



Environment and Transport Select Committee
23 October 2013

Countryside Management Transformation Programme

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services and Budgets/Performance Management/Policy Development and Review

Following the Report by the Countryside Management Task Group, it was agreed that progress on the actions would be reported to the Select Committee in July and October 2013. The Output from the Task Group has now been developed into the Countryside Management Transformation Programme.

Introduction:

1. A report was brought to the Select Committee on 19 July 2013 setting out the progress to date on the action that came out of the Countryside Management Task Group's Report. This committee report sets out the programme that has been developed from that action plan and the progress on key areas.
2. Appendix 1 sets out the broad outline of the Programme and the projects that make up that programme with progress to date. The key areas of work to report to this meeting of the Select Committee are the review of the Rural Estate, the progress on collaboration on Countryside Management across the County and the review of the Agreement with Surrey Wildlife Trust to manage the County Council's Countryside Estate.
3. Detailed discussions are about to start on Surrey Wildlife Trust's business plan for the Countryside Estate and in order to assist in providing advice on this and in assessing a more effective governance it is proposed to re-establish the Countryside Management Task Group to take on this focused piece of work. (Draft Terms of Reference for the Task Group are enclosed for discussion on page 53 of this agenda).

Review of the Rural Estate

4. The Committee agreed at the last meeting that they would like a review of the Rural Estate to be carried out by an independent third party. This work has

been commissioned from Knight Frank following a call for quotes to the work from three rural surveying firms, Smiths Gore, Savilles and Knight Frank.

5. Knight Frank will assess the management of the Smallholdings Estate and the tenanted farms on the Countryside Estate. The latter are managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust so this will give us a comparison of the way the types of holdings are managed. Work will include assessing the level of investment, support for the tenants and the way the holdings are used. All the tenants are being surveyed via letter and a number of tenants have been selected at random for a more in depth interview to gain their opinion of the way the smallholdings are managed and what they would like to do with their holdings in the future.
6. The report is due to be completed at the end of October and reviewed in November.

Collaboration in Countryside Management

7. A key aim of the transformation programme is to ensure that the Countryside Management Service can be continued across the County in this period of squeezed budgets. One way of achieving this is to work in a collaborative way with other organisations. The Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment and his Associate for Environmental Services hosted a meeting of chairmen of organisations that are involved in Countryside Management on 17 September.
8. Out of that meeting has come an agreement to meet again in November and develop closer working relationships on agreed priorities across the County. The paper that went to that meeting is attached at Appendix 2. The next stage is to agree a shared agenda across the County, to develop a strong and unambiguous communication strategy across all organisations and agree specific projects that can be achieved together.

Recommendations:

9. That the Committee
 - a) Notes the progress to date
 - b) Comments on the proposed programme

Next steps:

A further report will be brought to the Select Committee February 2014 setting out the progress.

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Sources/background papers:

Countryside Management Task Group Report: Report on Progress, report to ETSC on Friday 19 July 2013.

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