



Rural Forum South East

*To help inform and
develop delivery of rural
policy and services in the
region*

www.rfse.org.uk

Attendees:-

Cherry Aston – Buckinghamshire Rural Affairs Group
Cllr Andrew Bowles – Chair & representing Swale LSP
John Brownscombe – IoW
Hannah Bussey – GOSE
Valerie Carter – SEEDA
Chris Chaney – Surrey Rural Partnership
Richard Clarke – South East Protected Landscapes
Suki Coe – Audit Commission
Elaine Cooke – West Berkshire LSP
Edward Dawson – Hampshire Rural Forum
Cllr Rosemary Doyle – Canterbury City Council
Cllr Raymond Ellis – Hampshire County Council
Cllr Hugh Fitzwilliams – Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Angela Gilmour – SERCC
Keith Harrison – Action with Communities in Rural Kent
Liz Harrison – Kent Rural Board
Jack Holt – Oxfordshire Social & Community Service
Michael Hunt – Buckinghamshire Community Action/Bucks Strategic Partnership
Simon Kiley – Action in Rural Sussex
Cllr Bryn Morgan – Waverley Strategic Partnership
Tim Parry – Community Council for Berkshire
Roger Paterson – West Sussex Rural Forum
Meryl Smith – Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
Marilyn Smuland – Community Action Hampshire
Glyn Thomas – The SE Rural Community Councils
Jacinta Thorley – SERCC
Stephen Turner – SERCC
Linda Watson – Oxfordshire Rural Forum
Michael Varrow - Oxfordshire Social & Community Service
Andrew Wickham – Kent Rural Board

Minutes

17th November 2009

10.30 – 15.00

at

**The Park and Porchester Rooms, the Thistle Kensington Gardens,
104 Bayswater Road, London W2 3HL**

1. **Apologies** – were sent in by Cllr Ian Leake, Binfield Parish Council, Catherine Smith, Medway Council, John Haggadon, Wokingham Borough LSP, Rosalind Rutt, Hampshire Rural Forum, Cllr Maureen Holding, New Forest District Council, Cllr Christine Bateson, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead LSP, Jan Phillips, Milton-Keynes Council and Paulina Stockell, Maidstone LSP. The Chair welcomed the new Rural Forum Members to the meeting.
2. **Minutes of last meeting** – were reviewed by the Chair and Members, the corrections were noted and the signed off Minutes will be published on the www.rfse.org.uk website.

Action: VC to check the SEEDA link to the RFSE website.

3. **Update on Rural Board activity** –the Chair reported that the September meeting, held at GOSE in Guildford reviewed the evidence produced by RP and the CRC on home based businesses in the SE. Climate change; rural demographics and the access to services for the elderly, rural housing, economic disadvantage, rural broadband and technical innovation were the key focus areas for the Rural Board but unlike some other areas of England the SE was not a delivery Board.

- **Production of Critical Evidence** –Jeremy Leggett the CEO of Action in Rural Sussex www.ruralsussex.org.uk Jeremy.leggett@ruralsussex.org.uk is leading this group and has requested input from Rural Forum SE members for the 1000 word narrative he is producing for the Rural Board meeting on December 11th. He will be asking partners to test and give evidence at the local level. The evidence gathered does not dovetail into the priorities identified by the Rural Board but one key area that is emerging is the skills shortage in rural areas. Roger Paterson raised concerns about the gaps in evidence captured for the draft report, such as the large number of business, manufacturing bases and local food production industries located in the rural areas of the SE. GOSE are working with the statistics team to help plug the gaps in the report and evidence from Rural Forum members would be much appreciated by SERCC & GOSE. The Chair suggested that representatives from the Commission for Rural Communities should be invited to attend the Rural Board.

Action: - RFSE Members to send in evidence to ceo@sercc.org.uk or Hannah.bussey@gose.qsi.gov.uk

- **Broadband** – update presentation to be covered at item 6.0
- **Healthy Local Food** – the subgroup are focusing on health inequalities and food security.
- **Rural Architecture** – working with the SE Partnership Board to gain a clearer understanding of the rural architecture.

Action – SERCC to add link from RFSE website to the SE Partnership Board

Future support for the SE Rural Board and Forum – the members asked how the Rural Board and Rural Forum would be supported in the future. VC stated that there have been redundancies at SEEDA including the post of Rural Director and that the main focus of the Development Agency is business development. The rural implementation strategy will continue and a contact

will be identified to deliver rural intelligence to rural proof policy but there will no longer be a dedicated Rural Team. The Rural Forum members suggested that the Board and Forum could be supported by the Rural Community Councils but this support would require funding. The Chair stated that new arrangements are being implemented for SE Leaders and Councils and as a large percentage of the SE is Rural, this should be reflected in the resources allocated. The Chair volunteered to write to the Leader of the SE Councils and the CEO of SEEDA to express the concerns of the Rural Forum members. The Minister and the Shadow Minister attended the Defra Partnership Meeting and the Chair attended the Rural Chairs Meeting and at both events there was a great deal of interest in Rural Broadband and Regional Architecture.

Action: The Chair to write to the Leader of the SE Councils and the CEO of SEEDA to express the concerns about the future support to the Rural Forum and Rural Board.

4. **The Audit Commission presentation on Rural in Comprehensive Area Assessments** – Suki Coe from the Audit Commission explained that her role was to be the regional lead across the whole of England on rural issues. To work in partnership with key agencies to ascertain how well people are being served by their local public services and what matters nationally and locally and to try to ensure that reports are delivered in simple straightforward language. Big issues that affect quality of life do not fall neatly into on organisations responsibilities, particularly the more vulnerable members of society, who rely on public services and the Audit Commission’s aim was to stimulate continuous improvement. The process is forward looking and maps out the outcomes of the delivery to date and looks at the prospects for improvement. The themes that run through out are:-
- Sustainability
 - Equality – how the gap can be bridged
 - Organisational Assessment
 - Evidence and Partnership Working

The report will be launched on 10th December on a website called “one place”. Comprehensive Area Assessments will continue and the outcomes have been shared with LSPs. Early next year the Audit Commission will map out the commonalities. The goal is to create sustainable vibrant rural communities. Rural issues are not high on the Government’s agenda and the land use, resource and reliance on the rural and vulnerable communities are less well understood, which is partly why affordable housing is a struggle for LAs who cannot continue to preserve the countryside in aspic. Access issues are the most pressing and rural transport is a big challenge particularly in the current climate. It has become clear from the work of the Audit Commission that the role of third sector is under developed in rural areas.

Action: Audit Commission Presentation to be added to RFSE website.

5. **Rural Proofing in LAAs and LSPs in West Sussex and embedding rural in their LA Strategies** – Dr Simon Kiley of Action in Rural Sussex which is the Secretariat for the Rural Partnership in Rural Sussex gave a presentation on how rural proofing is becoming embedded in the LA Strategies. The Rural

Partnership has a wide-range of stakeholders from the public and private sector and tries to rural proof the equitability of rural and how rural issues are addressed within the policy processes. He reviewed how the IMD reflects rural as it maps areas rather than communities and does not drill down at a local level to evidence the rural share of deprivation. AiRS met with the LA to review service delivery and found that LAA targets were proving to be a barrier to rural proofing, especially since the introduction of mainstreaming. To motivate rural engagement AiRS organised 3 Seminars for WSCC and the PCT – to ascertain the perception of rural issues and how service delivery could be addressed in rural areas. The networking and pooling of knowledge has brokered a better understanding of the issues and how these can dovetail into the County Rural Strategy and Delivery Plan which has been streamlined to link in all the major policies. The PCT have developed a fair Access Strategy and have a unique NI175 to monitor access to Health Services and they have appointed a Community Access Development Manager. AiRS have produced Rural Profile Datasets across the LA's and PCT which has evidenced that "one size does not fit all". It is a learning process for many LA staff and embedding it into the organisations relies on partnership working and a consensus on the importance of rural.

Action: Forum Members were asked to identify contacts within their county with Data Analysis skills and to cajole them to make use of the Oxfordshire Centre for Social Inclusion (OSCI) data to drill down and evidence Rural Deprivation at a local level.

- 6 **Broadband Report** – The Chair & Hannah Bussey, Natural Environment Senior Advisor with Government Office for the South East have worked in partnership to compile a report on Broadband Coverage in rural areas of the SE. The Chair informed the members that 34% Households and 32.33% Businesses in the Rural SE do not have access to the minimum 2mbps and the feeling was that if the implementation of delivery for this vital service is left to market forces the situation will not improve, as the project is not economically viable. The CRC and Defra are campaigning to raise awareness of this issue but it is up to the Rural Forum members to lobby to get Rural Broadband on the Agenda of the SE Rural Partnership Board. There are many innovative projects in Kent, Hampshire, West Sussex and Oxfordshire which overcome the barriers of delivery in rural areas. 16.25% properties in Kent cannot currently access the minimum 2Mbs. KCC have issued grants of £50K to 4 Parish Councils to fund the Broadband suppliers infrastructure costs and provide a wireless solution and as a result of this initiative there are over 200 new Broadband subscribers in the County and 3 further Parish Councils will also receive funding this year. KCC are also in discussion with youth groups as the Government is launching a scheme for children on low incomes to provide a laptop with broadband access. Members suggest that it would be worthwhile to have a dialogue with the leading Breweries as many pubs provide internet access and this service may be able to be extended to the Village Hall. A further suggestion was that Section 106 Agreements should include the provision of broadband access for new builds and that It may also be possible to tap into Military National Network. The members felt that a review of the delivery of broadband in rural areas of Europe would be a worthwhile exercise.

The key findings of the report were

- The lack of regional ownership
- The cost to the local economy was unknown.
- There are no appropriate rural service delivery models
- A poor knowledge of existing service providers

Recommendations

- The production of a list of service providers
- Regional PSN statement
- RDPE funding to be target at innovation solutions to the delivery of Broadband in rural areas
- To cascade The RFSE Rural Broadband report into the Network Design & Procurement Company Ltd who are responsible for the Government project.

ACTION: RFSE members to lobby the SE Rural Partnership Board <http://www.se-partnershipboard.org.uk> to add access to rural broadband to their Agenda. SERCC to circulate the presentation to RFSE members and add to the website www.rfse.org.uk

7. **Using the Oxfordshire Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) data –** Michael Varrow & Jack Holt from Oxfordshire Social & Community Services of Oxfordshire County Council gave a joint presentation on the use of the OCSI data in their work. In their experience needs assessments and commissioning decisions are often based on geographical levels using tools such as the index of Multiple Deprivation. Oxfordshire RCC suggested that this method does not necessary reflect the true picture. Oxfordshire is a very rural area and they therefore wanted to map the areas of hidden deprivation and to achieve this goal they used the OSCI data which revealed that 46% of people over 65 live in rural wards and the mapping of the data also provided the ability to draw out the broader picture of under representation of rural issues. Some of the issues that came to light were that people living in rural areas were demographically older had a higher mortality rate with higher numbers of trauma, falls, cancer, vision problems, arthritis and dementia. OCC are working to address the demographic challenge by providing more services for Older people in rural areas. The key contributing factors which need to be addressed are the need for increased affordable housing and the provision of access to transport. The Care Quality Commission and CAA have flagged up that older people are being discriminated against in the provision of care and this is reflected in the provision of services in rural areas. However the support of communities in rural areas brings additional benefits for older people. The RFSE members suggested that it would be beneficial for the expert data analysts to work in partnership to share data and that the contact on jsna@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Action: SERCC to follow up with Michael Varrow & Jack Holt who have offered to identify data analysis experts within the LAs in the SE.

8. **Report on Rural Mainstreaming in the SE** – Jacinta Thorley the CEO of SERCC gave a presentation on the findings of the Report on Rural Mainstreaming. The Rural Forum South East was set up as a pilot by Defra to focus on the services required by Rural Communities. The Rural Mainstreaming report was commissioned by GOSE to review how rural issues are being addressed by Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) especially within the delivery of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). A questionnaire was sent to LSPs and Rural Community Councils (RCCs) and to the CEOs of the Local Authorities. The report evidenced that mainstreaming is extremely limited in its extent & scope and not a priority for those responsible and the implementation is often devolved to the rural champions such as the NFU, RCCs, and CLA who have neither the resources, power nor mandate to make it happen. The primary focus of LSPs is to ensure that LAA targets are met and more consideration is given to the process rather than an analysis of how rural needs are being met in relation to urban needs. There is a lack of awareness or understanding of rural needs or issues among those responsible for delivering the LAA which actively prevents them considering their rural communities.

Recommendations:-

- Engrain rural thinking by including it within equality assessments
- Develop local guidance & resources to build on what is already available nationally & regionally
- Restructure data & evidence to produce a geographical analysis of need that shows where need is located to ensure that resources are distributed on a basis proportionate to the need.
- Disaggregation where possible
- Feed back to Government the findings of the report

How are the RFSE members going to take the recommendations forward?

- Feedback to the Rural Minister through the RAF Chairs meeting on 9th December
- Distribute the Report widely
- Invite LSP Chairs to the next Rural Forum South East Meeting and engaging with them by offering to give a presentation at the LSP Meeting. JT offered to deliver the presentation as a critical friend.
- Review of rural as an “equalities” issue?
- GOSE will be briefing their Locality Managers on the results of the Report and will be inviting the SERCC CEO to give a presentation

Action: RFSE Members to report back at the February Meeting on how they have used the report. SERCC to add presentation and report to the RFSE website.

9. **Top 10 SE Facts** – very little input was received from RFSE members since the September meeting it was suggested that the CRC data should be reviewed to ascertain if there were any really obvious gaps. SERCC have negotiated with the CRC who are willing to disaggregate the data to cover only the SE. The members felt that the figures should be comparative with

the rest of the UK and that 1 in 3 type statistics proved to be more powerful than the actual numbers

Action: SERCC to circulate the CRC disaggregated data for the SE to the RFSE members.

10. AOB

- **Dates for the Rural Forum SE Meetings in 2010 to be held in central London on:-**

2nd February 2010
11th May 2010
15th September 2010
23rd November 2010

Angela Gilmour
SERCC Regional Development Manager
4 December 2009

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