

**SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE
28 JULY 2011**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

7

TITLE OF REPORT: PROPOSED COMMUNITY HALLS STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER : COUNCILLOR MRS TRICIA COWLEY

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members that a Community Halls Strategy is currently being developed for North Hertfordshire District Council, to advise on the progress achieved to date and that the strategy is open for public consultation and comment.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does contain a recommendation on a key decision and has been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 It is widely recognised that community centres and community halls play a valuable role in the communities that they serve. However the provision of such facilities, their ownership and management throughout North Hertfordshire, varies greatly. Their usage, condition and viability is also variable so in developing a strategy for the community halls of North Hertfordshire officers have sought to identify, map, and survey the multi-use community halls that currently exist in order that gaps, overlaps and needs for enhancements can be recognised, as well as any needs for future provision in line with projected growth in population numbers.
- 3.2 The development of the strategy, in the current economic climate, has also led to an appreciation of the need to encompass the Council's views on its role and capacity in the current and future operational needs and support of it's own managed halls and urban community centres.
- 3.3 There has also been a recognition of the need to define the Council's future position in terms of support of the village halls located in the District, particularly in the light of the end of the recent £1.25m investment programme via the Parish Amenity Capital Improvement rural grant scheme (PACIF).
- 3.4 An information report on the development of the strategy was presented to Members of this Area Committee on 25 November 2010 following which the committee expressed its support for the continued development of, and need for, such a strategy.

- 3.5 Further to the presentation to the committee on 25 November 2010 , and similar presentations to all other Local Area Committees within that same committee cycle, all of which also expressed support for the development of the strategy, work continued to produce a first formal draft document.
- 3.6 The first formal draft of the strategy was presented to Cabinet on 14 June 2011 for comment with a recommendation that it be placed for public consultation and presentation to all Local Area Committees, with a view to its return to Cabinet in September 2011 with a view to it being formally adopted. Cabinet also sought that the population statistics within the report before them be amended to reflect the latest housing growth predictions, which has been actioned by the officers responsible.
- 3.7 In the light of Cabinet's decision the strategy is therefore presented for further comment by Members of the this Area Committee as an appendix to this report.

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 There are no issues relating to the presentation of the draft strategy for comment to Members of the Southern Rural Committee as required by Cabinet.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Terms of Reference for Cabinet include to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved for full Council

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The risks arising from the operation of the Councils managed halls have been recorded and are visible to Cabinet on Covalent (the Council's Performance and Risk software). The key risks identified are the suitability of the buildings for their purpose, the ongoing maintenance costs and the risk of revenue costs exceeding income. The development of a Community Halls Strategy will enable these identified risks to be managed more effectively.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct Human Resource implications arising from this report.
- 7.2 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010. The Act creates a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011, which requires the Authority to give due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation
 - Advance equality of opportunity and ability to participate
 - Foster good relations between people (such as tackling prejudice and promoting understanding)

- 7.3 Recognising its responsibility in this regard, the authority will ensure that the consultation process as described at section 8 below includes full consideration of the differing needs of a wide range of community groups. Halls and community centres are traditionally seen to be more important to rural residents where alternative facilities are less likely to be on hand. They are also considered to be of most importance to younger and older residents who rely more heavily on very local facilities and ease of access.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND MEMBERS

- 8.1 A cross party Member and Officer Steering Group has been established to guide officers in respect of the format and content of the strategy to ensure that it addresses the salient issues in the best interests of the Council and members of the community.

- 8.2 Members of this Steering Group are:-

- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Tricia Cowley
- Councillor Bernard Lovewell
- Councillor Lisa Courts
- Councillor Joan Kirby
- Lynn Saville (Head of Community & Cultural Services)
- David Charlton (Senior Estates Surveyor)
- Peter Underwood (Community Facilities Manager)

- 8.3 A Member briefing event was held on 19th October 2010 to provide Councillors with a background to the need for a Community Halls Strategy, provide information on progress on the document, and to gather views and comments in relation to the matters to be addressed in its further development.

- 8.4 A inaugural meeting of Hitchin community centre managers was held in September 2010, to discuss operating issues and problems, to help assist the Council to seek information on and support for a more collective approach, co-ordinated by NHDC in terms of facility operation in the future. This was very much welcomed by those present with many ideas developed. A second successful meeting, opened to all centre managers in the District, was held in February 2011 with further meetings planned for the future.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That Members note the need for a Community Halls Strategy, and give their support in its development and implementation.
- 9.2 That members comment on the current draft document as part of the consultation process leading to its reconsideration and adoption by Cabinet in September 2011.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To enable the establishment of a strategic position to provide best value for those community facilities operated directly by the Council, and those owned by the Council but operated by local community organisations.

- 10.2 To establish a strategic position of support to those in the voluntary/community sector who operate community facilities entirely independently to serve the North Hertfordshire population.
- 10.3 To ensure that the standard and design of any new build community facility, as a result of a proposed new housing development in the District, meets Council requirements and those of the local communities that they will serve. This also to encompass scenarios where new housing developments require an increase in services being provided by existing local facilities.
- 10.4 To enable an appropriate and affordable rationale to be developed in respect of the operation of the Council's own managed halls and also in respect of the support of those facilities owned by the Council but operated by voluntary groups.
- 10.5 To enable appropriate levels of community facility provision to be available across the District in relation to current and forecast levels of population up to 2031.

11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 11.1 The alternative to developing a Community Halls Strategy would be for the Council to be unable to quantify the level and extent of service provision required by the Council from its managed halls and community centres, in relation to value for money to the local taxpayer. It would also mean that the Council was unable to specify the level and nature of support it can provide to the village hall community, and be unable to appropriately justify community facility section 106 contributions from prospective developers in relation to existing service provision or that to be provided in the future, and that there would be no co-ordination or planning of community facility needs for the future.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Draft Community Halls Strategy, Version AC2a, dated May 2011

13. CONTACT OFFICERS

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