Rural Proofing Policy

Report by Director of Resilient Communities

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

9 December 2021

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 **This paper provides information on the existing Rural Proofing policy and the effectiveness of the policy in helping to ensure that rural issues are properly considered in Council policy making.**

1.2 A Rural Proofing policy was developed and approved by the Executive Committee in November 2007 and was reviewed over the first few years of implementation. The most recent report was taken to the Executive Committee in 2011.

1.3 The key aims of the policy were to help ensure that the needs of people living and working in the rural areas were fully taken into account in the development of all new Council policies and strategies.

1.4 Scottish Borders Council has embraced and incorporated the UN Sustainable Development Goals Checklist and an Integrated Impact Assessment into the Council reporting structure which raises the question regarding the validity of the Rural Proofing policy and whether the Council requires this particular checklist within the Committee Report Template.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 **It is recommended that the members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee discusses the relevance of the rural proofing policy in light of the inclusion of UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Integrated Impact Assessment checklists within the Council Committee reporting template and decide whether they wish to take any further action.**

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   A 'Rural Proofing' policy was developed and approved by the Executive in November 2007, which was a key commitment at that particular time. The policy was initially developed to help ensure that the needs of people living and working in rural areas were taken into account in the development of all new Council policies and strategies.

3.2   The policy was implemented in April 2008 and a section relating to Rural Proofing was incorporated within the Equalities Section of the Council's Committee Report Template. This section was completed by report authors for all new or refreshed Council policies or strategies and was designed to help identify any potential adverse impacts on the rural nature of the Scottish Borders. A copy of the rural proofing checklist is provided in **Appendix A.**

3.3   The policy was reviewed three times over the first few years following implementation, with the last review taking place in 2011. From that report, it could be noted that 12% indicated that the policy or strategy would have a positive impact on the rural area, whilst seventy two percent reported that the new or refreshed policy or strategy would have no adverse impact on the rural area, with none reporting an adverse impact. Sixteen percent reported 'unknown impact' due to further work on Rural Proofing needing to be done at implementation stage.

3.4   Amongst those reports in which the Rural Proofing section had not been completed, most had included a standard equalities statement outlining that there were no adverse equalities issues expected from the report.

3.5   Scottish Borders Council formally agreed to commit to the implementation of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals as they relate to Local Government in August 2019, following a report to Council. A suitable checklist relating to Sustainable Development Goals was subsequently incorporated into the Committee Report Template. For clarity, the list of global goals has been provided in **Appendix B.**

3.6   The Council has a statutory obligation to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and advance equality of opportunity for all of the people throughout the Scottish Borders. To help achieve this aim, an Integrated Impact Assessment is also currently part of the Committee Report Template.

4   PROPOSAL

4.1   Following an initial review, officers suspect that the rural proofing checklist incorporated into the Committee Report Template could be considered as being surplus to requirements, primarily due to the fact that Elected Members have rural communities at the heart of decision making in all Council processes and a checklist associated with rural aspects seems unnecessary.

4.2 In addition some of the aspects associated with rural proofing appear to be covered by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the Integrated Impact Assessment which are both part of the Council's Committee Report template.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 **Financial**
There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report.

5.2 **Risk and Mitigations**
The key risk associated with this report is that rural issues are not given due prominence within the Council reporting structure. However, as the report details, rural issues appear to be well integrated into the decision making process and further mitigated by the existing report template checklists which appear to adequately cover the majority of rural aspects.

5.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment**
There are no direct implications associated with an Integrated Impact Assessment. However, if the recommendations of this report are accepted, the IIA will potentially have more prominence within the report checklist.

5.4 **Sustainable Development Goals**
If the recommendations of this report are accepted, the sustainable development goals will have more prominence within the report checklist.

5.5 **Climate Change**
There are no direct implications associated to climate change in the report.

5.6 **Rural Proofing**
If the recommendations of this report are accepted, the rural proofing section of the report template checklist may not be required

5.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**
There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

5.8 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**
There are no changes to the scheme of administration or the scheme of delegation proposed in this report.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council, Corporate Equalities and Diversity Officer and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Jenni Craig
Director of Resilient Communities

Signature …………………………………..

Author(s)

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Background Papers: Executive Committee – 13 November 2007
Executive Committee – 28 April 2009
Executive Committee – 29 June 2010
Executive Committee – 16 August 2011
Scottish Borders Council – 29 August 2019

Previous Minute Reference:

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Graeme Johnstone can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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