

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

18th July 2008, 10 am to 12pm, Okehampton Fire Station, Okehampton

Present

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

Apologies

Sue Rees	GOSW
Karen Nolan	Devon Assoc of CVS
Duncan Wood	Involve Mid Devon
Ewan Rae	Devon Heartlands Community Partnership

1.0 Welcome and Introduction

Apologies were given.

2.0/3.0 Minutes of Meeting held on 6th March 2008/Matters arising not on the agenda

Youth Involvement – Nick Creasy has still shown no response, although he did respond to an initial email about meeting arrangements. **Jay to recontact Nick**

Village Halls – a summary report was distributed, and the full report is available on the CCD website <http://www.devonrcc.org.uk/news.php?mode=2&nid=243>. It was reiterated that the report covers two points not previously looked at i.e. economic importance of village halls and the size of assets being managed by volunteers; and the carbon footprint, demonstrating the amount of Carbon saved by holding events locally.

It was recognised that village halls could be put to greater use as venues, although agreed that transport links often made rural venues unsuitable. It was reported that a new website had been launched <http://www.devonvillagehalls.co.uk/> which provides a database for a number of village halls and their facilities. It was reported that the land and insurance values of community buildings equates to nearly one third of £1 billion, which is being managed by volunteers.

CCD AGM – This will be held on 22nd October, along side a Rural Health Conference, at Bridstowe. Lynn Thornton, Sue Tucker, and Debbie Williams expressed an interest in attending. Bookings are to be sent out in August.

Carnegie – Paul reported that interim reports are available from the Devon Heartlands website <http://www.devonheartlands.co.uk/meetingnotes.asp?Category=9> and stated that early indications show that the regional picture was much better than at the local level, but this information is now of greater value to community led planning. It was reported that community led planning has not been picked up by the Empowerment White Paper. Three of the interim reports have been published with 2 more to follow.

Action Groups – copies of the transport guide for West Devon were handed out.

Access & Awareness – Jay reported that Penny Thame's work was winding up and that outcomes would be reported at the CCD conference.

4.0 Devon Consortium update

Jay reported that the new Consortium Board was operational, and a meeting for the wider assembly had been scheduled for 28th January 2009. It had been agreed that that Consortium would meet twice a year.

Currently Sue Craythorne is the only public sector representative on the Board, and it was suggested that there needed to be a public facing aspect of the Consortium to allow information to be effectively filtered to all public sector agencies. The elected Chair was announced as Alistair Mackintosh, and Sara Bennet as the new Development Worker (part-time). The Management Group has 8 members and meets regularly. The Rural VCS group fulfils the role of the rural interest group.

It was confirmed that the Consortium website was now live <http://www.devonconsortium.net/>

Funding had been granted to the assembly and had been used to employ the Development Worker. Funding had also been granted for a Collaboration, Partnership and Representation (CPR) project that will look at forming greater links, to be managed by Exeter CVS for the next three years. This project will be of interest to the Carnegie Trust in terms of producing a better model. It was also reported that a Basis 2 lottery funding round is upcoming and each countywide consortium is expected to be supported through this.

It was discussed that the environmental or faith sectors are not connected into the voluntary sector currently and this was to be addressed by the first assembly.

Work on services to grass roots organisation and rural volunteering is in development, including ensuring community led planning and the proposal for this will be submitted in August for funding.

Communities of interest – it was reported that the rural aspect is covered by the RVCSAG, but that it was also currently being seen as part of the Diversity Steering Group, however the structure on the latter may be revisited to see if the rural element does actually fit into this. It was suggested that the rural group may focus on rural proofing within the voluntary sector. The Devon Towns Forum will also be joining the Consortium although its position within the structure needs to be clarified.

5.0 Devon Rural Network update

Leanne reported that the main focus of DRN's work was Post Office closures, with a response submitted to the consultation and heavy involvement with the work ongoing at Devon County Council; and the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), working with Local Action Groups. It was confirmed that 4 proposals had been submitted to the RDA and that a response was expected on 31st July.

Work is also underway on updating the DRN website with a launch hopefully during August. It was agreed that a link would be provided to the Consortium website once the new DRN site is live.

A DRN Policy Steering Group meeting was to be held on 21st July, with the Rural Advocate, Stuart Burgess, in attendance.

6.0 RVSCAG working groups

a) *Current – Access and Transport*

Lynn reported that the group had not met as Karen Nolan had stepped down and Lynn's own role had changed. She reported that she was working on a number of projects including:

- 3 remote projects in West Devon, Mid Devon and Torridge looking at delivery on a local basis. The Mid Devon post had secured funding from the RDA and First Great Western for Tiverton Parkway Station and sustainable green travel. This will be a 2 year project to implement points that came out of previous research. The Torridge work is being funded through the Local Transport plan until March 2009. West Devon have produced the travel guide for Okehampton and are now drafting similar for Tavistock. There has also been some outreach

- work with West Devon Borough Council on access and around the Chagford/South Zeal area.
- Travel training – helping children with learning difficulties to catch buses independently. This has initiated a pilot in Tavistock with the Tavi Areas Support Service who are running a similar scheme with older people, along with a re-enablement service. Jenny Reygate, within the Transport Team at Devon County Council is the travel training manager.
 - Transport to health is a continuing issue, although the Health Transport Partnership is now running.
 - Community partnerships are struggling due to fuel costs, reduced sources of funding, and the reducing number of volunteers due to reimbursement rate

It was suggested that fuel prices are driving the Transport Agenda forward and that opportunities around this should be explored further and that work should have a greater link with the LAA.

Lynn questioned the value of a transport specific working group as this was already her full time position and stated that she felt it was more valuable to have the whole group feed into, rather than one or two individuals. It was agreed that community led planning work should also be fed into this.

It was debated how the RVCS group should operate and respond to issues and agreed that the group was valuable for broadening viewpoints. It was suggested that the Senior Council should also be represented on the group.

7.0 **Boundary Committee proposal for local government**

A background to the Boundary Committee was given and it was confirmed that the report was on the Devon County Council website

<http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/democracymunities/devonreview.htm> and also the Boundary Committee website <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/boundary-reviews/>.

It was reported that the proposal was for a Devon wide unitary; although there was an additional suggestion made of an Exeter and Exmouth unitary and rest of Devon unitary.

It had been proposed that within the Devon wide unitary, there would be 28 Community Boards created to ensure relevance and delivery at the local level.

It was stated that before a unitary structure could be agreed it was subject to 5 tests:

- Be affordable – cost of reorganisation paid for in 5 years
- Better value for money and provide fair access to services
- Be able to provide strategic leadership
- Have a broad cross section of support
- Provide neighbourhood empowerment

If it was agreed that the unitary options would fail these tests, then the 2-tier structure would remain, although financial savings would still need to be made.

It was stated that Nationally, the picture showed that unitary councils may have a better hook for attracting attention and that Devon was unique in terms of the good working relationship between the county and district councils.

It was discussed whether the 28 Community Boards would enable neighbourhood empowerment and whether there was a risk that these would effectively become district councils but without the relevant power. Representatives on the Board are likely to be Councillors, parish/town council reps, and private and voluntary sector reps. Some concern was expressed over this. Some budget will be devolved to these Boards. It was agreed that the agenda of these Boards needs to be balanced to ensure that delivery of current work could be continued, with the right level of locality and engagement.

Debbie suggested that work in Cornwall by Hazel Stuteley, Connecting Communities (2) may be

relevant www.healthcomplexity.net.

It was agreed that a number of issues were inbuilt into the Board structure and delivery, including:

- Community led planning – market and parish town plans need to be meshed together
- Rural voluntary sector voice
- Differing capacities and aspirations of areas, which need connection at base level
- Effective communications
- Transparency
- Type of structure to reflect size and carrying capacity of areas

It was agreed that the voluntary sector needs to be engaged to raise awareness and to provide a response. It was agreed that there are already a number of networks in place that need to be utilised. Community forums would provide a good base for this but it was questioned whether there were enough of them.

It was confirmed that the SWRDA was looking to provide support at a strategic level, with decision making devolved back to the local level.

Action: Leanne to contact Peter Doyle to obtain an electronic copy of the Review of Unitary Devon presentation for circulation

[Note: Leanne has contacted Peter Doyle who has stated that the presentation is too large to be sent out in electronic form but that he would be happy to give a verbal presentation. Leanne now to look into the possibility of organising an event for this]

8.0 Any other business

Final discussions revolved around how RVCS will work in terms of the structural changes within Devon Consortium and Local Government, to ensure that the voluntary sector is not left behind.

It was agreed that there is a difficulty with the lack of community engagement at the county level, and commented that the DSP had been asked to produce an engagement strategy. It was agreed that this work could be done by the voluntary sector and RVCS, with others, and presented to the DSP. It was stated that there was a project within the Stronger Communities LAA theme on developing a community development strategy that could overlap with this work.

It was agreed that the voluntary sector needs to plan in terms of the Community Boards, and to start identifying networks across these areas and encouraging those not structured to develop. It was suggested that community development trusts, where they exist, could help in this and they would already have their own linkages. It was agreed that expectations need to be managed in a constructive way to ensure effective community empowerment.

It was agreed that very few meetings dealt with cross cutting themes and that there could be a real issue in overcoming local interests. It was reiterated that interest groups also needed to be engaged and cautioned that these groups often network in different ways. Sue stated that the church has the same number of Deaneries as proposed Community Boards and that these could tie in.

Actions:

- **Group to try and identify organisations that could be interested and connect with memberships in each area to raise interest in proposed structures**
- **Identify key people and structures in market town areas as a starting point**
- **Identify what forms of community engagement currently exist**
- **Identify what forms of engagement activity work well**
- **Identify how voluntary and community issues can be flagged on the agenda of community boards**
- **Identify where people who have been engaged in community processes have gone on**

to become elected members

Also discussed:

- CRC State of the Countryside report published <http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/stateofthecountryside2008/overview>
- Devon Community Foundation will be administering the Grass Roots Grant programme in Devon – there will be three strands – fast track for amounts up to £250 with a 2 day turnaround; £250-£900 with a two week turnaround; and £901 to £5000 with a six week turnaround. There will be three programmes – Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. Each group will be able to get a maximum of £5K over the 3 year period of the programme.
- The Church has appointed a new rural support worker for West Devon for a five year period

9.0 Date of Next Meeting

10 am 25th November 2008 at Okehampton Fire Station, Okehampton