

Rural Services APPG

Notes of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services

Tuesday 20th November 2012, 8:30am-10:00am
Dining Room D – HoC

In attendance:

Members:

Graham Stuart MP – Chairman
Lord Dear
Tessa Munt MP
Dan Rogerson MP
Mark Spencer MP

Others:

Edwin Field - Parliamentary Assistant for Teresa Coffey MP
Jonathan Carroll - Research Assistant to Graham Stuart MP
Robert Church – Research Assistant to Graham Stuart MP

Rural Services Network (RSN) (Secretariat):

Wendy Cooper - Administrator

Speakers:

University of Gloucestershire:

James Derounian BSc (Hons) MPhil MRPI FHEA FILCM

Calor UK

Holly Sims, Corporate Affairs Manager

1. Notes of the Previous Meeting – 16th October 2012

Agreed with no matters arising.

2. Introduction

The Chairman, Graham Stuart MP, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the speaker for his attendance.

3. University of Gloucestershire

James Derounian introduced the concept of “The Big Green Gap Year” or “BIGGY” which was a new idea developed at the University of Gloucestershire which would offer young people a chance to spend 6 months or so of their Gap Year on work that supported communities, helped the environment and provided a foundation for their time at university. In return they would pay reduced tuition fees.

It was hoped that the BIGGY would become a national scheme to attract school leavers before going onto university. They would be offered work in the community, typically provided by third sector bodies, that contributed to sustainability or localism. Projects had to be intellectually and practically worthwhile for participants and valuable for employers. Participants would not be paid for their work, but their expenses would be covered. On completion of their 6 or so months, they would receive a 'certificate of community competence' and a fee waiver/credit to help offset a large part of their 1st year university tuition, plus-on-the job training and mentoring.

The next steps for the scheme were:

- A feasibility study to explore the idea, identify opportunities and challenges in developing it, costing and generating detailed proposals for a pilot run by a University;
- A pilot scheme which would focus on work in Gloucestershire and offer say 100 places at the University for those seeking Deferred Entry to HE in 2014.

The meeting welcomed the idea but expressed concern that the opportunity was only open to those that could afford a gap year. John was asked to also look at apprenticeship opportunities. John also confirmed that students had been canvassed on the idea of the scheme and had been supportive.

4. Calor UK

Holly Sims introduced 'FREE' which was a bespoke three year £1 million initiative funded by Calor to help tackle fuel poverty and promote effective energy efficiency advice and behaviours in off-gas grid communities. It was developed when Calor identified the need for independent carbon reduction and fuel poverty advice to be delivered directly into off-gas grid rural communities by a network of trusted expert advisors. Year 1 of the initiative focused on ascertaining the nature and extent of rural fuel poverty, and building specialist knowledge and capacity within rural community networks to both identify fuel poverty and recommend a holistic range of solutions.

The major component of Year 2 was the undertaking of Village Energy Audits (VEAs) in off-mains gas villages. The FREE VEA process involved:

- A detailed **physical energy assessment** of 5 domestic properties and a Community Building
- A **paper-based housing survey** of all households within the village
- A **walk-through external survey** of all properties within the village

Each VEA produced a suite of reports profiling the village housing, energy and social demographics, and signposting residents to energy efficiency opportunities tailored to both individual household circumstances and typical housing types. These reports were used to educate householders about better managing their energy usage, as well as identifying heating system replacement (including renewables), insulation and financial improvement opportunities.

It was concluded that whilst portraying only a small snapshot of off-gas grid rural households, it is evident from the Village Energy Audits that rural communities are currently at best being left behind, and at worst ignored, in the drive for energy efficiency

improvements. CERT has not been effectively delivered into rural areas in spite of both significant insulation opportunities and the high proportion of vulnerable residents CERT is mandated to help. This is a serious issue in light of the closure of the CERT scheme in December 2012 and the introduction of the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation in Autumn 2012.

The Village Energy Audits prove that urgent action is required to tackle rural energy efficiency and fuel poverty issues, but that 'one size fits all' solutions will not be effective due to the dual challenges of engaging with rural communities and providing effective solutions to the complexities of rural energy options and housing types. Working proactively at a community level and securing the assistance of trusted local individuals and networks to engage with rural householders is the most effective way to ensure that the countryside is not unfairly disadvantaged and can play its part in the carbon and fuel poverty reduction agenda.

5. Next Meeting

To be confirmed