



Essex Rural Partnership (ERP) Terms of Reference

Purpose

The Partnership will be known as 'Essex Rural Partnership' (ERP)

The overall purpose of the ERP will be to agree and deliver a *shared* vision for the future of rural Essex that will support balanced sustainable development that takes account of environmental, community and economic issues.

Aims

1. The ERP will be responsible for producing a Rural Strategy for the county of Essex. The ERP will support (and where appropriate co-ordinate) activities which assist with delivery of this strategy. The ERP will monitor and report on success in achieving the strategic priorities.
2. The ERP will provide a forum for bringing together in partnership the main stakeholders and delivery agencies with responsibility for and interests in the rural areas of Essex.
 - a. This forum will facilitate information sharing and identify opportunities for joint-working and added value.
 - b. Through this forum it will offer an important opportunity to undertake or support lobbying in order to bring Essex and its rural issues to the attention of regional, national and European bodies.
3. The ERP will act as a member of Defra's Rural and Farming Network (RFN) to represent the interests of rural Essex and to engage with national Government on matters relevant to our rural communities, businesses and environment.
4. The ERP will seek to ensure that other strategic documents in the county are rural-proofed and take account of rural issues and their impact on rural areas and residents.

Role

In fulfilling its overall purpose and meeting its aims, as above, the role of the ERP will be:

- to provide a forum for bringing together in partnership the main stakeholders with responsibility and interests in the rural areas of Essex, to agree a shared vision, and to identify policies, proposals and recommendations for action across a wide range of rural activities.
- to provide a framework for integrated actions by the partners taking an holistic approach that recognises the interdependence of rural and urban.
- to share and increase knowledge about rural issues and raise the profile of rural Essex.
- to identify and draw resources into Essex for the benefit of rural areas from regional, national and European sources.
- to contribute to regional, national and European policy developments, management plan initiatives, and statutory plans, providing a collective voice for rural Essex.
- to act as a co-ordination point for receiving and disseminating information relating to rural economic, environmental and community issues.
- to ensure linkage with other mechanisms in Essex.
- to advise and champion the concept and practice of rural proofing.

Membership

Full membership shall be open to all such organisations within the county of Essex (including Southend and Thurrock Unitary Authorities) that represent stakeholders or delivery agencies at a level that at least encompasses a single district. A list of current member organisations shall be maintained on the ERP website.

Organisations that are not currently members of the ERP may apply for membership, by writing to the managing body. Membership may be agreed by the Strategic Board, by a simple majority vote.

Organisations may also be approved as associate members. Associate members will be entitled to attend meetings but will have no voting rights. With this exception, all references to members in the following paragraphs shall apply equally to associate members.

Chairmanship

The ERP will elect a Chairman to serve for three years. In the first instance the position of Chairman shall be offered to the Essex County Council cabinet member with responsibility for rural affairs, and shall then be endorsed by vote at an ERP meeting to which full membership is invited. If this cabinet member is not willing to take the position of Chair, the Chair shall be elected from the existing membership at the time of election. Any Chair must be nominated and seconded by ERP members, and elected by vote at an ERP meeting to which full membership is invited.

The ERP will elect one or two Vice-Chairs to serve for three years. Vice-Chairs must be nominated and seconded by ERP members, and elected by vote at an ERP meeting to which full membership is invited.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman may be re-elected at the expiry of their tenure. In the circumstances of only one candidate being nominated for each post they shall be elected by a simple majority vote of members present at the relevant meeting (all members having been given at least 14 days' notice of such an election). If more than one candidate is nominated for each post, the voting procedure described below shall apply.

Meetings

Member organisations shall be entitled to send to ERP meetings one senior officer representative from each of the functional areas (i.e. broad type of service delivery or interest, for example, economic development, biodiversity, community transport, estate ownership) for which they are responsible.

Additional officer representatives will be permitted to attend by the invitation or permission of the Chairman or administrating body.

Elected members or Board members of member organisations will be welcome to attend.

Attendance of elected members or board members will only be restricted if it becomes necessary through venue size limitations.

The ERP will meet together at least three times each year. The Chairman, Vice-Chairman, or administrating body may call additional meetings if required, giving at least two weeks' notice.

At ERP meetings, the presence of representatives from a minimum of ten partner organisations shall render the meeting quorate.

Voting

At the request of at least ten member organisations, any decision of the ERP may be taken by a formal postal vote.

Members voting powers will be agreed by the Strategic Board at the time of joining for each member organisation, and will apply to both meeting decisions and postal voting.

Member voting powers will be based on the following guidelines to ensure fair representation across the county:

Countywide organisations	7
Unitary authorities	3
District wide organisations	2
Organisations representing an area greater than a single District but not conforming to county administrative boundaries	4
Other organisations	1
Private businesses (employing at least 10 people)	1

It is anticipated that recourse to formal voting will occur only occasionally as the intention is to maintain a consensus amongst the Partners. The voting power for any organisation will be reviewed upon request, but not more frequently than once per annum.

Activities

The ERP may establish task and finish groups subject to the agreement of two thirds of members present at the meeting at which the proposal is discussed.

Strategic Board

The activities of the ERP will be managed by a Strategic Board comprising senior officers and/or elected representatives or Board members of constituent organisations.

The purpose of the Strategic Board will be to:

- maintain the momentum of the ERP;
- endorse and support priority actions and funding bids to respond to identified issues;
- exert influence locally, regionally and nationally;
- determine policy views for the ERP, particularly when consulted as a member of Defra's RFN;
- nominate any such representatives as may be requested to attend other meetings, partnerships or groups to convey the views of the ERP;
- on the recommendation of any subsidiary groups, co-ordinate and support lobbying.

At Strategic Board meetings the presence of four members including the Chairman or Vice-Chairman shall render the meeting quorate.

Membership of the Strategic Board will be approved annually by the ERP at its first meeting of the calendar year.

The Strategic Board will comprise representatives from:

1. the primary funding body (member representative, ordinarily the ERP Chairman) (ECC)
2. the primary funding body (officer representative) (ECC)
3. the managing body (officer representative) (RCCE)
4. the managing body (RCCE)
5. the parish sector (EALC) (officer representative)
6. the parish sector (EALC) (member representative)
7. the farming community (NFU)
8. faith communities (Diocese of Chelmsford)
9. tourism/business (Visit Essex)
10. District/Borough/City local authorities (see below)
11. wildlife and environment (EWT)
12. crime and safety (PCC office)

The local authority representative will be nominated by the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives Group. Should the Chairman and/or Vice-Chairs not be appointed as members of the Steering Group by the above process they will, nevertheless, automatically be members of the Steering Group.

Unless otherwise stated, all other organisations shall be at liberty to decide who should represent them on the Strategic Board.

Ends