

Notes of Rural England Stakeholder Group Special Meeting

London, 11 July 2017

Present:

Margaret Clark (Chair and ex CRC); David Inman (RE/RSN); Andy Dean (RE); Brian Wilson (RE); Jane Hart (RE); Mike Perry (RE); Alice Grimes (Big Lottery Fund); Billy Beckett (Big Lottery Fund); Paul Blacklock (Calor); Chris Cowcher (ACRE); James Alcock (Plunkett); Mark Shucksmith (Newcastle Uni); Anna Bradley-Dorman (NFWI); Sophie Willingale (NFYFC); Clare Crookenden (Prince's Countryside Fund); Emma Critchley (Locality).

Apologies:

Alison McLean (ex CRC); Alison Marshall (Uni of Cumbria); Jo Lavis (RE); Graham Biggs (RE/RSN); Jerry Marshall (Germinate);; Fiona Davies (WIRE); Michael Winter (Uni of Exeter); Belinda Gordon (CPRE); John Birtwistle (First Group); Georgina Fung (UK Youth); Trevor Cherett (TCPA); Janet Dwyer (CCRI); Polly Gibb and Fiona Davies (WIRE); Catrin Robinson and Sarah Lee (Countryside Alliance); Sarah Palmer (NFYFC); Ian Sherriff (Plymouth Uni); Sabina Shahaney (Defra)

1. Margaret Clark opened the meeting at 1.30 p.m. and welcomed those present. This was followed by brief introductions.

2. (a) The notes of the previous meeting were agreed.

(b) Matters arising from the minutes:

Margaret Clark told the group that the Rural Coalition's Policy Statement launch at the House of Lords on 6th July had gone well. The documents and related case studies can be found on the ACRE website: <http://www.acre.org.uk/our-work/rural-coalition>

3. Presentation from the Big Lottery Fund

Alice Grimes and Billy Beckett gave a presentation to the group explaining the vision, funding priorities and future ways of working of the Big Lottery Fund (BLF).

Key statistics and information included:

- BLF awarded £509m in grants last year in England across 8,704 grants
- There were grants made in every English Local Authority area
- The three funding priorities are 'Stronger relationships'; Shared and sustainable places and spaces'; and 'Early action to prevent problems and tackle disadvantage'
- Some 12,352 National Lottery Awards for All grants of under £10,000 were made in the UK last year.
- 434 awards averaging £340,000 were made under the Reaching Communities stream.
- BLF's ambition is to have more localised assessment, more localised grant management and increased levels of stakeholder relations. This approach is being trailed in two areas.
- Their new approach will be more conversational, iterative, strengths-based and will identify collaborations and partnerships.

- They have lots of learning from both successful and unsuccessful previous funding
- They are non-partisan and less influenced by political change.

The full presentation can be viewed via this link [add link....](#)

There followed a number of question and comments from members of the Group including:

1. Concern that small rural organisations may not be aware of the BLF or how to contact them. Alice confirmed that the BLF were making efforts to go out where people are and not just using the internet and social media. More localised patterns of working are expected to improve accessibility.
2. Concern that rural areas may not be receiving their fair share of grant funding. Although available statistics did not suggest that to be the case it was acknowledged that the analysis of current data is not particularly easy. Billy advised that all new grants would be tagged in more detail and that the new system for statistical analysis will be more sophisticated.
3. It was asked whether there are any plans to extend the scope of available grants to assist communities with the purchase of assets of community value. This was thought to be under active discussion.
4. Concern was expressed about the use of ‘indices of multiple deprivation’ as a measure of need because this unintentionally discriminates against rural areas- only 3% of the rural population live in those areas but 17% are in poverty. The BLF is moving away from IMD and the more localised patterns of working should provide additional flexibility.
5. Concern was also expressed that some rural communities may be disadvantaged if they are unable to draw on professional skills amongst their residents. The BLFs new ways of working, including pre-application discussion and more iterative approaches, should prove more supportive.
6. Comment was made about the difficulties of co-ordinating grant aid from multiple sources when funders work to different time scales and have different criteria. This is acknowledged as a common problem but more localised patterns of working are expected to strengthen partnership arrangements.
7. The issue of different organisations operating in separate silos potentially duplicating each other’s work was mentioned. New ways of working are thought to be a positive step towards better partnership working.
8. There are issues around the higher costs of providing services to rural areas which is thought to disadvantage rural grant applicants. Alice commented that value for money was not all numbers based and that the value to the community would be carefully considered.

David Inman outlined the extreme difficulties facing England’s disparate rural areas in the context of changing demographics, austerity, and the contraction of local services and emphasised the importance of effective networking.

Mark Shucksmith offered to suggest some contacts who might be able to help the BLF with facilitation and capacity building if they are developing a theory of change.

Margaret Clark invited Alice and Billy to bring back to the group anything that it might be helpful to explore further. The Rural England Stakeholders Group would like to continue working with the Big Lottery Fund and it hoped to be seen by them as a resource, not least because it includes so many of the key stakeholder organisations and rural evidence experts.

Date of next meeting- Tuesday 6 November 2017