

**Agenda Item No. 6**

**TO:** SWALE RURAL FORUM  
**DATE:** 20<sup>th</sup> December 2005  
**SUBJECT:** RURAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMME - RESPONSE TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS (DEFRA)  
**BY:** Head of Community and Regeneration Services  
**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** This report provides details of DEFRA's response and conclusions from the recent consultations they undertook on the above programme.

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**Implications:** Human Resources. None  
Financial implications. None  
Sustainability. None  
Section 17 implications – Crime and Disorder Act.  
None

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**Decision Required:** It is recommended that :

- a. The Rural Forum note the response from Defra and the current business case.
- b. Swale partners work with Kent Rural Community Council to ensure that Swale has a clear plan to secure and commit a fair share of the Kent resources to the benefit of its community and the objectives of the Kent Local Area Agreement

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1. Defra's Rural, Social and Community programme is a 'new' funding stream that rationalises a number of separately managed funding arrangements, the aims of which were:

- i) To enhance the community capacity building capability of rural communities so that those communities can work together to shape their future.
- ii) To help socially excluded individuals in rural communities improve their life chances.
- iii) To develop the capacity of the voluntary and community sector, and of the town and parish council sector, to reinforce the delivery of the first two aims.

2. Defra's consultation on the proposed programme was carried out over a comparatively short period and their consultation document was responded to by Swale Borough Council acting on behalf of the Forum. A copy of that response is included at Annex B. The response's main points concerned a need for greater devolvement of the funding to local partnerships that are well established, a need for more clarity on how the funding formula would be calculated to distribute funds nationally, regionally and sub regionally, a more streamlined process for the submission of the area business cases to secure the funding using existing bodies/partnerships.

3. Following the consideration of over 200 written responses nationally Defra have recently published their conclusions and the way forward. That document is included as Annex A to this report and makes it clear how they have dealt with what they regarded as the key points to consult on. In summary they have;

- i) changed the overall funding split to £9m for each of the two years for the sub regional element (was £8m/annum) and have decreased the regional and national element to £1m for each of the two years (was £2m/annum). The £3.5m/annum for the service level agreements with the network of Rural Community Councils is unchanged.
- ii) not changed their commitment to the funds being revenue only but there will be no restrictions to its use other than demonstrating that the activities are expected to increase community capacity.
- iii) split the funding regionally on the basis of rural population and sparsity of population with no flat rate inclusion as previously proposed. The South East is allocated £1.281m.
- iv) repeated that it will be for the Gov' Offices to decide the allocations sub regionally.
- v) encouraged voluntary and community sector organisations to come forward with other partners in presenting the sub regional business cases. (For Swale this is Kent and the Kent RCC are coordinating the Business Case submission).
- vi) repeated that the funding may be included in the list of funding streams that may be pooled through a Local Area Agreement. (In Kent where there is an LAA there is a view that the funds should compliment the LAA but not necessarily be pooled with other funding).
- vii) Repeated the need for sub regional partnerships to present their business cases setting out evidence of need and how they propose to meet that need (by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2005).

4. Kent Rural Community Council, fulfilling the coordination role for the sub-region (Kent) have had to prepare the business case to meet the tight deadline. That is attached at Annex C. It is expected that this will be the starting point for more detailed discussions with Defra and GOSE that will lead to an agreement being reached about levels of support to Kent by the 16<sup>th</sup> January and in turn more discussions with partners about plans in each district as well as County wide. It is still expected that the funds will become available from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2006. The timescales for all this have been very short and this has meant that consultations have, unfortunately, not been extensive. However the business case, while presenting a fairly robust set of objectives will still have the opportunity for extensive partner involvement and participation in the detail.

5. There will clearly need to be some benefit to the Swale and that is most likely to be enabled through the work of the voluntary sector. The Borough Council may influence how it is spent through the Community Plan and Local Area Agreement with partners but is unlikely to be using or controlling any of the funding itself.

6. It is recommended that Swale partners work with Kent Rural Community Council to ensure that Swale has a clear plan to secure and commit a fair share of the Kent resources to the benefit of its community and the objectives of the Kent Local Area Agreement.

Peter Speakman ext 7251