

## REPORT TO THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 26 November 2007

**REFERENCE:** R/11/07

**SUBJECT:** RURAL CONFERENCE

### SUMMARY:

This year's Local Government Association's Rural Commission and Annual Conference was held at the Riviera Conference Centre, Torquay and the Vice Chair Councillor T E Evans attended on behalf of the Fire Authority.

OBJECTIVES		IMPLICATIONS	
Trusted & Respect		Operational Risk Management	
More than Emergencies		Community Risk Reduction	
Saving Lives, Protecting Communities		Training & Development	
Managing within Budget		Civil Contingencies	
Improving Efficiency		Finance & Procurement	
Resources to Priorities		H.R.	
Alternative Resources		ICT	
Managing People		Corporate Services	
Integrated Management Planning		Transport	
Partnership Working		Health & Safety	
Effective & Empowered People		Premises	
Sustainability & the Environment		Welsh Language	
Governance		Legal	
<b>COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:</b>			

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

For information only

### BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT:

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The Conference theme this year was titled 'shaping rural places' and was supported by delegates from Wales and England. In total, presentations were given by seven speakers with each highlighting the importance of local governance as the key towards prosperous communities. Regeneration in rural areas is seen as the key and at the centre is the clear recognition of the role of local councils in promoting economic development.

The Conference highlighted four particular issues for rural areas:

- Affordable housing - many people are attracted by the quality of life of the countryside and thriving rural economies, while at the same time, sites for new developments are scarce and opposition to new housing can be very strong. People on local wages are being priced out of the market for homes to buy or rent. This has a knock on effect of local people migrating to larger towns for employment and accommodation with young people not being available for local services, e.g. retained firefighters.
- Green belt - the view that councils should have scope to review green belt boundaries. However, change should not be imposed on local authorities, instead there should be local flexibility and case by case judgement.
- Transport - national policy is geared towards urban areas but government including Welsh Assembly needs to recognise that rural areas face particular challenges in delivering public transport.
- Broadband - access to broadband internet connections in our rural areas will be a key way of overcoming some of the challenges arising from having dispersed communities and sparse population. In the information age, if everyone has equal access, their precise physical location should be less than in the past.

These points raised a number of questions which resulted in a good debate with various other solutions offered. There is much further work required at all levels from Government to local communities but delegates felt this was a very good starting point. In general the Conference proved to be a worthwhile event and particularly useful for the Fire Authorities rural areas.