

PLANS FOR THE STATE OF RURAL SERVICES 2021 REPORT

Short paper for the Rural England Stakeholder Group

1. The Stakeholders Group had an initial discussion about the 2021 State of Rural Services (SORS) report at their meeting in July 2020. This paper is to prompt a follow-up discussion which will help progress ideas and clarify how members of the Stakeholder Group contribute to the project.
2. By way of a recap, Rural England produced SORS reports in 2016 and 2018. These each analysed data and evidence about a shortlist of service types, some in the public, private and community sectors. The reports thus drew conclusions about recent trends in rural service provision and their current status. Those reports were mainly (though not entirely) data-driven analyses.
3. The aim is to commence research for the 2021 SORS report in January 2021, so a report can be completed later in that calendar year, the aim being to publish it at an annual Rural Vulnerability Day event in late 2021 or early 2022.
4. At the last meeting it was agreed that the 2021 SORS document would take a different form from its predecessors. Namely:
 - The focus should be what impact (short or long term) Covid-19 has had on rural service provision and trends;
 - Whilst external data and research could still provide important context, this report would draw upon research and evidence held by Rural England stakeholders;
 - The CCRI and Rural England Rural Residents Panel could be used to gather relevant survey data and that survey might be further distributed via stakeholders;
 - It is thus hoped that the SORS 2021 report will become more of a joint enterprise with the Stakeholder Group.
5. Within that overall steer topics which were cited as of interest included access to cash, community assets, mental health services, advice and support services, welfare services, homelessness services and services supporting older people. It is recognised that other topics will be relevant and they are not out-of-scope.
6. **Research questions** for SORS 2021 could include the following, though it would be useful to hear if there are others:
 - What rural services have proved most important to users (especially during lockdown)?
 - What rural services have proved most resilient and why? How are they adapting?
 - What services are moving out of rural areas (perhaps faster than they were before)?
 - How much more reliant have rural service users become on online provision?
 - Is rural community action now playing a larger role in service provision?
 - What role are local assets (not least rural community buildings) playing?
 - Are these trends impacting on some rural groups more than others?
 - Are these trends impacting on some types of rural settlement more than others?
7. It would be helpful to hear **what evidence or intelligence** is held already or is being collected by members of the Stakeholder Group which is relevant to Covid-19 impacts on service

provision and access to services. This could be evidence from a service user or a service provider perspective.

8. It would also be useful to create a **Task and Finish Group** from among the stakeholders, who could be consulted at key stages to provide a steer and to review draft outputs. Ideally this would consist of around five or six people from varied sectors.

BW, October 2020