

RSN Seminar – Alternative Service Delivery Oxford
14 January 2014 - Group Discussion Notes:

Rural Proofing and Alternative Service Delivery

What is the capacity of the voluntary sector to deliver the ASD agenda? Does it have the skills, resources, time and appropriate governance? How can the sector be supported to “do more”? It is perennially challenged by short term funding.

In the new world of the transition from grants to contracts and loans for the VCS – is enough being done and how could the challenges most effectively be addressed in terms of building the “business” capacity of the sector? – and more importantly creating a level playing field so that this sector can compete effectively?

There is still much to do to position and develop the capacity of Parish and Town Councils to help them fulfil their potential in this area. Examples of good practice include “the community conversation” concept and the “Take Part” programme – both local initiatives which have supported the capacity of PCs in terms of both Clerks and Councillors.

There are subtle but important differences in focus and role between VCS groups and Parish/Town Councils which need to be fully understood if they are to be supported to fulfil the potential they offer to this agenda.

There is no standard blueprint of – “what works” in terms of engaging local and voluntary organisations in the ASD agenda – but some common themes – local circumstances and issues should drive the agenda.

Innovation is a hard but important part of any ASD agenda – PCs are particularly challenged in terms of innovation and risk taking

Is there enough real consultation in the service re-design/budget cut agenda at the local level?

More could be learnt from studying and disseminating the learning from the “Transition Town” Agenda.

There is now more support for asset transfer, but does it go far enough? Is there enough of an effective dialogue between the different tiers of local government? In unitary areas there are often challenges about the local focus for action.

Listing assets of community value is beginning to take off – some key themes which need more work include: getting the right organisational model, sharing good practice, business planning/finance, overcoming barriers, effective signposting and referral to help

Delivering a “Level Playing Field” involves: having the right ethos at client level, engaging with communities, cultural commitment; “Not about money but about passion and commitment.”

Some local authorities, even in the face of acute budget pressures, don’t want to, or know how to, “let go”.

Networking is a crucial element of building capacity to do more around this agenda in rural communities.

Housing and Ageing in Rural England

Bedroom Tax is having a disproportionate impact in rural areas due to limited housing stock

The connections between housing and other services in rural areas should be better understood – particularly in terms of the role the population of rural places plays in supporting local facilities: ie schools, shops, pubs etc

The church (in all its denominational manifestations) has considerable potential and asset value to add to the development of rural housing solutions. Most of the technical barriers can be overcome. It does take time to build relationships with the church at appropriate levels to make the use of church assets effective.

Broadband roll out is attractive as an ingredient to the development of church assets in rural areas.

LEPs and LEADER have a contribution to play in underpinning the service agenda in terms of housing and ageing if they are carefully and appropriately engaged.

“Hyper” local knowledge is important in harnessing community capacity in rural areas – the concept of creating “village companies” to provide a multi-functional approach to tackling market failure around local service challenges for the elderly and around housing is worthy of more detailed consideration.

Transport is definitely a key issue which needs to be addressed in the context of provision for the rural elderly but we need a much wider discussion about exactly what is needed – the solution does not just lie in public transport.

Both rural housing and services for the rural elderly aren't taken as seriously as they might be because there isn't enough concerted lobbying about these areas.

Much more could be done through planning and service design to embrace and tackle the challenges faces by the elderly and it could deliver more sustainable solutions if the issues were considered at the start point of planning such services.

The Faith in Affordable Housing agenda could be really usefully translated into looking at farm buildings – it would be interesting to engage the NFU in this agenda