

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

**29<sup>th</sup> September 2006 Ockment Centre, Okehampton**

**Present**

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| Jay Talbot         | CCD                                    | Duncan Wood       | Involve Mid Devon  |
| Geoff King         | Adult & Community Services DCC         | Sue Tucker        | Diocese of Exeter  |
| Amanda Denham      | Devon Rural Transport Partnership      | Jo Pickering      | Devon Rural Carers |
| Jane Williams      | Torrige Community Transport            | Sarah Streeeter   | DRN                |
| Debbie Williams    | Devon Fire & Rescue Service            | Jennifer Anderton | DRN                |
| Melanie McLoughlin | Devon Community Foundation             | Karen Nolan       | Devon Assoc of CVS |
| Penny Jackson      | North Devon Voluntary Services         |                   |                    |
| Ewan Rae           | Devon Heartlands Community Partnership |                   |                    |

**Apologies**

Scott Jacobs-Lange      GOSW

- The proposal for this Action Group was the result of a joint event between the DRN and the Devon Forum in February 2006. The Proposal was to form a Rural VCS Action group to represent this sector across Rural Devon.
- This was the first meeting of this group and subsequently the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the group's role, purpose and work.
- Jay Talbot chaired the meeting and the DRN acted as scribes. JT welcomed the group for coming and asked everyone to introduce themselves around the table.

| <b>Introductions and Background</b> |   |
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| <b>1.</b>                           | <b>Purpose of the Rural VCS Action Group</b>  |
|                                     | <p>JT felt that the purpose of this group was 3fold:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Too add value to the work that is already being done in rural Devon by the VCS</li> <li>2. Too act as representatives for the Rural VCS organisations on the ground</li> <li>3. Too act as communicators to the organisations on the ground and lobby more strategic bodies</li> </ol>   |
| <b>1a.</b>                          | <b>To what extent are rural VCS issues distinct?</b>  |
|                                     | <p>Rural issues in general are different from those in urban areas. The group needs to clarify the key rural issues in Devon to underpin the work of the Action Group. The group came up with the following issues that VCS face in rural Devon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility to Services</li> <li>• Sustainability of Services</li> <li>• Sustainability of Funding –</li> <li>• Marginalisation of Funding – Government funding doesn't always relate to rural areas – there is a need to ensure that government policies are rural proofed.</li> <li>• Transport – sustainability</li> <li>• Isolation – the vastness, sparsity and extreme rurality of Devon is a huge problem. There are also differences between rural areas which make it more complicated.</li> <li>• Closeness and tightness of communities – often difficult to influence and engage with the people. There is a need to use the respected links that are already in place within communities to ensure community trust.</li> <li>• Dispersion of need – minority groups are scattered and hard to reach. It is hard to form</li> </ul> |

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|            | <p>supportive groups or access the level of need in the communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of support for CVS's differs across the county from statutory partners.</li> <li>• There is diversity in the response from statutory organisations to rurality in general – many are unclear and inconsistent in responding and looking at rurality as a strategic issue.</li> <li>• Health services in rural areas differ across Devon – emergence of single PCT and its consequences remain to be seen.</li> <li>• Rural Communities often need to sustain their own facilities/infrastructure to ensure the viability of the community – resources are not always available. Some communities do not have community buildings that are vital to communities</li> <li>• High reliance on Volunteers – various issues relate to this.</li> <li>• Community Planning in Rural areas is a positive issue – the MCTi and Parish Plans help to identify the needs in rural areas that need to be built upon and addressed.</li> <li>• Inclusion - Influx of migrant workers to Devon –now one of the biggest minority groups in Devon and in need of support. DW said that there were a couple of conferences coming up on migrant workers in October and November.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION: DW to send to SS details regarding these conferences for dissemination to the group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication in communities is sometimes not as efficient</li> <li>• Reliance on Key individuals in Communities – i.e. particular volunteers who sit on various committees to represent the community.</li> <li>• Needs of different community groups – Young people and Older people require different services.</li> <li>• Devon has a large expanse of coastline – therefore coastal towns are often faced with more problems – they can only access services 'behind' them –less access across to services in close proximity to them.</li> <li>• Churches in rural areas are often an integral part of the community – the buildings are used as for several purposes.</li> <li>• Problem of Second home owners – communities left empty in the winter months – also people aren't involved in their community as they are only there for a few months/ weeks of the year.</li> <li>• Affordable Housing – social care support</li> <li>• Learning and Training</li> </ul> <p>In light of all these issues the group felt it was also important to define what they meant by 'rural'. OPDM (now DCLG) define rural areas as populations of under 10,000. The Devon Rural Strategy also uses this definition.</p> <p>After this discussion the meeting agreed to combine agenda items b and f later in the meeting, therefore the group moved on to 1c.</p> |
| <b>1c.</b> | <p><b>Role of VCS members and public sector members of the Action Group</b></p> <p>Structurally, this Action Group is part of the DRN, yet the group would also like to be a part of the emerging Voluntary Sector representation arrangements and link both ways. The group decided that it would be beneficial to have a statutory representative on this group to feed up comments and issues.</p> <p>The group asked for clarification as to the structure of the DRN, DSP and LAA. Attached is a diagram of this current relationship.</p> <p>This group will act as representatives from the key sectors in rural devon, and bring with them the necessary skills, resources and contacts needed to inform the whole sector. It is important that this group shares its information and links.</p> <p>It was felt that a few more groups needed to be represented on this action group, such as the NHS, District Councils, Youth Services and Elderly Services.</p>  |

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|                  | <b><i>ACTION: SS to contact representatives from these sectors on the DRN database regarding interest in joining the AG.</i></b>  |
| <b>1d.</b>       | <b>Formality/informality, e.g. Terms of Reference</b>   |
|                  | <p>JT said he felt that this group should remain fairly informal in style.</p> <p>Other DRN Action Groups have a Terms of Reference. The group tasked JT and KN to put together a draft version for discussion at the next meeting.</p> <p><b><i>ACTION: JT and KN to draft the groups Terms of Reference</i></b></p>   |
| <b>1e.</b>       | <b>Regularity of Rural VCS Action Group meetings</b>  |
|                  | <p>It was suggested that there could be 2 formal meetings of the AG each year, but that separate smaller groups would break off from this can carry out the work identified in the formal meetings.</p> <p>The need is to focus on what we can do.</p>  |
| <b>1b&amp;f.</b> | <b>Current Priorities &amp; Task and Finish groups</b>  |
|                  | <p>To produce a list of current priorities the group looked at the issues that they had produced under 1a. The following is a list of priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Services and Resources delivery</li> <li>• Sustainable Communities</li> <li>• Volunteers – reliance on a finite number in an expanding sector. Capacity of Volunteers, gaps due to age and skills</li> <li>• Lack of money/rural funding</li> <li>• Capacity of voluntary organisations – qualification issues</li> <li>• Procurement</li> <li>• Government Regulations and Bureaucracy</li> <li>• Infrastructure of advice and support</li> <li>• Active Community planning</li> <li>• Health and Social Care</li> <li>• Demonstrating need to funders</li> <li>• Social Enterprise</li> </ul> |
| <b>2</b>         | <b>Existing Rural CVS networks and partnerships</b>   |
| <b>2a.</b>       | <b>Gaining a comprehensive understanding</b>  |
|                  | <p>The group felt that it would be a good idea to send out to the group and its member organisations a pro forma in order to get a comprehensive idea of what work is going on currently in Devon. Once we have a map of what is being done we can analyse where the gaps are – and where the most important issues are.</p> <p><b><i>Action: DRN to produce a pro forma to send to the AG to fill in and disseminate, one for organisations, one for individuals</i></b></p>   |
| <b>2b.</b>       | <b>Ensuring the action group adds value</b>   |
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|            | <p>Once we have a comprehensive overview of the situation in Devon, the group will begin to add value to the current activity.</p> <p>The group will have a supporting, assisting and informative role to solution providers. The groups role is to influence and lobby for service providers and public agencies.</p>   |
| <b>3</b>   | <b>Representation of the Rural Voluntary and Community Sector</b>  |
| <b>3a.</b> | <b>Representation on the DRN</b>   |
|            | <p>JT sits on the DRN Policy Steering Group which is the group that guides the work of the DRN. The chair of all the DRN Action Groups sits on the PSG to ensure that the group is represented accordingly.</p>  |
| <b>3b.</b> | <b>And elsewhere on strategic bodies</b>   |
|            | <p>It was decide that on the pro forma it would be helpful to know what strategic bodies' individuals and organisations sit on within Devon.</p> <p><b>Action: SS and JA to put together a Pro Forma to be sent out to the group</b></p>   |
| <b>4</b>   | <b>Communications</b>  |
| <b>4a.</b> | <b>Sharing of good practice/innovative projects</b>  |
|            | <p>One of the key activities of the group should be to celebrate and promote good practice and success stories. Part of the pro forma sent to agencies should ask them whether or not they are willing for their details to be shared.</p>   |
| <b>4b.</b> | <b>Development of an Email Network for wider constituency</b>  |
|            | <p>The information gathered by the pro forma's will form the basis of a comprehensive email network of organisations and individuals. This group can be consulted on issues and will allow us to simultaneously inform the wider VCS community.</p>  |
| <b>4c.</b> | <b>Engagement with other DRN groups and the DRN newsletter</b>   |
|            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally, the chairman of each of the Action Groups sits on the DRN Policy Steering Group (PSG). While JT sits on the PSG, there is a lack of VCS representative. The group felt it would be important to make sure there is a VCS representative on the PSG</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION: JA to discuss with the PSG regarding a CVS representative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DRN have a quarterly newsletter that goes out to all its members and in turn is distributed by them to other organisations. The newsletter has been very successful so far and is growing in size each issue. The newsletter would be a great communication tool to celebrate good practice and the work of the group itself.</li> <li>• As well as the newsletter, the DRN website is also a vital communication tool. The other DRN Action Groups each have pages on the site, so there would be scope to add a Rural VCS page which would contain all the groups information, minutes and best practise case studies, that VCSs could be pointed to.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION: SS to find out about adding a new page onto the DRN website</b></p> <p>One of the main DRN action groups is the Consultation Response Group (CRAG) that looks at national strategic policies and assesses them against a set of rural proofing criteria. The group will have</p> |

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|            | <p>opportunity to feed into this group and recommend policies that need to be looked at by the CRAG.</p> <p>JT asked the group if they knew of any up and coming policy's or consultations that the DRN should be aware of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partnerships for Older People Consultation - The Department of Health's Older People and Disability Division are leading a project 'Partnerships for Older People Projects' (POPP). The strategic aim of the project is to test and evaluate (through pilots to be established during 2006/07 and 2007/08) innovative approaches that sustain prevention work in order to improve outcomes for older people. Devon is in the last 22 areas – of which 12 will be selected as pilots.</li> <li>- Travel to Health – changes to the transport for free access to services – could have a detrimental impact on rural Devon?</li> <li>- Local Government White Paper – double devolution – neighbourhood actions</li> </ul> |
| <b>5.</b>  | <b>AOB</b>  |
| <b>5a.</b> | <b>Date and Time of Next Meeting</b>  |
|            | The next meeting will be the 5 <sup>th</sup> December in Okehampton   |