

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

4th October 2007 Okehampton Fire Station, Okehampton

Present

Jay Talbot (Chair)	CCD
Debbie Williams	Devon Fire & Rescue Service
Sue Tucker	Diocese of Exeter
Paul Delahoy	Devon Towns Forum
Melanie McLoughlin	Devon Community Foundation
Karen Nolan	Devon Assoc of CVS
Lynn Thornton	Devon Rural Transport Partnership
Ewan Rae	Devon Heartlands Community Partnership
Leanne Crawford (secretariat)	Devon Rural Network

Apologies

Scott Jacobs-Lange	GOSW
Duncan Wood	Involve Mid Devon
Jo Pickering	Devon Rural Carers
Geoff King	Adult & Community Services DCC

	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>The chairman welcomed the group and thanked everyone for coming.</p> <p>It was noted that Scott Jacobs-Lange has now left Government Office; therefore another contact in GOSW will need to be appointed. Similarly, a replacement for Geoff King (Adult & Community Services) will need to be found. It is suggested that DCC or PCT are contacted, primarily Ian Tearle or Yash Patel. There is still a need for PCT, Youth and Age representatives on the group.</p> <p>Action: Ensure Nick Creasy is on contact list to represent youth</p> <p>Action: Jay to re-contact Age Concern Devon or Tony Green of Help the Aged</p> <p>Proformas were also discussed, it is requested that these are put on the website (if possible) and promote in the Newsletter – point to their availability and request any information gaps are filled.</p>
1.	<p>Reports back from action groups</p> <p>Rural Funding – Update to be given at next meeting.</p> <p>New rural funding stream now available, promoted through GOSW and RDA, following on from previous LEADER funding. It will provide revenue funding for Community Led Projects through the recently launched Rural Development Programme for England (Axis 4). Further details can be found at http://www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/eafrd/community-led-develo.shtm. Funding delivery will be through Local Action Groups (LAGS) and there are three LAGs in development in Devon as part of the RDPE process, which are Greater Dartmoor (Dartmoor and South Devon); Blackdown Hills; and North Devon (with some overlap into North Cornwall). There is currently no indication of which of these will be successful, and Expressions of Interest for partnership applications are currently being invited. Guidance notes on the application process are also available on the RDA website: http://download.southwestrda.org.uk/file.asp?File=/regeneration/urban-and-rural-regeneration/Local%20Action%20-%20Guide%20for%20Applicants.pdf</p> <p>Cornwall is also eligible for funding under this programme and is looking at forming a LAG for the Isles of Scilly, and a joint LAG with North Devon.</p>

It is likely to be a highly competitive programme and there needs to be an understanding of the specified priorities.

This group needs to look at what funding streams are available for RCVS groups, as many are currently through RDA or Devon Renaissance. The comprehensive spending review is published on 17th October. It is anticipated that the RDA will experience funding cuts and will also take on the responsibilities of the Regional Assemblies. The general trend is likely to be more economic. It has been suggested that Devon Renaissance align themselves with the emerging LAA, with the future of Rural Renaissance (Nationally) depending on local partners.

RSCP – Defra's main social and community programme was initially pegged as a 2 year programme, however they have expressed an interest in continuation of funding for rural housing and community councils. Defra are currently running an evaluation exercise to look at the funding for the rest of the programme.

Within Market and Coastal Towns there is uncertainty where planning (i.e. parish planning etc) sits. Community based planning has to have a future due to inclusion in so many Local Authority Strategies. Strategically the set up is there but the funding is not. The delivery needs to be looked at, especially in terms of the Exeter unitary bid. There needs to be protocol and consistent standards.

Action: Discussion around where planning sits comfortably in the VCS

Action: There is currently anxiety around future funding and continuity for many community groups. There needs to be a piece of work to understand funding implications more fully

Accessibility – the working group stated that there needs to be greater clarity on what it is trying to achieve. There is also a need to define the term “accessibility”.

A SWOT analysis on needs in rural area which identified accessibility as an issue has been initiated by CCD.

Action: Debbie to continue with community safety aspect. Lynn Thornton to supply list of contacts

The group to identify opportunities to increase and improve access, and look at adding value to existing services whilst also identifying gaps. This could tie in with the Community Planning Database. Transport has a separate group but could these be combined?

Discussion around IT service provision followed. It is suggested that the group looks at a minimum standard of what an individual in a rural area should have access to, however it is agreed that this is a complex issue. Needs rather than desire should remain the focus.

Action: Working group to continue with current work, with Lynn to join up to produce a Transport and Access group

Transport – to health – South West Ambulance Service withdrew its service VACS and Voluntary Community Transport groups took on this work through a 3 year process; however guidance has now come through the National Department of Health which states that Health Trusts no longer has a duty to and should not be providing funds for social transport, i.e. voluntary transport groups. The impact on the general public are yet to materialise, and health authorities now only have to provide transport for those in medical need, i.e. 999 and patient transfer buses. The voluntary community transport groups have felt a huge amount of pressure.

Action: health transport needs to be highlighted as an area of concern

Concessionary bus – after April 2008, any one over 60 or disabled will have free local bus journeys throughout the country. This may have a massive impact on District councils, who have not been allocated additional funding to provide extra services. Carers will no longer be entitled to free travel.

Action: Lynn to forward free transport consultation document on to Leanne for distribution around the group

Community Transport – will not be treated separately from public transport – this will need to be agreed internally. DCC has a £6 million community transport budget with around £45K currently allocated for public transport – could a value for money comparison be undertaken.

Action: highlighted areas of concern – add funding and health issues

A leaflet on Community Transport in Devon has been designed and now available. Private car has not been included in discussion so far and it is unclear whether there is a specific action plan in the Community Strategy. Some of the partnerships have applied for funding and are awaiting the outcome. Funding for rural transport groups is becoming less available. Local transport groups (area based) are under funded and also have to fundraise through grants and fares. Ring and ride is funded through the county with a 3 or 5 year guarantee of funding.

Other exercises could include looking carbon footprinting of reduced service delivery, e.g. post office closures and access to health. Also look at access for minority groups, e.g. non English speaking, disabled. Private car use should also be analysed to look at how it can be utilised in rural communities. Parish level planning also needs to encompass transport and access issues, however not all Parish Councils consider access to be an issue.

Action: Lynn to lead on combined access and transport working group

Community Buildings – Refer to Community Hubs sheet.

CCD are coordinating a new village hall scheme (quality assurance) known as with Hallmark, with 60 halls signed for quality assurance up so far.

There has been no village hall survey for 10 years; however CCD has just received funding to run a large piece of research on Devon Village Halls, which will include a focus on the economic impacts. This will need to tie back into accessibility and availability.

Susan Tucker is currently looking into the feasibility of putting facilities back into churches e.g. farmers markets, toddler groups etc. This is more difficult in deeply rural churches due to access and facilities.

Action: Susan to provide list of churches interested (may also include church halls)

Action: Susan to link in with Parish and Village Hall officer at CCD

Work is currently funded through Defra, and funding for the Village Hall service has yet to be confirmed post April 2008.

Action: Case study to be pulled together to provide example of best practise

There is agreement of Village Halls as a community hub is a positive, if only one, way to go.

Engagement & Inclusion – A piece of work to evidence good engagement practises for rural communities is currently in progress for the Carnegie Trust, however the quality of the work will depend on the level of feedback from partners. There needs to be more engagement from agencies and organisations. Capacity captured by market town planning groups must be incorporated, with a better bridge between groups and sectors – this could be captured in research work

	All partners at all levels need to inform the working group what they are actually doing within community engagement, and is a major opportunity to shape a document that will be used by central government.
2.	Rural VCS Priorities for the Devon Consortium Business Plan 2008-20011
	<p>Devon Consortium has been tasked with the delivery of the Change Up programme (Government programme to enhance infrastructure). The group is currently developing a 3 year business plan and 6 year strategy. A consultation is in progress to help identify priorities. A list has been produced but feedback is required to highlight a reduced number of strong priorities.</p> <p>Action: Complete consultation and return to Jay or Karen in the next 2 weeks, along with any other comments</p> <p>Discussion around listed priorities include suggestions for inclusion of funding issues in sustainability; access isn't obvious; there needs to be good umbrella partnership that address services and delivery at grass roots level; cross cutting issue should include access; where does community led planning as part of community led effort sit; community hubs and access to support services; representation of communities at higher levels and mechanisms for communication; communities of interest and networking; democratic structures; need a community development plan as well as a strategy; development of a community engagement strategy/plan;</p> <p>With regards to sector profile, it is stated that one important point to note is the perception of the Voluntary Sector, which is often seen as unprofessional. It should be remembered and promoted that there is a range of ability and size of voluntary and community groups. There is still a level of mistrust from some statutory bodies towards the voluntary sector. So much of the work in rural areas is undertaken by unpaid volunteers, it is imperative that these people are not overwhelmed by attempts to drive groups to become more "professional".</p>
3.	Impact of a unitary Exeter on the rural CVS
	It is agreed that this will require further discussion, depending on the decision reached. Should Exeter become unitary, Devon will be completely rural and implications to Rural CVS funding could be dire. It is easy to cut discretionary services. There may also be a loss of skill in the sector if people are transferred to unitary authority. Still awaiting result of appeal by DCC.
4.	Update on Devon Rural Network
	<p>The Policy Steering Group met on the 19th September in Okehampton. The members were very positive about the continuation of the network, and it was agreed that the DRN should begin to take on more of an active role. It was agreed that lobbying and rural proofing were amongst its strongest attributes and its function as a debating forum should be developed further. The role of the action groups will also be looked at, and it has been suggested that the Sustainable Tourism group will link in with the emerging Destination Management Organisation (DMO), and that Rural Business becomes a task group of the Devon Economic Partnership.</p> <p>Funding is still an issue, with the RDA finally announcing that the original rural funding will not be continued post March 2008. There is a possibility that DCC could increase its contribution, that DRN could tie in more closely with the Towns Forum, or that RDA funding for Economic Partnerships could be filtered down to continue the network, however these are all very much at the suggestions stage.</p> <p>DRN will be holding a workshop with its Sustainable Tourism group on Monday 8th October 2007, and will discuss the DMO idea further.</p> <p>Action: Rural Devon Facts & Figures to be circulated with minutes</p>
5.	Date & Time of Next Meeting
	Thursday 6 th March, 1-3pm Okehampton Fire Station