

MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC
STAKEHOLDER GROUP On-line via Zoom
Wednesday 13th October 2021, 11am – 12:30pm
MINUTES

Present:

Graham Biggs (Company Secretary) (GB)
John Birtwistle (First Group) (JB)
Lord Ewen Cameron (EC)
Amy Cobbett (National Farmers' Union) (AC)
Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association) (TC)
Margaret Clark CBE (Chair) (MC)
Chris Cowcher (RE Director) (CC)
Derek Egan (DEFRA) (DE)
Dr Steve Emery (RE Director) (SE)
Polly Gibb (WiRE) (PG)
Chris Hinchliffe (CPRE) (CH)
David Inman (RE Director) (DI)
Holly Lombardo (National Rural Touring Forum) (HL)
Rev Claire Maxim (Arthur Rank Centre) (CM)
Jane Mordue (CA – Rural Issues) (JM)
Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs) (SP)
Dr Matt Reed (CCRI) (MR)
Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle) (MS)
Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

James Alcock (Plunkett Foundation), Steve Dowling (Association of Convenience Stores), Professor Janet Dwyer (RE Director & CCRI), Sarah Hulme (Arthur Rank Centre), Professor Jeremy Phillipson (NICRE), Richard Quallington (ACRE), Professor Stephen Roper (NICRE), David Webb (FSB), Halima Yusuf (British Youth Council).

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting 12.07.21 (Attachment 1)

Minutes of the previous meeting 12.07.21 were accepted as a true record.

3. Matters Arising

Item 2: Future roles of Chair and Vice Chair

MC confirmed that she would be standing down at the next AGM and wondered if any progress had been made in securing a replacement. BW confirmed that role descriptions had been shared with Stakeholders but no response to date.

Action: BA to re-circulate role descriptions for Chair and Vice-Chair with minutes. If interested, please contact BW or GB to discuss further.

Item 7: Ongoing and Pipeline Projects

MC asked how the World Health Organisation webinar went that BW was presenting at. BW explained that he gave a presentation on the Rural Health Toolkit in a rural proofing session and it seemed to be well received.

4. RE Budget Report with actual to end September 2021 (GB) (Attachment 2)

GB confirmed that there was nothing outstanding to report on the budget and that it was on track. He explained that the estimated balance carried forward at the end of the current year is approximately £20K. It is down on the £32K brought forward into this year due to items of income generated last year, particularly from the utility companies for work that is being spread into this year.

5. Rural England Research Director Opportunity (BW) (Attachment 3)

BW explained that he is planning to reduce his consultancy work next year but not retire. The attachment invites applications for a role that covers a lot of the work currently undertaken by BW. Two main components of the job role include carrying out the annual main projects eg SORS, and also overseeing commissioned projects. Also looking at this role to develop other research and funding opportunities.

The Research Director post is a paid position through an IR35 Compliant contract – thus the appointee will be ‘self-employed’ or otherwise contracted. The deadline for expressions of interest is 1st December. Negotiable start date but potential for April 2022.

Action: BW asked if Stakeholders would “spread the word” through their networks.

Action: BA to set up an [Employment Opportunity](#) page on the RE website and email a link out to everyone.

6. State of Rural Services 2021 full draft report for comment and launch arrangements (BW) (Attachment 4)

BW explained that the report focuses on seven themes and very much on the impact of the pandemic:

- a) What are the trends in the run up to the pandemic?
- b) What have been the impacts of the pandemic? and
- c) Will those impacts last beyond the pandemic or will things revert back?

BW thanked those Stakeholders who sent through information directly. A key element of the report is the Rural Residents Survey, hosted by the CCRI. MR and his team helped shape the survey and undertook the initial analysis. The other survey was of rural, small market towns hosted by RSN.

BW asked for views on policy recommendations for the end of each themed chapter and if there was any rural evidence missing that would be useful to include.

Discussion took place within the Group with a number of suggestions including extra material/research from SP, CH and JM.

JM and MS also recommended drawing out themes around digital illiteracy and literacy skills and resilience of small market towns. CM offered to look for evidence on food banks through their network. MS also recommended BW contact Jayne Glass (SRUC), re her upcoming report on young people in rural areas of Europe. GB reiterated that though the main SORS report is about services rather than users, the user issues raised could frame the next piece of work undertaken by Rural England CIC rather than trying to weave more into the services section. MC agreed.

MR suggested that one of the themes emerging has been the degree of rural self-reliance. Those communities that had capability rallied and gave good support and those that were already structurally disadvantaged became worse. Important to qualify if communities are good at managing rather than thriving. SE agreed that it's not necessarily evidence, but it's the contextualisation of rural populations, which helps us better understand the consequences of the pandemic. TC recommended clarifying that we are not just say what needs to happen but who needs to act.

EC offered to raise a specific question in the House of Lords in the light of the State of Rural Services report and ask what is the government going to do about digital skills, levelling up, etc early in the new year.

BW discussed details for the launch ie 2 online events, one for Parliamentarians and the second more widely targeted to include another piece of research eg. the research funded by the Utility Supporters. Discussions had been held with Lexington who will produce targeted media outputs and can tailor to specific sectors etc.

Action: Any specific policy recommendations email BW directly.

Action: BW to consider MR's point on rural resilience and the just managing and SE's on the context of implications for individuals/groups to be brought out more.

Action: BW to develop specific policy asks and general policy messages and circulate those to give everyone a last chance to refine/delete.

Action: Launch date to be in January 2022 and on-line.

Action: Further discussion with EC re a specific question in the House of Lords.

7. Roundtable session

DEFRA – DE reported that the analytical resources in the DEFRA rural policy team are heavily involved in the levelling up discussions and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund development. Trying to get the rural needs into those key policy areas and drawing on evidence including that of Rural England CIC. Also, working on the DEFRA contribution to the Utilities Vulnerability report.

DE is currently working on a strategic case for investing in rural areas with NICRE. Sets out the justification why government should fund development in rural areas. Will bring a lot of evidence together to justify and provide a rationale for investment.

Also, Metro Dynamics have been commissioned to carry out a "Review of Rural and Urban Business Statistics" looking at the quality of statistics and what can be done to improve them or use "greyer" statistics to inform future economic policy. Looking at how

the IMD poses problems in terms of measuring poverty and deprivation in rural areas and how by using averages performance indicators we lose visibility of deprived people.

Plunkett – CC discussed the [Better Form of Business report – Community Pubs](#) and [Community Shops](#), BW has used some of the data sets in the SORS report, which looks at the community owned pub sector, impact of Covid and the resilience of communities and changes to services. Some datasets now updated. Also, currently commissioning a piece of research into [cold spots for community ownership](#) across the UK and also look at whether other community anchor organisations or socially led activities might perform the role expected of a community owned business.

Final piece of work is that Plunkett has taken on the “Keep it in the Community” platform which is a one-off repository of all assets of community value listings that exist in England. Seek to make a more proactive use of the data and campaign around improvements in relation to community rights and to realise the potential for community ownership.

Newcastle University – MS reported that he is continuing to work on the Rural Lives project to deepen that. He is also doing further analysis of the British Household Panel Survey and its successor in understanding how society and rural poverty has changed since 2010. MS is also doing a piece of work for the Scottish Government on rural movements and what they can achieve, including rural Parliaments.

MS reiterated the work that NICRE are undertaking on investing in rural areas and recommended viewing their [recent “rural catalyst” event](#) held in October -hailed a success.

TCPA – TC asked whether we could look at an attitude survey into how rural people/communities think about the planning system ie failures, chaotic state of planning reforms, universal neighbourhood plans etc, and what they want from the system.

MC thought this was something that perhaps the Rural Panel could look at and also the RTPI has launched a rural planning commission so it may be worth asking them to consider this.

TC commented that the TCPA is working with CPRE on a conference around neighbourhood planning in Wiltshire.

Rural England CIC – BW updated the meeting on the Rural Vulnerability project with utility companies re Priority Services Register etc. This field work by CCRI is now completed, and their report is now in discussion with the funders.

Action: If anyone has any further information they would like to feed in, then please let BA know and she will circulate it.

8. Any Other Business

No other items were brought forward and the meeting closed at 12:33pm.

Date of Next Year’s Meetings:

Thursday 20.01.22 at 11am – 12:30pm (follow up after SORS launch)

Monday 11.07.22 at 11am – 12:30pm (AGM)

Wednesday 05.10.22 at 11am – 12:30pm (Round table)