

**Rural Forum for the South East meeting
5th March**

Beechwood Hall, Lewes.

1. Welcome and introduction

1.1. Jeremy welcomed the Forum members to the second meeting of the new Rural Forum for the South East.

2. Action points from the last meeting

2.1. All actions from the last meeting were completed. Please can members ensure that they have provided the Forum Secretariat with a copy of their biography, highlighting their connection to Town and Parish Councils. This helps in the continuous monitoring of Parish/ Town Councils representation on the Forum. It was agreed by delegates at the meeting that representation was currently good.

Action: Members who are yet to provide their biographies and contact details to Secretariat are reminded to do so.

3. Chairman's report

3.1. Since the last meeting (5th November 2008) Jeremy has attended two Regional Rural Affairs Forum Chairs meetings with the Rural Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies. The notes from these meetings have been circulated to the Forum. Jeremy noted that the new Minister was very well briefed and knowledgeable on rural matters.

3.2. Jeremy tabled a copy of the paper, which has been submitted EFRA Select Committee on behalf of all 8 Regional Affairs Forums, as a brief commentary to Defra's response to the Committees report on 'The potential of England's rural economy'.

4. The Share of Deprivation - Developing and interpreting the evidence base - Dr Tom Smith – Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) - presentation attached.

4.1. OCSI have previously worked with the Government office for the South East, SERCC and the Forum in the production of 'The Rural South East: An evidence base'. Tom's presentation to the Forum highlights the need for continuous development and gathering of solid data and demonstrated how successful interpretation of data presented robust evidence of need for deprivation in rural communities.

4.2. The presentation also demonstrated the fact that the use of different data sets could present a significant difference in the numbers of individuals suffering deprivation. For example, by using either Super

Output Area data or individual numbers can present a significantly different statistical picture of rural need, the later demonstrating a more realistic picture of need.

4.3. The Forum agreed that the statistic with the biggest impact was that 70% of deprived people don't live in deprived areas – which could have considerable impact for individuals living in rural areas.

4.4. The discussions of the forum highlighted the issues of:

Age demographics

- More older people are living in rural areas than in urban areas and that this has increased in all areas of the South East. East Sussex has the highest number of >85 year olds in the country. The over 85 age group is doubling and will need more social care. This raises issues with how this will be funded; something that Department of Health is looking at.
- All agreed that the older people issue is a 'time bomb' which needs to be drawn to the attention of Department of health and PCTs in the Region.
- The issue of age demographics is very closely linked with 'Access to healthcare/ services'.
- There is also a concern that Younger people are leaving rural areas due to lack of employment opportunities. Support and help is needed for local groups to understand the issues, see recruitment below.

Recruitment

- In rural areas there are issues with recruitment and the problems around recruiting locally. Again support and / or evidence are needed to understand what these issues are.

Market towns

- There are concerns regarding that the significant work Small Market Towns do in supporting rural areas is currently not being recognized and slipping through the funding net. Most Small Market Towns don't receive any funding and are therefore at considerable risk from the economic crisis. There is an issue regarding lack of engagement with private landlords on the need for business support. The Forum would like to see Landlords engaged in the market towns debate.
- There was general consensus from the Forum that further work needed to be done by government/ local government regarding business rates and private landlords charging high costs. It was felt that this issue should be raised with Small Business Service.

Action: Rural Community Councils on the Forum to work together to produce a regional picture of deprivation, including the issues raised above and report back to the Forum at the next meeting.

5. County Priorities - Emerging Themes and next steps

- 5.1. At the last Forum meeting, County Rural Fora were asked to list 5 of their strategic priorities. The aim of this was to help the Forum develop a common consensus on priority policy issues. All 9 areas in the region responded, and most provided 6 top priorities. A table of each of the area priorities is attached to these minutes
- 5.2. After analysis of all priorities, 3 common themes emerged:
- Affordable Housing
 - Rural Transport;
 - Access to services.
- 5.3. All 3 are high priority areas and are currently, and will continue to be, high on the Forums agenda. However, in undertaking the analysis, other priorities have emerged which are 'less common'. To come to a consensus on these issues, it was decided to present and discuss these at the meeting. To prevent topic duplication, each area was requested to feedback one of their alternative priorities to the wider forum. The table below is a summary of this.

Action: Secretariat to identify working groups to lead in taking forward each of the above groupings. These working groups should identify needs of the wider forum on the topics in order to help set future agendas for the forum meetings and ensure that outcomes/ challenges are shared/ put to the Rural Board and other key stakeholders.

6. Membership and Chair of Forum

6.1. The Forum have elected Andrew Bowles as the new Chairman of the Rural Forum for the South East, his appointment took effect from the Lunchtime of the Forum meeting.

6.2. It was apparent that a number of LSP's are currently represented by an Elected Council Member. In order to achieve breadth of sector representation, it was agreed that the Secretariat would approach LSP's, who are not currently represented on the Forum to nominate a delegate from a non rural profession, but who has a rural interest, e.g. Police, PCT, business etc.

Action: Secretariat ensures LSP's are contacted with the above request.

6.3. It was agreed that a Vice Chairman should be elected and appointed at the next Forum meeting.

Action: Forum members to contact secretariat, Hannah, if they would like to nominate someone or themselves as a potential Vice Chair by the end of April 09.

7. Official Chairmanship handover

7.1. Andrew Bowles praised the work of Jeremy Leggett, and thanked him for all the work he had done for the Forum, both as Chair of the South East Rural Affairs Forum and as Interim Chair of the Rural Forum for the South East.

7.2. Jeremy was officially thanked by the wider forum.

8. Economic Downturn impact on Rural Communities - Crispin Moor, Director, Whitehall Office, Commission for Rural Communities

8.1. Crispin presented the Forum with an update of the work of the Commission for Rural Communities were doing in submitting briefing reports to Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for Defra. A summary of his talk can be found attached.

8.2. Crispin very much encourages Forum members to provide evidence to the CRC for their monthly reports – information and evidence is gathered and submitted at the beginning of each month.

Action: Forum members to submit evidence to www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/creditcrunch/overview#tellus at the beginning of April on the impact on debt in farms. Specifically: The rural impact & suggestion for improvement

8.3. Members raised concerns with CRC's reliance on local papers to evidence reports.

Action: Crispin to raise the above issue with the CRC communications team.

8.4. Members agreed that Crispin's presentation has highlighted the need for the Forum to have better knowledge and evidence on the issues effecting Home Businesses in rural locations.

Action: Roger Patterson, West Sussex, to provide secretariat with a contact for speakers on Home Business.

8.5. This session also raised concerns cuts in funding rural programmes. It was agreed that this was something that the Forum should focus on. It was mentioned that Frances Stokes, Business Development Manager Hampshire County Council, is currently putting together a letter to support the Rural Towns Project. It was decided that the Forum must work together and collectively provide a joint response to a recent letter from SEEDA.

Action: Andrew Bowles to raise issue at the next Rural Board meeting Planning meeting on 20th March.

9. Sub National Review – Sonja Rewhorn, Head of Strategy Co-ordination, GOSE.

9.1. Sonja gave a factual policy presentation to the Forum on the Sub-National Review. A copy of her presentation is attached. The presentation was informative and helped better equipped members to enter into SNR discussions in the future.

9.2. Sonja was clear that the Forum and the Board have a strong collective voice, and need to ensure that they are engaged in SNR discussions at an early stage. One process of engagement was to ensure that Members were ready to feed into the Local Economic Assessments of Local Authorities in the forthcoming financial year.

9.3. Andrew felt that it was crucial for 'Rural' to be engaged in this significant change in Regional architecture and would raise the matter with a meeting he was having with the Rural Minister on 12th March 09.

10.AOB

10.1. Jacinta Thorley is currently undertaking a project on behalf of the Government Office to publicise the Forum. Details will follow shortly.

11.Next Meeting

11.1. The next meeting will take place in June. The dates looked at were the 8th or 9th of June.

11.2. For the next meeting ideas where requested for a possible venue. Farnham Castle was suggested. If there are any ideas please let the Secretariat know.

Close of meeting.