



MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC

STAKEHOLDER GROUP On-line via Zoom

Thursday 14th January 2021, 11am – 12:00pm

MINUTES

Present:

Catriona Adams (National Federation of Women's Institutes) (CA)

Graham Biggs (Company Secretary) (GB)

John Birtwistle (First Group) (JB)

Margaret Clark CBE (Chair) (MC)

Steve Dowling (Association of Convenience Stores) (SD)

Professor Janet Dwyer (RE Director & CCRI) (JD)

Georgina Edwards (Plunkett Foundation) (GE)

Dr Andrew Francis (National Farmers' Union) (AF)

Derek Egan (DEFRA) (DE)

Dr Jane Hart (RE Director) (JH)

Lizzi Hearn (CPRE - The Countryside Charity) (EH)

David Inman (RE Director) (DI)

Professor Alison Marshall (University of Cumbria) (AM)

Dave Morris (British Youth Council) (DM)

Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs) (SP)

Richard Quallington (ACRE) (RQ)

Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle) (MS)

David Webb (Federation of Small Businesses) (DW)

Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)

Philip Wilson (Farming Community Network) (PW)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

The Chair welcomed everyone and explained that at the recent October meeting it had been agreed to hold another meeting in January to focus on the State of Rural Services Report (SORS).

1. Apologies for Absence

Lord Cameron (Former Countryside Agency Chair), Daniel Carey-Dawes (CPRE – The Countryside Charity), Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association), Amy Cobbett (National Farmers' Union), Christian Cubitt (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors), Dr Steve Emery (RE Director), Ellie Jesson (The Prince's Countryside Fund), Holly Lombardo (National Rural Touring Forum), Aanchal Mann (National Federation of Women's Institutes), Rev Claire Maxim (Arthur Rank Centre), Clare Mills (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action), Ian Sherriff (Plymouth University)

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Attachment 1)**

Minutes of the previous meeting 15.10.2020 were accepted as a true record subject to the following amendments:

- a) MS asked for Alistair Darling's name to be removed from the University of Newcastle update .
- b) JD clarified that the DEFRA study is led by Paul Cowie, University of Newcastle and that CCRI are partners in the team.

Action: BA to amend the minutes.

3. **Matters Arising**

Item 3 Update on the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit launch and Net Zero Project

a) Launch of Net Zero Project: GB updated the group that the revised draft document had been sent to funders and although still awaiting a response from Calor, it had been approved by the other funders. Once Calor has responded, then we can begin to discuss with Calor a launch/promotion. It is a completed project subject to launch and approval.

b) Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit: BW noted that there had been a successful launch of the toolkit on 9th December at a Rural Health & Care Alliance (RHCA) seminar at which it was well received. The report has been circulated widely around the network. One endorsement has been received from SP and she was thanked for this. BW asked for others as DEFRA likes to see wider endorsements too.

BW also informed the group that Cirican (formed by 17 members of the ACRE Network & Rose Regeneration) have offered to provide (for a fee from which RE would derive a small amount of income) training/facilitation to local level health and care organisations to encourage use of the toolkit.

GB noted that approval was needed from RE Directors to use Cirican as an associate partner and that this would be discussed at their next meeting (28.01.21).

Action: MC asked Stakeholders to consider endorsements for the toolkit and forward them to BW.

Item 5 Roundtable session - Stakeholders to provide a brief update on research/developments

c) DEFRA: DE explained that the Annual Rural Proofing Report was currently with Number 10 awaiting review in the Cabinet Office so until that happens there is no known date for publication.

4. **State of Rural Services Report (SORS) 2021 update (BW) (See Attachment 2 and Attachment 3)**

Draft Project Plan - Comments: BW thanked everyone for their helpful comments at October's meeting and hoped he had captured them in the draft project plan. BW asked if there were any other comments and stated that he was now looking to get the project approved.

MC queried whether Stakeholders, who were unable to commit to joining the Task and Finish Group, would have a chance to comment on the draft SORS report.

Action: BW agreed that there should be a two-stage process of review; first the Task and Finish Group, and then the Stakeholders Group as a whole.

RQ noted ACRE is working on a survey with Sheffield Hallam University re Covid and its effects on village halls and asked if BW had any questions he would like to put forward. BW thanked him for the helpful offer and MC suggested two of the project research questions ie "What impact have the events of 2020-21 had on the uptake of online services by rural communities?" and "Are recent trends in rural service provision impacting some types of rural area more than others?". MC also wondered if the SORS project should consider impacts on traffic eg delivery vans.

MS suggested the SORS project could look at Covid impacts for welfare services including Universal Credit, access to sources of help – mainly on-line, contact with CAB offices etc. How it is affecting different groups when such service contact is all on-line rather than face-to-face. This also true for Mental Health services and telephone services for poor literacy. BW agreed that this could be within the scope of the SORS project and will likely be a big trend to come off the back of Covid.

JB would like BW to consider the rationale used by councils during the pandemic, supporting already

subsidised bus services, but not those that were previously commercial. There have been very differing approaches across the country i.e., suspension of most services to stop people from travelling, to others that only put on a service taking people to shopping centres where they could go legally, and others that kept all bus services going.

SD noted that ACS has a Consumer Poll underway currently and will send the results on to BW once available. There are currently 17K Convenience Stores trading in rural areas. SD confirmed that he was happy to give feedback on the Task & Finish Group. BW thanked him for the additional support.

AM observed that many rural businesses had reinvented themselves e.g., theatres becoming community response centres, pubs turning into takeaways etc, showing true entrepreneurialism. She wondered whether take-up rates for government initiatives, such as the furlough scheme and business rates holiday, were higher in rural areas than in urban areas. MC noted that DEFRA has lots of this information. DE asked if social media/twitter would be used to seek evidence and draw out some of these themes.

Action: DE said he will contact Stephen Hall, who produces an internal DEFRA bulletin, and check to see what we can use.

JD is working on an analysis of business transformation with NICRE and the Business School, Warwick University. This is a large survey of rural businesses and some of the points raised by AM were covered by the survey. The analysis will be completed in early Summer and ready to report on in September. JD suggested checking the questions being used in the Defra rural communities and economies study, so that we could maximise synergies between the two projects.

On the topic of circulating the SORS project's online survey beyond the Rural Panel once finalised and ready to run, CCRI would be very happy to work on the option of spreading it further via other organisations and their memberships.

Action: If any Stakeholders would be interested/able to do that, please let JD and BW know.

GB noted that the Warwick Business School analysis timescale is similar to that of the SORS report so we could delay SORS slightly if there are new data/surveys that we can use. BW agreed and noted that the Rural Panel Survey may have to happen slightly later than thought anyway as the CCRI has a heavy workload.

SP and DW both commented on the impact of visitor numbers to rural areas which DEFRA is monitoring.

Action: EH to see if the CPRE network has any data on this.

MS and SP both thought it would be interesting to see how quickly vaccinations were reaching the rural population compared to urban. MC noted that she has asked DEFRA for data on this.

BW thought a tricky question for the SORS project was how much recent Covid-related impacts will stick and become long term trends.

Action: MC asked that if anyone has any survey work/evidence/ideas, please send it to BW.

MC concluded that everyone was broadly happy with the Project Plan, concept and outline and that there were lots of offers of help and evidence to feed in.

Evidence Source List: BW thanked everyone for the contributions to date, the offers of additional evidence and noted that he is continually adding to the list of evidence. The first Section of the note listed evidence from the Stakeholder Group members and the second Section listed evidence from other sources although some of that was not Covid specific and was there more as useful context.

MS recommended the Joseph Rowntree's recently published report on Poverty 2020 as its main themes are the impact of the pandemic across the nation. It could be helpful as a guide but may not have the rural/urban dimension.

EH recommended the CPRE's Transport Deserts report which will be launched in March 2021.

BW confirmed that there was no "closing date" for gathering new evidence, but it would be helpful to receive any existing evidence in the next couple of weeks

Action: BW to look at any gaps and contact people on an individual basis for supporting evidence.

Task and Finish Group: BW asked if anyone would be interested in joining this small group of 3-6 members who would be asked for advice at various stages. He did not intend this to be a big commitment of time. He would like to bounce drafts or key documents off people and most of this would be done via email and the occasional Zoom call.

The following agreed to help BW: SD, DE, DW, MS and RQ.

SP could not commit to being on the group but may still be able to help where workload allows.

Action: MC said that if anyone else would like to join the Task and Finish Group, then to contact BW directly. Also, if anyone has specialist knowledge then BW may contact them directly for a discussion.

5. **Any Other Business**

Date of Next Meeting: AGM on Wednesday 23rd June 2021 at 11am.

No other items were brought forward and the meeting closed at 11:55am.

ADDENDUM:

Information from JD to explain a bit more about the NICRE rural business survey mentioned at the RE stakeholders' meeting. Please see following page:



NICRE – Rural Resilience survey 2021

As part of its objective to strengthen the evidence base on rural enterprise NICRE is planning a business and farm survey focussed on Rural Resilience to be conducted in 2021Q2. The survey will cover around 4,200 organisations in the West Midlands, North East and South West regions and include a number of farms and rural businesses and a smaller comparator sample of urban firms. The survey will inform future NICRE reports including a State of Rural Enterprise report to be published in Autumn 2021.

As currently planned the survey will cover the following themes:

- * Business objectives and risk management strategies
- * Business and community relations and interaction
- * Local economic links – purchases and sales
- * Innovation, digital adoption and related management practices
- * Financial, physical, logistic and market resilience
- * Performance, expectations and the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit

We are interested in any ideas you might have for questions or issues which it would also be important to include in the survey. Please forward any ideas you may have to Barbara Tocco (Barbara.Tocco@newcastle.ac.uk). If you would like to discuss the survey in more detail please contact Stephen Roper (Stephen.Roper@wbs.ac.uk).

About the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE)

NICRE is a new research and evidence partnership led by the Centre for Rural Economy (CRE), Newcastle University in partnership with the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), University of Gloucestershire and Royal Agriculture University, and the Enterprise Research Centre, Warwick University. Funded by Research England, NICRE will conduct a programme of research, evidence gathering and business development to support rural innovation and enterprise. For further details on NICRE's activities see <https://ncl.ac.uk/nicre/about/> or contact Barbara Tocco (Barbara.Tocco@newcastle.ac.uk).