

**PARISH PLANS & MARKET TOWN HEALTHCHECKS
FEEDBACK FROM PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS.****1 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The concept of Parish Plans and Market Town Healthchecks both come from the Government's rural policy agenda, set out in the White Paper "Our Countryside: The Future" in 2000. Advice and information on both initiatives is available through the Countryside Agency, but this seems likely to decline due to restructuring of the Agency. Funding for Parish Plans was withdrawn earlier this year, and no funding is available for Market Towns Healthchecks, although there is some SEEDA funding available for certain projects arising out of them.
- 1.2 Some assistance on Parish Plans and Healthchecks is available. The Countryside Agency continue to fund an officer based at Community Action Hampshire (at least until March 2005), and the County Council has employed a Market Towns co-ordinator. These resources have been used by some parishes but as these officers cover the whole of Hampshire their time with each Parish is limited. Some parishes in the District have already begun
- 1.2 In many respects Parish Plans and Market Town Healthchecks are the same. Both aim to establish a community led plan for the future of the town or parish, with identified actions and projects. These may relate to land use planning, the economy, social issues, or any other matters identified as important by the community.
- 1.3 Parish Plans are generally intended to be undertaken by small communities of 5,000 population or less. Market Town Healthchecks tend to be undertaken only by those settlements which function as a service centre for a rural area. To clarify matters, SEEDA have produced a list of market towns which will be eligible to receive project funding. In New Forest District these are:
- Brockenhurst
 - Fordingbridge
 - Hythe
 - Lymington
 - Lyndhurst
 - Milford-on-Sea
 - New Milton
 - Ringwood
- 1.4 All other Parishes will be eligible to produce a Parish Plan, with the exception of Totton & Eling who fall within neither definition. In view of the absence of funding this is little more than a technicality however.
- 1.5 Parish Plans and Healthchecks have an important relationship with District Council plans, notably the Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework. Once established, these plans will provide a valuable picture of the issues, aims and objectives which local communities have.

2 CABINET INTEREST

- 2.1 Cabinet has been concerned at the dichotomy that has arisen on this issue. Essentially the work of the Countryside Agency has generated a lot of interest and

activity among town and parish councils, but just when this has reached a peak, funding has been discontinued. Cabinet therefore resolved in June to allocate funding for Parish Plans and Healthchecks from Planning Delivery Grant.

2.2 In order to advise Cabinet on how best to allocate this funding, a survey of town and parish councils has been conducted. This was undertaken during July/August and asked for the following information:

- Whether the parish intended to produce a Parish Plan/Healthcheck.
- If so, what progress had been made.
- Whether the parish would welcome support from the District Council.
- If so, what form that support should take (financial assistance; help with printing; a dedicated officer resource).

2.3 This report updates Cabinet on the information received.

3 SURVEY RESULTS

3.1 The response from parishes has been excellent, with 34 out of 37 responding to the survey.

3.2 Of the responding parishes 11 do not intend to undertake a parish plan or healthcheck. Two of these 11 parishes did however express interest in finding out more about the process.

3.3 The majority of parishes therefore are interested in these initiatives, 14 having started work already, 9 not yet started. Fordingbridge, Hythe & Dibden, Lymington & Pennington, New Milton and Ringwood are producing Market Town Healthchecks.

3.4 All of the 23 parishes above would welcome assistance from the District Council. The parishes supported all three forms of assistance almost equally, the most popular being the idea of a dedicated officer resource at NFDC who could provide assistance with the work.

4 POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 It is primarily for Cabinet to decide on how it wishes to progress this issue. By way of assistance however, the survey has the following implications:

- There is considerable interest among parish and town councils in these initiatives and all would welcome some form of assistance.
- There may be some confusion as to the difference between Parish Plans and Market Town Healthchecks, and as to which parish does which one.
- The survey has not revealed any great preference from the parishes as to what form of assistance they require.
- There is however, clear popularity for a dedicated officer resource. With at least 23 parishes undertaking or about to start this work, this would place a heavy workload on existing officers, assuming they continue to have other responsibilities.
- Different parishes approach the plans and healthchecks in different ways, it is not therefore easy to allocate financial funds in a simple way. Simply dividing the total

allocation of grant equally among those 23 parishes who wish to produce a plan or healthcheck is one option and approximates to £2,600 per parish. The size and complexity of the parish plan or healthcheck may need to be considered however when determining funding, as some parishes wish to appoint a specific person to work on the study.

5 WAY FORWARD

5.1 Analysis of the survey results suggests that the following approach to supporting the parish councils is appropriate:

Of a total sum of Planning Delivery Grant allocated by Cabinet of £60,000:

- 1) Use the majority of the sum to fund the appointment of a dedicated liaison officer, employed for an initial 2-year period to assist the parishes with preparation of plans and healthchecks.
- 2) Set aside a total of £10,000 to be allocated to parishes to cover costs associated with printing of plan documents, leaflets etc.

5.2 It is anticipated that a post could be advertised internally within the District Council, possibly using a secondment, and followed up with external advertising if required.

5.3 This approach appears to fulfil the main parish requests for a dedicated staff resource at the District Council, together with some financial assistance toward document production and printing. Cabinet are invited to endorse this way forward.

Further Information

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