

**Devon Rural Network  
Rural Voluntary and Community Sector Action Group Minutes**

**3<sup>rd</sup> March 2009, 10 am to 12pm, Ockment Centre, Okehampton**

**Present**

Jay Talbot (Chair)	CCD
Ewan Rae	Devon Heartlands Community Partnership
Lynn Thornton	Devon Rural Transport Partnership
Sue Rees	GOSW
Nick Creasy	Devon Young Farmers Club
Sue Tucker	Diocese of Exeter
Paul Delahoy	Devon Towns Forum
Jill Davies	Devon Association of Councils for Voluntary Service
Leanne Crawford (secretariat)	Devon Rural Network

**Apologies**

Duncan Wood	Involve Mid Devon
Debbie Williams	Devon Fire & Rescue Service
Kathy Beechen	Devon Community Foundation

**1.0 Welcome and apologies**

Introductions were made round the table.

**2.0/ Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**

**3.0**

- Melanie McLoughlin has retired from Devon Community Foundation
- Senior Council – a rep has not been invited at this stage, although there is a main Senior Council body which has a rep from each of the local Senior Councils. **Action: investigate link to group**
- Next agenda – how to move the Rural VCS group forward – membership and role
- Boundary Committee – the recommendation had been postponed until July
- Grassroots Grants – has been inundated with applications from Devon and it has been proposed that the criteria is tightened, especially for village halls
- The Church was just about to appoint its rural projects officer

**4.0 Boundary Committee proposal for Devon**

The Devon Towns Forum had conducted a survey on Market Town Partnerships and their engagement with other VCS organisations. This survey showed that Market Town Partnerships were well connected within their own communities, but that links with other VCS organisations was patchy, with groups connecting with only an individual within an organisation. This identified work that needed to be done around pulling the strands of VCS effort together. A copy of the survey report can be found at [www.devontownsforum.org.uk/Documents/shortsurveyDEC2008.pdf](http://www.devontownsforum.org.uk/Documents/shortsurveyDEC2008.pdf).

It was confirmed that Devon County and Districts were considering a more inclusive 3 tier system; to include town and parish councils, and this would have implications in terms of spend and impact of the voluntary sector.

It was suggested that some areas in Devon might not fall under the Market Town heading, e.g. Blackdown Hills and that the proposed Community Boards would need to be more flexible than Market Town definitions.

*Organisations with sufficient dominance and capacity to connect to others and raise interest.*

- Devon Towns Forum (fits into 28 areas)
- CVSs has a wider local coverage at district level
- YFC has 36 clubs split into 6 groups – East Devon, Exe Valley, North Devon, Tarka (West

- Devon), South Dartmoor, Haldon [www.devonyfc.co.uk/maps.php](http://www.devonyfc.co.uk/maps.php)
- Church of England has 28 Deaneries and subdivided into 4 Arch Deaneries. There are also links to the Methodist Church but not with the Roman Catholic Church
  - There are 15 community transport groups
  - The Devon Association for Community Buildings now has 200 members
  - Sports groups
  - WI/Senior Council
  - Housing – associations
  - Youth organisations – scouts, guides, venture scouts etc – Voluntary Youth Service
  - Age Concern – patchy coverage and all operate independently
  - Schools and education – child minders, children’s centres etc
  - Development Trusts

**Action: List to be kept under review, including the list of Market Town Partnerships**

**Action: Map of overlying organisations across Devon to show local area structure**

Comprehensive engagement could be made through the Market Town Partnerships, however the point was raised that groups looking to develop and expand were more likely to engage and that there need to be more efficient recording of groups who do not wish to ‘sit around the table’. There needed to be multiple mechanisms in place for engagement and representation as partners.

*Identify key people and structures in market town areas as a starting point*

- There was some anxiety amongst rural hinterlands on whether they felt represented by the market town structure
- Need to consider how to invite inclusiveness and a structured overview at the local level – the Devon Heartlands Community Forum could be used as a good practise case study for this [www.devonheartlands.co.uk/index.asp](http://www.devonheartlands.co.uk/index.asp)
- Market Town Partnerships and CVS’ should be pulled together and built upon
- Could the Community Forum model be piloted in an area?
- Community White Paper – is there a risk that agencies talk to the community groups/orgs that are most convenient? There needed to be more meaningful engagement
- Consideration of facilitated representation – reimbursement for travel expenses etc
- The concept of Community Forums was about facilitation not dominance – an opportunity for a collective voice to work to specific issues whilst remaining linked to the voluntary sector.

**Action: Due to continued lack of clarity over the Boundary review, this will be discussed further at the next meeting. Models to be pieced together – a set structure that would allow local areas to work together at the grass roots level**

## 5.0 Devon Local Area Agreement

Sue Rees wanted to ascertain the level of partnership involvement and the feeling of continued engagement, following a rural proofing exercise by DRN.

Some of the group had been engaged in the process, resulting in transport and access, rural housing, whilst some of the group, particularly at the grass roots level and faith groups, did not feel engaged.

Explanation of the benefits and relevance to grass roots had been a stumbling block, although some organisations had been involved through District level Local Strategic Partnerships or through links to other organisations. Grass roots were not aware of what the targets were or how local delivery plans helped to achieve these.

It was agreed that Community Led Planning hit almost all of the National Indicator targets, but it was not mentioned as a specific area that needed resources, and had not been capitalised on in a meaningful way. Engagement was also necessary to develop the capacity to delivery, particularly in terms of the

Comprehensive Area Assessment process.

The group was happy with the level of rural consideration within the LAA at the county and district level, especially as the original Defra targets did not include rural issues.

Ian Hobbs was now the lead for pulling all access issues and the LAA together, and Sara Cretney (DCC) was working with the CRC to secure proportional outcomes (see [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/LAA%20project%20breifing%20note%20for%20external%20use.pdf](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/LAA%20project%20breifing%20note%20for%20external%20use.pdf))

It was identified that there was an issue around communications and the perception of the mechanism for information to filter up as well as down. The voluntary sector was worried about restructuring and the ability for groups to attract funding in light of this. It was agreed that the voluntary sector still needed to be more strongly embedded in the process.

It was suggested that future LAA's be much more focused as a very broad brush approach had been used. Locally, the Regional Spatial Strategy had caused much more discussion, and only a very small section focussed on rurality.

## 6.0 Devon Consortium

### *a. communities of interest*

Jay gave a brief update of the Consortium and David Waddilove's role, which will be divided into support for the Compact, and Partnership Representation (report circulated).

The Consortium had 'communities of interest' from the sub sets of the voluntary sector and the rural dimension was represented both through this group and through the equalities group. It was agreed that the Consortium needed to let people know who the representatives were and how they could engage in the information flow.

Paul asked whether David's work would companion the survey work through the Devon town's Forum.

Jay suggested that there was new work around the Consortium relating to developing systematic accessible approaches to information and finding out what is needed. This needed debate with David and to link with the community interest groups.

### **Action: David to be invited to next meeting**

### *b. Beyond Boundaries – first vcs assembly*

Poor attendance from north Devon had been noted, possibly due to issues of communication or feeling of remoteness. There was also a criticism over the use of jargon by presenters.

The Consortium had not been part of the Delivery board for the LAA, but arrangements were now in place as a result of this meeting.

### *c. Possible new programme 'total support'*

A bid to the BASIS 2 element of the Lottery had been successful, with money awarded for a three year programme.

### **Action: summary of bid to be circulated**

Organisations will be commissioned to delivery the funding, and will require a business plan, therefore it is anticipated that the programme will start in July at the earliest.

The bid will be divided into two strands: front line support – capacity building for service delivery and procurement; and rural volunteering – around rural communities' dependence on volunteers and linking them in to maintain a flow of volunteers and inclusion.

This will link back into Community Planning and a major survey of the sector is planned.

*d. Equality and diversity*

This was a sub group of the consortium that had been difficult to get going, but was now operational.

## **7.0 Devon Rural Network – update**

Leanne reported that she was now the Coordinator for the Network. A graduate placement was under consideration for part of the Development Worker role, on a trial basis.

The main body of the work currently was the refresh of the Rural Profile and Rural Strategy. Each of the action groups will be asked to input into these, particularly to ensure the continued relevance of the SWOT analysis.

Once this body of work was complete, Leanne will be looking to redefine the purpose of the Network, including a review of the membership and action groups, to ensure that DRN was still pushing the relevant issues. It was anticipating that a refocus on rural proofing would be a strong element of this.

## **8.0 Any Other Business**

Young Farmer's Club – running a free course on 'tax effective giving' on 31<sup>st</sup> March, at the YFC Centre. If members know anyone who may be interested call Nick on 01392 272189. The course is aimed at more effective use of membership money and attraction of private funding.

A rural office hub idea had been discussed by Jay and Nick, close to Exeter and with a meeting room facility. The YFC were surveying members on the idea at present, more information at the next meeting.

Transport and access research on Tiverton Parkway and its catchment was now complete, with the report due to be made public in April. A survey of all voluntary car schemes had also been completed, with a 100% response rate, and all participants have been invited to a presentation on 17<sup>th</sup> March. This will be looking at developing local umbrella groups, building on the Somerset model.

Sue Tucker had been reviewing Church of England glebe land in Devon and was pushing to have this converted to community space through the creation of community allotments/farms/gardens etc. There were a large number of pockets of land across the county. In a similar vein, CDD had submitted a bid to the Lottery Local Food fund for 60 new local food groups over a 5 year programme.

## **9.0 Date of Next Meeting**

**10am, 15<sup>th</sup> September, venue to be confirmed**