

Transformation Challenge Award

Background:

Since the establishment of the Transformation Challenge Award, over **£110 Million** in funding has been awarded to Local Authorities. It was made available to support local authorities re-engineer their business practices and redesign service delivery over the next year.

At a time when government funding for local authorities is reducing, the salami slicing of budgets will no longer enable authorities to balance their budgets. They have to find different and innovative ways of working in different kinds of partnerships and delivering services differently.

A story in Localgov.co.uk recently led with the headline 'Councils predict 2015 will be a year of transformation'. It reported on a survey carried out by Civica which revealed that nearly three quarters of local authorities think efficiency cuts will be deeper this year, but that more than half of directors and managers also say they will transform public services this year.

"At the same time, local officials are struggling to cope with population pressures. Forty-four percent of respondents expect the growing ageing population to squeeze their finances further."

This is particularly relevant for rural communities which have a larger than average older population and also where options such as making services available online are difficult to make work in practice as there are rural areas within the local authority with no or very limited access to broadband.

Where has the money gone?

Overall when considering just the lead authorities for the bids, Predominantly Rural Councils have been awarded £22.6 Million and Urban with Significant Rural authorities have been awarded £18.5 Million.

When considering lead authorities over the three years, there were 73 Urban Authorities, 38 Predominantly Rural Authorities and 25 Urban with Significant Rural Authorities that received awards.

A number of the bids were made up on partnerships between local authorities, other public service bodies, housing associations and community or voluntary sector organisations. In total therefore, 156 unitary authorities, 89 Predominantly Rural Authorities and 49 Urban with Significant Rural Authorities received awards.

If you look at Rural Services Network authorities, solely considering the lead authorities for bids, they have been awarded over the 3 years, £31.5M in funding and £3.6M in capital receipt flexibility. This is a significant amount of expertise and different experiences across the network which we should all benefit from.

Government Perspective on future work

On 10th February 2015 in his speech about the Final Local Government Settlement, Kris Hopkins MP specifically said:

“As I announced in December, we are developing proposals for a project to identify and disseminate good practice in transforming services, especially in rural areas. This work will involve rural authorities and the Rural Services Network, and is a clear commitment to our rural areas.”

How can we build on this at the Rural Services Network?

We have written to Kris Hopkins MP to ask more about the project given the specific reference to our organisation however we have not yet had a response.

We have two Councillors from our Network that are going to talk about the projects that their authorities are undertaking at the meeting on 13th April. We would welcome authorities contributing in this way at future meetings.

Shropshire Council received £520,000 for the project ‘Our Community Hubs’ to transform existing face to face customer focused services, including libraries and Customer Service Points.

Suffolk County received £3,323,125 for their Future Councils Model. This project involves a wide range of authorities within the county and Suffolk Constabulary and the money will be used to pump prime new ways of collaborative working that support communities, reduce costs and generate benefits for residents of £19M over 10 years.

We are exploring the possibility of putting case studies or links to information about our members projects on our website so that member authorities can share information and find out more about best practice.