

Notes of Rural England Stakeholder Group meeting

London 4 December 2017

Present:

Margaret Clark (ex CRC); Jane Atterton (SRUC); Janet Dwyer (CCRI); Brian Wilson (RE); Mark Shucksmith (Newcastle University); Graham Biggs (RE); Andy Dean (RE); Jane Hart (RE); David Hughes (Defra); Clare Crookenden (PCF); Ellie Jesson (PCF).

Apologies:

Ruth McAreavey (UKRPPRG Convenors); Paul Milbourne (UKRPPRG Convenors); Aileen Stockdale (UKRPPRG Convenors); Ruth McAreavey (UKRPPRG Convenors); David Inman (RE); Paul Blacklock (Calor); Lord Cameron of Dillington; Trevor Cherrett (TCPA); Jo Lavis (RE); Alison Mclean (ex CRC); Jill Hopkinson (Germinate); Sarah Palmer (NFYFC); John Birtwistle (First Group); Georgina Fung (UK Youth); Belinda Gordon (CPRE); Alison Marshall (Cumbria University); Sarah Palmer (NFYFC); Anna Bradley-Dorman (NFWI); Suzanne Clear (NFU); Sheena Asthana (Plymouth Uni)

1. Welcome and introduction

The Chair, Margaret Clark, opened the meeting just after 1.30 p.m. and welcomed everyone attending. Those present then gave brief introductions.

2. Apologies were received - as listed above.

3. The minutes of the Stakeholders meeting held on 6 November 2017 were agreed. It was suggested that, in connection with item 6(a) Rural Panel that efforts be made to get Universities involved which could help to address the underrepresentation in younger age groups. Brian Wilson advised that the Amazon press release reported under item 5(b) had been somewhat delayed but is now imminent.

4. The minutes of the joint UKRPPRG and Rural England stakeholders meeting held on 7 December 2016 were agreed subject to two minor changes.

5. Feedback from the pre-meeting of UKRPPRG conveners:

Brian Wilson reported on the morning's discussions about how best to take forward the UKRPPRG. In summary, it was decided that the group's work could be built upon, without unrealistic resource implications, through the following actions:

1. Creating a UKRPPRG page on the Rural England website
2. The Rural Panel material being shared with the Convenors so that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can consider whether something similar should be undertaken in their areas.
3. Producing some UK-wide rural statistics, using the 'predominantly rural' local authority areas definition created for the Amazon project. Initially this will focus on a

limited range of demographic data, plus the couple of topics that are to be explored further by the Rural Panel i.e. health and housing. This will provide contextual information for the Panel work and also test how simple and useful it is to produce UK-wide statistics.

The group intends to make a proposal for those statistics by late January, so the Conveners can agree/amend the proposal prior to the Stakeholder meeting on Monday 5th February.

6. Presentation 1: Rural Poverty Policy Interventions (Janet Dwyer)

Janet told the group about work that CCRI and the University of Cardiff have been doing, for the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW), on 'An evidence review of rural poverty interventions'

. Looking at evidence in a range of OECD countries their analysis seeks to identify

- Which interventions have been successful in addressing rural poverty
- The relative costs of each intervention
- How robust the evaluation evidence is

From this research the team will draw out the implications for policy in general and for rural development strategies in Wales in particular.

PPIW previously identified four dimensions of rural poverty:

1. The rural economy
2. Transport and access to services
3. Housing
4. The rural poverty premium

However available evidence is often context specific and may not readily allow assessment of impacts on the rural poor. Other issues include existing evaluations tending to adopt a positive tone and difficulties in obtaining key data.

The prevalence of in-work poverty emphasises the need to work on the quality of jobs, not just the numbers of jobs.

It is expected that the final report will be available very shortly.

Presentation 2: Rural Business Survey 2017. Emerging Findings (Jane Atterton)

Jane explained that this Scottish Enterprise led initiative looked at the impact of changes in the CAP regime on a wide variety of non-agricultural rural businesses in Aberdeenshire, Tayside, Scottish Borders, Dumfries and Galloway.

Emerging findings include:

- 28% of the business owners/ director/ partners were aged over 60; 56% over 50 and just 13% under 40.
- 18% of businesses had no employees and 50% had fewer than 5 employees

- 10% of businesses were less than 5 years old and 15% between 5 and 9 years old
- 35% of businesses saw turnover increase in the past year and 25% experienced a decrease
- Overall about a quarter of businesses think Brexit will be positive whilst another quarter think it will be negative
- Often those linked to the land based sector have low reliance on it
- 51% of businesses with linkages to farming have noticed cashflow issues in the last 2 years but there were regional differences
- 47% of those reporting changed relationships with the land based sector have or will diversify.

The report is due to be launched early in 2018

Presentation 3: Unlocking the Digital Potential of the UK's Rural Areas (Brian Wilson and Jane Atterton)

Brian and Jane explained that past research had tended to focus on connectivity. This research looks at how rural based businesses are using digital; what factors constrain digital take-up and what growth potential might exist if the constraints were removed.

There are almost 764,000 registered businesses in rural areas of the UK comprising 24% of the UK total. In addition there may be 900,000 unregistered businesses.

The rural businesses are diverse but dominated by those with no or few employees

Some notable findings from the survey were:

- 24% of the survey sample exported during the previous year. Of these 80% used e-commerce to help them do so and 40% use e-commerce for all their exports
- A third of the businesses surveyed were one person businesses and these were more likely to be female owned; owned by someone over 55; set up in the last 5 years; professional or business services; and result from a lifestyle move
- The most frequently reported benefits from digital connectivity over the past 5 years were remote working; customer / supplier access; business efficiency; data storage and security and business flexibility
- Finding digital support was the most frequently reported difficulty overall
- Larger businesses were more likely than smaller ones to report difficulties with recruiting appropriate skills.
- Both connectivity and reliability remain serious constraints for many rural businesses

The report is to be formally launched in January 2018

When available, copies of the 3 presentations will be put on the Rural England website

<https://ruralengland.org/>