

Notes of Rural England Stakeholder Group meeting.

London 5 February 2018

Present:

Margaret Clark (ex CRC); Alison Mclean (ex CRC); Janet Dwyer (CCRI); Brian Wilson (RE); Graham Biggs (RE); Andy Dean (RE); David Inman (RE); Jane Hart (RE); Derek Egan (Defra); Helen Aldis (PCF); Trevor Cherrett (TCPA); Anna Bradley-Dorman (NFWI); Paul Blacklock (Calor); Richard Quallington (ACRE) ; Charles Smith (Farming Community Network)

Apologies:

Lord Cameron of Dillington; Jo Lavis (RE); Mike Perry (RE); John Birtwistle (First Group); Christopher Price (CLA); Gemma Bull (Big Lottery) Carole Reillu (Locality); Alison Marshall (Cumbria University); James Alcock (Plunkett); Sarah Lee (Countryside Alliance); Mark Shucksmith (Newcastle Uni); Becky Hart (Calor); Ian Sheriff (Plymouth Uni); Jane Mordue (CAB); David Hughes (Defra)

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 4 December 2017 were agreed.

Matters arising from the previous two meetings were then discussed:

- The group was advised that there had still been no response from Defra regarding the requested commendation for Rural England. It was decided to write again to Lord Gardiner via his Parliamentary Private Secretary and to copy the correspondence to Sarah Severn at Defra.
- CCRI and Rural England have agreed to undertake a survey using the rural panel which will include questions on health and housing. Further discussions are taking place regarding the contractual arrangements relating to the future use and development of the rural panel.
- David Inman reported that his attempt to contact Rural Estates as potential funders had not received a response. It was suggested that an approach to the CLA's new Chair and to Chief Surveyor might be helpful.
- With regard to a possible submission to the Big Lottery, David Inman noted that the Big Lottery had experienced recent staff changes and suggested that an application be made to 'Awards for All' which would probably start a dialogue. In discussion

Anna Bradley-Dorman advised that The Big Lottery was currently re-structuring and not accepting new applications until April.

4. Stakeholders' Research

Helen circulated a paper about The Prince's Countryside Fund's 'Recharging Rural' research looking at opportunities to make rural communities sustainable. The report is expected to be published in July and will contain practical recommendations and examples of successful collaborative ways of working.

Defra is procuring research about the dynamics of the rural economy which will include consideration of any distinctive barriers to opportunities. Contracts are expected to be complete by the end of February with report publication in September/October. They are also intending to invite tenders for research on ERDF/ ESF funding to rural areas, probably in October.

The TCPA has three areas of current research:

- Creating healthy places
- Innovative Local Authority delivery of housing including rural case studies
- Revision of the Planning System.

ACRE is about to go out to 38 members with strong linkages to local communities and to hold conversations with Defra regarding a rural services survey. This would complement Rural England's "State of Rural Services" research.

5. Current Rural England Research.

(a) Jane Hart briefly commented on the research about 'Issues facing providers of social care at home to older rural residents' which had been launched at the Vulnerability Day held at Portcullis House on 25 January. She noted that rural areas face particular challenges relating to the ageing population; issues of sparsity (no economies of scale and penalties of distance); and other aspects of rurality such as higher incidence of fuel poverty and characteristics of the older housing stock. The researchers had found a disappointing lack of rural statistics and targets/ minimum standards for meeting rural needs in National or local policies.

It was confirmed that this research would be widely disseminated to relevant Parliamentary Groups and Select Committees and that the content of rural STPs be looked at again in approximately 6 months' time.

(b) It was agreed that a desk-top study be carried out looking at fuel poverty (including definitions, data and initiatives). Target completion date of June.

It was also agreed that access to education and training by 16-18 year olds in rural areas would be the topic for research over the following 12 to 18 months. Jane Hart is to prepare an outline research specification for the next meeting.

(c) Brian Wilson reported that work on the State of Rural Services 2018 had started. He will circulate a preliminary draft.

(d) The amazon research has been completed and is awaiting sign-off. It is hoped that the research will feature on Countryfile on 18th March with the press release being the following day.

6. UK RPPRG Indicators Project.

Brian Wilson circulated a paper titled 'Initial proposals for a UK-wide rural statistics base' He explained that the convenors have decided to press ahead with a manageable range of indicators on demographics, affordable housing and health. These should be available by the summer. It is intended to monitor its usefulness before deciding whether and/ or how to further develop the service.

7. Issues from the Directors' meeting

David Inman advised that it is intended to split the Annual Supporters Meeting on 29th March into 2 sections. The first part would be for all supporters with the second relating to the Utilities.

8. Current Accounts

Graham Biggs advised that 4 former supporters have not continued their support. Whilst finances are alright currently the balance is diminishing.

9. Financial Backing

David Inman commented on the importance of the Utility Group's funding and outlined efforts to encourage their continued support.

Now that Rural England has a variety of completed research it is felt more publicity will be given to marketing research and dissemination opportunities. Attempts will also be made to get on selective tender lists.

10. Rural Vulnerability Day

There was positive feedback about the quality of the day, the good atmosphere and the level of attendance and engagement. Graham Biggs also noted the pleasing level of media attention. Congratulation were given to the Rural England / RSN team involved, including Bethan, who did so much to ensure the smooth running of the event.

It was agreed to run another rural vulnerability day next January if possible at which the SORS report could be launched.

11 AOB

The Chair suggested that the next meeting would be an opportune time to reflect on the role of the group, to step back and take stock.

Janet Dwyer told the group that she had been invited to join a rural academics panel set up by Defra looking at RDP non-agricultural funding. She would welcome any points of evidence on rural economy and communities.

The meeting ended at 3.15p.m.