Heritage; Scottish Environment Protection Agency; Health Boards; Area Tourist Boards; the Forestry Commission; other public sector agencies, representatives from business and voluntary sectors and the community. The partnerships are expected to:-
- produce a rural development strategy (integrated with the overall Community Plan);
 - contribute to the planning process for EC funded programmes;
 - work with local communities and support local partnerships;
 - feed views to and receive feedback from the NRP.
- 3.15 **Local partnerships** are viewed as a way of empowering local communities but it is accepted that no one model would be universally acceptable and are likely therefore to take different forms. Community Councils are seen as potential key players. The functions of local partnerships could include:-
- the articulation of a vision for the local community;
 - the employment of development officers (animateurs) to aid project planning and partnership development;
 - provision of an interface between local communities and strategic partnerships and feedback on rural development strategies and Community Plans developed at the strategic level.
- 3.16 The Framework Document envisages that at national and strategic level the main support will be the commitment of time by officers of the organisations involved. At the local partnership level the voluntary commitment of local people is seen as the major commitment with the Government "for the time being" continuing to assist through the Rural Partnership Fund.
- 3.17 The partnership structure set out is intended to build on existing best practice and on the Community Planning proposals.

4 DISCUSSION WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ANGUS RURAL PARTNERSHIP

- 4.1 Angus Council supported many of the general sentiments of the earlier discussion document. A key concern expressed by this Council was translating the sentiments into relevant action would require major efforts including a change of emphasis in policy and expenditure by the Government and national agencies in favour of rural areas. Disappointingly although the Framework Document echoes this need for change of emphasis (see para 3.9) it gives little if any indication of positive action to implement it.
- 4.2 The concept that resource commitment to the national and strategic partnerships would require only the time of officers of the participating organisations (see para 3.16) belittles the time and effort required to achieve successful working partnerships. This was recognised by the Angus Rural Partnership in the application for and subsequently approval by the Scottish Office for partnership funding.
- 4.3 One of the Framework Documents four key principles (see para 3.3) is to work through an integrated approach. This concept has previously been recognised and endorsed by Angus Council as evidenced in the Rural Strategy Member/Officer Group Report published in October 1996 and the establishment and registration of Angus Rural Partnership as one of the first Strategic Rural Partnerships in Scotland.
- 4.4 The Rural Strategy covering Angus which is already in place is fully supported by Angus Rural Partnership member organisations. This fulfils the Framework Document requirements (see para 3.14) for a rural strategy covering local authority areas. The current make-up of partners of Angus Rural Partnership is also in line with Government proposals for strategic rural partnerships (Scottish Homes, SNH, SET, Tayside Health Board, Angus and Dundee Tourist Board, the Forestry Authority, Angus Association of Voluntary Organisations in addition to Angus Council corresponding to the recommended list with further partners being Angus College, Angus National Health Trust, Rural Forum and the Scottish Agricultural College). Representatives of the business sector and the community are the main current omissions but the Angus Rural Partnership Development Officer maintains contact with these sectors and has actively involved Community Councils in project work.

Review of Angus Rural Partnership

- 4.5 There is a need to reconsider the role of the Angus Rural Partnership in the context of the proposed national, strategic and local structures and against the background of Community Planning. In Community Planning local authorities are seen as having a lead role to play in obtaining a shared view of the issues facing communities and on how various agencies should address issues. Local Authorities are charged with building on existing partnerships and existing best practice in planning, providing for and promoting the economic, social and environmental well being of the communities they serve. (Report No 956/98 to the Policy and Resources Committee on 8 September 1998, included a remit to analyse existing partnership arrangements and to examine possible future arrangements).

- 4.6 Angus Rural Partnership will be included in this analysis and the relationship between Community Planning aims as outlined above and those of Angus Rural Partnership will need to be carefully considered. Angus Rural Partnership's current aims can be summarised as a commitment, through an integrated approach, to developing and implementing policies and programmes to enhance the health, social, economic and environmental well-being of rural communities, which ensures quality, efficiency and a cost effective and sustainable use of limited resources. By co-operating in the identification of priorities for action, the Partnership aims to ensure that environmental quality is secured, that the needs of all communities in rural Angus are treated in an equitable manner, and that the people of the area are engaged in a meaningful dialogue on the development of their communities.
- 4.7 Angus Rural Partnership has had relatively little dialogue with the existing National Rural Partnership (NRP). One of the NRP meetings was, however, hosted by Angus Council and a presentation given by Angus Rural Partnership to the national body. Angus Rural Partnership has also given its views on local Rural Challenge Fund bids as part of its formal role. Greater dialogue and exchanges of views between the national body and more local partnerships as outlined in para 3.13 are to be welcomed.
- 4.8 The proposed structure of strategic and local partnerships identified in the Framework Document raises potential confusion with the categories of partnership currently used for awarding monies under the Scottish Rural Partnership Fund. This is split into three categories; strategic partnerships; area partnerships (often very localised) and topic partnerships.
- 4.9 Angus Rural Partnership has been developing links via the Partnership Development Officer with communities and community groups. As a result the Partnership is becoming more widely recognised in terms of the help and advice it can offer to the community. Approaches from the community for potential joint working, projects or advice are now being regularly made to the Rural Development Officer. This rapport has taken time to develop and it is generally acknowledged that community work takes time, effort and therefore commitment including resources to develop.
- 4.10 Allied to the consideration of the future role of the Angus Rural Partnership is the issue of the future scale and source of funding. The Scottish Rural Partnership Funding which has been on a sliding scale, ceases at the end of March 1999. Similarly Angus Council's commitment to the Partnership, in terms of secondment of an officer from within the Council to the post of Angus Rural Partnership Development Officer and other in-kind support is geared to this same timetable. (Report Nos 703/97 to the Policy and Resources Committee 17 June 1997 and 869/97 to the Planning and Transport Policy Committee on 28 August 1998 refer). The other Angus Rural Partnership member organisations are also currently giving this matter consideration with a view to agreeing at least an interim position for the future development of this Partnership.
- 4.11 It would seem appropriate that to facilitate any transition period and to maintain commitment of all the agencies, groups and individuals involved that resources should continue to be made available to support Angus Rural Partnership for a further year beyond March 1999. By that time a more informed view can be made on the future role of Angus Rural Partnership, particularly in relation to progress on developing Community Planning. It is suggested therefore that Angus Council

should agree i) to sign in due course the Memorandum of Agreement between the Angus Rural Partnership member organisations; ii) to the continuation of the secondment of an officer to the post of Angus Rural Development Officer and iii) to continue to make in-kind contributions regarding financial and management services.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from the Framework Document. Secondment of an officer from within the Council to the post of Angus Rural Partnership Development Officer for a further year until 31 March 2000, together with various in-kind support would continue the current level of support from the Council leaving other partners to consider appropriate financial contribution. It is recommended therefore that revenue budget provision be made to cover an AP4 post from within the Miscellaneous Other Services Budget.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Law and Administration, Director of Finance, Director of Personnel and Director of Education have been consulted on the terms of this report.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The overall policy aim of the Framework Document "Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland" to foster and enable the sustainable development of rural communities reflects the Council's key themes and corporate policies. However few if any practical guidelines are given as to how Rural Strategies and Community Planning are to interrelate and the document concedes that it would be premature to make any final pronouncement on the right structure for Rural Partnership in advance of three developments (the Scottish Parliament, Community Planning and reform of European policies).
- 7.2 It is important however to confirm at least an interim position for the future operation of the Angus Rural Partnership. Given the changing context in which Angus Rural Partnership will have to operate it is suggested that support be given for a further year up to March 2000 during which a further review, particularly in respect of Community Planning, can be undertaken. This would also be subject to other Partners maintaining their commitment.

NOTE

The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above Report:

- Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland - The Framework, Scottish Office August 1998

AA/PC/SP/KW
5 October 1998

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